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<https://doi.org/10.18778/1733-8077.10.3.01>

## Engaging Love, Divinity, and Philosophy: Pragmatism, Personification, and Autoethnographic Motifs in the Humanist Poetics of Brunetto Latini, Dante Alighieri, and Giovanni Boccaccio

**Abstract** Although the works of three early Italian Renaissance poets, Brunetto Latini (1220-1294), Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), and Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375), may seem far removed from the social science ventures of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, these three Italian authors provide some exceptionally valuable materials for scholars interested in the study of human knowing and acting.

As central participants in the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century “humanist movement” (in which classical Greek and Latin scholarship were given priority in matters of intellectual development), Brunetto Latini, Dante Alighieri, and Giovanni Boccaccio helped sustain an analytic focus on human lived experience.

Most of the materials addressed here are extensively fictionalized, but our interests are in the sociological insights that these authors achieve, both in their accounts of the characters and interchanges portrayed in their texts and in their modes of presentation as authors.

Although lacking the more comprehensive aspects of Chicago-style symbolic interactionist (Mead 1934; Blumer 1969) theory and research, these early Renaissance texts are remarkably self-reflective in composition. Thus, these statements provide us with valuable insights into the life-worlds of (a) those of whom the authors speak, (b) those to whom the authors address their works, and (c) the authors themselves as people involved in generating aspects of popular culture through their poetic endeavors.

More specifically, these writers enable us to appreciate aspects of pragmatist emphases on human knowing and acting through their attentiveness to people’s perspectives, speech, deliberation, action, and interaction. In addressing affective relationships, introducing generic standpoints, and considering morality as community matters, these materials offer contemporary scholars in the social sciences some particularly instructive transhistorical and transcultural comparative and conceptual reference points. Inspired by the remarkable contributions of the three 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century Italian poets and some 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century French predecessors, the Epilogue direct specific attention to the ways in which authors might engage poetic productions as “producers” and “analysts” of fictionalized entertainment.

**Keywords** Love; Religion; Philosophy; Italian Humanism; Pragmatism; Symbolic Interactionism; Autoethnography; Dante Alighieri; Giovanni Boccaccio; Brunetto Latini; Personification; Poetic Productions

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In addition to his work on the developmental flows of pragmatist social thought in poetics (fictional representations), he also has been studying the flows of Western social thought in the interrelated areas of rhetoric, philosophy, ethnohistory, religion, education and scholarship, love and friendship, politics and governing practices, and deviance and morality.

As part of this larger venture, Robert Prus has been developing a text on Emile Durkheim’s “pragmatist sociology and philosophy of knowing.” Working with some substantial but much overlooked texts developed by Emile Durkheim, this statement addresses the more thorough going pragmatist features of Durkheim’s later works on morality, education, religion, and philosophy. It indicates the conceptual affinities of Durkheim’s work with Aristotle’s foundational emphasis on the nature of human knowing and acting, as well as Blumerian symbolic interactionism. Still, no less importantly, it also considers the contributions of Durkheim’s scholarship to the broader pragmatist emphasis on the study of community life as this takes place in interactively accomplished process terms.

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*This paper is dedicated to Maria Lisa Krug (July 24, 1986 - May 30, 2014). Maria, who had just started working on her PhD, will be deeply missed by her family and friends. Maria also will be missed by the young, productive community of interactionists working with Michael Dellwing at Kassel University in Germany. It is hoped that the broader potential of human knowing, acting, and caring in all of us will be encouraged through the enthusiasm and dedication that lives on with Maria’s spirit.*

Using contemporary symbolic interaction (Blumer 1969; Lofland 1976; Strauss 1993; Prus 1996; 1997; 1999; 2004; 2007a; 2007b; Prus and Grills 2003) as the major analytical standpoint,<sup>1</sup> this paper considers the roles that three early Italian Renaissance poets assumed in helping to sustain an analytic pragmatist thrust that may be traced back to the classical scholarship of the early Greeks (c. 700-300 BCE).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In highly succinct terms, symbolic interactionist theory takes the viewpoint that human group life is (1) intersubjectively (linguistically) accomplished; (2) knowingly problematic; (3) object-oriented; (4) multi-perspectival; (5) reflective; (6) sensory enabled; (7) activity-based; (8) negotiable; (9) relational; (10) processual; (11) realized in instances; and (12) historically informed.

<sup>2</sup> The Greek project, as I sometimes label it, refers to my attempts to trace the developmental flows of the study and analysis of human knowing and acting from the classical Greek era (c. 700-300 BCE) to the present time. Albeit only part of a larger, ongoing project, the particular articles published to this point address some of the works of Plato (Prus 2004; 2009; 2011a; 2013a; Puddephatt and Prus 2007; Prus and Camara 2010); Aristotle (Prus 2003; 2004; 2007c; 2007a; 2008a; Puddephatt and Prus 2007; Prus and Camara 2010); Cicero (Prus 2006; 2010; 2011b); Lucian (Prus 2008b; 2008c); Dio Chrysostom (Prus 2011c); the Roman poets Horace, Longinus, and Plutarch (Prus 2008d), Ovid (Prus 2013b); and the Greek ethnohistorians Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon (Prus and Burk 2010). Readers may refer to Prus (2004) and Kleinknecht (2007) for an overview and interim account of the Greek project.

The three authors and their works considered here are Brunetto Latini (1220-1294) who authored *The Little Treasure* and *The Book of Treasures*, Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) who wrote *The Divine Comedy*, *The New Life*, and *The Banquet*, and Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375) who developed *Decameron*.

Still, before proceeding to their texts more directly, it may be appropriate to provide a little background information on pragmatism as an approach to the study of the human condition, as well as the larger project from which the present statement has been derived.

First, although as a philosophic venture American pragmatism generally is associated with the works of Charles Peirce, William James, John Dewey, and George Herbert Mead, its roots run much deeper and broadly than is commonly assumed. Thus, the pragmatist tradition may be more appropriately traced back to the classical Greek era (Prus 2003; 2004). Further, whereas the writings of Thucydides, Plato, Isocrates, and others also contributed to the development of pragmatist social thought, Aristotle was particularly consequential in emphasizing the matter of people coming to terms with the humanly known world.

In contrast to Plato and his mixed theological, idealist, structuralist, and pragmatist emphases, it was his student Aristotle who most centrally and consistently stressed the unity of mind, body, and activity within a community context. Relatedly, while clearly benefiting from Plato's work more generally, it was Aristotle who articulated notions of community, activity, speech, objects, and human interchange in ways that more closely approximate contemporary pragmatist thought.

Still, whereas Aristotle's texts have centrally informed developments in a variety of fields over the intervening centuries, Aristotle's work has been only sporadically and partially acknowledged in subsequent academic considerations of the human condition.

Thus, far from representing an entirely new unique intellectual phenomenon, "the pragmatist renaissance" of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was enabled by an assortment of Western European scholars working in the broader areas of philosophy, education, rhetoric, history, poetics, religious studies, and political science. As will become evident as the text unfolds, the materials that Latini, Dante Alighieri, and Boccaccio develop both benefit from and contribute to this more enduring pragmatist tradition.

Clearly, pragmatism is only one of several themes (theology, morality, emotionality, structuralism, fatalism, nationalism) to which early Greek, Roman, Christian, and later Latin-European scholars would attend. However, because the predominant emphasis in pragmatist thought is on the ways that people make sense of and act towards the world, pragmatism represents a central mechanism for linking a wide array of descriptive and analytical scholarship.

Focusing on the things people do and the ways in which they develop their lines of action, pragmatism enables one to deal with extended arrays of trans-contextual and transhistorical materials that address parallel realms of endeavor. Further, because of its conceptually generic (vs. topical) emphasis, pragmatism also allows scholars to develop comparisons across all manners of substantive fields, approaches, and disciplines.

Whereas pragmatist thought may be envisioned as falling within the domains of philosophy and (more recently) sociology, pragmatism represents a conceptual key for examining the things people do in all fields of endeavor (including, for example, education, rhetoric, politics, philosophy, history, religion, poetics, and science).

Having traced the developments of the poetic tradition from the classical Greeks to the 12<sup>th</sup> century in an earlier, companion paper that deals with 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century French poetics (Prus 2014), it may be appropriate to begin the present statement somewhat more directly.

However, it should be recognized that, like other major areas of scholarly endeavor, the development of fictionalized material (i.e., poetics) underwent substantial transformations (and losses) as the centers of Western civilization shifted from the classical Greek era (c. 700-300 BCE) to the Romans (c. 200 BCE-500 CE) and then to a shifting array of Christianized settings. Along the way, both the scope and quality of Western European scholarship would decline amidst the demise of the Roman Empire and the somewhat interconnected rise of Christianity.

Moreover, despite the mixed Christian capacities for and reservations about extending aspects of Greco-Latin thought into "the barbarian regions" of Western Europe, scholarship (and education) was nearly obliterated during "the dark ages" (c. 500-1000) as a consequence of a series of intense invasions that the Latin-Christian European territories would encounter from the north and the south.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Although Eastern (Greek speaking) Europe did not suffer the same losses, secular scholarship very much stagnated under the heavy religious emphasis of the Eastern Catholic (i.e., Greek Orthodox) Church.

Indeed, it was only by building on the residues of Greco-Latin scholarship that had been preserved by some small pockets of Benedictine and Irish Catholic monks that Charlemagne (742-814) and Alcuin (732-804) would begin to lay the foundation for a renewed educational emphasis in France. This, along with some, subsequently rediscovered, texts developed by Aristotle (c. 384-322 BCE), would represent the primary intellectual base on which the "scholastics" (12<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century Christian-educated philosophers) would build prior to the more prominently recognized 16<sup>th</sup> century Renaissance.<sup>4,5,6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Even though Latin scholarship had been centrally informed by classical Greek thought (c. 700-300 BCE), it was only through the Crusades (c. 1100-1300) in Spain and the Eastern Mediterranean that the scholars from the Scholastic era (through contact with some Muslim, Jewish, and Greek theologians/philosophers) gained more direct access to the philosophic texts of Aristotle. Still, without an earlier, interim Latin base, the scholastics would have had much greater difficulty comprehending and absorbing the classical Greek texts (especially those of Aristotle) into their intellectual milieu. Of the Christian philosophers from the Scholastic era, it is Albert the Great (c. 1200-1280) and especially Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) who were most attentive to the pragmatist philosophy of Aristotle and its relevance for the study of human knowing and acting across all realms of community life.

<sup>5</sup> It is often assumed that the 16<sup>th</sup> century Renaissance gleaned all that was worthwhile from the classical Greek and Latin eras, but it should be recognized that the 16<sup>th</sup> century Renaissance was much more of an artistic, linguistic, architectural attentiveness to classical Greek and Latin culture than a more sustained philosophically informed re-engagement of classical social thought. Indeed, amidst (a) the notably "artistic" emphases of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Renaissance, (b) the somewhat concurrent quests for regionalized nationalism and personalized individualism, (c) the religious divisions associated with the Protestant Reformation, and (d) the emergent, nationalistic pursuits to colonize new territories in America, Africa, and Asia, much of the more intense philosophic emphasis of the Scholastic era would be lost.

<sup>6</sup> Whereas the Renaissance often is envisioned as a 16<sup>th</sup> century phenomenon, it is important to recognize (as does Emile Durkheim in *The Evolution of Educational Thought* [Prus 2012]) that there has been a sporadic but ongoing series of "renaissances" or intellectual rebirths throughout the developmental flows of Western social thought. As well, as Durkheim observes, despite the accomplishments of particular eras, it should be appreciated that all instances of the humanly known present are fundamentally enabled by the achievements of the past.

The three authors considered here, Latini, Dante Alighieri and Boccaccio,<sup>7</sup> are the beneficiaries not only of the texts and other scholarly resources that survived “the dark ages” but also from the early (11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century) scholastic emphasis on grammar, rhetoric, and dialectics.

Along with the texts developed by some 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century French poets,<sup>8</sup> these three Italian authors represent a particularly important part of the intellectual bridge between the Western European “dark ages” (c. 500-1000) and the subsequent rediscovery of other texts from the classical Greek era that would define the essential character of the Renaissance.

Like the French poets (Alan de Lille, Andreas Capellanus, and Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun), one finds an extended emphasis in the works of Latini, Dante Alighieri, and Boccaccio on establishing contexts, defining roles and characters, portraying human activity and tactical interchange, attending to sensate intrigues and community morality, and achieving authenticity and other audience connections in the midst of elaborately-developed text.

<sup>7</sup> Although Petrarch (Francesco Petrarca [1304-1374]) is often cited as a central figure in the humanist movement in Italy, our more immediate emphasis is on the pragmatist features of the humanist movement. Thus, in contrast to the more notably Aristotelian emphasis on human knowing and acting that one encounters in the works of Latini, Alighieri, and Boccaccio, Petrarch seems more attentive to the idealistic qualities of virtue, beauty, truth, and artistic expressivity more commonly associated with Plato.

