The Thunder: Perfect Mind

A New Translation and Introduction

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The Thunder: Perfect Mind

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THE THUNDER: PERFECT MIND
A NEW TRANSLATION AND INTRODUCTION

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C O N T E N T S

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P R E F A C E

> I am she whose wedding is extravagant and I didn't have a husband
> I am the midwife and she who hasn't given birth
> I am the comfort of my labor pains ….
> I am the slavewoman of him who served me
> I am she, the lord of my child …
> Do not stare at me in the shit pile, leaving me discarded
> You will find me in the kingdoms ….
> Because I am a barbarian among barbarians …
> I am she who they call law
> And you all called lawlessness ….
> I am she who is revered and adored
> And she who is reviled with contempt
> I am peace and war exists because of me
> I am a foreigner and a citizen of the city
> I am being
> I am she who is nothing

This evocative, gender-bended, and ever-twisting self-portrait in the ancient document *The Thunder: Perfect Mind* sustains itself for some nine pages of papyrus. Sometimes commanding the scene like a goddess, other times disdained and thrown down in the dirt, she keeps challenging those around her. Still other times, she shape-shifts into a masculine form or intentionally contradicts conventional expectations of her previous utterance.

Like many other important ancient scripts, *The Thunder: Perfect Mind* was discovered in rural Egypt, where the dry air inhibits decay of ancient material. *Thunder* belongs to the increasingly famous Nag Hammadi collection of what appear to be mostly early Christian documents, all found in the same jar in the hills above the Nile. It is likely that the Nag Hammadi documents had been collected by an early desert monastic community. Found in the mid-twentieth century and translated within several decades afterward, these documents were initially published in English in 1977, but only accessible to the general public within the last generation. *Thunder* was one of 52 Nag Hammadi documents.

Thunder has nevertheless already distinguished itself in public consciousness. It stands vigil at the beginning of award-winning novelist Toni Morrison's works *Jazz* and *Paradise*. Umberto Eco also cited it in his novel *Foucault's Pendulum*. Julie Dash's award-winning 1991 feature film, *Daughters of the Dust*, opens with a long citation from *Thunder*. Its text also anchors a 2005 film by Jordon and Ridley Scott,[1] whose shortened version has appeared widely as a commercial for Prada women's fashions.[2] Numerous music groups and composers have set *Thunder* to music.[3]

Curiously enough–and in contrast with the *Gospel of Thomas*, the other document from Nag Hammadi known more broadly to the public–*Thunder* has never been published in book form in English. The *Gospel of Thomas* has been published as a single book in at least 20 editions. This work marks the first book-length publication and treatment of *Thunder* in English.

This book has four major purposes:

(1) To make the text of this extraordinary ancient work available to as broad a public as possible. This text in translation is presented in the opening section of the book.
(2) To provide a translation of this work that does careful justice to the original Coptic and whose English is fresh and poetic in keeping with the poetic quality in the Coptic.
(3) To introduce basic historical and literary contexts for the study of this text on any level.
(4) To reflect on the powerful meanings of *Thunder* in relationship to society, gender, violence, and identity through the ways in which it has been written and performed.

This book also provides an extensive annotated translation that allows scholarship for the next several decades to be aware of technical issues within the Coptic, that helps readers take into account variant translations and meanings not reflected in the main translation, and that offers additional historical and literary information for the understanding of this text.

This project originated in a year-long Coptic study at Union Theological Seminary in New York. It is also a part of a longer-range effort at Union to provide advanced study in the literature of early Christianity without regard to canonical boundaries or prerogatives.

Preface to the Translation

In translating *The Thunder: Perfect Mind*, we wanted to create above all a crisp, readable, and evocative piece of writing in English that reflects Coptic meanings (and their implications) responsibly. We wanted to avoid a "trendy" translation that serves particular contemporary interests at the expense of important ancient meanings. But we also wanted to go beyond strictly literal renderings or antiquarian attachments such as replicating exact syntax. In this vein, treating *Thunder* as a poem was crucial to us, and while literalisms can be useful to a certain point, respecting the text as poetry means also honoring the metaphorical, associative, and evocative functions of both English and Coptic.

There are a number of aspects of *Thunder*, though, that demand very specific representation in English. The poetic nature of the text meant retaining, for example, some of the alliteration and rhyme (though not in the very same phrases as the Coptic), and attending to the shifts in tone and content through stanza breaks. On the other hand, in order to keep the lines as sharp as possible, words that function to aid or indicate performance in an ancient context (the words "and" or "for/since") were eliminated unless they were necessary syntactically or gave a cue in meaning.

Translating grammatical gender in *Thunder* was also a task that required meticulous treatment. As we elaborate in various places throughout this book, gender has been universally under-translated in *Thunder*, and so we have attempted to address the various difficulties involved in translating the often subtle, often palpable gender play throughout *Thunder*. The "I am" *(anok te/pe)* structure was most difficult in its understated and elusive reference to gender. While we believe this structure contributes meaningfully to *Thunder* with regard to gender, we decided not to translate the gender in these phrases. We found no feasible way to include it without destroying its subtlety, and inadvertently weakening some of the more emphatic interests in gendered language. Otherwise, we have never translated neutrally where the text cites a gendered "one."

Similarly, past translations primarily have read *Thunder* as speculative or cosmological in ways that support a "gnostic" categorization for the text.[4] While *Thunder*'s philosophical concerns are clear, we have also found that it has strong investments in making meaning for its particular social situations. So where words or phrases suggest primarily concrete or "earthy" meanings, we have heeded those meanings rather than presume cosmological meanings ("when I am thrown onto the ground" as opposed to "when I am cast out upon the earth" [15.2–3]).

Regarding lacunae in the manuscript and word reconstructions made by scholars, we have made our own decisions for each of these on a case-by-case basis. Some careful and important work has already been done on textual reconstruction of *Thunder*, most of which we have accepted. It was nevertheless vital to let ambiguous lacunae stand, because of the text's tendency to surprise the reader with unanticipated turns in meaning and syntax.

Translation is a task that necessarily gives and takes away potential for meaning. We tried to be conscious of our gains and losses at every stage, and we have provided annotations (in the "Annotated Coptic Text and English Translation," beginning on page 102) to track where our decisions have been disputed among us or where our decisions might be better understood by readers. We hope that this translation offers an opportunity to scholars as well as artists, those who pray texts as well as casual readers, to rethink both *Thunder* itself and the circular safety of the canon.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

With the splendid help of our Palgrave editor, Burke Gerstenschlager, and Integra Software Services staff member Afrin Kabir, we worked to represent this apostrophic mark after some of the letters of "tau" as accurately as possible. Although electronic fonts; publishing standards; and ancient scribal, regional, temporal, or communitarian traditions seem to vary as to when this "apostrophe" mark occurs at the end of the tau and how it is written, we do note that in *Thunder* this tau apostrophe consistently touches the tau itself. This is not always the case with the tau apostrophe in either modern publishing or ancient manuscripts, nor does the modern printed material appear consistent with the various ancient manuscript renderings. Furthermore, the function of the tau apostrophe is not clear. We chose, thanks to Palgrave Macmillan's excellence in publishing, to represent the tau apostrophe in a way that corresponds as much as possible to the way it appears and is positioned in the one existing *Thunder* manuscript. We did this primarily because of the possibility that the tau apostrophe may be functioning in *Thunder* (and elsewhere) as a breathing indication, relative to the way the piece is rendered orally. The interpretation in this book has emphasized the importance of *Thunder* as a performed piece.

The Thunder: Perfect Mind

13 I[1] was sent out from power   2
I came to those pondering me
And I was found among those seeking me
Look at me, all you who contemplate me   6
Audience, hear me   7
Those expecting me, receive me
Don't chase me from your sight
Don't let your voice or your hearing hate me   11
Don't ignore me any place, any time
Be careful. Do not ignore me

I am the first and the last   16
I am she who is honored and she who is mocked
I am the whore and the holy woman   18
I am the wife and the virgin
I am he the mother and the daughter
I am the limbs of my mother   21
I am a sterile woman and she has many children
I am she whose wedding is extravagant and I didn't have
    a husband
I am the midwife and she who hasn't given birth
I am the comfort of my labor pains   27
I am the bride and the bridegroom
And it is my husband who gave birth to me
I am my father's mother,
my husband's sister, and he is my child   32
I am the slavewoman of him who served me
I am she, the lord **14** of my child

But it is he who gave birth to me at the wrong time
And he is my child born at the right time
And my power is from within him
I am the staff of his youthful power
And he is the baton of my old womanhood   7
Whatever he wants happens to me

I am the silence never found
And the idea infinitely recalled
I am the voice with countless sounds
And the thousand guises of the word   13
I am the speaking of my name

You who loathe me, why do you love me and loathe the ones who
    love me?
You who deny me, confess me
You who confess me, deny me
You who speak the truth about me, lie about me
You who lie about me, speak the truth about me
You who know me, ignore me
You who ignore me, know me   25

I am both awareness and obliviousness
I am humiliation and pride
I am without shame   29
I am ashamed   30
I am security and I am fear
I am war and peace

Pay attention to me
I am she who is disgraced and she who is important
15 Pay attention to me, to my impoverishment and to
    my extravagance   1
Do not be arrogant to me when I am thrown to the ground
You will find me among the expected
Do not stare at me in the shit pile, leaving me discarded
You will find me in the kingdoms
Do not stare at me when I am thrown out among
    the condemned
Do not laugh at me in the lowest places   12
Do not throw me down among those slaughtered viciously

I myself am compassionate
And I am cruel
Watch out!

Do not hate my compliance and do not love my restraint   17
In my weakness do not strip me bare
Do not be afraid of my power

Why do you despise my fear and curse my pride?
I am she who exists in all fears and in trembling boldness
I am she who is timid   26
And I am safe in a comfortable place
I am witless, and I am wise

Why did you hate me with your schemes?
I shall shut my mouth among those whose mouths are shut
    and then I will show up and speak

16 Why then did you hate me, you Greeks?
Because I am a barbarian among barbarians?

I am the wisdom of the Greeks and the knowledge of
    the barbarians
I am the deliberation of both the Greeks and barbarians   7
I am he whose image is multiple in Egypt
And she who is without an image among the barbarians
I am she who was hated in every place
And she who was loved in every place

I am she whom they call life
And you all called death
I am she whom they call law
And you all called lawlessness   15

I am she whom you chased and she whom you captured
I am she whom you scattered
And you have gathered me together
I am she before whom you were ashamed
And you have been shameless to me
I am she who does not celebrate festivals
And I am she whose festivals are spectacular

I, I am without God   24
And I am she whose God is magnificent
I am he the one you thought about and you detested me
I am not learned, and they learn from me
I am she whom you detested and yet you think about me
I am he from whom you hid
And you appear to me

Whenever you hide yourselves, I myself will appear   35
17For [………] you […]I myself […….] you[..]
    […….]Those who have [….]
    […..]to it […..……..]take me[…………]from within[………]   6
Receive me with understanding and heartache
Take me from the disgraced and crushed places
Rob from those who are good, even though in disgrace

Bring me in shame, to yourselves, out of shame
With or without shame

Blame the parts of me within yourselves
Come toward me, you who know me   20

and you who know the parts of me
Assemble the great among the small and earliest creatures

Advance toward childhood   25
Do not hate it because it is small and insignificant
Don't reject the small parts of greatness because they are small
    since smallness is recognized from within greatness

Why do you curse me and revere me?
    You wounded me and you relented
    Don't separate me from the first **18** ones
    you[.........]
throw away no one[..........]   3
turn away no[.............]she who[.....
I know those
And the ones after these know me

But I am the mind[.......]and the rest[.........]   9
I am the learning from my search
And the discovery of those seeking me
The command of those who ask about me
And the power of powers   14
In my understanding of the angels
Who were sent on my word
And the Gods in God, according to my design?   17
And spirits of all men who exist with me
And the women who live in me

I am she who is revered and adored
And she who is reviled with contempt
I am peace and war exists because of me
I am a foreigner and a citizen of the city   26

I am being
I am she who is nothing
Those who do not participate in my presence, don't know me
Those who share in my being know me

Those who are close to me, did not know me   32
Those who are far from me, knew me
On the day that I am close to you**19**[.............]are far away
    [........]on the day that I[........]from you[........]

    [.........]of the heart[.....]
    [.......]of the natures
I am he[.......]of the creation of the spirits[....]request of the souls
    [......]control and the uncontrollable   9
I am the coming together and the falling apart

I am the enduring and the disintegration
I am down in the dirt and they come up to me
I am judgment and acquittal

I myself am without sin, and the root of sin is from within me
I appear to be lust but inside is self-control
I am what anyone can hear but no one can say   21
I am a mute that does not speak and my words are endless
Hear me in tenderness, learn from me in roughness
I am she who shouts out and I am thrown down on the ground
I am the one who prepares the bread and my mind within
I am the knowledge of my name
I am she who shouts out and it is I that listens   35

20 I appear and[.........]walk in[...........]seal of my[...........]
    [.......]I am he[............]the defense[.......]
I am she they call truth, and violation[.......]   7
You honor me[.........]and you whisper against me
You conquered ones: judge them before they judge you
Because the judge and favoritism exist in you
If he condemns you, who will release you?
If he releases you, who can detain you?

