

## The Compendium, the Flower (Exergue toward Lysicology)

What choice do we have but, in attempting to define what a compendium is, to rally toward its double - that of the companion? What is textual companionship, and what bearing does this have on the somewhat molecular merging of elements or components that make up this strange hybrid-text known as the compendium? Is it not the scene that an exclusive selection will have taken place, to choose those elements that companion well at the exclusion of others. This is our double bind. And why an exergue? What are we taking "out of the work"? This issue of the compendium is as arbitrary a starting point into what I shamefully call lysicology as any other, but the elements and components interrelate, resonating in their conceptual similarities that I hope I may successfully reveal. This, in actual fact, must be our provisional ground toward a broader theory of poetics.

The compendium as companion, or at least companionable. It is the scene (or the ob-scene) of an intentional sobriety, to discharge superfluity and render all beautiful and ordered as well as entirely indispensable. Is this not what a compendium promises? And what of the companion, the companion text, that which acts as the redresser or the tolerant like Sancho Panza, or perhaps the indispensable ancillary? Ancillary to the primary text - but here we may question the double dealing of "primary" and "text", interrogating both, and then interrogating their intended felicitous union (would it be eristic? A cagamosis in the end? A discordance of the harmony a hermeneut may blush at rather than contend with?). At what point does the politics of friendship intervene? Perhaps only the poetics of friendship emerge, much to the chagrin of logical analysis. The compendium would play at being the lectionary, but is rather consigned to the sole task of annotating the real with an objective to cleanse it, reduce it, compact it.

A compendium has a very ambitious and lofty goal: to rally all the essential elements within it and become the indispensable (selective) totality. It is vorticist, if only because it is the inert centre of all elements collecting toward it, the densest mass like a neutron star (of course, what cannot be reconciled within its covers is judged as non-essential, and so expelled into the void, the margin). It is the aphorism of a collected knowledge, but yet promising to provide the essential experience. As a concise apparatus (and note here the utilitarian demand for pith and reduction), it may "weigh together" quite well. But a compendium is always double, for it serves as well in the function of the companion. The companion, as a good politics of friendship, will take up the role of defending the primary - perhaps even acting as apologist in some cases. If there were no interest in the subject for which a compendium need be written, a compendium would not be constructed in the first place, but now the compendium

must serve as the subject's companion. In armament terms, the companion is held in the non-sword hand - objects like bucklers and the like. In a pite, it is good to have some measure of defense. Against what is a question that may be suspended or kept under erasure.

Of course, there is always the risk of violence in representation. The companion represents the subject, and would - setting aside betrayal or any malice- have its intentions pure at heart. A good companion, that is. However, no matter how well-intentioned a companion may be in representing the subject, there is always the possibility of a violence in representation. This violence may take the position of occulting certain truths, excluding certain details, even if in the defense of the subject. The companion may be complicit with the prevailing metaphysical view of how to arrange truths, and so thus commit an unwitting act of violence against the subject.

In your best interests. A body of law (lex) and the defense. The companion serves as the shield against prosecution, attempting to wield rhetoric as a means of persuading judgement. Counsel represents the subject, puts the best forward and denounces all the worst as peripheral or irrelevant. Where it cannot denounce the prosecution, it will petition for context by means of explanation or apology. Perhaps it is the famous case against Kant (and there are several companions that serve the function of representing him under the sign of care and fairness) where the companion is faced with the moral dilemma: here be the axe murderer coming to kill the subject, and the companion must choose between two equally balanced moral principles in the categorical imperative: tell the truth and facilitate the destruction of the subject, or lie and preserve the subject at the cost of one's own principles. The role of the companion, taken here in the etymological sense, would be to "weight together" even this moral crisis. The implicit inscription of the companion would be to operate in the best interests of the subject, even at the cost of the companion's peril (there is little reciprocity between subject and companion, and there may be loyalty or love by the companion, and an echo thereof issued by the subject - perhaps).

The companion performs this act of sacrifice, martyrs itself when faced with a prosecution that would put itself in peril as well. A noble friend if evaluated thinking that the companion performs such an act altruistically and not for renown. But this compendium-companion, this shield of defense - when the defense is organized, is it not the case that the elements of the discourse are arranged just so, for maximum defensive effect, constructing an ineffable image of the subject so that it may in fact become *beyond judgement*?