<sup>8</sup> The more consequential 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century French poets include Alan de Lille (c. 1120-1203) who authored *Plaint of Nature* and *Anticlaudianus*, Andreas Capellanus (text, c. 1185) who wrote *The Art of Courtly Love*, and Guillaume de Lorris (c. 1212-1237) and Jean de Meun (c. 1235-1305) who in a sequential fashion developed the fuller text known as *Romance of the Rose*. See Prus (2014) for a somewhat parallel statement dealing with the works of these 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century French authors.

## Pragmatist Motifs in 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> Century Italian Poetics

In discussing the works of Latini, Dante Alighieri, and Boccaccio, we will be addressing poetical materials that deal with human knowing and acting in more direct and sustained terms.<sup>9</sup> Although these authors have different emphases and styles of presentation, they build on one another in chronological sequence. More consequentially, however, they all display reflective qualities and generic analytic considerations that extend well beyond the playful or entertaining features of most poetic endeavors.

In sequence, the present statement addresses Brunetto Latini's (1220-1294) *The Book of the Treasure* and *The Little Treasure*; Dante Alighieri's (1265-1321) *The Divine Comedy*, *The New Life*, and *The Banquet*; and Giovanni Boccaccio's (1313-1375) *Decameron* and other texts.

<sup>9</sup> While some may be inclined to restrict their definitions of poetic materials only to those verses that are characterized by rhyming, structural consistency of verse, and such, the term poetics is used here in a broader, Aristotelian sense (*The Poetics*) to refer to all manners of text or other linguistic expressions of an intendedly fictionalized quality.

This encompasses all matters of prose, place, and theatrical productions, as well as a great many instances of sarcasm and humor. These productions also may incorporate wide ranges of props and other materials, settings, music, gestures, movements, and the like, but our emphasis is on *linguistically generated fiction* and related considerations of these materials by those involved in their production, assessment, and analysis. Although often overlooked in many people's contemporary notions of “poetry,” these prose-based and theatrical productions are but differing aspects of the broader poetic (fictionalized) venture (also see: Dewey 1934).

Finally, it might be appreciated that even in developing extended instances of fiction, poets inevitably invoke aspects of non-fictionalized realities in generating their fictionalized materials. Not only may this add elements of authenticity to poetic productions but without some genuinely shared notions of reality, all poetical communications would lose their (inter-subjectively) meaningful qualities.

It is not possible to provide an adequate sense of the depth, intensity, and sophistication of these authors and their works in the present statement. Still, each of these texts will be briefly outlined, following the overall flows that the authors develop. As well, because it is their texts that are important rather than my commentaries, the materials will be referenced fairly extensively so that readers can more readily locate particular sections of the fuller texts.

After all the texts have been presented, the works of Latini, Dante Alighieri, and Boccaccio will be considered mindfully of (1) author viewpoints and interests, (2) depictions of participant qualities, activities, and interchanges, (3) author concerns with their audiences (readers), (4) author attentiveness to critics, and (5) author concerns with the problematics of representation.

Still, the more immediate intent is to stay close to the texts at hand so that the materials these authors provide might be examined in “more ethnographic terms” from a distinctly interactionist viewpoint. Fortunately, although there is no opportunity to interview these authors, they have been fairly detailed in the ways that they have presented their materials and more directly have discussed some matters that we would more routinely inquire about in the field.

In the conclusion, we will be asking whether and to what extent these early Renaissance authors represent human knowing and acting in ways that parallel or otherwise approximate contemporary pragmatist (and interactionist) approaches to the particular subject matters under consideration. The objective is to see if this material from some centuries past

might be used to assess and inform contemporary interactionist notions of human group life.

## Brunetto Latini's *The Book of the Treasure* and *The Little Treasure*<sup>10</sup>

Although Brunetto Latini (1220-1294) presently may be best known for a “horrific spot appearance” in Dante's *Inferno* XV,<sup>11</sup> Latini was not only Dante's mentor but also an accomplished rhetorician, philosopher, and poet, as well as a notably competent participant in the political life of Florence. Whereas our more immediate interest in this consideration of poetics revolves around a smaller volume, *Il Tesoretto* (*The Little Treasure*), Brunetto Latini's best known publication, *Li Livres dou Tresor* (*The Book of the Treasure*), merits attention not only for establishing the broader conceptual base with which Latini worked but also for suggesting some of the interconnections between humanly known environments, philosophy, religion, morality, rhetoric, governing practices, and fictional productions.

First published in French, Latini's *Li Livres dou Tresor* was particularly well received in Western Europe prior to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Representing an encyclopedia of sorts on wisdom, ethics, and rhetoric, Latini's *The Book of the Treasure* is comprised

<sup>10</sup> This abbreviated statement has been developed using Julia Bolton Holloway's (1981) English translation of *Il Tesoretto*.

<sup>11</sup> Despite Latini's remarkable accomplishments as a 13<sup>th</sup> century scholar, considerable attention appears to have been diverted by people's subsequent “scholarly” fascinations (and unresolved speculations) with Dante Alighieri's condemnation of Brunetto Latini to the depths of hell in the first of three volumes (*Inferno*, *Purgatory*, and *Paradise*) constituting *The Divine Comedy*. A closer examination of their respective works suggests that Dante has benefited immensely (even if distinctively begrudgingly) from the tutelage of Brunetto Latini.

of three books.<sup>12</sup> Emphasizing general wisdom, Book 1 is intended to provide a broad base of knowledge for engaging the world in practical terms. Addressing creation and Christian theology, the historical flows of Judaic, Christian, and Roman life-worlds, the cosmos, world geography, and a great many animal life-forms, Book 1 is ambitiously encompassing as well as uneven in its presentation.

Albeit a partial, commentary-oriented “translation” of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, the first part of Book 2 focuses on Aristotle’s considerations of community life and personal morality. Whereas Latini organizes Book 2 around the virtues of *prudence* (wisdom-based thought and decision-making), *temperance* (moderation and self-regulation), *courage* (generosity, trust, and self-assurance), and *justice* (rigor, liberality, and honor), he also attends to vice, wrongdoing, and evil. In the second part of Book 2, Latini discusses virtues and vices in distinctively instructional terms. Because he draws on a wide range of interim sources and his own experiences regarding people’s practices, characters, and relations with others, Book 2 represents a thoughtful, ethnohistorical account of personal and societal morality.

The first part of Book 3 explicitly builds on Cicero’s *De Inventione* (one of the very few available texts on rhetoric at the time), but supplements Cicero’s text with a variety of interim sources and Latini’s own observations. The second part of Book 3 is an advisory statement on the processes and problematics of governing cities by elected officeholders. A care-

fully reasoned descriptive, instructional commentary, this statement also provides valuable ethnohistorical insights into one of the political contexts in which Latini had been involved.

Although scarcely known at present, Latini’s *The Book of the Treasure* would serve, importantly, to alert scholars of his era to aspects of Aristotle’s work on ethics, as well as Cicero’s analyses of rhetoric – thereby fostering continuities with Greek and Latin scholarship and a generalized pragmatist attentiveness to the study of human knowing and acting.

Still, given our more immediate emphasis on *fictional* productions from 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century Italian poets, it is here that we turn to Brunetto Latini’s *Il Tesoretto* (*The Little Treasure* [LT]). Like his more immediate French predecessors (Alan de Lille, Andreas Capellanus, and Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun), Latini builds on the dream or trance motif associated with Plato, Cicero, Capella, and Boethius.

Latini begins his account as an embassy on route to Spain. Amidst learning of his exile from Florence, Latini (in a trance like state) found himself off the highway and in another place (LT:190). Amongst other sights, Brunetto (like Alan de Lille) encounters Nature. After defining herself as God’s agent and acknowledging God as the creator of all things, Nature promises to provide a clear, straightforward account of the human condition in the local (Italian) vernacular.

Nature subsequently re-engages the Biblical creation story emphasizing the good and beautiful essence

of God’s creation (LT:565). However, one of God’s creations, the angel Lucifer (LT:565), became so enchanted with his own sense of greatness that he set up his own kingdom in opposition to God. Nature then reviews the sins of Adam and Eve (LT:590) provoked by Lucifer in Eden and the resulting suffering and evils that would befall all mankind.

After observing that man was the last and best of God’s creations (LT:635) and depicting the human Soul (LT:700) as a divinely-enabled facility, Nature references the human capacities of intelligence, understanding, learning, reason, discretion (judgment), and memory, and next acknowledges the five senses (LT:765) and identifies people’s sensitivities to a range of differences, including colors, forms, and changes, heat and cold, humid and dry (LT:775).

Nature then addresses the cosmos (LT:840; e.g., planets, orbits), geography (LT:905), plants and animals (LT:995), and the oceans (LT:1030). After developing a sustained tribute to the wonders of God’s creation, Nature takes her leave, but not before providing Brunetto with instructions on how to find Philosophy and her sisters (LT:1040) and the four Virtues, as well as Fortune and the God of Love.

Setting out on his own (LT:1185), Brunetto (apparently misses meeting Philosophy and her sisters, but) encounters Virtue (LT:1240). In describing Virtue, Brunetto first refers to her as Prudence (LT:1270) – representing judgment, temperance, and fortitude. However, Brunetto also observes that Virtue is known as Justice (LT:1315), adding that Virtue’s four daughters (Generosity, Courtesy, Loyalty, and Prowess) work together for an overall effect.

Finding himself in the company of a young knight seemingly in pursuit of Virtue, Brunetto (LT:1365) describes Generosity. She is embodied through honor, greatness, gifting. Relatedly, Brunetto uses the occasion to denounce the spending associated with drinking, gambling, gluttony, and lavish personal consumption. Brunetto next acknowledges Courtesy who is highly mindful of speech and the circumstances of other. Courtesy is modest and considerate. She treats others with honor, Brunetto contrasts Courtesy with those inclined to be arrogant, boastful, and inconsiderate, as well as those who like to scandalize or abuse others in gossip.

Next, Brunetto addresses Loyalty (LT:1875). Loyalty converses only with Truth. Loyalty is attentive to the follies of deception, as well as the importance of maintaining secrets, repaying debts and other obligations, and avoiding injury or harm to good friends and honorable relatives. Consistent with Latini’s Christian viewpoint, Loyalty advises particular devotion to the church and Jesus Christ. This way, one might receive appropriate (virtuous) counsel.

Virtue’s fourth daughter is Prowess (LT:1975). Prowess [as in prudence, phronesis] encourages confidence without folly or foolishness. Prowess insists on the use of reason in dealing with others, but points to the importance of maintaining integrity in the face of the adversity. Prowess recommends discretion lest people be drawn into more extended conflicts (observing that all opponents are apt to be able to obtain help from others of some sort). Relatedly, self-control is counseled over bold, arrogant, or embittered words or acts that may end up creating more extended difficulties for people.

<sup>12</sup> I am grateful to Paul Barrette and Spurgeon Baldwin for their comprehensive 1993 English translation of *Li Livres Dou Tresor*. The present discussion has been developed from their translation.

Thus, while denouncing cowardice, Prowess also discourages rash or angry behaviors.

Parting company with the knight (LT:2170), Brunetto next pursues the opportunity to meet the God of Love. Encountering many people in states of joy and sorrow along the way, Brunetto observes a young archer, Pleasure (LT:2260), who inflicts great wounds on those struck by his arrows. Pleasure is accompanied by four ladies: Fear, Desire, Compassion, and Hope.

It is Desire who pierces the mind and intensely transfixes it, thereby forcing one to immediately pursue the desired object. Whereas Desire represents the primary source of trouble, Fear compounds things through hesitation, anxiety, and anguish. Compassion often accompanies and sweetens Desire. Hope makes Fear more bearable, where Hope does more directly promise Love and the realization of Desire. Together with Pleasure, thus, it is Fear, Desire, Compassion, and Hope that constitute Love. Albeit briefly, Brunetto (LT:2340) also makes reference to the importance of people exercising wisdom to avoid the mishaps that accompany love.

Still, Brunetto's consideration of love is not finished and he next recounts an encounter with Ovid (LT:2360). After Ovid tells Brunetto that one cannot know love without experiencing it, Brunetto is struck with one of Love's arrows. Brunetto subsequently works his way through the experience with Ovid's instruction (*The Art of Love*).