Since what is your inside is your outside   19
And the one who shapes your outside is he who shaped your inside
And what you see on the outside, you see revealed on the inside
It is your clothing

Hear me, audience, and learn from my words, you who know me
I am what everyone can hear and no one can say
I am the name of the sound and the sound of the name   32
I am the sign of writing and disclosure of difference
And I **21**

    [......................]light[.......]
    [........]and[.…......……]hearers[........]to you[.........]
    […..]the great power.
And[........]will not move the name . . .
    […..]he who created me
But I will speak his name   11
Look then at his pronouncements and all the writings that have been
    completed
Listen then, audience
And also you angels
Along with those who have been sent
And spirits who have risen from among the dead
For I am he who exists alone   18
And no one judges me

Since many sweet ideas exist in all kinds of sin,
Uncontrollable and condemning passions
And passing pleasures that people have
Until they become sober and go up to their resting place,
And they will find me in that place　　　　　　　　29
They will live and they will not die again

———❦———

A N   I N T R O D U C T I O N   T O   *T H E   T H U N D E R :   P E R F E C T   M I N D*

N o wonder *The Thunder: Perfect Mind* has attracted substantial public attention in the 30 years since it was first published. Its powerful, paradoxical, possibly divine, first person, primarily female voice has few–if any–parallels in all of literature. Even though occasionally obscured by terms from the ancient Mediterranean, the words of this assertive and mysterious self-revealer grip the twenty-first-century reader almost immediately. *Thunder'*s daring presentation of a cosmically strong woman's voice both shocks and lingers. Out of view for more than 1,600 years, its bold and evocative expressions of a commanding, yet complex, identity resonate today as they must have in the Greco-Roman era.[1]

It is then all the more curious that scholarship about *Thunder* has been scarce.[2] Brief literary and historical commentaries have been published in journals or anthologies.[3] Not one Ph.D. dissertation has been written on *Thunder* in the more than a generation that has elapsed since its publication. One book-length commentary on *Thunder* exists –in French.[4] Whereas contemporary artistic responses to *Thunder* evince a sense of surprise, discovery, or wonder, most scholarship has primarily asked where in the ancient Mediterranean one might find something similar. In this volume on *Thunder*, we hope to combine the strong poetic sense of novelty and amazement *Thunder* evokes with scholarly rigor. Generally, existing scholarly commentary has placed *Thunder* in the increasingly dubious category of "gnosticism,"[5] even while admitting that it does not fit most of the conventional criteria for that label. Chapter 4 addresses the problematic character of giving *Thunder* the gnostic label.

For both these reasons–the way *Thunder* has claimed a public audience and the general lack of scholarly interest in the things that the public finds most interesting, surprising, or even shocking–this book-length and accessible treatment is overdue. It is time that this striking ancient poem receives sustained attention. Our intense study of this fascinating and evocative text has convinced us that it is a rather unique document in the ancient world that strikes important chords for our contemporary world.

The Evasive Historical Background

Only one copy of *Thunder* exists, the one found in the Nag Hammadi jar described in the preface. This–and the limited specific historical references within the text itself–makes it quite difficult to say much about *Thunder*'s origins. It is almost impossible to tell who authored this piece of literature. It is nearly as difficult to say when and where it may have been written.

Although all the documents found at Nag Hammadi in 1945 were written in Coptic (the written Egyptian language of the first millennium C.E.), scholars agree that most were translated from Greek into Coptic, perhaps by early Christian ascetics in Egypt, sometime between the second and fourth century, when they were put in the jar. In this book we demonstrate that the one (Coptic) copy of *Thunder* has strong poetic structures only possible in Coptic. We also take careful note that the only location that is mentioned in *Thunder* is Egypt. This, however, does not necessarily change the previous consensus that *Thunder* first existed in Greek. Although it does open the possibility of *Thunder* being originally Coptic, it could also indicate that *Thunder* was so thoroughly used in Egypt that it became a genuinely Coptic expression after having first been authored in Greek.

The only somewhat specific historical reference found in *Thunder* refers to Greeks, barbarians, and Egypt within three lines. This would tend to make *Thunder*'s earliest date limited to a time when there were significant numbers of Greeks in Egypt. This means that *Thunder* could have been written as early as the third century B.C.E. The latest date for *Thunder* would have to be close to its discovery in the fourth century C.E.

That *Thunder* was found with a collection of primarily Christian documents makes a strong case for it having been used by Egyptian Christians, although some of the Nag Hammadi documents were pre-Christian (e.g., a partial copy of Plato's *Republic*). This book suggests

that the final column of the document was almost certainly added by ascetic Christians. This is not meant to imply that earlier Christians did not use–or even compose–*Thunder*. The ambiguities and lack of information about *Thunder* simply overwhelm any definitive statements about its authorship, location, time of composition, and history of use. We hope that this book can accelerate the history of study of *Thunder* so that additional progress on it can be made.

Translation Dilemmas, Gender Troubles

As our Union Theological Seminary Coptic study group used *Thunder* simply as a translation exercise early in 2007, we quite quickly realized that the standard and groundbreaking G.W. MacRae translation seemed to have under-translated some dimensions of the Coptic meanings. In particular, we noticed that the MacRae text left out some striking dimensions of the text's intense focus on gender.[6] MacRae deserves major credit both for the first published English translation of *Thunder* and for representing much of its stunning gender imagery. His translation clearly has attracted a public interest much greater than most of the other document discoveries from early Christianity in the past century and provided a foundation for later translations. Nevertheless, his translation seems to underplay the Coptic text's attention to and unconventional revisions of gender. Several other published translations maintain a major ongoing dependency on MacRae in this regard.

This under-translating of the gendered dimensions of *Thunder* is especially ironic since it is these dimensions of the portrait in *Thunder* that have attracted the most public attention. While the part of the public that knows about *Thunder* has been gripped by its powerful feminine voice, the major translations often omit some of the references to this voice. For instance, the Coptic clearly uses the feminine to designate the figure translated by MacRae as "I am the ruler of my offspring," and Anne McGuire translates, "I am the lord of my offspring." We have instead translated: "I am she, the lord of my child." Although the context of this line implicitly suggests the feminine voice in all translations, the translation in this volume recaptures the Coptic's vibrant, strong, and explicitly feminine self-proclamation. What might such a strong and mostly divine feminine voice mean for both the ancient world and our world?

Trying to do justice to this striking voice in *Thunder*, it has also become clear that this voice is not just a strong feminine voice.

Indeed, we have discovered many unpredictable facets of the piece's portrait of women and men. As noted in chapters 5, 7, 8, 9, and 10, it turns out that *Thunder'*s primary voice is not just strongly feminine. At crucial junctures, *Thunder* seems to delight in adjusting, and even confusing, its gender. The primary voice–while being strongly feminine–also actively self-identifies as masculine. For instance, only one current translation[7] has noticed that the Coptic of *anok petnashe peceine hekhme* should be rendered: "I am he whose image is multiple in Egypt," right before the same voice returns to the more dominant feminine:

> And she who is without an image among the barbarians
> I am she who was hated in every place
> And she who was loved in every place

The affiliation of images of feminine and masculine also defies what one might expect. Close attention to these dimensions of *Thunder* illustrates that it complicates gender in ways that are far from incidental. The strong feminine voice (perhaps in itself a kind of contradiction of expectations in the ancient world, if not sometimes the modern world as well), the switching between feminine and masculine pronouns, and the unconventional clusters of masculine/feminine images work together to undo, challenge, and flex meanings and identities related to women and men.

Because our age is working so strenuously on what "being" men and women means and how to relate to the ambiguities of gender and sexuality, *Thunder* provides a significant resource for the twenty-first century. *Thunder* deconstructs standard images of feminine and masculine, and makes room for a number of new understandings in relationship to the unsteady and flexible meanings of feminine, masculine, and queer[8] identifications.

Much of the rest of this book may be seen as an in-depth examination of the new promise of the Coptic's playful and intense gender imagery for larger issues of identity and meaning making. Here at the beginning–before any more extended analysis–it is important to signal clearly the possibilities evoked by *Thunder'*s voice. This signal is perhaps best noticed with another brief sample of that voice:

> I am she whose wedding is extravagant and I didn't have a husband
> I am the midwife and she who hasn't given birth
> I am the comfort of my labor pains
> I am the bride and the bridegroom

And it is my husband who gave birth to me
I am my father's mother, my husband's sister, and he is my child.

A Second and Third Look

Examining additional Coptic dimensions of *Thunder*'s treatment of gender pushed us to more care in translating the text generally. Here too this attention proved rewarding. Closer examination of the text revealed direct and passionate addresses to the reader:

Audience, hear me …
Don't ignore me any place, any time
Be careful! Do not ignore me! …
Receive me with understanding and heartache …
Hear me in tenderness, learn from me in roughness …
Hear me, audience, and learn from my words, you who know me …

There seems also to be deep identification with people in trouble and under violent attack:

Do not stare at me when I am thrown among the condemned
Do not laugh at me in the lowest places
Do not throw me down among those slaughtered viciously …
In my weakness do not strip me bare …
I am she whom you chased and she whom you captured
I am she whom you scattered …

This book is the first discussion of these elements of *Thunder* as a part of people's lives in real crisis. Once these social elements are recognized, important nuances of the Coptic itself begin to unfold with regularity throughout. For instance, *Thunder*'s powerful "I" is pictured in the middle of ethnic tensions between Greeks and "barbarian" Egyptians in this passage:

Why then did you hate me, you Greeks?
Because I am a barbarian among barbarians?
Since I am the wisdom of the Greeks and the knowledge of the
    barbarians
I am the deliberation of both the Greeks and barbarians
I am he whose image is multiple in Egypt
And she who is without an image among the barbarians
I am she who was hated in every place …
I am she who they call law

> And you all called lawlessness
> I am she whom you chased and she whom you captured

This passage as a whole boldly addresses ongoing ancient social tension between barbarian and Greek.[9]

By taking the insistence of *Thunder* to "hear me" and "do not ignore me," we have listened closely to the complexly layered gendered, social, and multivalent nuances of the piece, while presenting a disciplined, poetic translation with a twenty-first-century audience in mind. Our analysis has discovered powerful artistic devices in *Thunder*. Chapters 2 and 4 focus on *Thunder*'s powerful literary skills. Chapter 9 shows it as a strong and most likely participatory performance. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 underline how this skilled articulation passionately addresses issues of violence, cultural conflict, and sexual identities.

The deepest appreciation of *Thunder*'s skills at articulating both edgy social challenges and stunningly beautiful poetry, of course, can only be had with knowledge of the Coptic language. Chapter 8 reflects a study of the Coptic poetics of *Thunder*. Understanding all of Chapter 8 is therefore somewhat dependent on interest in the more technical issues of Coptic poetics. Although this chapter does not require knowledge of Coptic, for the readers of this book who do not want to invest in these Coptic dimensions, we recommend either skimming or skipping the chapter. Another more technical feature of this book is the annotated translation at the end of the book. These extensive annotations help both the introductory reader and the scholarly reader progress in their understanding of specific issues of translation. Indeed, even though the introductory reader does not know Coptic, reading the annotations to the translation may be of substantial interest for clarification on the way we have translated the texts.

In any case, the non-Coptic readers will want to be sure to read chapters 9 and 10. Chapter 10 (1) summarizes the main contributions of the overall study in several paragraphs each and (2) provides the most thorough review and commentary yet published on the contemporary films, music, and novels written in direct reference to *Thunder*. We have placed the more technical study in Chapter 8 because–for the reader interested in poetic technicalities–it helps understand Chapter 9's treatment of *Thunder* and performance.

On another more available level, this book also stays true to the power of *Thunder*'s Coptic poetics in its commitment to make this new translation one that has its own poetic power in English. It takes as an

obvious obligation to give the text its own rhythms, powerful imagination, creative improvisations, and disciplined structure in its English translation, especially in light of the meanings about *Thunder* already under way in the public sphere. We have made this choice in intentional contrast to other translations that occasionally bury *Thunder* in technical religious terms, actual Coptic or Greco-Greek words, or give little weight to literary patterns within the poem. By this we do not mean that translations should promote popular consumptions of *Thunder*. Rather with the likes of rock groups, perfume companies, and award-winning novelists jumping into the meaning-making fray, this text deserves careful attention to what meanings might be made of it and how the ancient language and literary forms used in this unique text might assist and provide clues to various meaning-making options.

We trust *Thunder*'s own eloquence. *Thunder*'s voice resonates strongly in the worlds of contemporary readers without much explanation. But this book also actively engages meanings that emerge when attention is paid to *Thunder*'s imagery, historical background, and literary structures . We suspect that more major meanings are still to come as twenty-first-century consciousness takes the next steps in encountering this text.

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What Kind of Literature is *Thunder*?

Although *Thunder* appears to be an exotic form of expression in the twenty-first century, that was not the case in the ancient world. Especially in the Hellenistic Mediterranean world there were other pieces of literature that resembled *Thunder*. In fact, *Thunder* seems to echo significantly parts of two overlapping major ancient literary traditions: a literature of divine self-presentation called aretalogies, and wisdom mythology. It can also be compared in some limited ways to traditions of ancient Mediterranean riddles.[1]

This chapter first examines the ways *Thunder* is similar to aretalogies and wisdom literature. While affirming these likenesses, it is also necessary to look at ways that *Thunder* differentiates itself from these ancient traditions of literature.

