

Clement of Alexandria and the Limits of Literary Production: Speaking Unnoticeably, Revealing Hiddenly, and Showing Silently

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Abstract

This article builds upon recent scholarship by investigating Clement of Alexandria's *Stromateis* as a product of the literary and pedagogical dynamics of the Second Sophistic. Rather than merely mimicking Greco-Roman miscellanists, Clement repurposes the miscellany as a Christian strategy for negotiating the boundaries of genre, pedagogy, and textual transmission. Drawing on literary-theoretical insights from Bourdieu and Skinner, the study explores how Clement embeds divine knowledge within a polymathic textual body that simultaneously conceals and reveals. The *Stromateis*' literary form reflects a commitment to preserving sacred truths and cultivating attentive reading practices. In composing the work this way, Clement positions the written word as a medium capable of transmitting apostolic instruction without forfeiting its mystery. The *Stromateis* thus exemplifies early Christian literary innovation, challenging second-century norms of textuality and offering a new model of Christian authorship that merges concealment, revelation, and pedagogy within the sociocultural matrix of the Second Sophistic.

Keywords

Clement of Alexandria – Second Sophistic – miscellanism – *Stromateis* – early Christian literature – pedagogy

1 Introduction

The corpus of Clement of Alexandria has become a treasure trove for the recent reemphasis of literary form and ancient philology within scholarly discussions of early Christian writings. H. Clifton Ward's recent volume *Clement and Scriptural Exegesis* examines Clement through the lens of textual practices stemming from Dionysius Thrax's *Art of Grammar* (τέχνη γραμματική), ultimately terming Clement's enterprise "creative exegesis."¹ Jane Heath's *Clement of Alexandria and the Shaping of Christian Literary Practice* investigates Clement's contribution within the broader frame of Greco-Roman literary production, considering his vocation as a Christian miscellanist.² Heath places Clement's miscellanism in conversation with works more traditionally considered miscellaneous (such as Plutarch's *Table Talk* and Gellius's *Attic Nights*), emphasizing how Clement "reinterprets Classical tropes of miscellanism, which entice his readers by holding out something familiar from Greco-Roman culture, only to recast it wittily and cleverly as utterly Christian."³ These studies evoke new implications for understanding early Christian literary practices, including authorial intention and self-presentation, textual composition, textual use and reception, and the fluid boundaries between textuality and orality.

Ward and Heath each offer helpful ground-clearings, and their conclusions act as a foundation upon which we can now more fully examine the consequences of Clement's literary activities in consideration of his grammatical, literary, and social contexts. Whereas Heath focuses primarily on demonstrating Clement's adaptation and transformation of Greco-Roman literary tropes, I approach Clement's miscellanism as a deliberate pedagogical and theological strategy – a calculated attempt to navigate the changing dynamics of textuality and literacy. As such, in this study, I reorient our attention toward the pedagogical, theological, and sociological stakes of Clement of Alexandria's literary decisions within the porous boundaries of Greco-Roman literature in

1 H. Clifton Ward, *Clement and Scriptural Exegesis: The Making of a Commentarial Theologian*, OECIS (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

2 J. M. F. Heath, *Clement of Alexandria and the Shaping of Christian Literary Practice: Miscellany and the Transformation of Greco-Roman Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020). Heath builds upon similar but unpublished readings of Clement found in Laurence Emmett, "The Divine Rhetor: A Study of Clement of Alexandria" (DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2001); Stuart Thomson, "The Barbarian Sophist: Clement of Alexandria's Stromateis and the Second Sophistic" (PhD thesis, Oxford University, 2016). Heath acknowledges the contributions of Emmett and Thomson in Heath, *Clement of Alexandria*, 16–17.

3 Heath, *Clement of Alexandria*, 381.

the Second Sophistic.⁴ By reflecting on these themes, I argue that Clement's decision to compose his *Stromateis* as a miscellany not only serves as a case study for how Christians participated in the contest over *paideia* by composing texts but also demonstrates how Christians explored the conceptual limits of categories like literary production, pedagogy, or genre. As cultural practices of writing, reading, and education were being articulated and refined in view of the larger cultural matrices of Greek and Roman identity, and as they emerged within even more localized identity struggles, Clement's miscellaneous compositions show that at least one strand of Christian intellectualism sought to capitalize upon the inherent boundaries of the reading and writing acts while communicating divine knowledge to surrounding literary communities, offering a truly new and innovative contribution to the growing field of Christian literature.⁵ By composing the *Stromateis* as a literary miscellany, Clement of Alexandria inserts a Christian voice into the contest over *paideia* and pioneers a mode of Christian writing that probes the limits of genre, pedagogy, and textual transmission as vehicles for preserving and veiling divine truth.

This essay begins from a few foundational premises. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu underscores the overarching difficulty of literary activity at the onset of his work *Language and Symbolic Power*: "The paradox of communication is that it presupposes a common medium, but one that works ... only

4 We could phrase this more interrogatively by asking, "If we choose to read Clement as a 'creative exegete,' or as a 'Second Sophistic miscellanist,' what does this change about our interpretation of his writings?" Scholarship seeking to define the Second Sophistic is notoriously fraught with disagreements about the term's boundaries, helpfulness, and precision. For the sake of this article, however, I intend it to refer to the literary-historical period of heightened Greco-Roman literary production and rhetorical practice which emerges in the first and second centuries CE. I use the term "Second Sophistic" henceforth as shorthand for the typically Greek-oriented, highly educated, and literate-minded attitudes that prevailed in this milieu.

5 While more extensive contouring of the cultural contest over *paideia* is beyond the scope of the present study, I particularly have in mind research interested in Roman imperialism's perceived encroachment on Greek identity and the dichotomies between Greekness and Romanness (where they exist). This is explored in studies like those of Tim Whitmarsh, Simon Goldhill, Greg Woolf, and William A. Johnson. For an overview, see Simon Goldhill, ed., *Being Greek under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic and the Development of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Daniel S. Richter and William A. Johnson, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Second Sophistic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Tim Whitmarsh, *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire: The Politics of Imitation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Greg Woolf, "Becoming Roman, Staying Greek: Culture, Identity and the Civilizing Process in the Roman East," *PCPhS* 40 (1994): 116–43. The topic has amassed great interest among classicists – so much so that Cambridge University Press has instituted a monograph series edited by Jaś Elsner, Simon Goldhill, Constanze Güthenke, and Michael Squire on the topic of "Greek Culture in the Roman World."

by eliciting and reviving singular, and therefore socially marked, experiences.”⁶ Cultural producers (authors, artists, material producers, or similar) work at the intersection of audience expectation and creative authority. To apply this to literature specifically, an author undertakes the act of composing a text in anticipation of how their reader will interact with the literature being composed. This is what Bourdieu calls the “meeting of two histories”: the history of the reader *qua* reader and the history of the author *qua* author, each situated within a particular space in their fields of experience.⁷ The perpetual task of the author, then, is to consider not only the content they aim to write; their task is to also consider their status within the field and the anticipated posture of their reader(s). For Bourdieu, this is a challenging task, as it suggests there is no longer such a thing as “innocent words” – every word participates in a contest.⁸ This is not wholly dissimilar to observations made by Quentin Skinner concerning speech acts and their interpretations, though Skinner emphasizes the importance of authorial intention more than Bourdieu.⁹ As he says in one essay, “To understand any serious utterance, we need to grasp not merely the meaning of what is said, but at the same time the intended force with which the utterance is issued. We need, that is, to grasp not merely what people are saying but also what they are doing in saying it.”¹⁰ Skinner makes plainer what

6 Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. John B. Thompson, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 39.