Later, Brunetto seeks forgiveness for all of his worldly indulgences and embarks on an extended statement of penitence (LT:2430-2890). Following

some commentary on a more general historical past, Brunetto (LT:2520) launches on an extended confession of his failings amidst a broader denigration of human vices more generally (as in wrongdoing, pride, envy, anger, slothfulness, negligence, covetousness, deceit, gambling, usury, disrespect for God, greed, gluttony, adultery, and sodomy). Afterwards, Brunetto claims to be absolved from all misdeeds and decides that he now has little interest in visiting Fortune. *Il Tesoretto* concludes with the beginning of Brunetto's encounter with Ptolemy (LT:2910-2940), an ancient philosopher.

Although much overlooked, Latini's *Il Tesoretto* is important as a connecting device that would enable Dante to develop his work in consequential conceptual manners. However, contemporary social scientists also will find it instructive not only in reference to the human capacities for self-reflectivity and considerations of people's relationships more generally but also for its treatment of love as a multiplistic, humanly engaged phenomenon.

### Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy*, *The New Life*, and *The Banquet*

While Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) is best known for *La Divina Commedia* or *The Divine Comedy* (presented in three volumes: *Inferno*, *Purgatory*, and *Paradise*), we also will be considering two of Dante's lesser-known works, *La Vita Nuova* (*The New Life*) and *La Convivio* (*The Banquet*).

*The Divine Comedy* is an extended, detailed, and highly graphic portrayal of Dante's journey through God's afterlife worlds, Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven.

*La Vita Nuova* is an interpretive analysis of a series of poems that Dante wrote about his own experiences with romantic love. *The Banquet* is a later interpretive elaboration and philosophic extension of *La Vita Nuova*. Although *The Divine Comedy* appears to have been completed late in Dante's life, *La Vita Nuova* will be discussed after Dante's better-known trilogy so that its conceptual continuity with *The Banquet* might be better preserved.

Although his formal education remains somewhat obscure, Dante Alighieri emerges as the best educated of the philosopher poets considered here. Indeed, while Dante retains (a) much of an Augustinian (Platonist inspired) Christian approach to the human condition, as well as (b) pronounced intrigues with Roman greatness (from Virgil) and (c) extended fascinations with romantic love (from Ovid), Dante also exhibits (d) a heightened awareness of some of Aristotle's works. This is particularly evident in *The Banquet*, which may be seen as Dante's approximation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Dante appears to have engaged some of Aristotle's texts on his own, but his earlier exposure to Aristotle likely came from his mentor Brunetto Latini and the writings of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). Following his own misadventures in romantic love and politics, Dante would become absorbed in the study of philosophy (see *The Banquet*) and later speaks of the quest for knowledge (i.e., the contemplative life) as the best route to happiness and a noble or virtuous life.

Still, like Christian, Judaic, and Islamic philosophers more generally (Aquinas is a notable exception), Dante's theological emphases are prototypi-

cally Platonist in essence. Thus, like Plato (*Timaeus*), Augustine, Latini, and others, Dante's philosophy also is rooted in theological notions of: sensate and divine realities; afterlife existence with judgment day, hell, purgatory, and paradise; human virtues and accountability; and a divinely enabled soul that is joined with a physical body. It is not apparent that Dante knows much of Plato's works directly, but Dante has been thoroughly emerged in Christian philosophy and has studied a great many of the Christian and Latin authors who engage Platonist theology and philosophy (especially Augustine and Aquinas) in one or other ways.

### *The Divine Comedy*<sup>13</sup>

Awakening to find himself in the midst of a dark wooded area (the departure point for *Inferno*), Dante begins a journey that will take readers across the fuller terrain of Christian knowing and acting in a highly detailed, often gruesome consideration of human activity, morality, sin, condemnation, and brutish suffering, as he moves towards potential purging and cleansing processes, and (for the select few) the wonders of Paradise.

Those who have examined Brunetto Latini's *Il Tesoretto* will find much that is familiar here, for Dante builds extensively on the foundations that Latini has provided. Still, Dante also is a student of Thomas Aquinas, as well as an ardent admirer of

<sup>13</sup> In developing this statement, I have relied extensively on Dorothy Sayers' translations of *The Comedy of Dante Alighieri* (*Hell* [1949] and *Purgatory* [1955]), and Dorothy Sayers and Barbara Reynolds' translation of *Paradise* [1962]). I also found the accompanying commentaries and notes particularly helpful in sorting through these three complex volumes.

the Roman poet Virgil (70-19 BCE; *The Aeneid*). Thus, while Dante builds on the contextual and artistic techniques developed by Latini and the intellectual discipline of Aquinas (and Aristotle) in developing *The Divine Comedy*, it is Virgil who serves as Dante's primary guide, companion, and poetic soul-mate through much of Dante's journey in the ultimate epic (theological/Christian) venture.<sup>14</sup>

In developing highly meticulous portrayals of the three afterlife states that all are guaranteed to experience in one or other respects, and the more particularized routings through which these conditions will be assigned in the next life, Dante locates and engages an extended cast of well-known people in these afterlife existences. Focusing on people's (theological and moral) failings and hypocrisies, as well as their virtues and devotion, Dante excludes no one.

Likely to the delight of some of the living, Dante assigns particular well-known religious figures (Popes included) to a variety of unsavory afterlife conditions. Religious office, in itself, provides no protection from burning in hell. Likewise, the most capable of rhetoricians and poets find that persuasive abilities and poetic license do little to absolve them from afterlife accountability.

Dante's overall message is that in making choices, as knowing, voluntaristic actors,<sup>15</sup> people determine

<sup>14</sup> Although perhaps less obvious, it might be appreciated that Dante, Virgil, and others also serve as companions for the readers who (voyeuristically) accompany Dante throughout this voyage.

<sup>15</sup> Attending to the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, Dante accepts Aristotle's notions of people as social animals, to be understood as participants in political arenas with capacities to engage in deliberative, purposive, and collectively coordinated activity.

their eventual afterlife existence. Still, between the terror of Hell (which Dante dramatically conveys) and the sustained joy of Paradise, Dante also holds out the Christian message of salvation, even in the afterlife. Thus, while those who repent their sins and change their ways on earth can expect to fair much better after death, there is the possibility of some afterlife purging or purification (Purgatory) for those who are prepared to listen, learn, and make changes of a more essential sort. In the divinely configured afterlife, thus, theological justice will prevail to the very ends of eternity!

Still, Dante will introduce some other viewpoints and agendas. Following Virgil, Dante also intends to promote a worldwide Roman Empire albeit with an explicit Holy (Christian) emphasis. Thus, although Dante's utopian world order is to be characterized by reason and justice in all manners of civil human affairs and is to be administered by a monarch,<sup>16</sup> this world state is to take its mandate from God.

However, instead of entrusting the moral order to the papacy (or other religious institution), Dante insists on a distinctively secular order based on reason. While concentrating on the well-being of its citizens, the state is to be tempered by a religious emphasis. The primary purpose of the church is to promote human life-styles that are attentive to people's afterlife

<sup>16</sup> Dante's position is developed much more extensively in *The Monarchy*. Although Dante appears to envision an emperor somewhat along the line of Plato's philosopher-king (*Republic*) and emphasizes justice and reason in ways that approximate Plato, Dante does not know Plato's *Republic* in any direct sense. Instead, working with Virgil as a source of inspiration for restoring the Roman Empire, albeit with a distinctively Christian character, Dante uses Plato as an analytical resource wherever this is convenient. More consequentially, in some ways, Dante clearly argues for a division of the church and the political order of the state.

eternities. Thus, although reason (and justice) is to be used to conduct the affairs of state, reason ultimately is to be superseded by personal religious devotion informed by Christian revelation.<sup>17</sup>

Attempting to promote the restoration and extension of the Roman Empire, Dante writes *The Divine Comedy* in Italian rather than Latin (so that it might be more accessible to a still substantial, albeit regional, readership). Still, Dante intends to deliver a highly compelling theological message about human conduct and people's lives in the hereafter. Dante may not have been ordained as a theologian, but, like Plato, Dante is a theologian nonetheless and *The Divine Comedy* is Dante's pulpit.

As with Plato, as well, no one is to be exempt from the message Dante delivers. While the voyage on which Dante is to embark takes place in the afterlife, his message is clearly directed towards the living. Thus, maintaining the adventurous format of Virgil, *The Divine Comedy* is very much an argument for human virtue and Christian morality. As Dante will observe elsewhere, he also has been highly attentive to the rhetoric of Cicero.

In addition to Dante's religious and political agendas, *The Divine Comedy* involves a love story. While lending some elements of intrigue to *The Divine Comedy*, "the love story" is cast in somewhat more generic terms. Reflecting Dante's own experience with romantic love, Dante's longstanding but intense fascination with Beatrice (a Florentine of his own age) has been the focal point for much of Dante's work as a poet.

<sup>17</sup> With Marco Lomardo as his speaker, Dante provides a summary statement of these views in *Purgatory*, Chapter XVI.

*The Divine Comedy*, thus, serves as another forum in which Dante pursues his intrigues with Beatrice. Dante (see *La Vita Nuova* – later in this paper) has loved Beatrice since the age of nine, but only from a distance. Still, Beatrice has long represented the glory of God in a human form for Dante. Given the extraordinary human graces Dante assigns to her, Beatrice appears only later in *The Divine Comedy* (in *Paradise*). Thus, after the Roman poet Virgil has reached the limits of his (pagan) wisdom and poetic virtues, it is Beatrice ("as the Blessed one") who enables Dante to achieve an encounter with Divinity.

### *L'Inferno*

The first volume of *The Divine Comedy*, *Inferno*, focuses directly and intensely on Godly retribution. People will be punished for their sins. While Dante's home state of Florence represents his primary reference point, Dante retraces various historical events in the Roman Empire as he accounts for the various personages he encounters in Hell.

With Virgil at his side to help Dante maneuver around the many torture chambers of Hell, the two poets witness the most hideous and unsettling of conditions. Together, they make note of the many levels and variants of punishment inflicted on particular evil souls. They pause along the way, observe the suffering, and consider the particular individuals and categories of characters that are being subjected to these vile punishments. They also engage some of these lost souls in conversation as they descend, level by level, into the increasingly destitute and horrifying depths of Hell. After visiting the level of Hell reserved for the most despicable of all

sinners, the two poets pass through a cavern and follow a river that eventually leads to Purgatory.

### *Il Purgatorio*

Whereas people's punishments in *Inferno* are based on a rational calculus that focuses on the culpability of human agency (acknowledging voluntary states and deliberative activity) that violates the moral order of a religious community and recognizes the authority of a divinely sanctioned retributory justice, Dante's account of *Purgatory* is apt to be even more appealing to those who approach *The Divine Comedy* from a sociological/pragmatist perspective.

Thus, while those sentenced to Hell assume more brute-like qualities during their interment as they undergo unending rounds of ghoulish treatment, those assigned to Purgatory are given opportunities to use their minds in more reflective, purposive terms. Whereas the tortures of Hell are intended for the totally incorrigible, those with some genuine capacity for accepting responsibility for their misdeeds may become candidates for Purgatory. [It is at this point, too, that the recipients of punishment may begin to define these treatments in remedial rather than in more purely negative terms (as in pain inflicted on them by uncaring or vindictive sources). Purgatory, thus, becomes the home of the "repentant sinner."]

As in the human community more generally, the purging or cleansing process in Purgatory requires the acknowledgment of sin or wrongdoing on the part of the perpetrator, a willingness of the actor to atone or pay for the transgression, and a desire or promise to do better in the future.

Like human forgiveness, Purgatory offers hope for a better future. Still, as with human forgiveness, too, purgatory implies an overarching sense of pity and benevolence; a willingness on the part of the wronged parties to absolve sinners of their transgressions. Without this benediction or forgiveness, there can be no salvation, no hope for the future.

Dante's elaboration of *Purgatory* is complex. In addition to identifying the seven major categories of sin, Dante defines and exemplifies each with a type of lost soul, and stipulates the appropriate mode of penance or atonement for each category of sin. Thus, for the proud or vain, salvation can only be achieved through sustained humility; the envious are to pursue generosity; the wrathful or intensely angry are to assume a life of meekness; the slothful are to practice zeal; the greedy are to exercise liberality; the gluttonous are to experience starvation; and the lustful are to practice chastity. Relatedly, Dante also specifies the prayers for confession for each type of sin and recognizes the particular agents of absolution (angels and benedictions) as he moves from the entrance of the gates of Purgatory along these several stages of Purgatory, with a related set of rites of passage at each point of possible ascension towards Paradise.

Still, while the souls who find themselves in Purgatory knowingly and conscientiously may work their way towards more complete salvation, they also will reach limits beyond which access is denied. Virgil, thus, relinquishes his role as guide at the seventh level of Purgatory (Chapter XXVII). With two interim guides, Dante is ushered through Purgatory to encounter Beatrice and his first glimpse of Heaven.