Aretalogies and Thunder

In *Thunder* a (seemingly) divine figure holds forth for the entire poem, speaking mostly about herself. It was not unusual for a divine figure to present him/herself in the literature of the ancient Mediterranean; this usually involved the divine speaker recounting a list of his/her virtues, accomplishments, and/or origins. Such a pronouncement of the Egyptian god Osiris contains the following:

My father is Cronus, the youngest of all the gods, and I am Osiris the king, who campaigned in every country as far as the uninhabited regions of India and the northern lands, even to the sources of the Ister River and again to the remaining parts of the world, even as far as Oceanus. I am the eldest

son of Cronus, and having been sprung from a fair and noble egg I was begotten a seed of kindred birth to day. There is no region of the inhabited world to which I have not come, dispensing to all the things which I discovered.[2]

A similar self-revelation of Isis, an Egyptian goddess, is reported by Lucius Apuleius as an appearance:

Behold Lucius I am come, your weeping and prayers have moved me to help you. I am she that is the natural mother of all things, mistress and governess of all the elements, the initial progeny of worlds, chief of powers divine, Queen of heaven, the principal of the gods celestial, the light of the goddesses: at my will the planets of the air, the wholesome winds of the seas, and the silences of the underworld be disposed; my name, my divinity is adored throughout all the world in diverse ways, in variable customs and in many name for the Phrygians call me Pessinuntica, the mother of the Gods, the Athenians call me Cecropian Artemis … and by their proper ceremonies accustomed to worship me, they call me Queen Isis. See, I am come to take pity of your fortune and tribulation, behold I am present to favor and aid you. Leave off your weeping and lamentation, put away your sorrow, and see the healthy day which is ordained by my providence, therefore be ready to attend to my commandment.[3]

These self-revelations by gods and goddesses occur with relative frequency in a variety of ancient contexts, both literary and archaeological,[4] and some, like *Thunder*, have a poetic rhythm to them.

Studies of these divine self-revelations or aretalogies have focused on a number of such expressions by Isis.[5] It is not completely clear whether Isis aretalogies are actually the most numerous or whether the particular interest in Isis has prompted more studies. In any case, the self-revelation speeches of Isis also relate quite directly to the other literary precedent for *Thunder*, in that Isis is often connected to near eastern wisdom mythology.[6] Perhaps the most striking similarity between the two is that the powerful revealing voice is predominantly feminine.

Wisdom Traditions and Thunder

Wisdom literature of the near east has many similarities among its many traditions. One of the most striking is that of divine Wisdom figures, which were all to one extent or another goddesses.[7] They were pictured as both embodying and inspiring the exercise and articulation of wisdom. As such they made a strong connection between the obviously human enterprise of discerning and learning what is

wise and the realm of divine understanding. That is, this picture of a wise divine female typically emphasized the connection between human and divine understanding, rather than obscuring the human-divine connection as much other near eastern mythology did.[8] These wisdom figures, including Isis (from Egypt), Maat (a more ancient Egyptian goddess), Athena (from Greek environs), and the Israelite/Jewish figure of Wisdom/Sophia/Chokmah, were pictured as making human wisdom possible.

A number of scholarly articles on *Thunder* compare the speaker there to Isis or Wisdom/Sophia, with many if not most of them concentrating on Wisdom/Sophia,[9] citing self-revelation speeches and lengthy descriptions of the attributes of Wisdom/Sophia in the third person (cf. *Wisdom of Solomon* 7:23–30, *Proverbs* 1:18–22, Proverbs 8:1–31, *Ben Sirach* 24:1–21).[10] In *Proverbs* she says:

> To you, O people, I call,
> And my cry is to all that live.
> O simple ones, learn prudence;
> Acquire intelligence, you who lack it.
> Hear me, for I will speak noble things,
> And from my mouth will come what is right,
> For my mouth will utter. (8:4–7a)

Here Wisdom/Sophia, like *Thunder*'s "I," portrays herself as asking/demanding to be heard, as well as offering wisdom (cf. *Thunder* 13, 2–9). In *Ben Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)* Wisdom/Sophia says:

> I came forth from the mouth of the most high,
> and covered the earth like a mist.
> I dwelt in the highest heavens,
> and my throne was a pillar of cloud.
> Alone I compassed the vault of heaven
> and traversed the depths of the abyss.
> Over the waves of the sea, overall all the earth,
> and over every people and nation I have held sway.
> Among all these I sought a resting place,
> in whose territory I should abide … .
> Come to me, you who desire me, and eat your fill of my fruits …
> Those who eat of me will hunger for more, and those who drink of
>   me will thirst for more. (24; 3–7, 19, 21)

This figure and other Wisdom/Sophia passages (e.g., *Proverbs* 1:23, 24; *Wisdom of Solomon* 7:15–30) echo *Thunder*'s "I" particularly in

the following passage, in which she describes her relationship to those who desire wisdom:

> I am the learning from my search
> And the discovery of those seeking me
> The command of those who ask about me
> And the power of powers
> In my understanding of the angels
> Who were sent on my word
> And the Gods of God, according to my design
> And spirits of men who exist with me
> And the women who live in me.

How *Thunder* is Different

While being aware of important similarities between *Thunder* and this other literature from the ancient world, it is important to remember the discernible differences as well. As expression, *Thunder* cannot be considered a bolt from the sky without context and precedence. On the other hand, it seems to have taken some important steps beyond the traditions from which it was born.

Indeed, often *Thunder* takes these traditions and stands them on their heads. The aretalogies were written to praise powerful divine and semidivine figures of the ancient Mediterranean. Often lauding these powerful figures was strongly connected to praise of the ruling order of particular ancient Mediterranean societies.[11] These aretalogies, as evident in this chapter, are completely positive and straightforwardly triumphant in the ways they characterize the self-revealing (divine) characters who speak them. While *Thunder* takes the formal shape of these aretalogies, it differs strongly from them in its making the powerful "I" identify itself as a much less predictable figure than those found in aretalogies. *Thunder*'s "I" often is not at all honorable according to conventional ancient Mediterranean standards. In fact, *Thunder*'s self-proclaiming grand figure regularly thrusts puzzling, contrasting, and offensive images into the middle of the praise.

A few of the many examples:

> Assemble the great among the small and earliest creatures
> Advance toward childhood
> Do not hate it because it is small and insignificant
> Don't reject the small parts of greatness because they are small
> since smallness is recognized from within greatness.

Such a defense of smallness is completely out of character with the typical aretalogies,[12] which never cease to identify the great "I" with large and cosmic images and characteristics. *Thunder*'s "I" also says:

> I, I am without God
> And I am she whose God is magnificent
> I am he the one you thought about and you detested me
> I am not learned, and they learn from me
> I am she whom you detested and yet you think about me.

The typical magnificent "I" of the aretalogies would never admit to being detested, unlearned, or without God. Rather, the object for the standard aretalogy is to identify its primary character as completely as possible with God, wisdom, and admiration.

So *Thunder* bases itself on the aretalogical form and then subverts it. It portrays a figure that breaks the molds, one that is a messy, almost indecipherable mixture of the standard traits of admiration and humiliation. As such, *Thunder* opens possibilities for reassessing and critiquing the stereotypical great figures of honor and power. In place of praise for the obvious powers, *Thunder* seems to open up an empty space where a consciousness that includes pain, humiliation, and negation can emerge.

It is difficult to find other aretalogies that follow the pattern of a divine figure glorifying him/herself while being vulnerable to difficulty and loss. Perhaps the nearest set of aretalogies that both glorify the god speaking and indicate that same figure's weakness or humiliation is Jesus in the *Gospel of John*. There Jesus makes much of himself (much more than in other gospels), and his long speeches seem to mirror at points those of Wisdom/Sophia.[13] But John's glorious Jesus is not always a figure of unlimited power and wisdom. Rather, John's Jesus also occasionally is both vulnerable and disgraced. Although *Thunder*'s voice and John's Jesus proudly claim glory and power, both also are mocked and condemned.

The relationship of *Thunder*'s I with Wisdom/Sophia resembles the way in which *Thunder* is both rooted in and different from standard aretalogies. Wisdom/Sophia never associates herself with dishonor, difficulty, or shame. She is always in control, offering sound advice and certain kinds of power. Inasmuch as Wisdom/Sophia and Isis were surprisingly dominant feminine voices in the patriarchal ancient Mediterranean,[14] they perhaps participated in the same surprise that *Thunder*'s "I" did. However, unlike Wisdom/Sophia, *Thunder* refuses to locate itself solely in the language of conventional

glory. Of course, *Thunder*'s voice in no way refuses its own authority and glory. But it fashions a new kind of wisdom and prestige by dismantling the discourse of obvious power and honor, and creating an open space where a complex mix of strength and vulnerability might appear. *Thunder* as literature then does belong profoundly to the aretalogical and wisdom traditions, but shapes these forms into an expression that challenges many of their assumptions and values.

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D E G N O S T I C I Z I N G   *T H U N D E R*

I S   *T H E   T H U N D E R :   P E R F E C T   M I N D*   A   "G N O S T I C"   T E X T?

If people have heard of *The Thunder: Perfect Mind* at all, it is likely that they have heard it called a "gnostic" text or know it as somehow linked to the movement of "Gnosticism." What, precisely, is "Gnosticism"? The label of Gnosticism comes from some traditional scholarship concerning a range of Jewish and Christian documents and beliefs from the first three or four centuries. The term itself derives from the Greek word *gnosis*, meaning "knowing." Although most major scholars of Gnosticism/gnostic have not agreed on what exactly the label means,[1] the term captured the imagination of the twentieth century so much that some religious devotees began calling themselves "gnostics." By and large, ostensible "historical" Gnosticism is described as a religious movement, somewhat related to early Christianity, that emphasized secret, perhaps esoteric, knowledge that could save humanity. Along with this emphasis on secret knowledge, Gnosticism is most often identified as dualistic, world denying, and/or body hating,[2] a system in which souls are sparks of divinity trapped in the material world. As more recent scholarship has found, however, there are some serious problems with this labeling and conceptualization.

Thunder has traditionally been placed in the category of Gnosticism, or at least in its general vicinity.[3] A notable exception is George MacRae, who provided the original English translation of the text. He described the difficulty with labeling *Thunder* at all, writing: "In terms of the religious traditions represented in the Nag Hammadi collection, *Thunder* is difficult to classify. It contains no distinctively Christian, Jewish, or Gnostic allusions and does not seem clearly to presuppose any particular gnostic myth."[4] Very few have

followed MacRae, despite his initial doubts. But this larger tendency to categorize *Thunder* as "gnostic" illustrates some broader questions regarding the terms "Gnosticism" and "gnostic." The category of Gnosticism was shaped primarily by scholars in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who based their work largely on the polemical writings of proto-orthodox writers (i.e., those commonly referred to as the Early Church Fathers) of the first several centuries C.E.[5] The problem is that these proto-orthodox writers were read out of their time and context. In fact, even the notion of proto-orthodoxy is anachronistic–at the time these men were writing, the notion of an agreed upon or uniform Christian orthodoxy did not exist. During this period, one person's orthodoxy was another's heresy.[6] One might say there were many diverse and divergent "christianities,"[7] all stressing the "correctness" of their own point of view. Each had its own outlooks, theologies, practices, and favorite texts, and while some of these features overlapped from one group to the next, others were quite opposed. As Karen King notices, " 'Orthodoxy' and 'heresy' are terms of evaluation that aim to articulate the meaning of self while simultaneously silencing and excluding others within the group. The power relations implied in the discourse of orthodoxy and heresy are firmly embedded in struggles over who gets to say what truth is."[8]

Today, it is clear which rhetoric won the struggle over Christian truth, with all those ideas outside of this "truth" coming to be regarded as heresy.[9] The remnants of this early struggle are illustrated by the fact that, until recent discoveries of additional ancient texts, almost none of the so-called heretical writings addressed by the preserved writings of the early polemicists survived. Instead, it is only through their adversaries that these writings have been known. A present day analogy of this might be if, 1,500 years from now, the only information available about the conservative right were available from the polemical writings of extreme leftists, or vice versa, and a reconstruction of the group were made by taking those polemical writings at face value.[10] Gnosticism was defined through such one-sided reconstructions of these surviving ancient polemical writings.

When the texts were discovered at Nag Hammadi, they were assumed to be a "gnostic" collection, and then read through the lens of these polemical writings. The scholars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries lumped many of the disparate opponents of the proto-orthodox writers into a single category, repeating the judgments, or rather slanders, of the "orthodox" side (i.e., those who ended up winning these debates) in the early Christian debates while producing their

interpretations and translations of this newly found literature. While as scholars they avoided calling these various opponents "heretics," they simply created another amorphous category called Gnosticism, rather than looking critically at the similarities and relationships among these and canonical New Testament texts. Indeed, the theological, social, and literary variety within the New Testament itself troubles its alliance with the category of "orthodoxy" significantly.