7 Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson, European Perspectives (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 61. By this, Bourdieu claims we must understand that creative acts exist within the “history of the positions they occupy” (i.e., the cultural producer’s location within the broader social or cultural space of their field) and the “history of their dispositions” (i.e., the cultural producer’s formation or development into being the creator to assume the position they take). While Bourdieu is interested in a range of cultural producers including drama, film, art, and literature, I use Bourdieu’s language in relation to authors and readers since literary production is the cultural field at hand in this study.

8 Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 40: “Each word, each expression, threatens to take on two antagonistic senses, reflecting the way in which it is understood by the sender and the receiver.”

9 Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 101: “To know what a writer meant by a particular work *is* to know what his or her primary intentions were in writing it.”

10 Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, 82. As William Johnson points out, however, the very medium of the written word challenges this ability – it is a static medium that offers only a partial ability to attain Skinner’s ideal: “Writing not only records incompletely the locutionary act (what is said) but is poor as a conveyance of the illocutionary force (how the speaker intends what is said to be taken).” See William A. Johnson, *Readers and Reading Culture in the High Roman Empire: A Study of Elite Communities*, Classical Culture and Society (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 23.

Bourdieu illuminates more theoretically: the interpretation of words and texts cannot be divorced from the circumstances within which these words were uttered (or, in the case of literature, composed, published, written, or disseminated). Any analysis must include the contexts within which they would have plausibly been read and interacted with. Bourdieu and Skinner, then, both remind us that the act of writing is not neutral but is socially-inflected; it is a gesture within a field of competing authorities. As Jacques Derrida points out, however, these questions are not merely contemporary theoretical concerns. These authors recall an even more ancient unease with writing that is expressed clearly and famously in Plato's *Phaedrus* 274–278. There, Plato recounts the myth of Theuth inventing writing and presenting it to Thamus, who challenges the utility of this new invention. Exploring the relationship between the written and the spoken, Derrida interprets this conversation as describing the written word as a *pharmakon*, either a poison or a remedy that can function as a preservative or a corrupting instrument.¹¹ Despite their differences, the tension of writing's social construction runs through Bourdieu, Skinner, and Derrida alike – and its basis in Plato's *Phaedrus* reminds us that skepticism toward the written and its relationship with the spoken is, in fact, an ancient question.

This ambivalence toward writing resurfaces in Clement's intellectual life as he problematizes writing as a philosophical and theological question and continues its transformation into a meaningful Christian practice. To follow the lead of the theorists above, interpreting Clement's miscellaneous writings is a task that entails understanding what it meant for Clement to write (and, specifically, to write a miscellany), how Clement would have likely envisioned readers interacting with his work, and how Clement's readers would have plausibly interacted with the work.¹² Moreover, such a task requires considering the

11 Jacques Derrida, "La pharmacie de Platon," in *Tel Quel* 32–33 (1968): 255–403; reprinted in Jacques Derrida, *La dissémination*, Points Série essais 265 (Paris: Éd. du Seuil, 1993). Notably, this portion of *Phaedrus* is the same text that Clement draws from in *Stromata* 1.

12 Nearly all studies of "miscellanies" fall victim to anachronism. There was, after all, no single Greek or Latin term that designated what a miscellany was in ancient literature. Likewise, the diversity of miscellaneous literature is a demonstrable challenge. The term may apply to any number of texts whose authors or editors compiled multiple works into a single volume, including anthologies, recipe books, letter collections, or educational handbooks. On the other hand, the term may also apply to a narrower set of works which share a similar aesthetic, as many classicists have used the term. Here, as will be discussed in the following section, I am working with the narrower sense of the term. See the discussion in Teresa Morgan, "The Miscellany and Plutarch," in *The Philosopher's Banquet: Plutarch's Table Talk in the Intellectual Culture of the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 50–70.

relationship between the spoken and the written, as the miscellany inherently plays with the limiting nature of composing a text in literary form and publishing or circulating it in material fashion. Miscellanies are often voluminous, participating in the cultural draw toward encyclopaedism, often seeking to be exhaustive (and, thus, end up being exhausting). Through their breadth, miscellanies remind the reader that literary production is a negotiation between what ought to be included and what ought to be excluded; through their unsightly presentation, they remind the reader that reading entails attentiveness and intentionality by the educated reader. And, thus, to speak of Clement the miscellanist is to speak of an author who tests the limits of literary production, pedagogical approaches, and understandings of the compositional task, especially in view of his inherited Christian tradition.¹³

2 Miscellanism among Genres

Recent trends in classics and early Christian studies have challenged the very nomenclature of assigning a label like “genre” to texts in antiquity.¹⁴ As Greco-Roman communities progressed from literary cultures of oral and performative dominance toward cultures of textual dominance, a wide range of textual forms emerged which escape tidy categorization.¹⁵ Beyond visible

13 In speaking of the “limits” of literary production, I hope to emphasize something Florence Dupont articulates in the introduction to one essay on books as material objects and symbols: “Even if we confine ourselves to literature – to what the ancients called *litterae* – a book in Cicero’s library, a book sent as a present from Horace to Augustus, and a book for sale in a bookstore in the Vicus Tuscus were different cultural realities. Not because their realizations sometimes drew on different techniques – papyrus, parchment, tablets – but because their symbolic status and functions were different according to the social uses that were made of them.” Florence Dupont and Holt N. Parker, “The Corrupted Boy and the Crowned Poet,” in *Ancient Literacies*, ed. William A. Johnson and Holt N. Parker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 143–63, at 143. By drawing on notions like the book’s symbolic status, literature’s function among communities, the authoritative nature of texts in particular groups, or reader expectations of the written word, Clement’s oeuvre brings to the fore an innovative approach that tests the boundaries of literature.

14 Often, these authors weigh the technological changes in the material production of literature on one hand and the seismic cultural shifts that accompanied these changes on the other, resulting in two major challenges when attempting to draw clear genre-boundaries in the ancient world. For one example of a helpful, recent overview of the relation between “genre” and material production of texts in antiquity, see Jeremiah Coogan, “Gospel as Recipe Book,” *EC* 12 (2021): 40–60 (esp. 50–57).

15 This societal shift took place gradually over the course of several centuries. The Second Sophistic may seem like a rather late era for such a discussion; however, as Simon Goldhill

elements like the book form or paratextual features such as titles, section titles, and tables of contents, the shifting social dimensions of local reading cultures raise additional uncertainties about how ancient readers interacted with the literary diversity of the ancient world.¹⁶ Even in instances where ancient authors or readers attempt to distinguish literature by labelling it as something like prose, poetry, or philosophy, their degree of self-awareness and their internal conception of literary “genre” remain unclear to present-day readers.¹⁷ So, while scholars mostly utilize “miscellany” in a uniform sense to describe miscellaneous segments of Greco-Roman literature, the field must also admit the scarcity of details concerning antique readers’ self-awareness of miscellany as a genre (or of genre as a category), and they must grapple with inconsistencies between how different miscellanists approached their compositions and intentions.¹⁸

asserts, “Literacy does not in any way preclude oral performance, but *grounds* it” (Goldhill, “The Anecdote,” in *Ancient Literacies*, 96–113, at 98). Instead, “literacy ... constantly polices the boundary of verbal performance” (Goldhill, “The Anecdote,” 99).