### *Il Paradiso*

Because reaching Heaven represents the most consequential of human accomplishments, Dante is only able to gain access to Paradise because of Beatrice's philosophically virtuous qualities and support. Still the scholar, Dante uses this opportunity to pursue Platonist (and Christian) notions of knowing things as they truly are, when free from the fetters of the (illusionary) mundane or sensate world.<sup>18</sup> As well, whereas some people may envision Heaven as a realm of tranquility and endless joy, Dante finds Paradise to be a highly multifaceted, bewildering, and intensely engaging experience. Heaven is no less complex than Purgatory and is far from being one mode of experience or one realm of existence.

Thus, while presenting Heaven as constituted of a series of planetary bodies accessible only to those who have lived a more viable Christian life, Dante (with Beatrice as his primary guide) will begin to explore the vastness of Paradise. Like all inhabitants of Paradise whose minds are cleansed, Dante enters Heaven with only good thoughts (Chapter I).

Although all inhabitants of Heaven share a life of contentment, Dante quickly realizes that their lives are highly diversified. People's souls also are stratified according to their relative earthly-achieved merits. Thus, some souls are much more exalted than others (i.e., achieve a closer proximity to God) depending on their earthly accomplishments and virtues; Beatrice

(Chapter V) explains that human deeds are assessed mindfully of people's devotion or self-dedication to God. Relatedly, too, though people may be good in other ways, those who have been inclined towards pride, fame, ambition, and the like will not be able to move beyond lower levels of Paradise even if they had been highly successful in the earthly world.

Amongst other souls encountered in Paradise, Dante (Chapter VIII-IX) observes that some of those who have been smitten with love (i.e., the excessively amorous who have since been purged of their sins) have found a place in the still lower levels of Heaven (on the planet Venus).

Dante and Beatrice subsequently ascend to the Heaven of the Sun (Chapter X). Here, they encounter Thomas Aquinas who introduces Dante to eleven other faithful sagely contributors to Christian scholarship along with an additional twelve illustrious theologians (Chapter XII).

Moving yet closer to God, Dante encounters an assortment of other souls who, amongst other things, engage Dante in considerations of the personal difficulties facing Dante and the well-being of his home state of Florence. Along the way, Dante is encouraged to tell others of his afterlife experience (Chapter XVII), and to pursue justice on earth (Chapter XVIII) mindful of the degeneration of the existing European states, various religious monasteries, and the church more generally.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Notably, while Aristotle views the humanly known world as the paramount reality or parameters of human knowing, the theologians who follow Socrates and Plato argue that people can only learn what things "truly are" when they experience the afterlife.

<sup>19</sup> Here, as in *The Monarchy*, Dante's criticisms of the papacy and his insistence on the separation of the state and the church may be seen as a precursor to the 16<sup>th</sup> century Protestant Reformation. Still, despite his deep disaffection with many of the popes, Dante does not propose to replace the Catholic Church as the source of religious truth.

Dante's account of Paradise culminates with an encounter with God. Although commenting on his immediate comprehension of the totality of creation and eternity while in God's presence, *Paradise* ends abruptly with an acknowledgement of Dante's current inabilities to represent the splendors of God. Dante can only testify to the intensity of God's Will and God's Love.

Denoting an epic poem or narrative of extraordinary depth and detail, *The Divine Comedy* is much more than that. With Dante as the primary guide through Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven, readers are provided with an extended, albeit also fantastic (fantasy), insider account of Christian theology and Biblical morality.

I am not in a position to comment on the impact of Dante's *The Divine Comedy* on Christian theology, popular fiction, or associated notions of deviance, regulation, accountability, and rehabilitation. However, those attending to the cultural flows of Western civilization should not overlook the relevance of this highly detailed, compelling, widely read text for the images of religion and deviance characterizing Western social thought over the ensuing centuries.

For our more immediate purposes, however, *The Divine Comedy* represents an extension of the pragmatist thought associated with Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. Thus, even in this religious portrayal of people's afterlife experiences, the characters are portrayed as reflective, deliberating, anticipating, acting (and interacting), monitoring, assessing, and adjusting entities.

Still, Dante has much more to offer to students of the human condition with *La Vita Nuova (The New Life)* and *La Convivio (The Banquet)*.

### *La Vita Nuova (The New Life)*

Albeit long overshadowed by *The Divine Comedy*, Dante's *La Vita Nuova* is an important text for those in the human sciences.<sup>20</sup> *La Vita Nuova* has particular relevance for sociologists and others who are attentive to interpretations of human knowing and acting more generally, as well as to those interested in affective relationships and the study of the production of entertainment more specifically. Denoting an intriguing account of Dante's love life, *La Vita Nuova* also is an explicitly self-reflective account and interpretive analysis of a selected sample of poems that Dante wrote. In contemporary interactionist terms, *La Vita Nuova* represents an autoethnographic or more personalized participant-observer account of the production of a literary text. *La Vita Nuova* is remarkable not only because of its early development in the absence of more explicit social science models but also because of Dante's detailed explanations of his activities and the sustained analysis of both poetic activity and love he provides along the way. The poems in *La Vita Nuova (VN)* revolve around the romantic intrigues that Dante develops for Beatrice, a young woman with whom he first becomes fascinated during a brief childhood encounter.

Their relationship is essentially a one-way romance, in which Dante loves Beatrice intensely but very much from a distance. Dante's fascination with Beatrice has a highly covert and solitary quality but it also assumes some overtly disruptive and deeply discrediting dimensions. For Dante, it is strikingly emotional and, at times, uncontrollably consuming.

<sup>20</sup> In developing this statement, I have relied principally on Barbara Reynolds' (1969) translation of *La Vita Nuova*.

Clearly, Dante is not the first to experience a love of this sort or to develop poetic materials along these lines. Relatedly, had Dante just talked about love in a poetic manner (as does Francesco Petrarca [1304-1374] – another famous Italian who followed Dante), *VN* would be of much less value to those in the social sciences. Dante, however, provides much more sustained analysis.

Thus, while Dante's poems were written for the (educated) public more generally, he says that *VN* is written for other poets and those who might appreciate the production of poetic texts and the intrigues of love. Ironically, the very commentaries within *VN* that those seeking fictional entertainment may find it distracting constitute the particularly valuable gift that Dante gives to those who wish to understand *how poetry is produced*.<sup>21</sup>

Although social scientists would prefer a more extended comparative base, Dante's analysis has some particular redeeming analytic qualities. First, given his limited database, Dante does not claim to explain people's behavior other than his own. Likewise, Dante makes little attempt to be poetical in his consideration of his poems but rather strives to be openly analytical.

<sup>21</sup> While Dante is recounting his earlier experiences and emphasizes at a later point in time, those who have read Dante's other works would likely suggest that Dante's abilities not be underestimated. Likewise, although Dante may not have taken notes of the sort that contemporary ethnographers might do, it might be appreciated that he has his poems as reference points. Indeed, because of the additional work required to express his thoughts in verse, Dante's "field notes" may be much more valuable as memory aids than are the notes that most participant observers take while in the field. As Dante also emphasizes (*VN*: Chapter XXV), he envisions his poems as highly disciplined constructions and has little regard for more frivolous and less technically informed poetic productions.

As well, while Dante has no apparent awareness of Aristotle's *Poetics* (and thus, cannot be expected to benefit from the remarkable analytic materials contained therein), Dante's presentation of *VN* is remarkably systematic. Not only does Dante discuss the events leading to the development of each poem in a chronologically ordered fashion so that people may follow the overall flow of his experiences but Dante also describes his emotional states, dilemmas, and interactions as these pertain to the drafting of particular poems.

In addition to presenting each of his 31 poems in this general fashion, Dante often follows particular poems with a further interpretation of his intentions and subsequent thoughts. Although Dante does not tell us everything, he very much takes readers into the fuller regions of his mind. In the process, Dante not only acknowledges his fascinations and desires but also discusses the shifting senses of fear, shame, suffering, pity, compassion, ambiguity, and frustration he experiences as he attends to his object of love and develops particular instances of poetic expression.

Dante begins *VN* by recounting his initial intense but emotional disabling reaction (heart pounding, violent trembling) when he first encountered Beatrice (she who is blessed) when both are about age 9. He retains intense images of her in the intervening years. At one point, when Dante was 18, Beatrice casually acknowledged him as they passed on the street. As before, Dante again became emotionally distraught, losing physiological composure merely at the sight of Beatrice.

Dante describes this as the first time she has spoken to him and he is totally enraptured, emotionally



captivated. Following a series of dreams (and day-dreams), Dante writes his first love poem. It is addressed to “all of the souls who had been captured by love.” Following his second encounter with Beatrice, Dante becomes intensely fascinated with this most gracious creation and will sometimes find it necessary to explain to others why it is that love has reduced him to a hopeless state of distraction including notably obvious instances of functional incompetence (VN:IV).

Still, while trying to maintain the secrecy of the identity of the object of his affection, Dante (VN:V) begins to employ one of Beatrice’s associates as a “screen” for his intrigues. Feigning mild interest in this other woman, Dante uses every occasion to glimpse at his beloved. Eventually, the lady who (seems unknowingly) to have served to conceal Dante’s interests in Beatrice left Florence. As in many related occasions, Dante composes a poem to mark his thoughts on this particular misfortune (VN:VII).

Later, Dante learns of the death of a young woman who he had once seen in the company of the gracious one. The thought that someone who could have been close to Beatrice (and therefore worthy of his affection) died, brings considerable sadness to Dante and he is inspired to write about the loss of a lovable person and the cruelty of death (VN:VIII).

Amidst the sorrow of distance from his beloved during a trip outside Florence, Dante (VN:IX) has the idea of finding another woman to serve as a diversionary cover to get closer to Beatrice. This time, however, his efforts to use this third person as a screen result in malicious gossip, and when Dante next encountered Beatrice, he was openly disregarded.

As Dante (VN:XI-XII) explains things, he had been totally captivated by a loving bliss and the mere hope of a greeting from Beatrice overflows his capacity for joy. Now, in being slighted or shunned, Dante is reduced to bitter tears and left feeling like a beaten child.

In a state of restless sleep, Dante has another vision and decides to alter his strategy. He will use his poems as an intermediary between himself and Beatrice. Still, Dante recognizes that these poems may not be adequate. Written in the second person, Dante can only hope that Beatrice somehow will appreciate these messages.

After composing some additional poems on love, Dante describes himself as in a quandary of conflicting thoughts (VN:XIII). He wants to be dominated by love and yet does not want to be dominated by love. He is captivated by the sweetness of his love but also sees the object of his love as inaccessible. Recognizing that love is not one thing but a mix of viewpoints and not knowing how to proceed, Dante decides to seek solace in pity as the most fitting solution for those who find themselves in states of this sort:

All thoughts within my mind discourse of Love  
And have among them great diversity:  
One makes me long for Love’s authority,  
Another its unreason seeks to prove,  
Then sweetness, as of hope, I’m conscious of.  
Another makes me weep incessantly.  
Only in asking pity all agree,  
Trembling in fear with which the pulses throb.  
And so I know not from which theme to start;

And I would write, yet know not what to say.  
Thus in a maze of Love I’m wandering!  
And if to harmony all these I’d bring  
My enemy I must bring into play,  
And lady Pity call to take my part.

(Dante Alighieri [*La Vita Nuova*:XIII]; Reynolds trans. 1969)

As soon becomes apparent, however, even pity proves not to be an adequate consolation. A more disabling event takes place when Dante and a friend (VN:XIV) inadvertently find themselves in the presence of Dante’s love-object. Visibly overcome with disabling emotion at the sight of Beatrice, several young women make reference to his obvious reactions. Dante immediately is talked about and openly mocked in Beatrice’s company. Dante has to be helped away by his friend.

Feeling thoroughly disgraced in the eyes of the precious one, Dante thus returns home. Filled with shame and anguish in a highly tearful state, Dante decides to write more poems in the hopes of arousing some compassion on the part of the most gracious one. He tries to explain his reactions to her presence and how love renders him fearful, unworthy, and completely helpless. He observes, as well, that readers who have not had similar experiences will not be able to comprehend his experiences. Dante struggles (VN:XV-XVI) to express the way in which all senses of courage and confidence desert him whenever he is in her presence.

Later, Dante (VN:XVIII) is engaged in conversation by some of the women who had been present at Dante’s discrediting performance while in Beatrice’s

presence. Seemingly out of curiosity and questing for entertainment, they ask Dante what value his love has when he cannot endure his loved one’s presence.

Despite his initial trepidation, Dante finds their interest in his situation somewhat consoling, as well as congenial and stimulating. Attending to their observations on his love life, Dante decides that his poems about Beatrice now will be poems of praise. However, mindful of the consolation these women have provided, Dante’s poems (VN:XIX) will be directed “to ladies who know what love is” (to those who are gracious, not merely female).