As a result, a radical distance between these so-called heretical texts and a coherent, already formed orthodox Christianity is often assumed, creating a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy. Terms or ideas that appear similar to those in the New Testament are explained away as "gnostic" reappropriation rather than shared resources, texts, or ideas. In a similar vein, this newly rediscovered literature has been heavily romanticized as being "foreign" or "esoteric," as opposed to the more "familiar" canon. This can be seen, at its extremes, in the total rejection of "gnostic" literature as being somehow threatening to Christianity or its enthusiastic embrace through popular mediums such as the *Da Vinci Code*. But even seemingly positive romanticizing can reinforce the caricatures and dynamics of the early debates. Both characterizations are, in King's words, "equally reliant on the attacks of the polemicists–only the appraisal differs. Whether such portraits provoke admiration or condemnation, they both manage to present the polemicists' views as objective history."[11]

This interplay between ancient polemics and modern scholarship can be seen with two quotes, one from Irenaeus' *Against Heresies*, the other from Bentley Layton's popular book, *The Gnostic Scriptures*. The following is from Irenaeus' refutations of the doctrines of Carpocrates, a man from Alexandria, who Irenaeus claims as the founder of one of the myriad of early Christian movements. Irenaeus says:

These men, even as the Gentiles, have been sent forth by Satan to bring dishonour upon the church, so that, in one way or another, men hearing the things which they speak, and imagining that we all are such as they, may turn away their ears from the preaching of the truth; or, again, seeing the things they practise, may speak evil of us all, who have in fact no fellowship with them, either in doctrine or in morals, or in our daily conduct. But they lead a licentious life, and, to conceal their impious doctrines, they abuse the name [of Christ], as a means of hiding their wickedness.[12]

While this statement is specifically directed at the Carpocratians, it provides a typical example of the rhetoric employed by Irenaeus

throughout his treatise. In turning to the more recent words of Bentley Layton, it is easy to see how this rhetoric is reemployed in defining Gnosticism:

[G]nostic scripture now seems strange because it rebels against important beliefs shared by many early Christians and their Jewish predecessors, beliefs which even now belong to the core or ordinary Western Judaism and Christianity–especially belief in the goodness and omnipotence of the Creator: gnostics believed that Satan made the world. From the ordinary modern perspective, then, gnostic scripture may seem both Christian and anti-Christian, both Jewish and anti-Jewish: the strength of this paradoxical ambiguity eventually made it the classic example of heretical scripture.[13]

As noted, this type of rhetoric posits orthodoxy and heresy as opposites, or binaries, as canon and anti-canon, each composing a monolithic and coherent category. One can begin to see how this rhetoric falls apart when turning to the canonical gospels themselves. Often the canonical gospels are presented as containing one consistent story. The stories about Jesus from Sunday School, the pulpit, or silver screen are conflated, creating a cohesive narrative from a rather disparate New Testament canon, instead of looking at each gospel individually. Pieces of the gospels, *Acts*, epistles, et cetera, are combined to create one master narrative. This conflation fails to take into account the individuality and perspective of each text. When each canonical text is taken individually, a much more complicated picture begins to take shape. For example, when one looks at the birth narratives of Jesus one realizes that there is no birth narrative in *Mark*; that the *Gospel of Matthew* traces Jesus' lineage through David and Abraham; that *Luke* moves through Abraham and Adam to God; or that in *John* there is no birth per se, but that Jesus is the preexistent *logos.* Or that the beatitudes only occur in *Luke* and *Matthew, Luke* putting "woes" in the mouth of Jesus that are absent from *Matthew*'s account. Different theologies and outlooks emerge from these different narratives, revealing a multiplicity that is inherent to the canon itself.

A similar process occurs with noncanonical texts as well, but instead of a cohesive Jesus story, what is sought here is a cohesive "gnostic" system–a story that sufficiently distances these texts from orthodoxy, fixing them in a nice neat pattern that can then serve the purpose of defining "not-Christianity," as can be seen from the Layton quote. This was done by polemicists in the early centuries of the first millennium, and is similarly used by scholars when exploring these texts today. Just as the canonical texts fail to cohere at many points, the

same is true of noncanonical texts. *The Thunder: Perfect Mind* and the *Secret Revelation of John* or the *Gospel of Thomas* do not share genre, perspective, or theme. Finding occasionally overlapping features and ignoring other crucial differences among texts does not make one coherent outlook. Yet this has been a widespread scholarly practice in determining what "Gnosticism" is.

Because of these and other factors, the use of the category of "Gnosticism" has come under some scrutiny in recent years, most notably by Karen King and Michael Williams.[14] Both King and Williams show that nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars do not agree about what the major components of "Gnosticism" are. They also describe at length how the category in its many definitions strongly distorts the documents from Nag Hammadi. Despite these arguments, gnostic, Gnosticism, and "the gnostic religion" are still mainstays of textual, social, and theological classification. The following quote from Marvin Meyer (in his introduction to *The Gnostic Bible*) on the disputed use of these terms illustrates this phenomenon quite well. Meyer says:

[Michael] Williams stresses the widespread diversity within the category Gnosticism, and of course he is correct in doing so. Yet his recognition of gnostic diversity merely parallels the similar recognition by scholars of diversity in Judaism and Christianity. This recognition of diversity has led Jacob Neusner to suggest "Judaisms" and Jonathan Z. Smith "Christianities" as appropriate terms for these diverse religious movements. Perhaps we might also opt for "Gnosticisms" or "gnostic religions" as a similar way of acknowledging the differences among religions of gnosis.[15]

While Meyer's inclination to acknowledge diversity within so-called gnostic texts moves in the right direction, several problems emerge. First, if the term "Christianities" is being employed, then the term "Gnosticisms" would need to be encompassed in this category, as it also refers to Christian texts.[16] From the *Gospel of Truth* to the *Gospel of Thomas* to the *Tripartite Tractate* to the *Secret Revelation of John*, Jesus, named as such, or called simply Christ or Savior, is an integral part of the text, hence making them more a part of emergent Christianity(ies) than of anything else.

Second, in many ways, canonically defined Christianity could also be labeled a "religion of gnosis." The Greek word *gnosis* is found 28 times in the New Testament, with *epignosis* ("full knowledge") found an additional 20 times, and the verb from which the word stems, *ginosko* ("to know"), occurring 208 times. To present one example, in

Matthew 13:11–13, Jesus answers the disciples' question as to why he speaks in parables with the following words, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. The reason I speak to them in parables is that 'seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand'."[17] Secret knowledge, often a hallmark of defining "gnostic" literature, is clearly present here, in this (and many other) canonical texts.[18] The ways in which canonical and so-called orthodox texts use this and other hallmark "gnostic" categories only emphasize the difficulty of maintaining the idea of "Gnosticism" itself.

Turning specifically to *Thunder*, the word *gnosis* only occurs once, where the speaker says, "I am the wisdom of the Greeks and the knowledge of the barbarians" (16,6).[19] "Wisdom" and "knowledge" are paired 32 times throughout the First and Second Testaments, six times in the New Testament itself. It would seem to reason that this pairing in *Thunder* has less to do with "Gnosticism," and more with connected theological/philosophical concepts or Hebraic poetic parallels.[20]

Finally, it must be emphasized that there was no such thing as the "gnostic religion" in antiquity. Neither did these early Christian movements refer to themselves as a gnostic religion per se, nor did their detractors. The idea of a "gnostic religion" is a modern invention.[21]

The Interpretation of *Thunder* as Gnostic

In his introduction to *Thunder* in *The Gnostic Scriptures*,[22] Layton compares it with the *Secret Revelation of John*, describing it as "a riddlesome monologue spoken by the immanent savior, here represented as a female character and identifiable as 'afterthought,' a manifestation of wisdom and Barbelo in gnostic myth."[23] To get a fuller picture of Layton's interpretational stance, it is worth quoting him at some length. He goes on to say:

In gnostic myth the role of afterthought–also know as "life" (Zoe), the female instructing principle, and the holy spirit–is to assist both Adam and all human kind, in order to recollect the power stolen by Ialdabaoth (*Secret Revelation of John* 20:14f) and now dispersed in the gnostic race. She is immanent in all gnostics who have the holy spirit (*Secret Revelation of John* 25:20f). Although the monologue consists almost entirely of self-descriptions and exhortations directed to the reader, three short passages refer to the mythic setting of the

savior's words: (1) she has been sent from "the power" or Barbelo (*Secret Revelation of John 4:26f*) and is immanent within human kind (13:2f); (2) she continues in her mission to "cry out" and summon members of the gnostic race (19:28f); (3) souls that respond will gain liberation from the material world and ascend to a place in the metaphysical universe where the speaker herself resides and will not suffer reincarnation. (21:27f)[24]

Even though there is no mention of Barbelo within the course of *Thunder*, Layton relies heavily on linking her with *Thunder*'s speaker.[25] While Layton's introduction to *Thunder* strictly elaborates on Barbelo in regard to the *Secret Revelation of John*, none of the complex cosmology or mythologizing in the *Secret Revelation of John* is found in *Thunder*.[26] There is no mention of a "gnostic race" within the text to which the speaker of *Thunder* supposedly "cries out" in 19,28–although Greeks and barbarians are certainly present (16,1–5). Lastly, Layton sees a motif of "liberation from the material world," although it appears scantly in the text. Instead, one finds a speaker intimately involved with her hearers, drawing on images as diverse as familial relationships, sex, birthing, poverty, humiliation, war, and peace. Instead of liberation from the material world, there is an investment in it–hardly support for the so-called gnostic myth. Only in column 21 of *Thunder*, which we will show was almost certainly written by a later Christian, do we find these parts of life briefly deprecated.

In contrast, Marvin Meyer, in his introduction to *Thunder* in *The Gnostic Bible*,[27] says that there are "few obvious characteristics of Jewish, Christian, or gnostic themes."[28] Despite these initial similarities with MacRae's original caution, he goes on to conclude that "gnostic ideas such as liberation from the material world, a pantheistic deity that permeates matter and life and the promise of salvation of return distinguish it from traditional religious poems. Hence we may recognize gnostic and even Sethian[29] themes in Thunder."[30] While Meyer stresses a relationship between *Thunder* and Sophia (wisdom in the Jewish tradition), he also cites Layton's connection with the speaker and Barbelo.[31] Many of the previous conclusions concerning Layton apply here as well. In citing some of the earthier aspects of *Thunder* when describing its overall character (such as 15,6, "Do not stare at me in the shit pile," or 13,18, "I am the whore and the holy woman"), Meyer sees these paradoxes as modes of transcendence related to a pantheistic deity who harkens to the "gnostic" world rather than as modes of inhabitation in the world.[32]

Paul-Hubert Poirier, who introduces the text in the *Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The International Edition* and has written the only other

book on *Thunder* (in French) , is at times less certain of *Thunder*'s gnostic qualities.[33] Poirier notes that *Thunder* "features no known Gnostic Deity,"[34] and sees the text more in line with Jewish Sophia/ Wisdom literature and the Isis aretalogies,[35] but, as he notes, "these parallels remain only partial."[36] This said, Poirier also states that "our tractate shows obvious parallels with Gnostic texts or doctrines that suggest it could have been composed in a milieu familiar with Gnostic ideas."[37] He also states that "[i]t would not be too daring an assumption to suppose that the Gnostics who gathered the Nag Hammadi tractates included *Thunder* because they saw in its feminine speaker an evocation of Barbelo as she appears in *Three Forms of First Thought* or the *Three Steles of Seth*. The Gnostic Barbelo could easily be reinterpreted in sapiential [wisdom] or philosophical as well as mythological terms."[38] In contrast with Layton and Meyer, Poirier appears somewhat less certain about his own conclusions. He admits there is no known "Gnostic deity" found within the text and notes that the concepts of knowledge and ignorance function for *Thunder* in ways quite untypical of so-called gnostic literature.[39] Poirier also observes that while the text may have affinity with Sophia, in this text she does not function as much like "the Sophia of the classical Gnostic myths."[40] So, while he does employ the idea of *Thunder* as a gnostic text, or at the very least a text attractive to "gnostics," much of his work complicates this conclusion.

Degnosticizing *Thunder*

This book departs then from most scholarship's interest in characterizing *Thunder* as "Gnostic.", As MacRae originally stated, *Thunder* should not be labeled as, and indeed is not, a "gnostic" text. The use of the term "Gnosticism" is not only inaccurate for the overall classification of Nag Hammadi literature and other texts outside of the canon, it also deeply obscures the rich textual, philosophical, and theological innovations of *Thunder* in particular. *Thunder* functions as a negotiation of identity, gender, violence, social struggle, and cultural prejudice, theologizing about societal and personal issues using an inventive poetic style. Indeed, to define *The Thunder: Perfect Mind* as "gnostic" is perhaps antithetical to the text itself, as it places on it the kind of oversimplified category that the poem is actively seeking to disintegrate.

CHAPTER 4

⸻❧⸻

LITERARY PATTERNS

T*hunder* is full of humor, exaggeration, and subversion. It constantly disorients and reorients its audience; it sets up expectations and then turns them, so that moving through its images feels like a walk through a house of mirrors. Indeed, in the unpredictable spaces of both *Thunder* and a house of mirrors, reflections of the self are warped and multiplied, recast and denaturalized, with fantastical effects. This chapter explores a number of the literary patterns in the text that create this unpredictable space, and then proposes ways that the patterns in *Thunder* might come together to form its larger meaning-making strategy.