- 16 On textuality and early Christian reading communities, see Chris Keith, *The Gospel as Manuscript: An Early History of the Jesus Tradition as Material Artifact* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 17–69. For innovation in book culture in the Christian tradition, see C. H. Roberts and T. C. Skeat, *The Birth of the Codex* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983); H. Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995). For more on innovation and the role of paratext in early Christian literature, see Matthew R. Crawford, *The Eusebian Canon Tables: Ordering Textual Knowledge in Late Antiquity*, OECs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), esp. 21–95; Jeremiah Coogan, “Transforming Textuality: Porphyry, Eusebius, and Late Ancient Tables of Contents,” *SLA* 5 (2021): 6–27.
- 17 As a case study for readers interacting with texts, the omission of detail passed down throughout history concerning the volumes housed at Alexandria’s *Mouseion* – how its books were categorized or how its patrons interacted with the collection – serves to illustrate the problem. If it is nearly impossible to conclude how readers engaged with the variety of works at the *Mouseion*, consider how much more difficult it is to conclude what they may do when encountering such variety within a singular volume. See Christian Jacob, “Fragments of a history of ancient libraries,” in *Ancient Libraries*, eds. Jason König, Katerina Oikonomopoulou, and Greg Woolf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 63–65.
- 18 Scott DiGiulio notes that “despite commonalities, there is no single ancient term for these sorts of works, and the term ‘miscellany’ is itself an anachronism, first used in this way by the Renaissance humanists.” Scott J. DiGiulio, “Dead Letters, Documentality, and the *Noctes Atticae* of Aulus Gellius,” in *Documentality*, eds. Jacqueline Arthur-Montagne, Scott J. DiGiulio, and Inger N. I. Kuin (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022), 181–208, at 182n2. Later examples of this tension between common literary practice and the obfuscation of genre will be seen in Plutarch and Clement. Still, there is a clear literary heritage of the miscellanistic practice.

To complicate the identification of ancient miscellany even further, the use and appropriation of variety is a primary marker for identifying miscellanistic literature – particularly the kind of high-brow literature that emerges in the Second Sophistic.¹⁹ This is to say, miscellany is considered miscellaneous in large part *because* it intentionally gives an appearance of disorder, disarray, and discombobulation with respect to its literary form, subject matter, flow, or internal logic.²⁰ The challenge of arriving at a precise and agreeable definition for this kind of text should be apparent. For the purposes of this study, however, I yield to Teresa Morgan's definition of "miscellanies narrow," which calls the miscellany "a collection of often fragmentary material borrowed from other sources, and more or less reworked to a new purpose."²¹ While this definition would describe less self-indulgent examples of miscellanistic texts like recipe books, apophthegmata, or other compilatory works, this definition also allows us to group together the specific, literarily atypical works of imperial prose like Plutarch's *Table Talk*, Pliny's *Natural History*, Gellius's *Attic Nights*, and Athenaeus's *Deipnosophists* – those works which scholars often refer to when using the term "miscellanies."²²

While extant miscellanies are relatively consistent in their compilatory nature and their polymathic breadth, they are wildly *inconsistent* in their arrangement of knowledge, the purposes toward which they seek to repurpose said knowledge, and the kinds of readers their authors envision interacting

19 "The defining feature of Second Sophistic miscellanies is their commitment to thematic variation (a feature designated with the Latin term *variatio*, or *poikilia* in Greek), and their deliberate choice to eschew a methodical style of exposition, even when the option to organize their topics systematically is clearly available to them." Katerina Oikonomopoulou, "Miscellanies," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Second Sophistic*, eds. Daniel S. Richter and William A. Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 448–449. It is also worth mentioning Tim Whitmarsh's use of the term "prosography," which he defines as "the marked, stylized use of prose (and hence also the polemical renunciation of poetry)" in Tim Whitmarsh, "Quickening the Classics: The Politics of Prose in Roman Greece," in *Beyond the Second Sophistic: Adventures in Greek Postclassicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 186–208, at 190.

20 Alternatively, as Jason König says it, "Miscellanistic works ... are marked primarily by the disparateness of the material they accumulate." See Jason König, "Fragmentation and Coherence in Plutarch's *Sympotic Questions*," in *Ordering Knowledge in the Roman Empire*, eds. Jason König and Tim Whitmarsh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 43–68, at 43.

21 Morgan, "The Miscellany and Plutarch," 61.

22 These are some of the most common examples of the "miscellany" as discussed by classicists and historians, and they are the four interlocutors for Heath in "Studying Ancient Miscellanism," in *Clement of Alexandria*, 23–55.

with what is written.²³ To this end, some scholars have suggested that even if ancient texts may be sorted into distinct genres, miscellanies almost certainly transcend them. William Fitzgerald writes in his study of variety in Roman life and literature that “the variety, whimsy, or arbitrariness of the names given to miscellanies emphasize the fact that they lie outside the generic grid. Miscellaneous works are often self-conscious about their status in relation to the established genres. But while there is no single generic name for what they are, there may be names for what they are not.”²⁴ Evoking a similar point, DiGiulio calls it “anachronistic to speak of miscellany as a distinct ancient genre” while also pointing out how the term is still “a useful shorthand for a range of imperial texts that shared various formal or aesthetic characteristics.”²⁵ Such a difficulty emerges from the tension between miscellanies’ likeness and unlikeness: miscellanies are typically and intentionally committed to being dissimilar to other ancient literary forms – and, yet, they are typically and intentionally similar to contemporaneous miscellanies.

As one example of this tension, consider the differences between Plutarch’s *Table Talk* and Clement’s *Stromateis*. The *Table Talk* follows a pattern of ten questions per book (at least for the first eight books), and there is a case to be made for an underlying intentionality between segments of the work, as revealed by its proems.²⁶ The *Table Talk* relies on staging closed-door conversations among philosophical men and presenting them to Sossius Senecio so he can be immersed in Plutarch’s intellectual world. On the other hand, Clement’s *Stromateis* contains a similarly sizeable collection of quotations from various traditions, but they are interspersed with Clement’s own commentary or reflection, often colored by apologetic intent, and follow no apparent rubric

23 Morgan herself addresses the challenge of using the term, noting that miscellany “was, and is, a flexible genre.” See Teresa Morgan, “Reading Moral Miscellanies,” *SCI* 26 (2007): 135–53, at 136.

24 William Fitzgerald, *Variety: The Life of a Roman Concept* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 157. As one example of this, Jared Secord convincingly points out that Tatian’s *Against the Greeks* “presents itself implicitly as a miscellany, while simultaneously rejecting that it should be characterized as one.” Jared Secord, *Christian Intellectuals and the Roman Empire: From Justin Martyr to Origen* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2022), 79. Tatian’s coy denial of participating in the broader miscellanistic trends around him is, of course, reflective of this generic self-consciousness; to deny writing a miscellany is to play the literary game of miscellanism well.

25 Scott J. DiGiulio, “Ποικιλὰ Ποικίλω: Situating Aelian’s Miscellanistic Programs between Greek and Roman Models of Variety in the Second Sophistic,” *TAPA* 153 (2023): 213–51, at 214n3.

26 For more on the proems and their relationship to one another, see Philip A. Stadter, *Plutarch and His Roman Readers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 98–103.

for their arrangement, length, or subject matter. Clement's *Stromateis* is denser than Plutarch's *Table Talk* – portions of the *Stromateis* contain long lists of intellectual genealogies, while others retell dramatic tropes or remember the poets – and it is considerably less digestible. Plutarch's *Table Talk* and Clement's *Stromateis* are deeply different works despite both having a fair stake to the claim of embodying the ideal characteristics of “the miscellany.”