After circulating the ensuing poem to some he thinks will be receptive, Dante receives further encouragement from a male friend to write about love. With Beatrice firmly in mind, Dante (VN:XX-XXI) begins to pursue this task in more focused terms.

However, Dante’s venture is interrupted when he learns of the death of Beatrice’s father. Hearing how intensely Beatrice suffers at the loss of her father, Dante also becomes thoroughly grief-stricken. He observes how much consolation he takes in the comments of a few people who say that he must know how Beatrice grieves in order for him to feel such sorrow (VN:XXII). Dante’s grieving is interrupted a few days later as he finds himself in a debilitating state of illness and delirium. It is at this time that Dante recognizes the inevitability of Beatrice’s death (VN:XXIII). After dreaming that Beatrice has died, Dante is inspired to write a poem around this theme.

Despite his own accounts of his poetic productions and related activity, it is in Chapter XXV that Dante

embarks on a more generic consideration of poetic endeavor. He discusses the practice of poets writing in Italian versus Latin indicating that the practice had begun about 150 years earlier when a poet wrote in Italian, to make his verse intelligible to a sweetheart who lacked fluency in Latin.

Then, after acknowledging the particular value of personification in the works of Virgil, Lucan, Horace, and Ovid, Dante stresses the importance of poets developing informed familiarity with poetic devices. He discounts poets who lack (disciplined) knowledge of what they are doing. [Despite Dante's comparative analysis of poetics, there is little direct evidence that Dante is aware of Aristotle's (conceptually enabling) *Poetics*.]

Dante (VN:XXVI-XXVII) then returns to Beatrice, commenting on the broader joy that Beatrice uniquely brings to all that know and behold her.

About this time, misfortune strikes and readers are informed that Beatrice has died (VN:XXVIII). Beatrice was 24, Dante is 25. After indicating why he will not go into detail about her death, Dante (VN:XXX) comments on the great loss that Florence, the city of his beloved, has experienced and enters into an extended period of tearful sorrow. He subsequently writes of his loss.

In the midst of his deepest grief, Dante is visited by a brother of his beloved Beatrice. In an experience that Dante finds remarkably uplifting, the brother (who seems to have been one of Dante's close friends) suggests that Dante might compose a poem for a young woman who has died. This request be-

comes the focal point of more poetic expressions of love and loss.

Dante (VN:XXXV) later says that a year following Beatrice's death had passed and he was still intensely filled with sorrow when he noticed a gracious young lady looking at him in what seemed a compassionate manner. Observing that unhappy people are inclined to weep when they encounter compassion from others, Dante finds himself more deeply in tears.

While noting that any subsequent compassionate looks he received from this lady encouraged further weeping on his part, Dante also describes his newly emergent delights in seeing this new lady. He writes about these experiences. While recognizing that she is taking pity on him, Dante begins to find himself struggling between desire for this compassionate lady and his sense of devotion to Beatrice.

Later, Dante (VN:XXXIX) has a particularly intense visionary recollection of Beatrice as she first appeared to him as a child. Dante again finds himself totally captivated by his thoughts of Beatrice. Amidst his continued weeping, Dante writes more about his beloved Beatrice.

Watching some pilgrims passing through Florence, Dante (VN:XL) realizes that they know nothing of Beatrice or the great loss that the city of Florence has endured after her death. Dante reasons that if these strangers knew the magnitude of the loss, they could not keep themselves from weeping. He develops his next poem around this theme, to inform others of great loss the Florentines have suffered so that these strangers also might share in the grieving.

Later (VN:XLI), Dante encounters a request from two ladies for some of his poems. He forwards his poems along with another tribute to Beatrice that he writes for the occasion.

VN (XLII) ends with Dante referencing another vision. As a result, he decides to write no more of the beloved one until he can do so in more worthwhile manners.

In concluding this depiction of VN, two sets of questions may be entertained. The first revolves around the authenticity of Dante's analysis of his own poems, while the second pertains to the value of his analysis in more contemporary terms.

Because Dante would later establish himself as among the most capable of fabricators and representationists (see *The Divine Comedy*), some may be skeptical of his intentions in VN. Responding somewhat cryptically (space limitations), I would argue for the overall sincerity of this statement.

Whereas Dante's visions are the most exceptional feature of his text, he does not center these out other than as additional points of (human) inspiration for his poems. VN provides Dante with another opportunity to discuss his love for Beatrice, but he does not use the text to accentuate his own role or qualities. Instead, he describes his own activities amidst a series of fascinations, hopes, disappointments, strategies, failures, fears, sadness, and embarrassing experiences. For someone in Dante's comparatively solitary but intensely focused situation, these seem experiences of a reasonably typical sort. Minimally, we are left with an analysis of multiple (31) instances of poetic productions within the

context of a chronological flow – a highly engaging and thoughtful contextualization of a series of texts.

Still, on a broader note, one may ask about the value of such works or autoethnographies (as they are sometimes called). On the one hand, they represent sources of inspiration for other authors. They also may provide valuable insight into people's emotional, solitary, strategic, and adjustive senses of self, as well as provide points of comparison for any who might approach similar or related matters in parallel terms.

However, it should be openly acknowledged that it is more difficult to ascertain the typicality and relevance of autoethnographic materials when they are presented more extensively on their own. While they may be suggestive in various respects, these statements also lend themselves to more speculative analysis (in which some may be inclined to explain particular productions on the basis of individual qualities as in habits, extremisms, or fascinations, for instance).

Even though many of the things Dante discusses in this account of over thirty poetic works address noteworthy features of community life, his observations could be yet more instructive when located in a more sustained comparative context involving other authors in differing places and times. In this way, we may better comprehend the more enduring, generic features of these human lived experiences.

Accordingly, it is essential that social scientists engage notions of love and devotion across a fuller range of intensities (from intense fascinations to minimalist concerns) as realms of human knowing and acting. In that sense, even Beatrice's account of

(the relationship) would represent a most instructive counterpoint to that of Dante. Still, by developing a statement that is not only highly and explicitly reflective but that also provides insight into poetics, love, and devotion, Dante has helped sustain a pragmatist focus on human knowing and acting in *La Vita Nuova*.

Although many years would pass between *La Vita Nuova* and *La Convivio*, and Dante appears to have developed much of *The Divine Comedy* during this time, *The Banquet* may well have been his greatest challenge.

### *La Convivio (The Banquet)*

Whereas *La Vita Nuova* may be seen as an autoethnographic account of Dante's early encounters with poetics and love, *The Banquet* (or *La Convivio*) may be envisioned as Dante's autoethnographic encounter with Philosophy.<sup>22</sup> Dante still remains intent on producing something worthwhile in honor of Beatrice, but it is Philosophy rather than Beatrice who has become the love of his life or the focus of his meaningful productions.

Consequently, whereas Beatrice gave Dante splendor, graciousness, and inspiration, it is Philosophy who gives Dante enhanced meaning and provides comprehension of, and intellectual connection with, the larger community of poets and scholars. Following the loss of Beatrice, Dante would become deeply involved in the politics of Florence. In the

<sup>22</sup> In developing this statement, I have benefited from Christopher Ryan's (1989) translation and related commentary of *Dante: The Banquet*.

course of a major political transition, Dante would find himself exiled from the city in which so much of his meaningful self had resided.

Consequently, after encountering Boethius' (c. 480-524) *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Dante found consolation in Philosophy. Consistent with Boethius, Dante's philosophy is anchored in Christian (and Platonist) images of divinity.

Like Boethius, Dante also tries to synthesize aspects of Aristotelian thought within a Platonist framework. However, Dante has yet more to reconcile. Thus, Dante endeavors to achieve conceptual coherence amidst (a) the theological emphasis of Plato and Augustine, (b) the intellectual emphasis on human knowing and acting that Aristotle and Aquinas adopt, (c) the discerning and expressive articulation of rhetoric of Cicero, and (d) the more purely sensual life-worlds that Dante associates with Virgil, Ovid, and Dante's own *La Vita Nuova*.

With these emphases in mind, Dante intends to produce something that extends well beyond his poetics. *The Banquet*, thus, is presented as a more mature, more sophisticated statement than *La Vita Nuova*. While subsumed by an overarching Christian theological frame, *The Banquet* may be seen as Dante's approximation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, as well as a more general defense of scholarship.

*The Banquet* lacks the depth, scope, and more consistent Aristotelian emphasis of Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologica*), on whose works Dante builds, but as a more distinctively poetic endeavor directed towards a broader (vs. theological/philosophic

audience), *The Banquet* remains a remarkable piece of work.

Approaching his text in a highly self-reflective manner, Dante will deal with "human knowing," "reputations and stigma," some "pragmatic features of language," and notions of "human agency." As well, Dante (Book II) provides an extended discussion of "interpretation" as this applies to his own work and to human knowing more generally (as he introduces Philosophy and explains her relevance).

Dante pursues Philosophy with much the same intensity that he had earlier directed towards Beatrice. Notably, however, *The Banquet* is more fully developed in a comparative sense. Thus, Dante discusses his love for Philosophy while discussing philosophy and philosophers in broader terms. While maintaining loyalties to God as a creator (from which all comes), Dante declares that wisdom is the beauty of the soul and the source of all human activity.

Likewise, whereas he completes but three of the fourteen intellectual courses he had intended to serve at *The Banquet*, Dante provides an array of items that are particularly consequential for the sociological insight they provide.<sup>23</sup> I have tried to highlight these matters along the way while attending to the overall flow of this text, but readers are

<sup>23</sup> Albeit situated within a Christian framework, Dante's *The Banquet* seems to parallel Martianus Capella's *The Marriage of Philology and Mercury* (c. 410); wherein an earlier celebration provides the setting for an extended instructive account of the Seven Liberal Arts (Grammar, Dialectic, Rhetoric, Geometry [measurement, geography], Arithmetic, Astrology [climate, cosmos], and Harmony [rhythm, musical theory]).

cautioned that Dante's sociological insights are not developed in a systematic manner.

Referencing Aristotle (*Metaphysics*), Dante (*The Banquet*, Book I: Chapter I) begins with the observation that people naturally desire to know things. While people's physiological states sometimes prevent them from learning, Dante also notes that many people have little time or respect for knowledge. He explains these latter tendencies in terms of people who (a) are so absorbed in family and civic responsibilities that they have little opportunity or energy for study or (b) grow up in settings that lack facilities of higher learning and other opportunities to associate with more learned people. Consequently, Dante observes, only a very small portion of people actually pursue studies on a more sustained basis.

In developing *La Convivio (The Banquet)*, Dante hopes to be able to share things he has learned with those who wish to learn but have not had the opportunity to do so. All who wish to learn, thus, are invited to Dante's banquet.

In Chapter II, Dante apologizes for speaking about himself in the text, but observes that this may be allowed when one attempts to avert danger, minimize personal disrepute, or help others in more instructive manners (Dante cites Augustine's *Confessions* as a case in point). Dante also wishes to use the occasion to explain some of his earlier poetic works (seemingly one for each of the fourteen courses; *The Banquet* is notably incomplete in this regard) that he believes have been subject both to misinterpretation and disrepute.

Addressing the topic of discreditation in Chapters III and IV of Book I, Dante provides a comparatively short but highly insightful discussion of *images*, *reputations*, and *stigma*. Drawing on his own experience as an exile from Florence and his somewhat hapless life-style thereafter, Dante discusses people's reputations (good and bad) in highly generic processual terms.

Relatedly, Dante discusses the emergence, spread, embellishment, and superficiality of people's reputations. He also acknowledges the malicious motivational relevance of envy in many cases and the inevitable human imperfections (as in passions, physical disabilities, misfortune, ill repute of parents, or other close associates) that may become the focus of attention when people assign identities to others.<sup>24</sup>

After acknowledging that he, himself, appears to be held in lower esteem than may be appropriate, Dante says that he will adopt a loftier, more serious presentation in the hopes that he may be able to minimize this disadvantage. Anticipating that this emphasis on legitimation may obscure his commentary in certain respects, Dante apologizes in advance.

Dante (Book I: Chapter V-IX) adds to the sociological appeal of *The Banquet* when he elaborates on his use of the (vernacular) Italian instead of Latin in his text. While this material may be of particular interest to those in linguistics, Dante also stresses the pragmatic features of his decision to write in Italian.

<sup>24</sup> Those who know Goffman's (1959; 1963) and Klapp's (1964) work on impression management, stigma, and identities will find much in Dante's compacted analysis that resonates with their analyses.

Although a Latin text would be accessible to a wider community of scholars, Dante reasons that the vernacular will be useful to many more people (albeit Italian readers) whose educational standards effectively have become so limited as to render Latin text inaccessible. It is his attempt to be generous on the one hand, while also pragmatically observing that nothing can be of value unless it is used.

