

'All the World's His Stage': The Divine Protagonist of Clement of Alexandria. Performance Soteriology and the *Theatrum Mundi* in the *Protrepticus*.

I. Introduction

On Clement

Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 6.11: "Clement... a man virtuous and approved...who, when he was present here [alive]... both established and increased the Church of the Lord."

Jerome, *On Illustrious Men*, 38. "He is the author of notable volumes, full of eloquence and learning, both in sacred Scripture and in secular literature."

On the 'trilogy'

Kovacs 2001 (3): "The centrality of παιδεία in Clement's explication of Christianity is well known. He presents Christ as the consummate παιδαγωγός and διδάσκαλος, who seeks to train all humanity up to perfection."

II. The *Protrepticus*

Protreptic literature

Karanasiou 2016 (333): "protreptic writing... intends to convert by exhortation non-believers."

Rankin 2005 (6): "[the *Protrepticus*] is purposed for exhorting conversion to the faith and directed towards pagans."

Epictetus, *Discourses* 3.23: "For in what does the hortatory manner consist? In being able to show, to one and all, the contradictions in which they are involved; and that they care for everything rather than what they mean to care for; for they wish the things that lead to happiness, but they seek them where they are not to be found."

Contemporary exhortations

Justin, *Exhortation* 2.1: "Whom, then, you men of Greece, do you call your teachers of religion? The poets? It will do your cause no good to say so to men who know the poets; for they know how very ridiculous a theogony they have composed..."

Tatian, *Address* 42 [Conclusion]: “These things, O Greeks, I Tatian, a disciple of the barbarian philosophy, have composed for you. I was born in the land of the Assyrians, having been first instructed in your doctrines, and afterwards in those which I now undertake to proclaim...”

III. The Christianisation of *theatrum mundi*

The aim of the work

Clement, *Protrepticus* 10.75: “Let us therefore repent, and pass from ignorance to knowledge...from unrighteousness to righteousness, from godlessness to God.”

Contemporary understandings

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 11.6: “At first tragedies were brought on the stage as means of reminding men of the things which happen to them, and that it is according to nature for things to happen so, and that, if you are delighted with what is shown on the stage, you should not be troubled with that which takes place on the greater stage.”

Epictetus, *Handbook* 17: “Remember that you are an actor in a drama of such sort as the Author chooses—if short, then in a short one; if long, then in a long one. If it be his pleasure that you should enact a poor man, or a cripple, or a ruler, or a private citizen, see that you act it well. For this is your business—to act skillfully the given part, but to choose it belongs to another.”

Plotinus, *Ennead* 3.2.17: “it is like in the production of a play; the author gives each actor a part, but makes use of their characteristics which are there already.”

Seneca, *Epistles* 11.8-10: “Cherish some man of high character, and keep him ever before your eyes, living as if he were watching you, and ordering all your actions as if he beheld them.”

Clement’s *theatrum mundi*

Clement, *Protrepticus* 10.76-77: “The Father has created for your pleasant delights [all things...therefore] acknowledge your Master. You are God’s own handiwork.”

Clement, *Protrepticus* 10.77: “Let us join in the real contest in the arena of truth, where the holy Word is umpire, and the Master of the universe is president. For the prize set before us is no small one, immortality.”

Clement, *Protrepticus* 12.92: “I will show you the word, and the word’s mysteries, describing them...this is the mountain beloved of God, not a subject for tragedies, like Cithaeron, but one devoted to the dramas of truth.. The word [is] assembling a sober company. The righteous form this company, and their song is a hymn of praise of the King of all.”

IV. Seeing Christ: Spectacle and Spectators

The beginning of the *Protrepticus*

Clement, *Protrepticus*, 1.1-2: “Amphion of Thebes and Arion of Methymna were both minstrels. Both are celebrated in legend, and to this day the story is sung by a chorus of Greeks... There was also a Thracian wizard [Orpheus]... I can also tell you of another legend and another minstrel akin to these, namely, Eunomus the Locrian and the Pythian grasshopper.”

Halton, 1983 (177): “As the commentators remind us, all these figures, including Orpheus, are doomed musicians. A quartet of such musicians, Amphion, Arion, Orpheus and Eunomus, contribute to the overture of the *Protrepticus*.”

The exhortation as spectacle

Clement, *Protrepticus* 1.5: “See how mighty is the new song! It has made men out of stones and men out of wild beasts. They who were otherwise dead, who had no share in the real and true life, revived when they heard the song.”

Clement, *Protrepticus* 8.66: See the greatness of God and be amazed! Let us worship him...”

Clement, *Protrepticus* 9.70: “See the threat! See the exhortation! See the penalty!”

Clement, *Protrepticus* 9.68: “And I could bring before you ten thousand passages of Scripture, of which not even ‘one title shall pass away’ without being fulfilled.”