We should tarry here with this idea of being *beyond judgement*, for it seems to be

the role occupied by the companion which settles the issue of judging the subject *for us*. Does not Hegel himself in the advancement of his compendium shelter the integrity of history (*his* perspective of history)? The talents that may be employed by the companion to protect the integrity of the subject could turn out to be problematic if, according to Kant, "the will, which is to make use of these gifts of nature and which in its special constitution is called character, is not good." (MM9). So, if the companion knows that the subject is flawed, and only defends the subject out of some feeling of duty over and against the flaw, then it is being heteronomous - and so therefore it can be questioned if the companion is acting more out of good will (character) or from a feeling of coercion brought about because of duty and a desire to efface the flaw. However, being *beyond judgement*, being *non pareil*, being "above reproach" would appear to release the subject from the Kantian sandwich of Reason and Understanding, for judgement proper resides between the two, twixt cognition and desire. If the companion can smuggle the subject beyond judgement, at what peril? Does it cease to have any relative connection to pleasure? If this "beyond judgement" is taken as a flight away from *being judged*, and so therefore insisting on a new variety of finality where the matter is now bricked up from further consideration, in which way does it fly? Toward Reason or Understanding? Is the compendium at all even successful in its aim to position the subject under its protection to being beyond judgement?

It is perhaps an impossibility to weigh compendium and companion together despite their lexical affinity as synonymous terms. A companion text is intended not as a replacement, but as supplement to a primary text. It serves as a "comprehensive" compilation. Again, these definitions trouble our investigation much further for this assembly of items comes at the cost of plundering (in Latin *compilare*). We could eschew the literal meaning of this plunder and embrace the metaphorical instantiation, but we are still left with at least the shadow of violence in the act of assembly, in this function of compiling. The story is then rewritten this way: there is some body of knowledge *x* such that we are assigned to compile it comprehensively, and this will entail that body of knowledge *x* must be reduced in some fashion for proper assembly. Or, perhaps, it is an instance of invading body of knowledge *x* and returning "home" so to speak with the booty of such adventurism. What is not thoroughly questioned in this act of plunder is what grants the compiler the right and facility to *select* what is considered worthy of assembly into a compendium? It is to make a judgement on this body of knowledge and reject what, according to the compiler or group of compilers, is of little or no value. And so we are presented with three registers of violence that occur at differing times: 1. the violence of plundering and selection by invasion. 2. the violence of exclusion and marginalization of elements according to prejudgement of value. 3. The violence of the companion in representing the subject despite good intentions.

A compendium: is it a frontier, a borderline, a frame? Is it an implicit editorial checkpoint with all the gatekeeping functions of relevance, or is it under the banner of economics where financial feasibility will determine what will be admitted from so many oeuvres and which rejected? The companion has, in its definitional ideality, the best interests of the other in mind, but *who* is this other for whom the companion has best interests in mind (or, perhaps, "at heart"). Do these intentions become knotted with other criteria, more ego-driven than altruistic? A frontier is an open space, untrammelled, while a border defines and contains two or more bodies. A frame functions as full border that encircles a single body, making its separation between an inside and an outside (see Jacques Derrida's discussion of Kant and the parergon in *The Truth in Painting*). A porous border will allow more to pass through it, a sieve, a filter-mechanism rather than an impenetrable wall. Of course, even at some of the most porous borders there can be bottlenecks as what would pass through must still offer itself up to scrutiny at appointed checkpoints to allow passage.

If we compare the secret rites of "compagnonnage" in France in the 15th-17th centuries, we will note some chance correspondence on how to conduct companionship. Before one was passed as a full "compagnon" in the Craft (with echoes of Freemasonry), four conditions followed: 1. An inquiry was made into the candidate's character, something that exists today as the "reference letter" which establishes the ethos of the person by means of a glowing or condemning narrative. 2. No one was compelled to join since membership had to be a matter of free choice, in honour of their principles of free will. 3. Exposition of general aims and tendency of the order, forming the keystone of any Craft: education and the dissemination of a strict set of values and *reglements*. 4. Sponsorship [*parain*] to legitimate candidacy, a subset condition to providing a good reference for the candidate. Once passed, the candidate must abide by the fraternity's ordinances. To be a good and suitable companion, the candidate (much like a text included within an accepted canon) must conform to the criteria by means of interrogation and anterior support, relevance of inclusion being supplied by references.