Somewhat relatedly (Book I: Chapter X-XI), Dante indicates that he intends to defend the Italian vernacular against those disloyal Italians who promote the (vernacular) languages of other people while disparaging their own tongue. After identifying a series of motives for the disregard of one's own language, Dante emphasizes that his greater fluency in Italian and its potency for expressing his thoughts constitute primary considerations of the love he has for Italian.

Drawing parallels between his love for Italian and Aristotle's (*Nicomachean Ethics*) and Cicero's (*On Friendship*) analysis of friendship, Dante also observes that it was in learning Italian from birth that he was first able to acquire knowledge and that it was only through Italian that he could later learn Latin. Italian, thus, has been his long-time, enabling companion and he anticipates that his appreciation for Italian will grow even more as their association continues.

Following the presentation of Canzone I (set of stanzas or verses) in Book II of *The Banquet*, Dante embarks on a sustained interpretation of this poetic statement. In the process, he also (Book II: Chapter I) delineates four ways in which any text may be interpreted. While noting that *The Banquet* is to be interpreted in literal and allegorical terms,

Dante distinguishes (a) literal or overt, conventional meanings of text; (b) allegorical representations, in which the truth is told under the context of an eloquent misrepresentation or fable; (c) moral or instructional messages, which are presented in the context of another account or statement; and (d) anagogical representations, wherein the message transcends the senses and mystically or spiritually goes beyond human capacities to understand.

Having said this, Dante argues for the necessity of people first acknowledging the literal interpretation of one's message. Without this, he emphasizes, there can be no (further) qualifications. He observes that nothing else can be known without first acknowledging the literal intended meanings. Dante indicates that in commenting on his canzones, he will first establish the literal translations of his verses and then address the allegories or underlying meanings contained within.

Bypassing much of Dante's earlier commentary on Canzone I, we focus on Chapter XII (*The Banquet*, Book II), wherein Dante quickly reviews his great sense of loss when Beatrice dies and his subsequent encounters with Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy* and Cicero's *On Friendship* that lead him to philosophy.

For Dante, Philosophy has become the linguistic key to comprehending human knowing over the ages:<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Focusing on human knowing and acting from a pragmatist philosophic viewpoint while engaging the larger project of which this statement on 12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century poetics is but one part, I could not help but appreciate Dante's observations on the centrality of philosophy (from the classical Greeks onward) for comprehending people's considerations of the human condition.

so in my search for consolation I found not only a remedy for my tears, but a linguistic key to authors, disciplines, and books. Reflecting on these, I became firmly convinced that philosophy, who was the lady of these authors, these disciplines and these books, was something of supreme importance. I imagined it as having the form of a noble lady, and I could not imagine her with the bearing other than full of pity; consequently, my power to perceive truth found such delight in gazing on her that I could scarcely turn it elsewhere. Drawn by this image, I began to go to where she truly revealed herself, that is, to the schools of the religious and the disputations of the philosophers. And so in a short time, perhaps some thirty months, I began to experience so profoundly the sweetness she brings that love of her drove out and destroyed all thought of anything else. Finding myself, therefore, being drawn from the thought my first love by the power of this other, I gave voice to the wonder I felt in the words of the above canzone, in which I describe my real situation under another guise. I adopted this strategy because there was no form of vernacular poetry of sufficient merit to portray directly the lady with whom I was in love, nor were those who heard the poem of sufficient culture to have understood the nonfictitious words so readily; nor, further, would they have given credence to the true meaning, as they did to the fictitious, since they certainly believe that its author was quite capable of the first love but not of the second. (Dante Alighieri [*The Banquet*, Book II: Chapter XII]; Ryan trans. 1989:65-66)

Elaborating somewhat on his new love and the enabling features of Philosophy as the gate to Heaven, Dante explains that heaven is knowledge. In addition to the more typically cited seven arts or

realms of knowing (Grammar, Dialectics, Rhetoric, Arithmetic, Geometry, Astronomy, and Music), Dante adds Physics (natural science), Moral Science (virtue, deliberation, and acting) and Theology (the study of God, religion).

Referencing Philosophy as the source of fulfillment for those who “gaze into her eyes,” Dante adds that although devotion to this lady requires endless study and struggling, the results are most fulfilling.

Dante begins Book III with Canzone II, wherein he expresses his great admiration for the lady Philosophy and acknowledges her heavenly qualities. As Dante explains this canzone, he engages in a consideration of love and friendship by drawing on Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Attending to Aristotle’s description of the human soul (*psyche*) as having three components – a life-energy, a capacity for sensation, and a reasoning or deliberative capacity – Dante observes that his love of Philosophy is minded activity (Book III: Chapter III). Relatedly, Dante acknowledges his own senses of bewilderment and inadequacy for engaging Philosophy. Subsequently (Book III: Chapter IV), Dante describes his shortcomings as the products of his limited background understandings and an existing set of linguistic resources that is inadequate to more fully pursue Philosophy.

Following some more divinely-focused considerations of Philosophy, Dante (Book III: Chapter IX) more directly addresses the question of “who may be called a philosopher?” For Dante, a *philosopher* can only be someone who loves wisdom, who is

deeply devoted and caring about knowledge. Those who engage philosophy for purposes of entertainment or gain (e.g., lawyers, doctors, clergy) thus cannot be true philosophers. Only those who maintain a sincere, steadfast focus on acquiring wisdom deserve the term philosopher. Philosophy exists (Book III: Chapter XII) when the mind and wisdom have become friends in a complete and loving sense.

Relatedly, Dante (Book III: Chapter XIII) observes that when people are not actively engaged in contemplation, they are not truly in the realm of philosophy, even though they may have developed the habit of study and possess the capacity to pursue this activity. Approaching his topic in Aristotelian terms, Dante says that philosophy exists or assumes its primary essence as a minded, reflective realm of activity.

In Book IV (Canzone III) Dante says that he has put aside his *poetic* concerns of love, not because he wishes to do so but in order that he might more adequately deal with the matter of human worth and nobility.

Following Aristotle, Dante stresses the common human foundations of all virtues. He defines virtues as things that contribute to human happiness. Observing that where there is virtue, there is nobility, Dante explicitly rejects the idea that nobility is a matter of family lines or heritage. He will pursue this topic at several points later, emphasizing achieved (learned, voluntary, deliberative, enacted) versus ascribed or wealth-based notions of virtue.

More directly re-engaging his love for Philosophy, Dante (*The Banquet*, Book IV: Chapter I) explains

how Philosophy’s loves have become his loves and her disaffections are now his disaffections. While noting that Philosophy has not been disposed to reveal knowledge of God to him, Dante still envisions his mission as one of generating nobility across the broader community. As with *La Vita Nuova*, Dante (Book IV: Chapter II) continues to interpret his text (Canzone III in this case), noting he will follow Aristotle in engaging other authors and analytically questing for the truth.

While stressing Aristotle’s emphases on people as animals who are community beings, Dante (Book IV: Chapter III-V) fuses aspects of Aristotle’s works with Virgil’s (*The Aeneid*) depiction of a worldly Roman Empire ruled by a monarch in a reasoned, just fashion.<sup>26</sup> Still, maintaining his Christian ties, Dante aspires for a Holy Roman Empire. The state will be tempered by theological considerations, but it will not be ruled by theologians (or the papacy).

Dante (Book IV: Chapter VI) next proceeds to establish “the authority of Aristotle,” a task he considers much more consequential than ascertaining the authenticity of the emperor of his anticipated state. Noting that the term authenticity is derived from the Greek word to be trustworthy, Dante describes Aristotle as the most fitting philosopher to merit this designation. Thus, while recognizing several other philosophers – and acknowledging a deep-rooted indebtedness to Plato and Socrates – Dante contends that it is Aristotle who has developed the most adequate moral philosophy.

<sup>26</sup> Dante develops this theme in *The Monarchy*, wherein he also argues at a length for a separation of the secular Roman state and the church.

Dante (Book IV: Chapter VII) again denounces the claim that people may achieve nobility (virtue) through birth or heritage. He further suggests that those who came from advantaged backgrounds but who do evil are especially contemptible.

Then, engaging Aristotle more directly, Dante notes that while animals differ from plant life by virtue of their capacities for sensation and movement, it is the capacity for reason that sets humans apart from other animals.

Dante (Book IV: Chapter IX) then addresses what may be defined as the *sociology of knowledge* in even more direct terms. After observing that the only activities that properly belong to humans are those in which they engage in knowing and intentional terms, Dante (briefly) distinguishes four kinds of action (process) to which people may attend at an intellectual level.

Thus, he refers to (a) things that people might study in highly abstract terms (as in the subjects of physics, mathematics, metaphysics); (b) modes of rational discourse (dialectic/rhetoric), wherein people engage one another in more technical or skilful manners; (c) the mechanics of things, wherein people discover certain principles of how things work and how things might be adjusted, accomplished, or produced; and (d) activities that people pursue in knowing and willful terms, things for which they can be held accountable and judged as good or bad.

In Chapter X-XII, Dante not only denies that wealth is a base for nobility (virtue) but argues that riches can be an impediment to nobility. Knowledge,

Dante argues, is the truly viable way of attaining virtue.

Still, Dante (Book IV: Chapter XIII) observes, knowledge is far from being a single thing. Not only is knowledge a multiplistic essence but it also becomes an unending quest, since each step or phase both reveals and enables subsequent lines of inquiry. Dante then presents a prototypic debate wherein he takes issue with those who suggest that people's pursuits of something as "elusive as knowledge" are futile and could be more productively spent on other matters (such as accumulating richness or pursuing position).

Dante (Book IV: Chapter XV) next delineates three central failures or flaws of character that keep people from acquiring knowledge. The first is the presumption that people already know all that is necessary or important. Second, some people are timid. They lack confidence in their abilities to learn or are unwilling to make the effort to learn and think about things more fully and carefully. The third impediment to learning is found among those who adopt frivolous standpoints on things – people who bounce from thought to thought and who fail to engage matters in more careful, disciplined, and sustained manners. While poorly informed about the basics, these people will still insist in the correctness of their opinions on things.

Dante (Book IV: Chapter XVII) subsequently engages Aristotle's virtues in direct but highly compacted terms. Amidst very brief commentaries on the relevance of each virtue to people (at personal, interpersonal, and community levels), Dante acknowledges

the virtues of: fortitude (courage), temperance (self control), liberality (generosity), munificence (grand level generosity), honor, appropriate pride, evenness of disposition, affability, truthfulness, pleasantry, and justice. Noting that each virtue has two corresponding vices (one on each extreme of the virtuous mid-points), Dante reaffirms Aristotle's advice to strive for moderation (in all things) in the pursuit of happiness on personal and collective levels.

Attempting to address human happiness in more definite terms and defining the mind as the rational component of one's being, Dante (Book IV, Chapter XXII) distinguishes two kinds of minded activity, the practical and the contemplative. Further defining practical activity as that people knowingly engage with the purpose of generating certain outcomes, Dante says that contemplative activity involves the study of God and nature. In pursuing these two activities, he contends, one will find supreme happiness. However, because the most consequential thing one can do is to prepare oneself to experience God, Dante envisions contemplative activity to be the highest goal of intellect.<sup>27</sup>

Later, Dante (Book IV: Chapter XXIII-XXIX) divides human life into four stages: youth (birth to age 20), maturity (20-45), old age (45-70), and extreme old age (70 and beyond). Relatedly, he discusses (a) people's habits, interests, capabilities, concerns for others; (b) their involvements in community and political life; and (c) their attentiveness to and modes of engaging

<sup>27</sup> While Dante frequently and centrally invokes Aristotle as a philosophic reference point in *The Banquet*, it should be appreciated that here, as in many other points of orientation, Dante's philosophy also is fundamentally rooted in Platonist and Christian theology.

theological matters that characterize people at these different times in their lives.

*The Banquet* (Book IV: Chapter XXX) ends abruptly, with the observation that philosophy and nobility (virtue) are to be appreciated together, as inseparable adornments one to the other.

### Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Other Works

Although the practical limitations of space and time prevent me from addressing the texts of Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375) in more detail,<sup>28</sup> Boccaccio deserves particular attention for his 14<sup>th</sup> century considerations of love, philosophy, and divinity. Like Brunetto Latini and Dante Alighieri, Boccaccio addresses some particularly consequential pragmatist features of human knowing and acting. Even though Boccaccio, later in life, would renounce his secular involvements and writings, as well as assume the role of the cleric (*The Decameron: A New Translation* [Musa and Bondanella 1977]), it is Boccaccio who, more than the other authors referenced in this paper, overtly takes issue with theological and secular morality in developing his texts.