PARADOX AND PARADOX UNHINGED

I am she who is honored and she who is mocked
I am the whore and the holy woman
I am the wife and the virgin
I am he the mother and the daughter
I am the limbs of my mother. (13,16–22)

Scholars and readers of *Thunder* have regularly noted the presence of two basic literary moves: paradox and antithesis.[1] As it is commonly described, paradox is a statement that places two opposites side by side for a puzzling, illogical, or impossible conclusion. Antithesis, a more general category, also rests a structure of binaries: two contrasting ideas placed next to each other. Throughout *Thunder*, as in the excerpt just presented, the "I" takes up a number of paradoxical positions, for example, describing itself as both despised and loved, or

powerful and powerless. Yet a closer reading reveals that these structures of twoness often buckle nearly as soon as they are spoken. The application of paradox then is somewhat misleading if left unqualified, and likewise, antithesis appears as too basic a category, suggesting that *Thunder* maintains the opposites it sometimes evokes. Instead, it seems that *Thunder* calls such opposites into question. In the previous excerpt, for example, the first sets of two opposites give way at "I am the wife and the virgin." If the comparisons before it juxtapose an acceptable or honorable social position for women with a shameful one, this line undercuts such a comparison. The next line, "I am he the mother and the daughter,"[2] further sabotages the paradox, as well as expectations of meaning, by the addition of "he." Following that, "I am the limbs of my mother," is doing something entirely different than paradox–in this one short thought the "I" both splits into the plural, and condenses herself with her mother. The same loose pattern echoes in the section of the text directly following this.

> I am a sterile woman and she has many children
> I am she whose wedding is extravagant and I didn't have a husband
> I am she the midwife and she who hasn't given birth
> I am the comfort of my labor pains. (13,22–27)

Again, the images in the first two lines have a more obviously paradoxical relationship. Yet, as in the section before it, these oppositions are trailed by missed or bended sets of opposites: a midwife and a woman who hasn't given birth. Then again, as in the section before it, the not-quite-opposite tumbles into a split and condensation.

Describing the paradoxes in *Thunder* as "missed" or "failed" might be deceiving, since it suggests they occur accidentally or might be a result of lazy writing. Quite on the contrary, they are part of *Thunder's* larger scheme that subverts standard relational patterns, turns against expectations, or turns notions upside down. These paradoxes and their unhinging are also matched by at least two other like-minded literary moves, inversion and contradiction, all of which can lend some definition and qualification to previous scholarly emphases on antithesis and paradox.[3]

INVERSION

To invert is to change positions, to turn something inside out. But the word "inversion" has had a complex and troubling life. In both anatomical and psychological history, women have been described as

inverted men, and inversion has also referred to any kind of gender deviance.[4] Likewise, "sexual inversion" has been evoked to pathologize homosexuality.[5] Keeping this range of meanings in mind, power dynamics emerge in what at first appears to be a simple language flip-game.

> I am the bride and the bridegroom,
> And it is my husband who gave birth to me
> I am my father's mother,
> my husband's sister, and he is my child
> I am the slavewoman of him who served me
> I am she, the lord of my child,
> But it is he who gave birth to me …[6] (13,27–14,1)

In the previous excerpts, there is a clear change of positions, an attempt to confound roles. In both cases, the "I" sets up a relationship,[7] and then twists it. First, the bridegroom becomes the parent of the bride, and then the son becomes parent of the mother-lord. Both examples are a series of reordering of positions and relationships in which characters act outside their roles. Interestingly, the men and women in this section all partake in the same process: the word *jpo* in Coptic is usually translated either "to give birth" or "to beget," depending on the gender of the actor. Yet the moving back and forth between masculine and feminine subjects who all participate in *jpo* creates a playful kind of disorder.[8] There are so many twists that it is nearly impossible to keep track of them. There is a muddling of who belongs where in these sentences, an entanglement of family relations that echoes the incestuous lineage of Antigone.[9] *Thunder* actually manages to invert a number of different kinds of relationships, all with power-subversive implications.[10]

> Do not stare at me in the pile of shit, leaving me discarded
> You will find me in the kingdoms … (15,5–9)

The idea of a social outcast sitting in a shit pile and then being found in a kingdom is an ironic reversal, and almost a farce. This kind of switch is probably quite familiar to readers of the canonical gospels, since this social outcast bears some resemblance to the outcast in the parable of the good Samaritan.[11]

In the following, the undercutting of the powerful seen earlier happens again on a more general level:

> Advance toward childhood
> Do not hate it because it is small and insignificant

> Don't reject the small parts of greatness because they are small
> Since smallness is recognized from within greatness (17,24–32)

Here again, the echoes of kingdom of God sayings (welcoming the kingdom of God like a little child, parables of mustard seeds and leaven) can be heard in both the valuing of childhood and the suggestion that greatness and smallness are not what they seem.

Contradiction

Inversion as a literary pattern is also akin to what might be described as the contradictory aspects of *Thunder*. Contradiction should be thought of here in its most literal sense–speaking against, or even double-talking. One might speak against oneself, against another, or against a truth.

> You who deny me, confess me
> You who confess me, deny me
> You who speak the truth about me, lie about me
> You who lie about me, speak the truth about me (14,18–22)

In the first line, the "I" speaks in the imperative, demanding that the "you" (plural) contradict themselves, and then the second line (in the indicative, not in the imperative), performs a kind of inversion by making liars into truth tellers and truth tellers into liars. What exactly is in this demand to speak against, and this aim at blurring the truth? The "I" has actually changed the terms of confession and denial. "To confess" suggests profession of beliefs, admission of guilt, or declaration of an actuality. "To deny" implies disavowal, renunciation, or refusal. To deny what one has confessed revokes the truth, takes it back, exchanges it for another. If those who deny this "I" begin to confess her, it is truly both a compelled and a false confession, and it sabotages the basis on which truth telling happens in the first place. What kind of truth gets produced under duress? Police and military personnel might have to ask themselves this regularly. Or maybe rather, what kind of invitation is this to contradict oneself, to turn back against one's professions? In the first line of the text quoted, everyone is implored to speak wrongly, everyone is made into a "liar" in a certain sense. Moving to the second line then, in a fantastic reversal, the text returns liars to a place of inadvertent truth telling. Is it only in the lie, in the contradiction, in speaking against, that "truth" might be told? And what kind of truth would this be?

In another section of *Thunder*, contradiction is employed to great irony.

> I am she whom they call life
> And you all called death
> I am she whom they call law
> And you all called lawlessness (16,11–15)

Here "they" and "you" are speaking against one another, each calling the "I" in strikingly different ways. While more will be said about these lines in the following chapters,[12] it is important to note that the tension between these two separate calls is never quite resolved; they simply stand against–and undercut–one another.

Contradiction, inversion, paradox, and "unhinged" paradox are instruments of a particular process of making meaning in *Thunder,* a motion of "coming together and falling apart." This process repeats itself emphatically throughout the text, and often these literary operations occur together in dense ensembles, as in the following excerpt:

> I, I am without God
> And I am she whose God is magnificent
> I am he the one you thought about and you detested me
> I am not learned, and they learn from me
> I am she whom you detested and yet you think about me
> I am he from whom you hid
> And you appear to me
> Whenever you hide yourselves, I myself will appear (16,24–34)

Note the anticipated simple reversal between the third and the fifth lines that gets undercut by the use of the present tense at the end of fifth line. Gender works in both to support the binary, or set up the expectation of a binary, that is then undermined (the use of gender in these lines is particularly self-conscious, given the exact repetition of the words for "detest" and "think about").[13] The statement "I, I am without God," rings as more than just paradox against the next line. It is also highly ironic, as this "I" without God is speaking in some sense *as* a god, in a decidedly theological genre. Contradicting even the terms on which the "I" speaks, the voice of *Thunder* troubles the basis of its own existence.

Another remarkable facet of this passage is the way the "characters" of *Thunder* (the pronouns "I," "they," and "you") relate to one another and function within the literary and philosophical frame of the piece.

Who is Speaking? And from Where?

The so-called characters of *Thunder* never have uncomplicated relations with one another–they are in constant conflict, and individually remain elusive. The question of who the "I," "you," "they," and "he" are mystifies. It is therefore not particularly useful to speculate too much on who these pronouns might be specifically referencing outside the text. Instead, it might be more worthwhile to sketch how these characters appear and disappear within the piece, how they relate to one another, and what effect these characters and relationships have on those who read *Thunder*.

"I"

What is to be made of this "I" who, prefiguring Puck of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, reverses relations, confuses confessions, and carefully sets up relationships and expectations only to pull the rug out from under them? Who is this "I" that turns over, turns back, turns into, and turns against?

The question of identity in *Thunder* is a tricky one, and apparently deliberately so. Thwarting typical associations in scholarship of the "I" with Sophia, Barbelo, Isis, First Thought,[14] Afterthought, or others, the "I" of *Thunder* over-identifies. She is as much ignorance as she is thought or *Sophia* (wisdom). She is not only *Sophia*, but also *gnosis*, then *logos* and foolishness both. This "she" doesn't even always identify with the feminine. The "I" is never conclusively named–she never stays still long enough to be conclusively named. As in the excerpt just presented, she is named differently by different parties. Her only concrete affiliation is with the barbarians, who themselves are never a static group, but simply a dustbin category for "uncivilized outsiders." The "I," in keeping with her constant power reversals, importantly situates herself at the low and outside.[15]

Periodically, there is also something plural about this "I':

> I am the silence never found
> And the idea infinitely recalled
> I am the voice with countless sounds
> And the thousand guises of the word (14,11–14)

The first person occupies multiple locales on a regular basis, and subverting the almost exclusively cosmological readings of *Thunder*, the "I" employs plural modes for describing itself, using social, theological/religious, and philosophical terms[16]. This is an "I" that refuses to

be contained, or rather invokes containers only to make their inadequacy plain.

The strategies of "I" have sounded, at this point, predominantly negative. She does constantly void, evacuate, and cancel. In her inversions and contradictions, she collapses kinship categories, and breaks down assumptions. This surface-level negativity might be tidily associated with the "elite" and "world-hating" perspective so often attributed to the "gnostics," but simple labeling like this misses the point in several key ways. While the "gnostic" label has seemingly noticed the disillusionment in *Thunder* or texts that employ a similar negative strategy, it fails to ask the question, in what particular social setting might one be most disillusioned with the way the world works? "Elite" and "world hating," as a pair, do not typically hold together too well. These labels also fail to notice that negativity is not necessarily cynicism, and can have its own constructive designs. It can be a means of creating agency for those on the low and outside.[17] Negativity is also a major strategy for interrupting the established (hegemonic) order.[18] Before any more is said about the broader moves in the text, we will need to situate the "I" in relationship.

"You"

> Why then did you hate me, you Greeks?
> Because I am a barbarian among barbarians? (16,1–3)

The "you" in *Thunder* is only slightly less elusive than the "I," but also tends to be at odds with it. Aside from the few instances when "you" includes those "who are waiting for me," those who "honor me," or those "who know about me," the second person of *Thunder* antagonizes, ignores, scoffs, despises, and calls the "I" death and lawlessness. Again, the only concrete affiliation for "you" is "Greeks"–a group diametrically opposed to the outsider/barbarians. It is not a task of this book to hypothesize what clues this association of you = Greeks, I = barbarians might offer for the social origin and authorship of the text. On a literary level, it is enough to note that in this excerpt, the "you" is on the insider position and so has a high status relative to "I." Similarly, in another passage, the first person begs the second to deal gently with her when she is lowest:

> Do not laugh at me in the lowest places
> Do not throw me down among those slaughtered viciously
>   (15,11–14)

The second person of *Thunder*, despite its hypocritical behavior, also has a strong association with order. In lines that directly follow the disagreement between they and you on lawlessness and law, "I" and "you" share a scene that echoes a police officer chasing a criminal.[19]

> I am she whom you have chased and she whom you have captured
>   (16,16–17)

Even though in much of the text, the second person has the more powerful position, the "I" retains a certain capacity for danger. "I am compassionate and cruel" (15,15–16), she states menacingly. "Watch out!" she warns again and again. She is a kind of threat from below.

Perhaps the most telling interaction between the "I" and the "you" happens in the lines, "I am he from whom you hid/And you appear to me/Whenever you hide yourselves, I myself will appear." The "you" is always hiding here, and two appearances result–"you" paradoxically appears to the "I," and unpredictably the "I" also appears. What about hiding produces a "revelation,"[20] of both the self and the other? In some ways, these lines echo back to the contradictory moments in the text, in which an attempt to deceive becomes a mode of truth telling. Later in the text, the "I" explains,

> Those who do not participate in my presence don't know me
> Those who share in my being know me
> Those who are close to me, did not know me (18,28–33)

While the "you" is not present here, a similarly complex manner of relating is described. Participating in the presence or being of the "I" renders knowledge of the "I," but proximity does not. Indeed, over-familiarity with someone can often inhibit the ability to be "in the moment" with them. As we hear our relatives or oldest friends speak, are we attuned to this person's presence in the moment, or what we expect to see and hear? Familiarity, it seems, produces a kind of judgment about who someone already is, which not only inhibits the ability to experience him/her fully, but also forecloses his/her capacity to "be" differently.

Yet the flux and concealment in *Thunder* doesn't stay between the textual "I" and "you." *Thunder* is also composed within a larger context of address, in which "I" invites a kind of identification[21] by the audience, and "you" can implicate the audience at any given time along with "Greeks," "those who know about me," those who call the "I" death, and so on.[22] It seems then at varying times, the audience

merges with *and* splits its identification from "I" or "you." Distance and proximity, hiding and revealing are then also *enacted* in the performing of *Thunder,* even as they are described.

Two other figures haunt the scene of *Thunder*–"they" and "he"–both of which interfere with and mediate the relationship between "I" and "you."