To offer another example of this tension from a well-known miscellany, Gellius begins his *Attic Nights* by rattling off a list of titles of miscellaneous texts that have gathered together a varied, manifold, and confused learning (*variam et miscellam et quasi confusaneam doctrinam acquisiverant*).²⁷ Gellius voices his desires to write a project that imitates the style of the others while remaining distinct from them, hoping to be most distinct from the Greeks (*et eorum maxime Graeci*), who heap up their collections of notes and quotations after their multitudinous and varied reading acts (*multa et varia lectitantes*). Gellius, in contrast to the Greeks who show no pedagogical prudence in compiling their miscellaneous works, aims to compose his *Attic Nights* in a way that guides students with “active and alert minds” toward a “desire for independent learning” (*ingenia prompta expeditaque ad honestae eruditionis cupidinem*).²⁸ By composing a work that appears similar in aesthetic and style to the thirty-one miscellanies listed in *Attic Nights* pr. 6–10, Gellius embodies the tension I describe here, depicting the emergence of a conscious miscellaneous literary tradition while simultaneously highlighting its diversity by foregrounding the distinctions by which miscellanists separate themselves from one another. To sum this up, then, miscellanies may be characterized by two literary traits: (1) their elusiveness compared to extant literary genres; and (2) their intentional location within the intellectual sphere of other miscellanists. Whether one chooses Plutarch, Athenaeus, Gellius, Pliny, or Clement, the literary differences between any two given miscellanies are great enough to justify retaining their individuality when compared to one another, yet they offer enough in the way of methodological similarity to discuss them in relation to one another – often exhibited by intentional literary hat-tips to each other.²⁹

How, then, should we discuss these works in view of their willful similarities and their lack of uniformity? Where do we situate miscellanism among

27 Gellius, *Attic Nights*, praef. 5 (Holford-Strevens, OCT, 2). It is unclear if Gellius's list of titles is all historical or if some are invented for rhetorical effect.

28 Gellius, *Attic Nights*, praef. 12 (Holford-Strevens, OCT, 3).

29 A good overview of this trope is found in chapter 6 (“Miscellany Titles and Clement's Divine Paratexts”) and chapter 7 (“The Miscellanist's Trope of Deselecting Titles and Clement's Conversion of Imagery”) of Heath, *Clement of Alexandria*, 120–203.

the genres? To ground the impending discussion of Clement's miscellanism, I suggest here that the similarities between these kinds of imperial prose miscellanies do not lie within internal literary qualities; rather, their similarities lie in the authors' pedagogical commitments and their goals in composing a miscellanistic text. It is not a shared commitment to a literary form or genre which suggests works like Plutarch's *Table Talk*, Gellius's *Attic Nights*, Clement's *Stromateis*, and Athenaeus's *Deipnosophistae* ought to be discussed alongside one another. Instead, these authors shared particular methodological and pedagogical commitments which led them to write in this particular literary form. Plutarch, Gellius, Clement, Athenaeus, and the like shared an impulse to embed polymathic knowledge in textual form, ordering it into compilatory and creative texts that required attentive reading practices in order to understand them.³⁰ By doing this, miscellanists challenge their readers' expectations of literary works, innovate upon the act of reading, and push the boundaries of the written word as a pedagogical medium.³¹

3 The *Stromateis* and Clement's Miscellanistic Intent

Having situated miscellanies among the genres, we may now consider how Clement's decision to compose his *Stromateis* as a miscellany serves as a case study for how Christians participated in the contest over *paideia* by exploring the limits of literary production, pedagogy, and the concept of genre. First, I will give an overview of the place of genre within Clementine scholarship; subsequently, I will see how Clement articulates his literary task in the *Stromateis* with regard to its literary aesthetic and the pedagogical benefits it offers its readers.

³⁰ On the place of encyclopaedism and polymathic learning in miscellanies, see König and Woolf, "Encyclopaedism in the Roman empire," in *Encyclopaedism from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, eds. König and Woolf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 52–58.

³¹ For example, Scott DiGiulio characterizes Gellius's *Attic Nights* by the way it subverts its readers' expectations: "Despite its heterogeneity, Gellius' endeavor is unified by the act of reading itself: the *NA* is a work that challenges his audience to cultivate a specific reading practice in order to help them negotiate their contemporary textual landscape." See DiGiulio, "Dead Letters," 182. In the case of Plutarch, König and Woolf suggest the miscellany demands "active reading," described as "something which could bring a kind of unity and comprehensiveness to material which to modern eyes looks at first sight highly disparate and incoherent" and something that "encouraged one to draw moral lessons for oneself from disparate material." See König and Woolf, "Encyclopaedism in the Roman empire," 57.

A widespread disinterest in Clement's relationship to miscellanism is reflected within the broader field of Clementine scholarship, though the topic is not wholly forgotten.³² In consideration of modern scholarship, it was addressed as early as Eugène de Faye's 1906 study *Clément d'Alexandrie: étude sur les rapports du christianisme et de la philosophie grecque au IIe siècle*, where de Faye introduces his reader to a few miscellanies mentioned by Clement in his list of rejected titles for the *Stromateis*, surmising that Clement deliberately composed his work in a manner that drew upon these literary modes encountered in Pliny and Gellius.³³ De Faye's work was later rivaled by André Méhat's 1966 dissertation-turned-monograph on the *Stromateis*, published as *Études sur les Stromates de Clément d'Alexandrie*.³⁴ In this work, Méhat undertook a similar approach of utilizing internal evidences to understand Clement's literary task, making much out of Clement's use of chapters (*kephalaia*).³⁵ More recently, a landmark in the field was the publication of Eric Osborn's influential volume *Clement of Alexandria*, which became a primary interlocutor for several studies of Clement since; however, it makes use of only a single quotation from Judith Kovacs that relates Clement's use of miscellanism to his pedagogical goals or interests.³⁶ While his inclusion of Kovacs's quotation acknowledges Clement's use of miscellany and even designates it as a "genre," Osborn does not engage more extensively with Greco-Roman literature or consider miscellanism as a Second Sophistic literary practice, and he does not use it to springboard deeper conversations about Clement's authorial intent.³⁷

32 The history of the scholarship on this point is elucidated by Heath's chapter, "Clement's Miscellanism and the Scholarly Trope of Christian Difference," in Heath, *Clement of Alexandria*, 9–22 (esp. 9–17).

33 Eugène de Faye, *Clément d'Alexandrie: étude sur les rapports du christianisme et de la philosophie grecque au IIe siècle* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1906), 96–98.

34 André Méhat, *Études sur les Stromates de Clément d'Alexandrie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966).

35 For Méhat, these *kephalaia* reflected a larger pool of material which Clement pulled from and sought to arrange into a particular order to advance his pedagogical purposes; however, even while placing a high value on Clement's promise to remain orderly, Méhat recognizes Clement's reputation for being wholly unsystematic, attributing to him "la plume d'un écrivain qui a la réputation de n'être à aucun degré systématique" (Méhat, *Études sur les Stromates*, 123).

36 Judith L. Kovacs, "Divine Pedagogy and the Gnostic Teacher According to Clement of Alexandria," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9, no. 1 (2001): 3–25, at 25, quoted in Eric Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 11: "As the *logos* has carefully designed the literal and symbolic levels of Scripture so that the same text can simultaneously teach students on quite different levels, so Clement chooses the versatile genre of the miscellany."

37 See Eric Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria*, 11; 15n45; 27.

Such an attitude remains prevalent among much of the scholarship since then. In fact, notwithstanding the insightful and recent contribution of Heath, several monographs engaging Clement's theology or philosophy have reached print since Osborn's – yet they, too, make virtually no reference to the way Clement's choice of the miscellanistic literary form relates to other authors of miscellanistic literature within his milieu and make little reference to how this disparate literary form affects the overall contents, teachings, and interpretation of his work.³⁸ These examples only gesture toward the breadth of the neglect given to Clement's literary context when analyzing his works. Despite the fact scholars have dedicated numerous works to Clement's *Stromateis* (and many of these authors often translate its title into English as *Miscellanies*), such infrequent references to how the work fits into Second Sophistic practices of miscellany-making reveal the need to continue revisiting the field's previous readings of Clement with closer attention to his authorial intent and literary aesthetic.