Seeing Christ

Clement, *Protrepticus* 1.8: “God’s *logos* became a man, so you could learn from the man, how man can become god.”

Clement, *Protrepticus* 1.4: “But far different is my minstrel, for he has come to bring to a speedy end the bitter slavery of the daemons that lord it over us; and by leading us back to the mild and kindly yoke of piety he calls once again to heaven those who have been cast down to earth.”

Halton, 1983 (192): “Clement’s bold purpose is to replace Eunomus with Christ as lyre-payer, singing not just the ἐπιτάφιον of the dead Pytho, but also the last rites of the snake charmer, Apollo, and the woman charmer, Dionysus, surrounded by his crazed band of Maenads with serpents in their hair.”

Clement, *Protrepticus* 1.6: “What then is the purpose of this instrument, the Word of God, the Lord, and the New Song? To open the eyes of the blind, to unstop the ears of the deaf, and to lead the halt and erring into the way of righteousness; to reveal God to foolish men, to make an end of corruption, to vanquish death, to reconcile disobedient sons to the Father.”

V. The ἄγών of a Divided Chorus.

The Greek Chorus

Clement, *Protrepticus* 1.2: “How in the world is it that you have given credence to worthless legends, imagining brute beasts to be enchanted by music, while the bright face of truth seems alone to strike you as deceptive, and is regarded with unbelieving eyes?”

Plato, *Phaedo* 61b: “A poet, if he is really to be a poet, must compose myths and not speeches.”

Plato, *Protagoras* 320c: “But shall I, as an old man speaking to his juniors, put my demonstration in the form of a fable, or of a regular exposition?”

The Christian Chorus

Clement, *Protrepticus* 1.2: “Let truth, sending forth her rays of light into the farthest distance, shine everywhere upon those who are wallowing in darkness, and deliver men from their error, stretching out her supreme right hand, even understanding, to point them to salvation...this is the new song, the song of Moses.”

Clement, *Protrepticus* 1.2: “As our witness let the prophetic voice, which shares in the song of truth, come forward...”

Clement, *Protrepticus* 8.77: “The writings of the prophets...with one and the same voice they provide a cure for many ills, turning us aside from delusion that works harm, and urging us onward with clear guidance to salvation set before our eyes”

Clement, *Protrepticus* 8.81: “And, in his exceeding great pity for us, the Lord raises high the strain of salvation, like a marching song.”

The error of the Greeks

Clement, *Protrepticus* 2.37: “Callimachus the Cretan, in whose land he lies buried, will tell you in his hymns: ‘for a tomb, O Lord, did the Cretans fashion for thee.’ Yes, Zeus is dead.”

Clement, *Protrepticus* 4.58: “Their [the gods’] adulteries which are sung by the bards, their feasting which are a theme of comedy, and the bursts of laughter which occur over their cups, these exhort me to cry aloud, even if I would fain keep silent - Alas for such atheism! You have turned heaven into a stage. You look upon the divine nature as a subject for drama. Under the masks of daemons you have made a comedy of that which is holy. For true worship of God you have substituted a travesty, the fear of daemons.”

VI. Performance Soteriology: Christ Centre Stage

Clement’s performance soteriology

Clement, *Protrepticus* 10.110: “τὸ σωτήριον δράμα τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος ὑποκρίνεται”
“[Christ] began to act the drama of salvation for humanity.”

Clement, *Paedagogus* 1.6.30: “... faith is the one universal salvation of humanity.”

(Cf. Clement, *Stromateis* 2.4.14.3).

The response of faith

Clement, *Protrepticus* 9.70: “Let us, then, ever listen to the voice of the Divine Word.”

Clement, *Protrepticus* 9.71: “Faith shall lead you, experience shall teach you, the Scripture shall train you.”

VII. A Call to Respond: Step Onstage

The appeal of the *Protrepticus*

Clement *Protrepticus* 1.8: “[Christ] exhorts men to salvation.”

Tiresias as the archetypal pagan

Clement *Protrepticus* 12.93: “Quit Thebes; fling away your bacchic revelry and be led by the hand to truth. Behold, I give you the wood of the cross to lean upon. Hasten, Teiresias, believe! You shall have sight. Christ, by whom the eyes of the blind see again, shines upon you more brightly than the sun. Night shall depart from you; fire shall fear

you; death shall depart from you. You shall see Heaven, old man, though you cannot see Thebes.”

The end of dramatic allegory

Clement, *Protrepticus* 12.95. “Enough, I think, of words. It may be that, moved by love of man, I have run on too long in pouring out what I have received from God, as is natural when one is inviting men to the greatest of good things - salvation... But with you still rests the final act, namely this, to choose which is more profitable, judgement or grace. For my own part, I claim that there is no shadow of doubt which of the two is better; nay, it is sinful even to compare life with destruction.”

VIII. Conclusions.