"They"

"They" appear mainly in the section referring to Greeks and barbarians, and it seems that "they" might indeed refer to barbarians. This third person appears most assertively at the episode of wrong calling in 16,11–15. That is, "their" chief action is calling the "I" of *Thunder* life and law, when "you" have called her death and lawlessness. "They" also learn from her, though she is "unlearned." In an ancient context, "barbarian" would have been practically synonymous with lawlessness, or being uncivilized (read: unlearned), from the perspective of the Greeks.[23] In a certain way then, "they" are an ominous presence,[24] quite literally overturning the order, the law, the terms of civilization, of the "you"/Greeks. It seems that "they" are called up by the voice of *Thunder* in order to complicate or intervene in the relationship between "I" and "you." The "you" has no final naming power over "I."[25] Even a seemingly obvious opposition–life and death–is made ambiguous by "they," who disappear a few lines later.

"He"

There are a number of places where "he" appears in the text. Toward the beginning, "he" refers to both "my child" and "him who served me." The "he" that appears near the end of *Thunder*, though, marks an odd set of appearances. Later, the "he" occurs as an internal judge, and then as the one who "shapes the outside of you.…" It is not clear at all that these are the same masculine subjects being referred to, and there is neither anything here elucidating a relationship between "he" and "I."

Soon after, in line 21,10, there is "he who created me." Again, there are no indications that this "he" is related to any of the others before it. This "he" is remarkable, and strongly authoritative. It is the first time in the piece that someone supersedes the "I" unchallenged–this "he" seems to have crept in at the last moment. However, and perhaps more importantly, in this final appearance, "he" coincides with a number of other perplexing moves at the text's end. Or rather what makes this last section so strange is exactly how *unperplexing* it

becomes. The question then is less about who "he" is and more about what brings him into *Thunder* at the end.

> And[......]will not move the name
> [...]he who created me
> But I will speak his name
> Look then at his pronouncements and all the writings that have been
>   completed
> Listen then, audience
> And also you angels
> Along with those who have been sent
> And spirits who have risen from among the dead
> Since I am he who exists alone
> And no one judges me
>
> Since many sweet ideas exist in all kinds of sin
> Uncontrollable and condemning passions
> And passing pleasures that people have
> Until they become sober and go up to their resting place
> And they will find me in that place
> They will live and they will not die again (21,8–32)

The final manuscript page of *Thunder* begins with a three-line-plus lacuna, and when the piece resumes, the reader has practically woken up into a different text. The use of "reader" here is not incidental, since one first notices, just preceding this lacuna and then again soon after it, that the audience has changed from one entirely centered around listening/speaking, to one that is centered around writing (cf. the first line excerpted in the previous section). There are a number of key points in this final section that completely alter the trajectory of *Thunder*, and bespeak a context different from the rest of the text.

First, in the last citation ascetic language dominates in several lines. Phrases like "passing pleasures," "uncontrollable and condemning passions," and becoming "sober" all refer to a fairly coherent set of ascetic values, whereas earlier in the text, the voice of *Thunder* foils such neat prescriptions by stating, "I appear to be lust, but inside is self-control." Also, in this section, monotheism (or at least monism) makes an awkward appearance. There is only one "I am" in this section,[26] and it is "I am he who exists alone"[27]–even after pages of primarily human identifications, and of course claiming to be "without God." The gender of this suddenly singular "I" should also be noted, since the singularity also occurs on the field of gender. No trace of the feminine here, or of gender-bending or -offending: this voice is masculine "alone." The double occurrence of resurrection language

in this section is also at odds with the total lack of other occurrences in *Thunder*. That such incongruities in basic tone exist between this final section of *Thunder* and the rest of the piece must be taken into account when trying to understand *Thunder* as a whole. The effect of this final section is a domesticating one, in that the previously ironic, twisted, irreverent, un- or over-identified voice now speaks with masculine certitude about sin and the fate of souls.[28] The "I" begins the text speaking assertively as a "she," and ends speaking equally assertively as a "he," though this final gender switch occurs at the expense of gender subversion.

While the workings of *Thunder* as it stands now are certainly worth analysis, it is imperative to consider that an ending so markedly different in agenda, style, and (masculine) language is an appendage,[29] particularly because it indicates that an earlier "version" of *Thunder* was being actively engaged, perhaps within a later monastic community. Yet it also important to try to understand what *Thunder* is aiming for without this tone and language change on the last page. In the section that follows (and in other places where we will draw some conclusions about *Thunder*'s meaning-making strategy), we will be de-emphasizing the final page of the manuscript, and commenting with increased focus on what we consider to be the more organic whole of the text.[30]

CONCLUSIONS

Taking *Thunder*'s contradictions, inversions, paradoxes, and missed paradoxes seriously, the "meaning" of *Thunder* is not a thing as much as process. What *Thunder* achieves is a shift between crystallization and disintegration that evokes and then exploits predictable forms, and brings everything it names into question. Little is stable; no form or identity is fixed in *Thunder*, and through its context of address, even the characters of the text are in flux.

Yet the images of the "I" that the text distorts, the relations it tangles, are far from spacey aspirations. They have serious implications for the social realm. When the logic that keeps "whore" and "holy woman," the "ashamed" and "shameless" on opposite poles falls apart, so must also the social architecture that relies on these categories to function. Even more remarkable is that *Thunder* ironically uses declarations of selfhood to achieve this breakdown in systems and identity. As we shall suggest further on in this book, the "I am," for all its ostensible innocence, is exactly the place where things materialize, only to fall apart.

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C H A P T E R 5

G E N D E R I N G *T H U N D E R ,*
T H U N D E R I N G G E N D E R

In ways both large and small, *Thunder* shows profound sensitivity to the powers, pains, and constraints inherent to gender–particularly to being a woman. Amidst its carnivalesque shape-shifting, the "I" of *Thunder* continually takes account of the cruelties and contradictions of feminine identities: the unsparing swing between whore and holy woman, virgin and wife.[1] She is at the mercy of listeners at one moment, and warns of her menacing power the next. Yet by way of inversions and failed paradoxes, she dismantles the logic on which these binary identities are built.[2] Oppositions become ridiculous or fall apart.

The undercutting of predictable gender categories happens on another, perhaps more surprising level, though: the "I" does not exclusively identify as a woman throughout the piece. In numerous places, "she" also becomes a "he." At first it seems like a slip, or maybe a joke. Then as *Thunder* continues, these errors and confusions appear more calculated and deliberate until finally the "she" of *Thunder* declares, "I am he who alone exists," as if there never was a "she" at all.[3]

These shifts raise a number of important questions: why is gender one of the least investigated aspects of existing scholarship on *Thunder?*[4] Why are the masculine identifications in the poem glossed over so regularly?[5] Finally, what does the violence and gender confusion in the text mean for the countless admirers of this text who have related to it primarily as a voice of empowerment and affirmation for women?

In this chapter, we will not only address these questions, but also look carefully at the involvement of gender in *Thunder*'s overall work.

Finally, we will address the question of what might be made of *Thunder*'s sustained attention to and complication of the category of gender.

Thunder *as a Poem of Affirmation for Women*

As noted earlier, *Thunder* has been incorporated into numerous artistic and popular culture endeavors.[6] It is often invoked as a positive imagination of the feminine divine, seated in an affirmation of women in the variety of societal roles they inhabit. The "I am" of *Thunder* then seems to both unite women across this plurality of roles and identities, and also allow some women to think of themselves as all these identities, expansively escaping certain constraints. Contemporary American Christian culture is indeed starved for imaginations of the divine that are not male centered, and the basic misogynistic character of this culture has often prevented women from both taking pride in their identity and work, and moving outside of certain limited ideas of what women should be and do. In this way, the place that *Thunder* has had for women needing positive feminine images reflected in theological language and in the ancient world has been crucial.

On the other hand, these readings of *Thunder* are not without their complications. The problems with misogynistic culture are not simply that images and identities ascribed to women are undervalued or given negative valences. Many of the images and identities themselves are a function of such a culture: they are constructions that undergird such a culture. So celebrating these images has the unfortunate effect of reinforcing the very culture and ideology that produced them. The Prada ad that uses *Thunder* as its text makes this point most obviously. A model is seen throughout the short film in several different *haute couture* outfits, corresponding to several different scenes and situations inspired by the identities in the poem. In each scene, her outfit relates to her persona, giving the effect of a woman who can "be" anything depending on how she is dressed. All the while, a woman's voice recites: "I am she who is honored and she who is mocked. I am the whore and the holy woman.…" This film evinces the close alliance between gender and late capitalist "lifestyle" culture,[7] and suggests that these identities are flexible, easily taken on and off. Of course, any woman who has ever been called a whore or any woman who has ever mothered knows these are categories that are not slipped off as easily as a $5,000 dress. "Empowerment" in this film means buying lots of clothes in order to feel like one can escape determinations of female identities–not coincidentally, it seems to do this, one must also look like a model. While the Prada film is perhaps an extreme example of

the compromised nature of affirming the socially constructed images of women, the point nonetheless stands that there is a cost, literal and otherwise, in reclaiming and glorifying such socially determined images of women.

This positive mirroring is not a particularly useful paradigm for disrupting misogynistic assumptions about women and gender. One must also ask whether *Thunder* even participates in such mirroring. It is an important conclusion to this study that this affirmation is not particularly close to the text. *Thunder*'s interest in dissembling binary logic and drawing attention to the violence at the crux of such feminine identities bespeaks deconstruction[8] rather than "empowerment." So the poem is perhaps better understood through the framework of postmodern gender theory, which is also focused on disrupting norms and critiquing dominant working assumptions. What follows will be a reading of *Thunder*'s employment of gendered terms and imagery through an application of the postmodern gender theoretical lens.[9]

GENDER, POWER, MEANING

Postmodern gender theory, developing out of a number of disciplines including philosophy and feminist and queer activism and theory, takes as one of its main premises that gender is not a natural category, but is posited as natural though a number of social mechanisms including, importantly, language (e.g., the term "biological sex"). Bodies are both unstable and diverse on multiple levels, and they are invested with particular meanings that are not automatic to bodies "themselves," but are rather social productions. Gender is a category that tries to stabilize and define bodies, and not coincidentally has a way of ordering social relationships. What it means to be a man or be a woman means different things in different times and places, but the category of sex makes gender seem as if it traverses history, and posits it as being outside of the realm of human meanings, something that simply "is," while at the same time naturalizing all the historically specific meanings that come with gender. To give an idea of how gender at once seems biological but yet requires social maintenance, consider the anxious instruction to "be a man," for example. The irony of this statement is that instead of saying, "do what I think men should do," it instructs its recipient to "exist" differently–a kind of ontological instruction. This statement is odd against the backdrop of biological claims that suggest that the categories of "man" and "woman" are based on obvious physical differences. If one is born a man by biological standards, how could he ever not "be" a man no matter how he behaves? Then again, maybe

gender really leans more on "acting" and less on "being" in the first place.[10] The many subliminal and overt ways that gender is enforced give the lie to biological insistences around gender and, importantly, around other naturalizations of identity.

If gender is a complex intersection of social meanings mapped onto and enacted by bodies, then references to gender in texts also must be analyzed for what they implicitly suggest. The instruction to "be a man" would be empty if "man" didn't have its own very specific demands and references (… someone who doesn't cry, who isn't vulnerable, who is in control …). Therefore, a reference to masculinity or femininity, men or women, is always heavy with other unspoken meanings. Gendered language is power-sensitive language. When gender helps determine who one is, how one is treated, and what kind of agency one has, there is always a reference to position that also comes with gender. Gendered language is always charged language.

The previous chapter discussed some of the ways in which gendered language cooperates with *Thunder*'s literary moves. Particularly in the inversions, paradoxes, and broken paradoxes of *Thunder*, gender contributes significantly. Extending an earlier example from Chapter 4:

> I am she, the lord of my child,
> But it is he who gave birth to me at the wrong time
> And he is my child born at the right time (13,34–14,2)

In the first line, a power relationship is established–the mother is "lord" of the child. In the second line, that dynamic is reversed as the son becomes the mother, and the mother becomes the child. Yet it is not a perfect reversal; the inversion continues more deeply, since he gives birth prematurely, and she gives birth to him "at the right time." Again, both mother and son are participating in the same activity here (in Coptic, the word *jpo*), which contributes to the mixing up of relationships and gender roles. If there is any doubt that power relationships and gender play are being evoked, one only needs to read the very next lines to have that allayed:

> And my power is from within him
> I am the staff of his youthful power
> And he is the baton of my old womanhood
> Whatever he wants happens to me (14,4–9)

Not only is power mentioned twice plainly in these lines, but there is also a question of to whom power belongs–her power is from him, she

is his power. The phallic authority imagery of "baton" and "staff," as well as the subtle plays on grammatical gender in the second line send the twisting of authority and gender roles in a more humorous, explicit direction. Since in Coptic, "staff" is a masculine word and "baton" is a feminine word, these lines read "I (f.) am the staff (m.) of his youthful power/And he is the baton (f.) of my old womanhood."[11]

Thunder not only uses gender to establish and then foil power relationships through inversion, but uses it as the basis for its paradoxes and broken paradoxes as well. The statement "I am the whore and holy woman" is of course not a simple juxtaposition of opposites, but is also very much an acknowledgment of the painful gap between these two identities. At the same time, this gap is questioned and relativized in the following lines, "I am the wife and the virgin/I am he the mother and the daughter," since the opposites lessen until they fall apart completely in the line "I am the limbs of my mother."[12] That this apparently divine "I" takes social positions that are so wildly divergent is itself a statement of relativization and collapse of distinctions.