Clement spends a considerable amount of the *Stromateis* reflecting on what it means to compose literature – or, more specifically, what it means for Christians to leave behind writings for the sake of spiritual reading communities. Clement's comments about writing tacitly reveal an important commitment that ought not be taken for granted in understanding his corpus: leaving behind written words is, in fact, an appropriate thing to do in the service of the church. Despite the heightened sense of literacy and bookishness that pervaded Greco-Roman culture in the second century, the contest between oral

38 As examples, see Henny Fiskå Hägg, *Clement of Alexandria and the Beginnings of Christian Apophaticism*, OECs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Kathleen Gibbons, *The Moral Psychology of Clement of Alexandria: Mosaic Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2019). Additionally, despite seven volumes on Clement in Brill's *Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae* series, nearly all of the authors neglect Clement's use of miscellany aside from Andrew Itter, who quotes Judith Kovacs in passing (utilizing the same quotation from Osborn). See Anniewies van den Hoek, *Clement of Alexandria and His Use of Philo in the Stromateis: An Early Christian Reshaping of a Jewish Model*, VCSup, v. 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1988); Peter Karavites, *Evil, Freedom, and the Road to Perfection in Clement of Alexandria*, VCSup, v. 43 (Leiden: Brill, 1998); Bogdan Gabriel Bucur, *Angelomorphic Pneumatology: Clement of Alexandria and Other Early Christian Witnesses*, VCSup, v. 95 (Leiden: Brill, 2009); Andrew C. Itter, *Esoteric Teaching in the Stromateis of Clement of Alexandria*, VCSup, v. 97 (Leiden: Brill, 2009); Piotr Ashwin-Siejkowski, *Clement of Alexandria on Trial: The Evidence of "Heresy" from Photius' Bibliotheca*, VCSup, v. 101 (Leiden: Brill, 2010); Matyáš Havrda, Vít Hušek, and Jana Plátová, eds., *The Seventh Book of the Stromateis: Proceedings of the Colloquium on Clement of Alexandria (Olomouc, October 21–23, 2010)*, VCSup, v. 117 (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Veronika Cernuskova, ed., *Clement's Biblical Exegesis: Proceedings of the Second Colloquium on Clement Of Alexandria (Olomouc, May 29–31, 2014)*, VCSup, v. 139 (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

instruction and textual instruction had still not been clearly decided among Christian intellectual communities, who needed time to work out their commitments to scriptures, ecclesial authorities, the apostolic tradition, and the rule of faith. Although Christians engaged with texts even in the earliest days of their tradition, studies from Loveday Alexander, P. J. J. Botha, and Stephen Carlson remind us that various literate groups of Christians in the second century were not homogenous in their reverence for texts, and anecdotal evidence of “literacy” writ large is not the same thing as a normative use of written word as an authoritative medium.³⁹

To better locate where Clement falls within this discussion, we may heuristically map these second-century Christian groups onto a spectrum. At one pole, some second-century teachers treated the post-apostolic Christian tradition as if it is too malleable to be confined in a textual format. These teachers preferred to rely on unwritten teachings or instructions, often resulting in groups with isolated interpretative commitments or extended defenses of esotericism.⁴⁰ In contrast to this, anchoring the opposite pole, other groups concluded that the written word was a necessary medium for transmitting Christian knowledge as they watched their surroundings grow increasingly literate (even if some conceded to textuality with a sense of ambivalence). Seeking a Christian sense of belonging and authority in literate circles, these groups continued practicing what they had witnessed concerning authoritative texts in other philosophical or religious traditions.⁴¹

39 Loveday Alexander, “The Living Voice: Scepticism towards the Written Word in Early Christian and in Graeco-Roman Texts,” in *The Bible in Three Dimensions: Essays in Celebration of Forty Years of Biblical Studies in the University of Sheffield*, ed. David J. A. Clines, Stephen E. Fowl, and Stanley E. Porter (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 221–247; P. J. J. Botha, “Living Voice and Lifeless Letters: Reserve Towards Writing in the Graeco-Roman World,” *HvTSt* 49 (1993), 742–759; Stephen C. Carlson, “Papias’s Appeal to the ‘Living and Lasting Voice’ over Books,” in *The Rise of the Early Christian Intellectual*, ed. Lewis Ayres and H. Clifton Ward, AKG 139 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 25–44. Regarding competition between textuality and orality in the Christian tradition, see Blossom Stefaniw, *Christian Reading: Language, Ethics, and the Order of Things* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019); Mark Letteney, *The Christianization of Knowledge in Late Antiquity: Intellectual and Material Transformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

40 A similar example we could offer is the contest between Irenaeus and the Valentinians. The hypothesis (ὑπόθεσις) undergirding Irenaeus’s rule of faith had not been clearly codified into creedal formulations or mapped onto a specific textual form, yet one of his chief accusations against the Valentinians is their propagation of unwritten (ἀγράφων) doctrines based on their manipulation of apostolic teachings (*Against Heresies* 1.8.1). In the end, this conflict is less over the textuality of instruction and more about the non-textual interpretation or arrangement of these teachings.

41 David Brakke, “Scriptural Practices in Early Christianity: Towards a New History of the New Testament Canon,” in *Invention, Rewriting, Usurpation: Discursive Fights Over*

Clement places himself at this second pole, commending the written word as a serviceable means of remembering the apostolic teaching and as a way to instruct those who are students in the faith. A portion of Clement's *Eclogae propheticae* may clarify his understanding of the relationship between written and oral teachings in the Christian tradition before turning to *Stromateis*. At *Eclogae propheticae* 27, Clement writes:

But the elders did not write – neither wishing to preoccupy the instructional concern of the tradition with another concern, that of writing, nor spending the time meant for reflecting upon what was to be said on writing. Perhaps also, being convinced that the compositional and the teaching form are not achievements of the same nature, they yielded it to those who were predisposed toward it by nature. For the current of the speaker is carried forward unhindered and with a rush and perhaps even has the power to seize; but that which is continually tested by those encountering it, coming to obtain exactness through examination, is worthy of extreme care, and is, so to speak, the written confirmation of the teaching – and, thus, the voice being transmitted to later generations through composition. For the deposit of the elders, speaking through writing, employs the writer as a servant for the transmission of the tradition, for the salvation of those encountering it. Just as the magnet-stone, passing its influence through other matter, draws only iron to itself by affinity, so also books, although many encounter them, only attract those able to understand. For the word of truth is to some foolishness, to others a stumbling block, but to a few it is found as the wisdom and power of God. But let envy be far from the Gnostic. For this reason, he considers whether it is worse to give it to the unworthy one or to withhold it from the worthy one; and, because of much love, he is in danger, not only to share with whom it is fitting but sometimes even with one who is unworthy, earnestly begging – not because of the petition itself (for he is not vainglorious), but because of the persistence of the one begging, who through much supplication is exercising toward faith.

Religious Traditions in Antiquity, ed. Jörg Ulrich, Anders-Christian Jacobson, and David Brakke, vol. 11, *Early Christianity in the Context of Antiquity* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2012), 263–280, at 271–272: “Texts provided a crucial means of access to the doctrines of the academic school’s founding figures and to knowledge of ethics, the natural world, and the divine. Texts could be evaluated for their legitimacy as works of past masters and their disciples, and they might be edited to remove corruptions. They served primarily as objects of close reading and interpretation, often allegorical interpretation, and learned readers produced new texts – commentaries, scholarly tools such as text editions, and new philosophical treatises.”