Like Dante, Boccaccio has been notably inspired by Ovid, as well as his personal romantic experiences. However, whereas Boccaccio's earlier writings display an idealism, optimism, and sensual intrigues associated with love (along with a heightened ap-

<sup>28</sup> I found Aldington's (1930) translation of *The Decameron*, Musa and Bondanella's (1977) *Decameron: A New Translation*, Smarr's (1986) *Boccaccio and Fiammetta*, Osgood's translation of *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium*, and and Serafini-Sauli's (1982) *Giovanni Boccaccio* to be exceptionally helpful sources.

preciation of women more generally), Boccaccio's later works on love are more resentful and disaffected – both with respect to love and female objects of love.

While developing some of his early texts (e.g., *Filocolo* and *Filostrato*) around popular love stories, Boccaccio in *Teseida* (written circa 1339-1341) provides a series of personified accounts of the inhabitants of the "House of Mars" (as in Fear, Fury, and other evil characters) and the "House of Venus" (as in Courtesy, Kindness, Beauty, and other love-related allegories).

In the *Amorosa Visione* (c. 1342-1343), which is modeled notably after Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, Boccaccio develops an epic journey that takes the poet (dreamer) through the realms of profane and sacred love. The work appears to be the journey towards Christian love, as well as an examination of the failings of sensate love. Still, Boccaccio never relinquishes the sensual appreciation of his beloved Fiammetta.

Written shortly after *Amorosa Visione*, *Fiammetta* is highly reminiscent of Dante's *La Vita Nuova*. However, instead of presenting the text from the viewpoint of a male poet, this statement is presented from the standpoint of a lady who has been abandoned by her lover. A depiction of the experiences and intense emotional struggles of a woman who has been rejected in love, *Fiammetta* is addressed to "ladies in love." Here, as well, one witnesses the debate between love and reason, albeit primarily as a display of the painful fate that can befall those who are smitten by and rejected in love.

Despite the many insights into heterosexual relations and community life more generally that Boccaccio provides in the works just cited – and the value of these texts both as resources for a more extended analysis of human relations and as points of intellectual continuity for various pragmatist motifs introduced by earlier poets – Boccaccio is best known for *Decameron* (c. 1349-1353).

*Decameron* is an account of a group of young people (seven women and three men) who have gathered at a country estate in the hopes of waiting out the plague of 1348. As a means of entertaining themselves, they decide to present stories for each other around particular themes of one person's choosing for each day. While two days each consist of ten stories that are freely chosen, the other eight days each feature ten stories that deal with more specific matters involving notions of love, happiness, deception, resourcefulness, intelligence, generosity, fortune, and fame.

Although social scientists may appreciate the generic emphases of these various accounts, as well as particular aspects of these stories as these reflect aspects of the human condition more generally, *Decameron* also represents a more sustained break with Christian theology and community morality. Not only are many of the stories explicitly erotic in emphasis but they also are notably attentive to the interests and misadventures of everyday people. Still, several of these accounts also pointedly depict the folly of theological emphases and the hypocrisy of representatives of the church.

Still, *Decameron* is yet more compelling because of the poignant commentary that Boccaccio pro-

vides on the plague of 1348 at the onset of his text. Although Boccaccio devotes only a small proportion of *Decameron* to the plague, his observations are strikingly straightforward, humanly humbling, and sociologically insightful.

As Boccaccio discusses people's definitions and ways of coming to terms with an ambiguous, uncontrollable series of deaths in their midst, it becomes strikingly apparent that the moral order of the community is a socially constructed essence. When the usual elements (law, religion, medicine, family obligations, civil relations) that prop-up morality lose their mystique and relevance, people may more readily pursue their own interests without regard for these (now more noticeably) humanly fabricated structures.

In *Decameron*, the artificiality of religious restraints and other notions of civil morality, along with the limitations of science, become strikingly apparent amidst (a) the extremely disabling capacities of nature (as in sickness and death); (b) people's related senses of fear, frustration, and hopelessness; and (c) the yet possible human intrigues with sensuality, entertainment, and curiosity.

Boccaccio's last fictional work is *Corbaccio* (c. 1355). An embittered account of a rejected (male) lover, *Corbaccio* provides a highly disparaging account of the particular object of affection, as well as a more general denunciation of women. *Corbaccio* represents a striking departure from the viewpoints that characterize *Decameron* and Boccaccio's earlier writings. However, when combined with Boccaccio's early accounts of love, *Corbaccio* helps generate a more com-

prehensive set of viewpoints within which notions of love may be more adequately conceptualized.

In addition to his poetic works, Boccaccio is also known for his extended texts on famous men and women (*De Casibus Virorum Illustrium* [c. 1356-1360]) and well-known women (*De Mulieribus* [c. 1361-1362]). Here, Boccaccio describes the settings, circumstances, and turns of fortune, as well as the intrigues, resourcefulness, and failings of these well-known personas.

Albeit much less well-known than *Decameron*, Boccaccio's *Genealogia Deorum Gentilium* [*GDG*; *Genealogy of the Gentile Gods*] is best known (Books I-XIII) for its remarkably extensive compilation and analyses of mythologies pertaining to the pagan gods of antiquity (particularly as these were recorded in Greek and Latin texts). Still, within yet more focused circles, *GDG* also is known for its extended defense (and justification) of poetry as a responsible, honorable, and uniquely valuable realm of artistic expression and scholarship.

It is in Book XIV of *GDG* that Boccaccio directly, intensively, and cogently defends and promotes poetic endeavor. Building on this base, Boccaccio (Book XV) extends this venture as he subsequently engages active and prospective critics of *GDG*. Much more than just a creative, expressive, partially fictionalized corpus of representations, Boccaccio addresses poetics as a "practical art form." Not only do poetic materials reflect and stimulate people's imaginations but wide ranges of poetic productions also are deeply interwoven with many other realms of community life.

While aligning himself (seemingly self-protectively) with the Judeo-Christian tradition at times, Boccaccio stresses the importance of (a) compiling and intellectually examining the mythologies of the gods of antiquity; (b) attending to the foundational features of classical Greek, as well as Latin social thought; (c) acknowledging the broader value of poetic expression; and (d) dealing with the invectives directed towards poetic productions by uninformed, mercenary, and pretentious people, as well as the obscurity, contradictions, and misplaced emotionality of religious and other moral zealots who condemn the poetic enterprise.

In the process, Boccaccio takes concerted issue with the base-line ignorance associated with those who emphasize personal sensate experiences over scholarly endeavor; the heavy, selfish concern with financial success that characterizes those working in the field of law; the arrogance and pretensions of self-proclaimed intelligentsia; and the narrow, contradictory, often vicious intolerances of zealous Christians and other moralists.

In developing his defense of poetics, Boccaccio also attends to the differential viewpoints of poets, philosophers, historians, rhetoricians, and theologians. As well, he stresses some highly consequential divisions between poets themselves. Thus, whereas Boccaccio provides an exceedingly thoughtful defense and justification of poets and their work, he particularly emphasizes honorable, scholarly, dedicated, instructive, thoughtful, and creative poetic endeavors. By contrast, he disparages those poets whose concerns revolve more centrally around financial compensation, fame, and situated popularity

– poets who would sacrifice personal integrity and sensibility, as well as self-respect to appeal to the licentious tastes of cruder audiences.

Still, Boccaccio's objectives in developing *Genealogia Deorum Gentilium* are broader and more scholarly. Viewing *GDG* as a departure point and enabling resource, and building on a wide array of classical Greek and Latin sources, as well as some particularly creative, dedicated, noble poets closer to his own time, Boccaccio encourages the study of poetry as a distinctively valuable, enabling field of scholarship in the Liberal Arts. Relatedly, he emphasizes the consequential developmental interplay and interconnections of poetics not only with grammar and rhetoric but also with philosophy, religion, politics, and the yet more encompassing study of human relations. The following passage provides only a very limited indication of what Boccaccio envisions as the highly varied, deeply consequential, and long-standing relevance of poetics for community life:

[t]his poetry, which ignorant triflers cast aside, is a sort of fervid and exquisite invention, with fervid expression, in speech or writing, of that which the mind has invented. ... This fervor of poesy is sublime in its effects: it impels the soul to a longing for adherence; it brings forth strange and unheard-of creations<sup>[5]</sup> of the mind; it arranges these meditations in a fixed order,<sup>[6]</sup> adorns the whole<sup>[7]</sup> composition with unusual interweaving of words and thoughts; and thus it veils truth in a fair and fitting garment of fiction.<sup>[8]</sup> Further, if in any case the invention so requires, it can arm kings, marshal them for war, launch all fleets from their docks, nay, counterfeit sky, land, sea,

adorn young maidens with flowery garlands, portray human character in its various phases, awake the idle, stimulate the dull, restrain the rash, subdue the criminal, and distinguish excellent men with their proper meed of praise: these and many other such, are the effects of poetry. ... [Beyond grammar and rhetoric – RP] it is necessary to know at least the principles of the other Liberal Arts,<sup>[11]</sup> both moral and natural,<sup>[12]</sup> to possess a strong and abundant vocabulary, to behold the monuments and relics<sup>[13]</sup> of the Ancients, to have in one's memory the histories of the nations, and to be familiar with the geography of various lands, of seas, rivers and mountains. (Boccaccio [*Genealogia Deorum Gentilium*]; Osgood trans. 1956:39-40; endnotes are acknowledged in brackets, but not provided here)

As suggested in this brief commentary on Boccaccio's texts, several of Boccaccio's other works have considerably greater sociological relevance than does the vastly more popular *Decameron*. Like Dante, whom he emulates in part, Boccaccio helps sustain the pragmatist intellectual tradition well beyond the 14<sup>th</sup> century. However, because Boccaccio addresses matters of human knowing and acting, particularly as these pertain to interpersonal relations, definitions of self and other, reflectivity, and encounters with and expressions of emotionality, his works merit much more sustained attention on the part of social scientists than they have been given in the present statement. Thus, more than the insightful, enabling work of an earlier historical period, Boccaccio's considerations of interpersonal relationships, poetic endeavor, and the social ordering of community life also represent valuable resources for transhistorical and transcultural comparative analysis.

## Conclusion

It may seem unfair to subject the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century poetics of Latini, Alighieri, and Boccaccio to the more stringent criteria of contemporary symbolic interactionism. However, this is necessary if one is to attain a more adequate appreciation of the potential of these materials for contributing to a more sustained social science of human knowing and acting.

To this end, the works of Latini, Alighieri, and Boccaccio are assessed with respect to their (a) compatibility with interactionist premises, (b) attentiveness to basic social processes that characterize humanly engaged life-worlds, (c) methodological rigor, and (d) amenability to comparative analysis of a more transsituational sort.

Insofar, as these early Italian materials fare reasonably well in these regards, they may be employed to make significant contributions to an empirically informed (human lived experience) social science that goes well beyond their value as an interesting set of cultural artifacts or historical documents of the early (pre-16<sup>th</sup> century) Renaissance. Accordingly, it is important to know where and in what ways these materials are consistent with the interactionist enterprise.<sup>29</sup>

First, none of the poets discussed here outline *the premises* of pragmatist scholarship in manners that are as complete, explicit, or distinctively pluralist as

<sup>29</sup> Those familiar with a companion piece (Prus 2014) on some 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century French poets (Alan de Lille, Andreas Capellanus, and Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun) may notice that I used the same format in assessing their works. This way, readers may more readily compare the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century French poets with the Italian authors considered in this paper with respect to symbolic interaction more generally.

those of Mead (1934), Blumer (1969), Lofland (1976), Strauss (1993), and Prus (1996; 1997), for instance. Nevertheless, Latini, Alighieri, and Boccaccio are attentive to broader pragmatist notions of multiple viewpoints, linguistically-achieved meanings, reflectivity, activity, influence work and resistance, relationships, and process.

Like their French predecessors, these 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century Italian poets have anchored aspects of their analysis in Christian (Platonist informed) theology. However, once readers approach these texts in more neutral (atheological) manners, it becomes apparent that Latini, Alighieri, and Boccaccio also engage human group life in terms that are notably pluralist and pragmatist in emphases.

Further, whereas the three Italian authors encourage Christian and civil (i.e., personal and societal virtues) morality in various ways, all of these authors are attentive to people's sensate and secular interests, activities, and interchanges. Dante Alighieri (*The Banquet*) evidences a greater familiarity with the foundations of pragmatist social thought than do Latini or Boccaccio, but all three Italian poets appear mindful of the interactional features of human knowing and acting.<sup>30</sup>

When one turns to a more explicit elaboration of the basic or generic *conceptual themes* (e.g., Blumer 1969; Lofland 1976; Strauss 1993; Prus 1996; 1997; 1999) that characterize interactionist emphases more generally, somewhat similar conclusions may be drawn.

<sup>30</sup> For a fuller consideration of Aristotelian pragmatist social thought and its linkages and affinities with American pragmatist philosophy, see Prus (2003; 2004; 2007c; 2008a; 2009).