Companionship according to the Craft only ensures strong filiation when the preconditions for joining are met. Once this occurs, however, that bond is life-long barring a companion's disobedience of the rules. There is always a rigorous selection process involved, be it in joining a fraternity or including a text in a compendium, and this "courtship" of a kind is leveled according to a certain set of truth values. The criteria for inclusion operate by a given set of parameters, established prior to potential inclusion. For a compendium, there is usually a guiding theme or motif, and that which conflicts with this is generally excluded. The relevance of a text is judged according to the compendium's criteria, which can include the past popular reception of a text, its connectivity to other texts in its genre or theme, its structural integrity and its historical

credibility. What are some of the ethical obligations of the compendium in relation to the texts it includes? Must it act as an implicit apologist, conferring value upon the text as being indispensable? Must it showcase and promote a particular text by enfolding it within its pages?

Compendia's sister would be the anthology. A compendium collects together information according to the logic of concision, depicting what it considers the most relevant. Whereas, in the case of the anthology, it is a collection of artistic matter - usually literary or musical. We find, however, that anthologies operate by a similar logic to that of the compendium, and is usually arranged thematically or historically. Like a compendium, an anthology does not aim for a complete collection of works, but is also a comprehensive text that showcases definitive works. There is a demand for succinctness and selectivity in dictionaries and encyclopedias, but these generally have an obligation to be indispensable texts on the grounds that they amass all relevant knowledge. Anthologies are generally freer to perform exclusions and omit texts that would unfairly over-represent one author at the expense of other authors. Both anthologies and compendia depend on the rhetorical feature introduced by Quintilian called *dispositio*; i.e., "organization" of elements for desired effect. Once the primary selections are made as to what will be included, then comes the process of organizing these elements into a thematic whole that coheres. Rhetorically, it would be dangerous to become with the weakest piece just as one would not begin a speech with the weakest argument. The placement of texts in succession is important, and generally the most vital texts come first (unless, of course, the anthology is temporally arranged, but even then each piece must conform to being the most "representative" of its era). In his prologue to *A Personal Anthology*, Borges invokes a temporal disorder in the arrangement and organization of the short stories, and mentions a kind of paucity. As he states, "My preferences have dictated this book...To a chronological order I have preferred one of 'sympathies and differences'." (ix). Forsaking chronological sequence, Borges' preferred mode of *dispositio* has been in the arrangement of pieces in terms of their "sympathetic" coherence and connection to one another so that certain fictions operate as launching points for subsequent ones, acting as a prefiguration rather than a configuration.

There is always a lurking and hidden danger in the composition of an anthology. By implicit suggestion, the prefatory note to *The Norton Anthology of Poetry, Third Edition* boldly states: "we again give readers a wide and deep sampling of the best poetry written in the English language"(ix), which therefore stipulates that poems not appearing in this volume are considered lesser. Any claim to "the best" automatically excludes a wide range of other potential suitors from enjoying the top honours the anthology confers. This is ferried to the reader who is to conclude that the anthology

possesses all that is relevant and "best" in poetry, thereby stating that the omitted poems are somehow subpar, superfluous, repetitive of an already demonstrated example, or not sufficient to act as the exemplar. We also note here the invocation of this word "sampling" - the gustatory dimension of this word seems to suggest that the reader is frequenting a kind of poetry buffet; however, the contradictory predicate of "deep" is confusing given that sampling is a superficial and not sustained or deep appreciation of a work or author. As if taken on cue from Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, the editors make their argument on an appeal to authority: "our efforts have been crucially helped by the practical criticism and informed suggestions provided to us by many teachers who have used the anthology in their classes"(ix). No word, of course, is given to the identity of these "many teachers" or what their literary prejudices might be (however, this may be inferred from the acknowledgements page). It is to be taken on good faith that these "many teachers" have our best interests at heart for what will pass as the "best" poetry written in the English language. These teachers positioned as the "good companions" of the volume. The anthology goes on to declare a change in its selective criteria, relying on its pedigree of providing a "comprehensive" representation of poets, but with a stronger focus on " a more teachable array of poems"(ix). The anthology also implicitly addresses its previous shortcomings by mention of its newest inclusions. According to the preface, twenty-five women poets were added, a "generous" selection of Afro-American poets, a tripling of Canadian content, and a stronger focus on American poetry. This would, of course, suggest that earlier incarnations of the anthology were much more male-centered and predominantly British in content. The anthology also makes clear a distinction between major and minor poet, claiming that it has generously added the latter for pedagogical purposes. The order of the anthology is based chronologically, and all texts are drawn from what they call "authoritative editions", lightly modernized for student readability. That "minor poets" (a valuation imposed by canonical discourse and the consent of "experts") are added for pedagogical purposes is perhaps a subordinating gesture, making minor poets useful only insofar as they serve a pedagogical end. If we turn to the literal rendering of pedagogy, we do find that there is a "wandering about on foot", which seems to suggest that a foray into the works of minor poets serves as a segue, a stroll, a way of rounding out a frontier that has hitherto been smaller, a distraction. The anthology has laid out its aims to increase its territory, making of minor poets "clientele states" that reify the canonical centre.