As Clement weighs the values of unwritten and written teachings, he notices that writing has the added benefit of being “continually tested by those encountering it, coming to obtain exactness through examination.”⁴² As such, the written word functions as a “confirmation of the teaching,” refining and honing the oral tradition while keeping its core contents intact, even describing the process of writing down oral instruction as “the voice being transmitted to later generations through composition.”⁴³ Using this as his foundation, Clement frames the practice of writing as one that exhibits servitude to the same gospel that was proclaimed by the apostles and passed down in the church: “For the deposit of the elders, speaking through writing, employs the writer as a servant for the transmission of the tradition, for the salvation of those encountering it.”⁴⁴ For Clement in *Eclogae propheticæ* 27, the written word preserves the very voice of the elders, as their deposit or legacy is able to speak through the writings (τῶν πρεσβυτέρων παρακαταθήκη διὰ τῆς γραφῆς λαλοῦσα).

This resonates with the introduction to the *Stromateis*. The bulk of *Stromata* 1’s introduction is a philosophical defense for determining one’s fittingness for composing and reading works of literature (*Stromata* 1.1.1.1–1.1.10.5).⁴⁵ Clement begins with a simple presumption: if writings are our spiritual offspring, and if we call spiritual leaders our fathers, then it must be proper for Christians to leave behind writings that instruct those of faith in an effort to leave healthy

42 *Eclogae propheticæ* 27.3.31–32 (Stählin, GCS 17, 144): τὸ δὲ ὑπὸ τῶν ἐντυγχανόντων ἐκάστοτε βασιανιζόμενον, ἀκριβοῦς τῆς ἐξετάσεως τυγχάνον.

43 *Eclogae propheticæ* 27.3 (Stählin, GCS 17, 144–145): καὶ ἔστιν οἷον εἰπεῖν ἔγγραφος διδασκαλίας βεβαίωσις, καὶ εἰς τοὺς ὀψιγόνους οὕτως διὰ τῆς συντάξεως παραπεμπομένης τῆς φωνῆς.

44 *Eclogae propheticæ* 27.4 (Stählin, GCS 17, 145): ἡ γὰρ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων παρακαταθήκη διὰ τῆς γραφῆς λαλοῦσα ὑπουργῶ χρηταὶ τῷ γράφοντι πρὸς τὴν παράδοσιν εἰς σωτηρίαν τῶν ἐντευξομένων.

45 As pointed out by Alexander, since Clement does not begin any of his other works with a defense of the author’s task, we may only assume some kind of inherent literary quality or something about the work’s philosophical nature made Clement feel as if he ought to begin with an introduction explaining his purposes. Interacting with Osborn, see Alexander, “The Living Voice,” 243: “The writing of Clement’s other works had needed no justification (Osborn 1959: 343); it was the particular exercise of forming and committing to writing the ‘Christian philosophy’ of the *Stromateis* that caused Clement’s Platonist heartsearchings.” This prologue has since been analyzed in Alain Le Boulec, “Pour qui, pourquoi, comment? Les ‘Stromates’ de Clément d’Alexandrie,” in *Entrer en matière: les prologues*, eds. Jean-Daniel Dubois and Bernard Roussel (Paris: Centre d’Études des Religions du Livre, Cerf, 1998), 23–36. Even more recently, *Stromata* 1 has been edited with an introduction, translation, and notes in the series *Sources chrétiennes*: Clément d’Alexandrie, *Les Stromates*, ed. Bernard Pouderon, sc 633 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2023).

progeny behind (*Stromata* 1.1.1.2–3).⁴⁶ Clement draws this presumption from *Phaedrus* 278a–b, where Plato argues that a teacher’s teachings are written in the soul: “Such speeches of his should be said to be as if they were his legitimate sons.” Rather than merely interpolating Plato, however, Clement displays an intertextual polymathy, grounding this classical philosophical point in a spiritual reading of the parable of the ten talents (Matthew 25:14–30). In his explanation of the parable, Clement says the Savior appears out of his abundance (καταφαίνεται ἐκ περιουσίας), referencing the wide manner in which the Lord casts the seeds of truth to many hearers in his earthly ministry and in his preaching.⁴⁷ Clement deduces a point of application for the Christian life from the Savior’s manifold preaching of the parable: the one who sows truth – whether in word or by voice – will be rewarded in the same way the servants who invested the master’s money were rewarded, but the one who hides it will be punished (*Stromata* 1.1.3.1–1.1.4.4).

In other words, Clement places his value on the core content of Christian instruction, not on the oral or textual form of expression that this instruction assumes. Rather than taking the traditional warnings against writing as a reason to retreat from materializing Christian knowledge, he uses this discussion on the character and nature of the writing act as a basis for composing a progressive text that challenges conventional prosaic literary forms, explicitly addressed in 1.2.20.4–21.2:

The *Stromateis*, making a body of polymathy [οἱ Στρωματεῖς τῇ πολυμαθίᾳ σωματοποιούμενοι], aim to skillfully conceal the seeds of gnosis [κρύπτειν ἐντέχνως τὰ τῆς γνώσεως βούλονται σπέρματα]. Just as the one who loves the chase looks for, tracks, traces, and trails with dogs, winning the wild beast, so the truth appears sweetened when sought and brought about with labor. Why, then, you will ask, did you think it fit that

46 The Platonic background of Clement’s authorial and interpretive task has been more extensively explored by both Dietmar Wyrwa and Miklós Gyurkovics. Wyrwa offers an investigation of the *Phaedrus*’s influence on this theme by using linguistic parallels and detecting Platonic allusions at Dietmar Wyrwa, *Die Christliche Platonaneignung in den Stromateis des Clemens von Alexandrien*, AKG 53 (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1983), 30–46. Gyurkovics depicts the interplay between the Platonic trope of unwritten doctrines and Clement’s interpretation of Scripture and describes its pedagogical role in leading to the Gnostic’s formation: “Il frutto della contemplazione è la trascrizione interior delle “idee divine” nell’anima gnostica.” Miklós Gyurkovics, “La Teologia ‘Non Scritta’ in Clemente Di Alessandria,” *Eastern Theological Journal* 3.2 (2017): 289–316, at 300.

47 This corresponds to the oft-cited distinction Clement makes in *Paedagogus* 1.1.1–3, where he distinguishes between the *paedagogus* (who offers moral instruction) and the *didaskalos* (who leads the student to true *gnosis*).

the recollections be arranged like this? Because there is great danger to betray [ἐξορχήσασθαι] the secret, which is the very truth of philosophy, to those who unsparingly wish to contradict all things unjustly and who cast out all names and sayings in unordered fashion, deceiving themselves and bewitching those that follow them.⁴⁸

Clement begins by first describing the *Stromateis*'s literary and intellectual traits before describing the pedagogical intentions with which he composes the text. The image Clement uses connects to the agrarian motif littered throughout *Stromateis* 1.1, only this time the sower is not the Savior, and the seeds are not the gospel being preached or written down; instead, Clement now speaks of himself sowing the seeds of true gnosis by embedding them in writings and forming a verbose, textual flesh of polymathy. By forming these words into a textual body, Clement intends to "skillfully conceal" the seeds of true *gnosis* within the soil of the *Stromateis*, refining the work's core teachings by wielding the "fruit of Greek chrestomathy" (τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς χρηστομαθίας ὁ καρπός).⁴⁹

In addition to mirroring a literary aesthetic around him, Clement offers his audience another rationale for this approach through a hypothetical caution, citing a fear that writing divine truths in a clearer way could "betray the secret." The word translated here as "betray" (ἐξορχέομαι) may most literally be rendered "to dance out," and it becomes something of an idiom for divulging or revealing esoteric or mysterious knowledge that gains traction among cultic and/or gnostic groups, with similar uses by Lucian, Epictetus, and Achilles

48 *Stromata* 1.2.20.4–21.2 (Stählin, GCS 15, 14). In preserving the transliteration of "polymathy," I seek to retain Clement's participation in an ancient interest in polymathic inquiry. In its antique context, its meaning would have likely been something to the effect of "extensive learning, study, and the consequent integration or deployment of that experience to make one seem an authority." See Christopher Moore, *Calling Philosophers Names: On the Origin of a Discipline* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 39.