Outside of its uses within these literary patterns, it is worth noticing how/when gender is emphasized–in which contexts "she" and "he" get explicit mention. Often, "she" appears where there are plays on the word "shame."[13] The "I" is also a "she" when being called radically different names by "them" and "you";[14] when treated like a criminal or otherwise brutally;[15] and in an even more drastic turn, when the "I" ceases to exist.[16] "She" is subject to the most extreme behaviors by "them" and "you"–she is loved and hated, honored and mocked. "He" occurs less independently. The "I" is usually a "he" in a reversal (or a skewed reversal) of a statement made with the feminine "I."[17]

This basic inventory of gender emphases glimpses the heartbreaking perspective *Thunder* takes with regard to what it is to be a woman. "She" is all too often associated with shame, victimhood, and brutality, and "she" is subject to extreme and polarized behaviors and attitudes. This is hardly an affirmative set of associations, though it does affirm some very difficult and troubling truths about the experiences of women. The fact that gender is contrasted, switched, and collapsed as nearly all other binaries and relationships in the piece is no less significant, and will be dealt with in more detail later. But the poem also exhibits a significant stake in identifying as "she," an overwhelming preference for feminine language and a feminized position. This certainly works as part of *Thunder*'s allegiance, generally speaking, to those low and on the outside. Perhaps though it also communicates inescapability–to identify or be identified as a woman is to never be

able to forget your body, forget who you are (i.e., where you belong). The references to "he" then could be read as an attempt to thwart such final and determined identifications: a failure to "be" the right way, or a hope to live as *more*, put into words and performed.

This inescapability associated with being a woman is in part a reference to the associations of women with embodiment, "the flesh," and limitation versus the ability for men to "transcend" (be alienated from) their bodies, and be perceived as neutral. It also points, however, to the inescapability of "being" in any case, and the more intricate entanglements of gender and language. The simple word "being," and language at a general level, contributes to modern understandings of gender and identity in invisible ways. Take once again the example "be a man." This example glimpses some of the complexities of the intersections of gender, language, and identity. Of course, the current question of identity is always, "Who am I?"–a question that communicates unchanging essence and inflexibility. The categories that often answer this question also communicate permanence–race and sexuality,[18] in addition to gender. These categories are lenses through which ones sees and defines oneself, and the "am" is a hinge on which the apparent stability of those categories turns.[19] *Thunder*'s multiply identified voice, on the other hand, *un*hinges this seeming stability: it refuses to "be" in any final way by simply "being" too much.

FEMININITY AND NEGATIVITY

In a different consideration of gender, but along similar theoretical lines, we would like to address the initial question of what it means that previous scholarship has abandoned the masculine identifications in *Thunder*. Indeed, this is part of what has motivated this new translation. In a poem so attentive to gender, why might scholars not translate the masculine terms and identifications in the text? For one, feminist biblical scholarship of the last few decades has been engaged in an important debate over how to translate masculine language in ancient texts. For instance, where texts such as Paul's letters address "brothers" (in Greek, *adelphoi*), the question is whether one should translate literally only "brothers," or translate "brothers and sisters" since it was a matter of convention that women were not mentioned even when they were present. The term "brothers" (as well as some other masculine terms) can work much like the current term "mankind," which, although gendered masculine, means to apply to all human beings. The work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza in particular has made a powerful case that not translating such words neutrally or

gender inclusively perpetuates the illusion that women had no presence or an active role in the ancient world and early Christian communities when much evidence suggests otherwise.[20] There is a strong consensus on this point. However, it is not at all clear that this ethic should apply outside of direct addresses to and descriptions of groups, least of all in the case of *Thunder*, a singular voice in the first person. Nonetheless, even where the Coptic specifically cites a masculine subject, many scholars have translated with either neutral, or even feminine, terms. Take, for example, the following:

> I am he from whom you hid (16,32)
> I am he whose image is multiple in Egypt (16,6–7)

In these two lines, the Coptic specifically refers to a masculine "I," with the use of the relative pronoun. Previous translations have ignored the assertive use of gender here and have only translated with the neutral word "one." In general, translations adopt gendered language exclusively when referring to "she." MacRae,[21] Layton,[22] McGuire,[23] and Poirier[24] all seem to cite gender inconsistently in their translations, even when differently gendered pronouns occur in parallel structures. MacRae at one point cites the feminine and abandons the masculine in two identical grammatical constructions.[25] In the following set of lines, a near-exact reversal occurs only one line apart, demonstrating that the use of gender is motivated, not accidental.

> I am he the one you thought about and you detested me
>   (16,26–16,27)
> I am she whom you detested and yet you think about me
>   (16,29–16,31)

These omissions could be either an application of the ethic of treating masculine language neutrally or another attempt to connect *Thunder* with the (modern) myth of the gnostic revealer.[26] Either way, denying or reading over the masculine in *Thunder* forces coherence. It is one response to the very anxiety that *Thunder* wants to provoke. *Thunder*'s refusal to finally or neatly identify, even or especially at the level of gender, is a strategy of disruption. The total neglect of the "he" moments of *Thunder*, the act of translating over them, not only misses a tactic of the text, but it is also an inadvertent gesture of predetermining what counts and what does not. In this way, it also reflects how gender operates at large–as a selective reading of bodies, a decision of what differences matter.

There is yet another aspect to the monolithic femininity of *Thunder*'s "I." As mentioned previously, the strategy that the "I" uses to self-describe is predominantly negative. That is, it sets up and then cancels social distinctions, makes truth claims and evacuates them of their significance, and forms and undoes relationships. The extreme destruction would be more daunting if it were not packaged so poetically. But negative strategies are often the tools of those who are most deprived of privilege and humanity, maybe because they have the least to lose. Importantly, destruction can bring with it constructive ends–disruption of a sometimes brutal order, relief from powerless situations, and invention of new, unprecedented ways of being.

Much of Julia Kristeva's work has theorized a strong relationship between negativity and femininity. Kristeva claims that precisely because the feminine (and therefore women) has been the excluded, secondary others, both historically and paradigmatically, femininity and women remain impossible to define or contain within those structures that exclude it.[27] To offer an idea of just how this resonates with the strategies of *Thunder*, consider the following quotes:

> I am being
> I am she who is nothing (18,27–28)

… a woman cannot "be"; it is something which does not even belong in the order of *being*. It follows that a feminist practice can only be negative, at odds with what already exists so that we may say "that's not it" and "that's still not it." In "woman" I see something that cannot be represented, something that is not said, something above and beyond nomenclatures and ideologies.

–Julia Kristeva[28]

For both *Thunder* and Kristeva, existence is always already gendered as "masculine," and absence, lack, and nothingness as "femininity." Kristeva also sets out a more menacing aspect to this nothingness of femininity–it shows the masculine order of existence, which claims completeness and totality, to be *incomplete*. There is a destructive aspect to femininity for Kristeva, which parallels *Thunder*'s destruction of predictable categories, relationships, or terms for truth. *Thunder* in a sense prefigures Kristeva's notion of feminist practice.

Yet recent gender theorists have complicated Kristeva's ideas of femininity and negativity, and *Thunder* and Kristeva have some divergences in their tactics of disruption. While Kristeva describes the feminine as that which is not able to be contained, it has been pointed

out that her use of the term "the feminine," for instance, troubles her conclusions, as this term itself can totalize and contain.[29] Masculinity and femininity, man and woman, are already categories at the service of maintaining a certain kind of order. Even while her notion of negativity lends a wonderfully useful notion of disruptive excess, Kristeva's work on this point occasionally naturalizes some of the effects of the schema that she hopes to unsettle.[30]

In a certain way, it is exactly this limiting equivalence of "femininity" with "negativity" that is reinscribed by failing to read the masculine moments of the "I." *Thunder* is then not only gendered as "feminine," it is also "feminized." We want to suggest that *Thunder*'s destructive and deconstructive gestures get hemmed in with this approach. It seems that *Thunder* instead outruns and critiques this negativity-femininity association, since one of the negative tactics of the "I" involves failing to always be feminine.

Instead of limiting the possibilities for subversion by containing it to "the feminine," *Thunder* invites something quite devastating, whether through its playful misplacement of phallic power or its slow dissolve of binaries into absurdity. Not only does the piece critique the gendered terms of being, but the "being" in gender as well. The inescapability of "being" a woman is also apparently an inescapability of nonbeing, following Kristeva and the *Thunder* excerpt about being and nothing. The masculine moments of the "I," then might be read less as an escape into another identity, but rather as a basic failure of coherent identity that unhinges the paradox of "being" a woman. And while to follow the voice of *Thunder* is to reach outside the boundaries of predictable identity categories, it is not simply about identifying multiply. In other words, while *Thunder* uses both masculine and feminine pronouns, it is not about an idealized ethic of gender flexibility. There is indeed very little idealization in *Thunder*. If *Thunder* is a queer voice, she is queer not because of her transgressive boundary blurring, but because she has been violently projected into marginality, namely, the margins of life and death.[31]

Thunder repeatedly reminds the reader in subtle and explicit ways to push past the expected, to surprise and be surprised by speaking too much and speaking wrongly. As Chapter 7 will illustrate, by doing so, she makes room for something other than what is contained in and by the speakable. Rather than "over-identifying," *Thunder* seems to disidentify–not to celebrate the multiplicity of identity(s), but to speak to the culturally produced/reproduced nature of identity. *Thunder* speaks to the sense of not belonging, of feeling out of step with the very categories one is supposed to inhabit.[32]

Thunder's invitations to continually reach past neatly established identifications, and its perhaps more radical summoning of the listener to sign on to its course, are intimately related to the text's "performability." As we argue in chapters 8 and 9, the continuing incorporation of *Thunder* into performance and other artistic expressions is no mistake; it is a text that demands acting out. There is a difference though between simply speaking the words out loud and adopting the text's critical scheme. So we will now suggest some ways *Thunder* can shape current discussions about gender, and outline what further critical possibilities might exist in "performing" the text.

Cosnclusions: Gender, Performance, Theology

The dismantling and denaturalizing language of *Thunder* is right at home in contemporary gender theory, and yet it challenges the assumption that deconstruction in the general sense (i.e., critical analysis of power and language) is only a postmodern activity. For every age, inasmuch as human beings exist in it, there is power and its time- and place-specific subversions. Yet it is worth noticing that *Thunder*'s challenge of gender norms happens within another contestation –a contestation of the theological.[33] The "I" speaks through a distortion of the aretalogical genre, evokes more human categories than divine ones, and once even claims to be "without God." Actually, all of *Thunder*'s contestations occur in a theological context, but one that practically mocks theological convention.

There are theological implications to this ambivalent stance, as well as major implications here for theorizing gender. By entwining gender and theology this way, *Thunder* proposes that challenging the stasis of gender as a category is contingent upon evacuating all of the existing terms for talking and thinking about God.[34]

Setting the contestation of gender on a crumbling theological stage shows not coincidence, but investment. It seems that the continuous incompleteness of the "I" is part of, even triggered by, an altered theological position. In *Thunder*, "God-talk" (or rather "Goddess-talk") is unseated from its place in foundational discourse–language that, like gender, seeks to naturalize and establish. The "negative" agenda of *Thunder* then could be read as wanting to move particular kinds of theological convention to a position of vulnerability, of relativity, and therefore make possible the interrogation of what theology underwrites.[35] *Thunder* demolishes certain historical theological conventions in order to show their exclusions and expropriations.

To be sure, performing *Thunder* means carrying out a set of strategic destructions. It means being at a loss for who you are and where you belong: calculated amnesia in a reality saturated with forceful reminders of who and how one should "be" at every moment. But *Thunder* encourages and performs something alongside its negative work. In one of *Thunder*'s jarring imperatives, listeners must deny their confessions, and confess their denials. Such an undermining of truth works equally for confessions of belief as it does for confessions of identity.[36] But this means that *Thunder*'s persistent voice, speaking seemingly "inauthentically," creatively reconstructs as well as shatters. Through the repetition of and the shifting in the "I am" statements, the "I" performatively reinvents herself against the structures of twoness, emerging as something of a troublesome and unnamable third. The "I" is, emphatically, not a third gender or even about the often romanticized plasticity of being "both/and." "She"does not offer utopian imaginings of neutrality, multiplicity, or wholeness. Instead, the "I" arises as a third that is a body of mobile, if somewhat dangerous, possibility. The "I" reimagines herself against "what is," and does it through a deep fidelity to and profession of the unreal. It is not that she can "be anything," but that by speaking to, and performing, the failure of all available models, she practices a new mode of selfhood, one predicated equally on loss, menace, and generative promise. She practices a provisional habitation–she is perhaps a squatter, even and especially on her own land.

Acting out *Thunder*, and disidentifying with the "I," also has other crucial consequences, though. As we shall suggest in Chapter 7, it works to return the brutal sport of naming back upon itself.

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CHAPTER 6

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RUMBLING CULTURAL AND SOCIAL ORDER

It is very difficult to place *Thunder* in an exact location and an exact time in the ancient world. We have already noticed how questions of authorship and time of composition are extremely difficult to determine since there is only one copy of *Thunder*, and *Thunder* itself does not mention many specifics that can be tied to particular times or places in the ancient world. One can still, however, take up a generalized sociocultural analysis of *Thunder*'s language,[1] in the hopes of finding important clues for thinking about its possible sociocultural setting and/or its social and cultural message. This chapter will do so, and proceed to situate this language within two of the prominent social dynamics of the ancient Mediterranean: the honor-shame system and the patron-client system.