Anthology derives from the Greek word for garland, or a collection of flowers. The anthology, or compilation, positions itself as having picked the best flowers for a bouquet, an arrangement. This floral arrangement of literary works is meant to resonate as a whole, for a fully given aesthetic effect. The politics of inclusion and exclusion factor strongly in the arrangement of an anthology, and "lesser" poets can be given a boost by the poetic company they keep within an anthology. The editor of an anthology

effectively becomes a literary florist.

This "handpicking" is a feature common to all anthologies (even if the hands doing the picking are single or many). In his introductory note to *Future Welcome: The Moosehead Anthology X*, editor Todd Swift outlines and confesses his selective method: "I have thought that, like cinema-making, the creation of anthologies demands an *auteur* theory"(1). Swift goes on to say, "I confess to admitting that, if these collections were graded like movies, some would be strictly B-poetry"(1). Swift's frank admission is nuanced by the value he attributes to 1950s B-movies with their brazen willingness to explore new themes free of the canonical demands of the art form. Swift offers a refreshing take on anthologies and freely admits to his prejudices and preferences without couching his selective method behind the veil of academic or high-literary relevance. This provides for a more organic and asymmetrical arrangement and organization to attain its harmony of contents, akin to the Japanese art of *ikebana* where minimalism and organic composition are signature aspects of floral arrangement.

It is crucial that we tarry with this floral (and florid) metaphor in considering the structure and intention of anthologies and compendia. The function of flowers, especially in the Romanticist period, was to convey private emotions given that flowers were imbued and invested with cultural significance. This "hidden" pathos of the flower, portrayed by its type, colour, and arrangement, would be "deciphered" by the recipient. Of course, different types of flowers became fixed in their metaphoric meaning so that some meant passion, death, condolence, etc. These fixed or forced metaphors inaugurated a kind of *florilegium* for the use of flowers as communicative transmission. In a similar fashion, the textual elements that are picked and arranged to appear in a compendium or an anthology carry with them the signifying resonance of *belonging to* and being *proper to* a textual arrangement, owing to the thematic coherence of the book itself. In floral arrangement, as in compendia and anthologies, there are implicit regulations such as variety and harmony that govern the efficacy of the volume. An alternate, but equally vital concern is that the whole-part relation is adequately balanced so that one flower can reflect and represent the bouquet, and the bouquet furnishes the proper context for the single flower. Where interpretation and commentary take place would be an act of botany, and the mind-saving task of reducing the bouquet to a singular salient reference lends it a contained semiotic register.

A compendium is compound: it designates a kind of enclosure that definitionally will not admit of outsiders. Thematically coherent, it operates by way of abridgment which, etymologically, means a sparing of expense. The compendium becomes a minimalist endeavour to some extent by its discretionary selective principle for what to

include and exclude. The companion text, as it generally is, derives from *com panis*, or that which assists in eating bread. A companion, under this lexical definition, is reducible to an order of utility, like cutlery. However, a companion text occupies a subsidiary role to a compendium given that the companion text (most notably the *Cambridge Companion* series) is not meant as a substitute but a supplement.

The arrangement of items in a compendium or companion text must cohere in some fashion by way of deeming relevance versus irrelevance. The word *Auszug* marshals under its plethora of interconnected definitions such terms as arrangement, extract, abstract, outline, excerpt, and abridgment. Abridgement literally means to save, a sparing of expense. There is in compendia the issue of a limited economy that must make its selections in order to guarantee the proper flow of circulation. This is generally done by an appeal to the higher economic law presented by discourse, particularly the canonical variety which dictates on the order of a hierarchical valuation.

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