Thus, whereas Latini, Alighieri, and Boccaccio may not discuss these matters in the particular terms used by contemporary interactionists, they are notably cognizant of the matters of *people acquiring perspectives, interpreting situations, achieving identity, developing relationship, doing activity, making commitments, achieving linguistic fluency, expressing emotionality, and forming and coordinating associations*, as well as *the problematic, moralistically-oriented, often conflictual nature of human group life*.

As might be expected, the Italian poets fare less well when assessed on the *methodological criterion* of symbolic interaction. Still, even though they do not provide data of a more direct, sustained ethnographic sort,<sup>31</sup> they are highly astute observers and analysts of the human condition. Moreover, because they present much of their material in distinctively poetic terms, readers may lose sight of the community-based representativeness of their observations.

As participant observers of sorts, these authors provide open considerations of their own poetic ventures. Dante's thoughtful "autoethnographies" of his experiences with love (*The New Life*) and philosophy (*The Banquet*) are particularly noteworthy in this regard and rival a great many contemporary autoethnographic accounts of this sort.

This brings us to the fourth criterion. What is the nature of *analysis* that Latini, Alighieri, and Boccaccio

<sup>31</sup> In fairness to these Italian scholars, it should be noted that the American pragmatists (Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, John Dewey, and George Herbert Mead) also fare poorly in methodological (i.e., ethnographic data) terms.

present in their texts? Are their materials largely expressive and playful or does this literature have consequential transsituational and/or transhistorical analytic relevance? Relatedly, do these statements offer any sustained frames for examining human knowing and acting beyond some more situated sociological insights? More minimally, do the materials contained in these texts provide data for more sustained comparative analysis?

None of the Italian poets achieve the remarkable analytical considerations of the human condition that one finds in the broader, highly detailed philosophical works of Plato, Aristotle, or Aquinas. Still, Latini, Alighieri, and Boccaccio have been much more attentive to classical Greek and Latin scholarship (particularly the pragmatism of Aristotle, the rhetoric of Cicero, and the strategic interchanges of Ovid) than have the American pragmatists and the interactionists more generally. The Italian scholars also have been mindful of people's encounters with morality (i.e., engaging community notions of good and evil) and religion (attending to people's definitions of and experiences with), as well as matters pertaining to knowledge (as wisdom, philosophy, scholarship), love and friendship, identities and reputations, and influence work. In these regards, the Italian poets exhibit a notably instructive appreciation of the developmental flows and enacted interlinkages of multiple realms of community life.

Because Latini, Alighieri, and Boccaccio deal with matters of human relations, identities, influence work, morality, and religion in fairly explicit and detailed manners, contemporary social scientists

would likely find it productive to examine these materials in more direct, analytically comparative terms (possibly using generic social processes as conceptual comparison points).

As well, whereas contemporary interactionists and sociologists more generally have tended to organize their analyses around structure-based roles, perspectives, and identities, the three Italian poets featured here offer another line of analysis for considering the human condition. As with their 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century French predecessors (Prus 2014), this revolves around the use of personifications or allegorical figures. Signifying features of *character-based roles* (and their associated "modes of orientation and ways of relating to others in the setting"), these personifications draw attention to additional ways of knowing and acting within the context of ongoing community life.

Because they so centrally address aspects of human interchange, along with the associated ambiguities, dilemmas, and tensions that people experience on a day-to-day basis, Latini, Alighieri, and Boccaccio have yet more to offer social scientists. Their works may be fictionalized in certain regards, but the three Italian poets provide analysts with materials from another place and time that can be instructively compared with the texts developed by contemporary ethnographers and social theorists. By using specific works from Latini, Alighieri, and Boccaccio as transhistorical and transcultural comparison points, one may examine, assess, and possibly extend a variety of generic social processes (e.g., acquiring perspectives, developing relationships, achieving identity, doing activities, pursuing influ-

ence work, engaging morality [see Prus 1996; 1997; 1999; Prus and Grills 2003] in more focused, comparative analytic terms.

In addition to the conceptual continuities that they provide in the development of Western social thought (from Christian, Roman, and yet earlier Greek sources to subsequent developments in Western European poetics and broader scholarly understandings of human relations), the materials developed by Latini, Alighieri, and Boccaccio represent part of a larger but much neglected intellectual treasure chest from the past.

Like the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century French poets addressed earlier (Prus 2014), the relevance of the works of these early Renaissance Italian authors for the broader study of human knowing and acting did not cease with their own texts. Thus, in turn, a wide range of 15<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century Western European authors, critics, and analysts of poetic productions would obtain direction and inspiration of a pragmatist sort from Latini, Alighieri, and Boccaccio.

Not all of the authors identified here are as centrally attentive to the matters of human knowing and acting, for instance, as is Dante. Still, many of the authors listed here have struggled with issues pertaining to the representation of human knowing and acting in fairly consequential terms. And some, like Dante, who also follow Aristotle, have been particularly mindful of these matters.

Among subsequent Italian authors who address human knowing and acting in poetical contexts one finds Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527), Giovan Giorgio

Trissino (1478-1550), Julius Caesar Scaliger (1484-1558), Cinthio (1504-1573), Lodovico Castelvetro (1505-1571), Franciscus Robortellus (1516-1567), Torquato Tasso (1544-1595), and Carlo Goldoni (1707-1793).

Also noteworthy in these regards are the British authors: Geoffrey Chaucer (1340-1400), Thomas Elyot (1490-1546), John Heywood (1497-1580), George Puttenham (1529-1590), Philip Sidney (1554-1586), Thomas Lodge (1558-1625), William Shakespeare (1564-1616), Thomas Heywood (1571-1641), Ben Jonson (1572-1637), Philip Massinger (1583-1640), John Milton (1608-1674), John Dryden (1631-1700), and Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800-1859).

Although the Dutch most notably are represented by a single author, Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536), a consideration of Renaissance poets would be notably incomplete without recognizing this exceptionally prolific and highly influential Latin philosopher-poet and educator-theologian.

The more consequential French authors who address human knowing and acting in poetical contexts include Francois Hédelin (1604-1676), René Rapin (1621-1700), Francois de Callières (1645-1717), François-Marie Arouet (Voltaire) (1694-1778), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), and Denis Diderot (1713-1784).

Also contributing to this broader poetical venture are the German authors: Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781), Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), Georg Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), Friedrich Schiller (1799-1805), Gustav Freytag (1816-

1895), Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900).

Insofar, as they address the matters of human knowing and acting in more explicit and sustained terms, the works of many poet-analysts from the near and distant past could be added to the preceding list. As with those addressing rhetoric, history, philosophy, love and friendship, politics, and religion in more direct, humanly engaged terms, these earlier sources can be seen as having been instrumental in maintaining consequential continuities in pragmatist thought prior to the appearance of American pragmatism (as presented by Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, and Charles Horton Cooley) and symbolic interactionism – pragmatism’s sociological offshoot associated with Herbert Blumer and Chicago-style ethnography.

Clearly, I am not suggesting that we turn the social sciences into a realm of poetical expression. Indeed, we need to proceed with caution in the ways we approach *all* materials pertaining to the study of human knowing and acting from any era (including those that are closest to one’s own times), and to be explicitly mindful of the parameters of one’s own assumptions (see Prus 1996; 1997), as well as those of any sources under consideration. Still, even with these cautions in mind, it is important to recognize that fictionalized materials that address people’s viewpoints, identities, activities, emotionalities, interchanges, and relationships in more explicit, extended, and analytical terms can be extremely useful in providing us with transhistorical and transcultural vantage points that simply would not be otherwise available.

## Epilogue: Producing and Analyzing Poetic Materials

Given their extended involvements in the poetic venture, as well as their more open, notably extended reflections on their own productions and life-world contexts in presenting their materials, I found the works of Brunetto Latini, Dante Alighieri, and Giovanni Boccaccio, along with some 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century French predecessors (Prus 2014), exceptionally valuable for considering in more direct conceptual terms *the ways in which authors may engage poetic productions as “producers” and “analysts” of fictionalized entertainment.*

In particular, thus, attention may be directed towards the authors’ involvements in (a) acknowledging their own viewpoints and interests in developing their texts; (b) depicting the life-worlds, activities, and interchanges of the people about whom they speak; (c) attending to the readers or audiences to whom their materials are addressed; (d) dealing with competitors and critics; and (e) considering the problematics of poetic representation.

When approached mindfully of the themes outlined here, it is evident that both the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century Italian poets and their 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century French predecessors have much to offer to more sustained considerations of “the social construction of poetics.” Although it is beyond the scope of the immediate paper to address these matters in depth, it is possible to suggest some analytical themes that might be pursued by using these texts and those of like-minded poets from these and other eras as resources with which further to reflect on and articulate these matters:

## Acknowledging Author Viewpoints and Interests

[Here the emphasis is on the ways that authors define and pursue their objectives, practices as authors.]

- Attending to particular objectives as authors (as agents who knowingly engage others),
- Pursuing moral agendas (moral / religious/ censorship),
- Expressing political positions (critiques / supports),
- Providing audience directed entertainment/pleasure,
- Seeking money / fame / sponsorship,
- Striving for artistic expressivity (personal intrigues / popular emphases / appeasing critics).

## Depicting People’s Qualities, Activities, and Interchanges

[The focus here is on the ways that authors portray those whom they discuss as “active participants in the settings at hand.”]

- Addressing people’s circumstances / obstacles / disruptions / natural changes,
- Recognizing people’s interests / dispositions / rationales,
- Attending to people’s activities, tactics, adjustments,
- Appreciating people’s concerns with sincerity, deception,
- Considering people’s modes of engaging (interpreting, acting towards, and monitoring) objects, self, others,

- Depicting interchanges between people in the setting,
- Acknowledging relationships, associations, and other alignments,
- Experiencing, expressing, and adjusting emotionality,
- Attending to the processual sequencing of events,
- Concealing and misrepresenting relevant matters.

### Attending to Prospective Audiences

[This set of subprocesses attends to author concerns about their audiences and their more particular modes of relating to readers and others.]

- Focusing on audience perspectives, interests, situations,
- Pitching to specific / diverse audiences,
- Addressing generalized audiences,
- Encouraging reader receptivity,
- Developing reader connectedness (understandings, affinities, alignments) with the people and settings being featured,
- Promoting reader disaffection (also distancing, rejection) as situations and others,
- Acknowledging reader ambiguities, dilemmas, and disaffections.

### Dealing with Competitors and Critics

[Although competitors and critics may be seen as part of the audience, the concern here is with the ways that authors more specifically take competitors and critics into account.]

- Recognizing Competitors:
  - Defining, disregarding, monitoring,
  - Copying, learning from, concealing from,
  - Distancing, exposing, destroying,
  - Supporting, instructing, assisting.
- Dealing with Critics:
  - Anticipating, encountering criticism,
  - Contesting, resisting, rejecting challenges,
  - Adjusting to criticism,
  - Seeking out criticism.

### Conceptual Issues of Poetic Representation

[This section draws attention to the reflective nature of poetic endeavor, wherein those involved in developing fiction more explicitly attend to the matters of portraying authenticity or achieving realism in their presentations of the matters at hand – as in portraying and coordinating settings, events, characters, action, exchanges, emotionality, and so forth.]

- Pursuing and maintaining authenticity of representation,
- Attending to context, action, interaction, objects, timing,
- Striving for coherence of the components in the setting,
- Introducing and stressing incongruity,
- Attending to ambiguities and dilemmas.

Mindful of the very sketchy and tentative nature of the conceptual frame presented here, it is my hope that this statement will serve as a starting point for further research and analysis of the social produc-

tion of poetic materials. In addition to the present materials from Brunetto Latini, Dante Alighieri, and Giovanni Boccaccio, and the earlier referenced 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century French poets (Prus 2014), readers also are referred to the somewhat parallel pragmatist oriented analyses of poetic endeavor that address the works of Plato and Aristotle (Prus 2009), the philosopher-poet Lucian (Prus 2008b, 2008c), Horace, Longinus, and Plutarch of the classical Roman era (Prus 2008d), and their contemporary, Ovid and his poetic depictions of love (Prus 2013b). This overall venture also could be extended in notably consequential terms through the more sustained pragmatist inquiry and analyses of “the consumption of poetic productions.”

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### Acknowledgments

I am grateful to Hans Bakker, Natasa Bereneant, Fatima Camara, Sara Ann Ganowski, Peter Grahame, Christine McWebb, Gabriel Niccoli, Lorraine Prus, Andrea Salvini, Beert Verstraete, and Kyra (Kierra Kay) Winer for their thoughtful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. I also wish to acknowledge the work and thought of Magdalena Wojciechowska (editor), Krzysztof Konecki, Anna Kacperczyk, and Łukasz Marciniak, as well as the assistance of those at *Qualitative Sociology Review* who were involved in preparing this manuscript for publication.

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