49 *Stromata* 1.1.17.2 (Stählin, GCS 15, 12). "Chrestomathy" is transliterated here, primarily to reflect the distinctiveness of the word's appearance in this passage. Clement uses it only a few sentences before this at *Stromata* 1.1.16.1. There, he describes how an abundance or diversity of learning is similar to the variety of spices that adorn an athlete's food: αὐτίκα καὶ ἡ τῆς χρηστομαθίας περιουσία οἷον ἡδυσμά τί ἐστὶν παραπεπλεγμένον ἀθλητοῦ βρώματι. The sense seems to follow the most literal reading of the word rather than its more technical use to represent a literary compilation of quotations from an authoritative figure; however, this other sense is certainly worth considering given the *Stromateis*' form. One example of how Clement demonstrates this is a citation of Cleanthes (*Stromata* 5.11.1), who condemns idolatry despite the quoted text suggesting otherwise. The deeper meaning of Cleanthes's words may only be discovered once Clement more fully integrates it into an argument against idolatry founded upon Scripture.

Tatius.⁵⁰ Interestingly, this is the same word Clement uses to describe how Alcibiades had revealed secret mysteries in *Protrepticus* 2.12.1. There, Clement presents Alcibiades's method of burlesquing sacred knowledge in a negative light, setting it up as a foil for Clement's own task of plainly speaking these hidden truths publicly [ἀγορεύσω δὲ ἀναφανδὸν τὰ κεκρυμμένα] (*Protrepticus* 2.14.1). In the context of *Stromateis* 1, however, Clement inverts the sense in which he uses the word. Here, he co-opts the term to emphasize the public manner by which his recollections are contained in a text capable of concealing true *gnosis* through the text's verbosity. In other words, Clement hides the truth by speaking more extensively and embedding it textually. This approach, as Clement alludes, is how he avoids casting the pearls before swine, citing the common figurative language of the "donkey and lyre" and the preference pigs have for mud over clean water (*Strom* 1.1.2.2 and 1.12.55.3).

When it comes to teaching higher levels of knowledge, then, we see that Clement understands the written word to be a stable medium for preserving divine truth. Yet, because not all are suited for higher levels of knowledge, he thinks certain safeguards should be followed when composing his work. Clement recognizes that the medium of written word cannot self-regulate or discern its audience in the same way oral teachers or reading communities are able to do.⁵¹ And since literature is limited in this capacity, Clement embraces a literary form that allows him to simultaneously reveal truths while concealing them, with a larger goal of guarding the highest principles of divine instruction. Clement describes this tension by using the imagery of concealment and revelation: "There are some things my writing will hint at; some it will linger upon; some it will only mention – it will attempt to speak unnoticeably and

50 The most instructive case is Lucian, who writes on mystery cults in Lucian, *De saltatione* 15 (Macleod, OCT III/45, 33): "Many say those who divulge the mystery 'dance them out'" [ὅτι τοὺς ἐξαγορεύοντας τὰ μυστήρια ἐξορχεῖσθαι λέγουσιν οἱ πολλοί]. This sensibility is likely something Clement draws upon polemically in the service of his wider agenda against those who falsely label themselves as gnostics, and it is also the sense with which he uses the word in the opening of *Protrepticus* 2.

51 The problem of individual literacy and its relationship to public teaching is highlighted by William Johnson in his reading of a scene from Gellius's *Attic Nights* 13.31, where a *grammaticus* embarrasses himself by attempting to read a bookroll aloud. As Johnson concludes, "The group in this scene strongly endorses the view that *understanding* the text is a necessary preliminary to the sort of reading here practiced – that is, reading aloud to the group with a view to questions and discussion." See William A. Johnson, *Readers and Reading Culture in the High Roman Empire: A Study of Elite Communities*, Classical Culture and Society (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 129–130.

reveal hiddenly and show silently.”⁵² The operative and pedagogical functions of his miscellanistic form are not framed according to their esotericism but according to their public and outward-facing nature. Even if it does so in an elusive, subtle, or confusing way, the compositional act is still an act that fundamentally speaks, reveals, and shows. For Clement, then, the literary miscellany is not a thoughtless or wandering literary form but a careful one – one that allows him to plant the seeds of *gnosis* into words that are stable enough to be transmitted without betraying the very truth of Christian instruction or allowing this truth to be gainsaid by false teachers. As such, it is a fitting method for the task of training the full range of pagans, catechumens, converts, and maturing Christians through a single curriculum.

Perhaps the most vivid image Clement provides to this end is not contained in the *Stromateis* but, once again, in *Eclogae propheticae*, where he provides an analogy likening books and their readers to magnets and iron: “Just as the magnet-stone, passing its influence through other matter, draws only iron to itself by affinity, so also books, although many encounter them, only attract those able to understand. For the word of truth is to some foolishness, to others a stumbling block, but to a few it is found as the wisdom and power of God.”⁵³ Like the magnet which draws iron to itself because of the objects’ essential proclivities toward one another, books containing divine truths will capably attract readers who understand what is written. The transmission and preservation of the apostolic proclamation is not hindered by the verbosity and density of the Greco-Roman miscellany because the one who is predisposed by nature toward the divine will be drawn to the truth as it is contained in the writings. Thus, this attitude encourages Clement to negotiate the limiting function of literary production throughout the *Stromateis* in order to conceal the seeds of divine knowledge within a polymathic body of text: he trusts that the words will find the readers they should. By miscellany-making, then, Clement keeps the church’s most sacred and secret truths in a written format which allows them to be passed down without introducing a danger (ἀκίνδυνον, *Stromata* 6.1.1.1) and without handing them over to the wrong recipients. For Clement, this resolves any conflict between the oral and the written, reflected once again in Clement’s definition of divine knowledge as “a succession given to a few of the apostles, passed down unwritten,” yet necessarily requiring the written word so that it may be “trained up in an eternal and unalterable habit

52 *Stromata* 1.1.15.1–2 (Stählin, GCS 15, 11): ἔστι δὲ ἃ καὶ αἰνίζεται μοι γραφή, καὶ τοῖς μὲν παραστήσεται, τὰ δὲ μόνον ἔρει, πειράσεται δὲ καὶ λανθάνουσα εἰπεῖν καὶ ἐπικρυπτομένη ἐκφῆναι καὶ δεῖξαι σιωπῶσα.

53 *Eclogae propheticae* 27.5 (Stählin, GCS 17, 145).

of contemplation.”⁵⁴ In short, the explanation he gives for utilizing the miscellany is one which “positions his work on the cusp between orality and writing,” keeping the doctrine passed down by tradition while also mapping this tradition onto text.⁵⁵

While Clement recognizes this concealing character of the miscellany, he also recognizes the positive pedagogical benefits it offers his readers. As Clement tells it, he anticipates that the reader of these writings will find a sweeter reward because they have to work harder in order to understand these hidden truths: “Just as the one who loves the chase looks for, tracks, traces, and trails with dogs, winning the wild beast, so the truth appears sweetened when sought and brought about with labor.” In the same way that the work has been composed in a skillful way (ἐντέχνως), using the crafty literary practice of miscellany-making, Clement suggests his readers ought to labor congruently, utilizing the reading act in a way that draws out concealed truths through labor (that is, through careful and attentive contemplation).⁵⁶ Thus, revelation through concealment offers a better prize for those who are able to obtain it.⁵⁷ This is fundamentally a pedagogical maneuver embedded into Clement’s authorial decision-making; since it requires a dedicated sense of labor to work through Clement’s miscellaneous curriculum, readers will inevitably reap greater benefits than they would from a “clearer” composition. Clement adapts this from what he sees in the Scriptures – not just in the parables of Jesus but also from the concealed (ἐπικρύπτονται) nature of Scripture itself, as explained in *Stromata* 6. Clement suggests that the obscurity of the written words of Scripture encourages its readers to be disposed toward inquiry and keep us watchful of the words of salvation (*Strom* 6.15.126.1–3).⁵⁸ It was most appropriate for the authors of Scripture to conceal their texts in this way because

54 *Stromata* 6.7.61.3.1–5 (Stählin, GCS 15, 462–463): ἡ γνώσις δὲ αὕτη [ἡ] κατὰ διαδοχὰς εἰς ὀλίγους ἐκ τῶν ἀποστόλων ἀγράφως παραδοθεῖσα κατελήλυθεν. Ἐντεῦθεν δὲ ἄρα γνώσιν εἴτε σοφίαν συνασκηθῆναι χρή εἰς ἕξιν θεωρίας αἰδίων καὶ ἀναλοιῶτον.

55 Heath, *Clement of Alexandria*, 104.

56 Piotr Ashwin-Siejkowski, *Clement of Alexandria: A Project of Christian Perfection* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 107: “As Clement believed that truth was scattered among different philosophical *scholae*, as seeds planted within different doctrines, the candidate to become a Gnostic was impelled to study, compare and critically reflect on all systems in order to reconcile in himself or herself the full image of the one truth.”

57 Itter, *Esoteric Teaching*, 19 summarizes Osborn effectively on this point, noting “it is exactly the attainment of the higher reaches of knowledge that determine the mode of composition, the form and content of which are conducive to teaching the doctrines of the true philosophy.”

58 *Stromata* 6.15.126.1 (Stählin, GCS 15, 495): πρῶτον μὲν ἵνα ζητητικοὶ ὑπάρχωμεν καὶ προσαγρυπνῶμεν ἀεὶ τῇ τῶν σωτηρίων λόγων εὐρέσει.

it serves a double purpose of preventing outsiders, who will inevitably misinterpret the Holy Spirit's words, from misreading harm (βλαβεῖν) onto themselves through their act of misreading what has been revealed for salvation (*Strom* 6.15.126.1–5).⁵⁹ In the same way Isaiah was told to write down unwritten truths that the Spirit prophesied in anticipation of divine knowledge that would follow, the Savior offers the apostles an unwritten knowledge which can be passed down – a knowledge that is now written on our hearts and in textual form through the renewal of the book, both according to the power of God (*Strom* 6.15.131.4.1–5.2).⁶⁰ By this logic, Clement models his own compositional practices after those examples modeled in the prophets and the Gospel writers, concealing the spiritual sense of divine knowledge through contemporary literary forms of his day.

4 Conclusion

How, then, ought we best understand what it means to read Clement as a miscellanist? Above all, his approach cannot be, as Heath notes, “just a ‘Christian twist’ to note-making and miscellanism.”⁶¹ Instead, we should receive it as a more stable window into how Christian cultural producers grappled with the shifting standards of ancient pedagogy and literary culture. As reading communities emerged and evolved, and as Christian interactions with textual forms and styles reached new contexts, Clement's miscellanism proves itself to be a progressive and ambitious project that simultaneously appreciates and repurposes the literature surrounding him. In light of this, we ought to appreciate Clement's *Stromateis* as an expression of Christian literary creativity and as a deliberate retooling of an extant Greco-Roman literary form that allows him to mediate between orality and textuality. This strategy not only conceals and reveals divine knowledge but also redefines the very purpose of literature in Clement's Christian intellectual context. By integrating the Greek polymathic tradition into a textual form, drawing on the fruits of

59 *Stromata* 6.15.126.1 (Stählin, GCS 15, 495): ἔπειτα μηδὲ τοῖς ἄπασι προσήκον ἦν νοεῖν, ὥς μὴ βλαβεῖεν ἐτέρως ἐκδεξάμενοι τὰ ὑπὸ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος σωτηρίως εἰρημένα.

60 *Stromata* 6.15.131.4–5 (Stählin, GCS 15, 498): ἀλλὰ καὶ Ἡσαΐας ὁ προφήτης βιβλίον καινὸν κελεύεται λαβὼν ἐγγράψαι τινά, τὴν γνώσιν τὴν ἁγίαν διὰ τῆς τῶν γραφῶν ἐξηγήσεως ὕστερον ἔσεσθαι προφητεύοντος τοῦ πνεύματος τὴν ἔτι κατ' ἐκείνον τὸν καιρὸν ἄγραφον τυγχάνουσιν διὰ τὸ μηδέπω γινώσκεισθαι· εἴρητο γὰρ ἅπ' ἀρχῆς μόνοις τοῖς νοῦσιν. αὐτίκα διδάξαντος τοῦ σωτῆρος τοὺς ἀποστόλους ἡ τῆς ἐγγράφου ἄγραφος ἦδη καὶ εἰς ἡμᾶς διαδίδοται παράδοσις, καρδίαις καιναῖς κατὰ τὴν ἀνακαινῶσιν τοῦ βιβλίου τῇ δυνάμει τοῦ θεοῦ ἐγγεγραμμένη.

61 Heath, *Clement of Alexandria*, 104.

Greek education and erudition, Clement solidifies the apostolic teaching into a philosophically-sound and reliably transmissible textual form.

To take this idea any further, however, we must recognize how, to quote William Johnson, “literary pursuits form a large part of what men *do*.”⁶² Clement’s authorial decisions do not solely reveal his literary concerns. Instead, they reveal the overarching lenses through which he sees the world. Beyond the ordering of grammar and text, his goal is not to amass knowledge or to properly structure syllables and words. Rather, he aims to effect transformation in the spiritual habits and actions of those who realize the full potential of Christian truth – the true Gnostic, who attains the highest order of divine knowledge and upholds the once-unwritten apostolic teaching.⁶³ The erudition performed through the miscellanist’s vocation of culling, curating, and composing reflects the cosmological harmony that undergirds all of creation, inviting us to partake in what Edward Creedy has called Clement’s “hermeneutic of the harmonizing divine Logos.”⁶⁴ For Clement, the intellectual exercise of polymathic inquiry and its embodiment in textual form is not merely a literary practice derived from the surrounding culture; rather, it is Clement’s answer to Bourdieu’s meeting of two histories, Skinner’s investigation of interlocutory force, and Derrida’s problem of the *pharmakon*. In the *Stromateis*, miscellany-making becomes the very essence of Christian maturity and the locus of apostolic transmission, offering a means by which Clement can cast his vision for repurposing worldly things for divine ends and adding our voices to the harmony of God’s created order.

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62 Johnson, *Readers and Reading Culture*, 204.

63 As Brakke points out, the performance of academic rituals and rites in second century reading communities like Clement’s is not at the expense of religious activities; rather, “the goal of such groups was personal and communal transformation, the turning away from vice toward virtue and from ignorance toward knowledge.” See Brakke, “Scriptural Practices in Early Christianity,” 271.

64 Edward J. Creedy, “Redemption through Divine Harmony: Clement of Alexandria’s True ‘Gnostic’ as Editor of Early Christian Writings,” *Gnosis* 9 (2024): 1–34, at 10.