THUNDER'S SOCIOCULTURAL LANGUAGE

Thunder evinces interest in sociocultural dynamics in three arenas: (1) its attention to gender, which is a primary dynamic in all societies and cultures; (2) its section in 16,1–15 on Greeks and barbarians; and (3) its sensitivity to the sociocultural location of being cast down or isolated.

Chapter 5 has already addressed the issues of gender, so this chapter will treat only the topics of Greeks and barbarians and those being cast down.

Greeks and Barbarians

Column 16 begins with the following:

> Why then did you hate me, you Greeks?
> Because I am a barbarian among barbarians?
> Since I am the wisdom of the Greeks and the knowledge of the
>   barbarians
> I am the deliberation of both the Greeks and barbarians
> I am he whose image is multiple in Egypt
>
> And she who is without an image among the barbarians
> I am she who was hated in every place
> And she who was loved in every place
>
> I am she whom they call life
> And you all called death
> I am she who they call law
> And you all called lawlessness

Antagonism between *Thunder*'s "I" and Greeks is underlined by both its voice identifying Greek "hate" for her/him and the "I"'s identification as "a barbarian," the cultural opposite of Greek. This is striking for several reasons. Barbarians did not generally self-designate as "barbarians" in this time period.[2] Rather, "barbarian" was a derogatory term used to defame sets of people whose primary characteristic was that they were not "civilized" into Greek culture. That *Thunder*'s "I" proclaims her/himself[3] "a barbarian among barbarians" jolts the hearer in that it takes on an onerous status with a seemingly proud voice that upbraids the "Greeks" for hating her/him.

To a certain extent, it is also surprising that the "I" designates her/himself just as "a barbarian" without adding some contrasting or complicating second or third identity in tension with the first designated term. On second thought, however, this is not so surprising in that the self-designation of "barbarian" carried within itself the tension inherent in the more typically "thunderous" contrasting identities. In other words, the designation "barbarian" was defined by its contrast with Greeks or Romans. There are within this section tensive contrasts, where the "I" does describe her/himself also as "the wisdom of the Greeks and the knowledge of the barbarians" and "the deliberation of both the Greeks and barbarians." These two phrases are quite consistent with one another in that they are highly ironic–the typical contrast between Greek and barbarian considers it impossible for

barbarians to be wise. So the "I" 's affiliation with barbarian knowledge and deliberation is a feisty barbarian assertion, confirming both that the "I" is a barbarian, and also that she does not fit the caricature the word "barbarian" connotes. Once again *Thunder* makes room for an unconventional identity.

Finally, within the matrices of "Greek" and "barbarian" there remains the question of Egypt, the only place name mentioned in *Thunder*. In this section the "I" asserts "I am he whose image is multiple in Egypt." This characterization of the "I" as being in Egypt actually references complex identities. In this regard, "I am he whose image is multiple in Egypt" corresponds hauntingly to the hybrid cultural milieu of Egypt in the Hellenistic and Roman periods . It could be that *Thunder*'s "I" chooses to rest in this uncomfortable mixed set of identities that embraces the complex mix of Greek and barbarian that existed in Egypt at that time. This could also contribute to explaining the "I" whose image is multiple in Egypt. In this way, *Thunder*'s "I" is not just an affirmation of the slandered barbarian, but an assertion of the messy identity of Egyptians from many different walks of life under Hellenistic and then Roman occupation.

Such analysis of this, the most culturally specific language in all of *Thunder*, underlines the questions noted in Chapter 1 concerning the other deep Egyptian roots of *Thunder*. Not only is Egypt the only location mentioned in the poem and the place where the manuscript was found, it is one of the most hybrid mixes of culture in the Hellenistic Mediterranean, and our close analysis of the poetics reveals deep language structures possible only in Coptic.

Cast Down

Thunder's "I" has a wide range of identification with people who are downtrodden. A list of such passages–with the downtrodden descriptions in italics–includes the following:

I am she who is honored and she who is *mocked*

I am the *slavewoman* of him who served me

I am *humiliation* and pride
I am *ashamed*

I am she who is *disgraced* and she who is important
Pay attention to me, to my *poverty* and to my extravagance

Do not be arrogant to me when I am *thrown to the ground*
You will find me among the expected

Do not stare at me *in the shit pile*, leaving me *discarded*
You will find me in the kingdoms

Do not stare at me when I am *thrown out among the condemned*
Do not laugh at me *in the lowest places*
Do not *throw me down among those slaughtered viciously*

In my *weakness* do not *strip me bare*
Do not be afraid of my power

I am she who exists in *all fears* and *in trembling* boldness
I am she who is *timid*
And I am safe in a comfortable place

I shall *shut my mouth among those whose mouths are shut*
and then I will show up and speak

I am she whom you *chased* and she whom you *captured*
I am she whom you *scattered*
And you have gathered me together
I am she before whom you were ashamed
And you have been *shameless to me*

Take me from the *disgraced* and *crushed* places
Rob from those who are good, even though in disgrace
Bring me *in shame*, to yourselves, out of *shame*
With or without *shame*
blame the parts of me within yourselves
I am she who is revered and adored
And she who is *reviled* with contempt

I am the coming together and the *falling apart*
I am the enduring and the *disintegration*
I am *down in the dirt*, and they come up to me

Thunder's "I" is mocked, humiliated, ashamed, disgraced, impoverished, thrown to the ground, in the shit pile, thrown out into the condemned, in the lowest places, thrown down into those slaughtered viciously, in weakness, stripped bare, timid, among those whose mouths are shut, chased, captured, scattered, crushed, in shame, reviled with contempt, falling apart, disintegration, and down in the

dirt. Of these 25 characterizations of some kind of humiliation, 13 appear paired in typical *Thunder* fashion with an antithetical characterization of being honored as well. But it is striking that 12 of these 25 humiliations are *not* paired with something honorable, but simply place *Thunder*'s "I" in a despised place.

This concentration of stripped-chased-crushed-thrown down locations of the "I" forces the attentive listener to think socially about the piece. It becomes clear that *Thunder* is thinking intensely about what it means to be cast down and humiliated. Especially since the typical expression of the more-or-less divine "I" in ancient literature (the aretalogy) is filled with praise for the "I," this focus on the disgraced-slaughtered-captured-impoverished "I" in *Thunder* points to a decisive aspect of its character. *Thunder*, then, was probably written with consciousness of social locations in which this humiliation occurred. Although more investigation is needed on the social location of the composition(s) of *Thunder*, it certainly must be considered as a piece in which reflection on humiliation is incumbent.

This voice from within *Thunder* about the one cast down, however, is also quite unique in that it speaks with so much authority. Thoughtful investigation of *Thunder*'s social location would then need to include identifying places where people are both cast down and with the possibility of claiming authority. Such investigation needs also to consider the possibility that the poem itself evokes a sense of authority from those who are socially "cast down." Similarly, the possibility that *Thunder* speaks from social locations reflecting a mix of humiliation, negotiation of power, and certain privilege would need to be pursued.

Honor and Shame in the Ancient Mediterranean

In the past 25 years the study of the ancient world has included an important new sociological and anthropological analysis. One of the major categories for thinking about the ancient Mediterranean has become the socio-anthropological categories of honor and shame. Honor and shame were major ways that everyone in the ancient Mediterranean thought about themselves and each other, and had to do with the ways that the public viewed and responded to individuals. Certain behaviors were considered honorable and others full of shame, with the accruing results that particular individuals were tainted by a more generalized shame. Especially important for any social analysis of *Thunder* are the ways women attracted the label of shame in the ancient Mediterranean.[4]

The attention *Thunder* pays to this pervasive social dynamic of its time may not be obvious at first. Anne McGuire is the only scholar to have thought about *Thunder* in these categories.[5] The following examples demonstrate how thoroughly the honor and shame apply to *Thunder*:

> I am she who is honored and she who is mocked
> I am the whore and the holy woman
>
> I am a sterile woman and she has many children
> I am she whose wedding is extravagant and I didn't have a husband
> I am the midwife, and she who hasn't given birth
> I am the slavewoman of him who served me
>
> You who loathe me, why do you love me and loathe the ones who
>   love me?
>
> I am humiliation and pride
> I am without shame
> I am ashamed
>
> I am she who is disgraced and she who is important
> Pay attention to me, to my poverty and to my extravagance
> I am she who is revered and adored
> And she who is reviled with contempt
> Do not be arrogant to me when I am thrown to the ground
> You will find me among the expected
>
> Do not stare at me in the shit pile, leaving me discarded
> You will find me in the kingdoms
>
> Do not stare at me when I am thrown out among the condemned
> Do not laugh at me in the lowest places
> Do not throw me down among those slaughtered viciously
>
> In my weakness do not strip me bare
>
> Because I am a barbarian among barbarians?
>
> I am she who was hated in every place
> And she who was loved in every place
>
> I am she whom you chased and she whom you captured
> I am she whom you scattered

And you have gathered me together
I am she before whom you were ashamed

And you have been shameless to me
Take me from the disgraced and crushed places
I am down in the dirt, and they come up to me
I am she who shouts out, and they throw me down on the ground
You honor me ……… and you whisper against me

Honor-shame then is a susbstantive topic of *Thunder* as a whole. The terms of honor and shame themselves appear explicitly throughout, especially the terms of shame. In contrast with most ancient documents with a powerful speaker, the "I" is often associated with that which is disgraceful, and as noted earlier the "I" evokes demeaning situations more than honorable ones.

Yet the tension between societal honor and shame is taken on in *Thunder*'s "I." The piece as a whole is surprising in its identification with shame, but this identification is transformed and deconstructed by *Thunder*'s active combination of the shame and the honor in the same person. In this way, being ashamed, down in the dirt, chased, captured, and enslaved no longer are excluded from being honored. This piece seems to take aim at the dominant societal system of the Mediterranean. It aims to undo it by paying attention to the societal stations considered shameful in deft connection to celebrative combinations of both honor and shame in the same voice at the same time. In this way, the mutually exclusionary quality of honor and shame is undercut.

Patron and Client in the Ancient Mediterranean

Another major category of sociological and anthropological analysis of the ancient Mediterranean world is that of the patron and client. Patronage in the ancient Mediterranean was a way of organizing relationships hierarchically, and it had social, religious, economic, and political dimensions as it arranged vertically series of patrons and clients. The patron was perceived as the benefactor of the client, and therefore the client was obliged in an ongoing way to the benefactor. Creating a kind of social ladder, patrons could be clients of other patrons above them socially. The dependency of the client on the patron was explicitly articulated and held to be a permanent state. The emperors of the time were understood to be the patrons of everyone, and the Romans used this to a maximum benefit. Following the intra-society model, the emperor often set up client kings and queens

to rule for them in particular regions. The patron-client relationship understood itself from both sides as having been divinely instituted, and was often religiously inaugurated.[6]

The speeches of the semidivine "I," were often used as speeches asserting the divine right of certain kings, queens, or emperors. Zeus, Athena, and Apollo were among the gods connected to the Roman emperor, while Isis was often the goddess whose speeches represented the queens and kings of Hellenistic Egypt (in previous centuries when Egypt had a number of reigning queens). These aretalogies claimed a connection between political power and divinity, belonging then to the larger phenomenon of divine rulers in the Hellenistic Mediterranean. The speech of Wisdom/Sophia in Proverbs 8:15,16 illustrates this identification between political power and the semidivine "I": "By me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just; by me rulers rule, and nobles, all who govern rightly."[7] The speeches of the gods and goddesses portrayed themselves at the head of the hierarchy of patrons.

Since *Thunder* is a kind of aretalogy, it has, in some ways, a very similar powerful "I" that asserts authority. However, *Thunder* is also emphatically an anti-aretalogy, in that by emphasizing humiliation, it uses the aretalogical form ironically. So *Thunder*'s "I" actually undermines, and possibly satirizes, the patron-client relationship. Inasmuch as *Thunder*'s divine patron's assertion of privilege embraces positions and situations that would obviously belong to the lowliest of clients, the patron-client hierarchy breaks apart.

Conclusion

Through the ironies of gender complication, the strong affiliation with barbarians, and the insistence of association with those who are cast down, *Thunder* locates itself critically and creatively at the sociocultural boundaries of honor and shame, patron and client. It actively confuses established gender, honor, and patron systems, making them for the ancient world less eternal and more vulnerable to shifts and ambiguities of power, status, and identity.

CHAPTER 7

VIOLENCE, SUBJECTIVITY, AND IDENTITY

Do not throw me down into those slaughtered viciously (15,13–14)

Take me from the disgraced and crushed places (17,10–12)

I am she whom you chased and she whom you captured (16,16–17)

There is a surprising prevalence of violent images in *Thunder*. In the excerpts cited here for example, there is a heightened sensitivity to physical cruelty–the aggression of the law, the devastating aftermath of military conquest. In the first two lines, the "I" seems to plead for mercy. The voice of *Thunder* is in a constant state of suspense relative to bodily safety: "You wounded me, and you relented," (17,35–36) she says. It is also hard to forget the capricious power of the "you," who variously loves and hates, glorifies and mistreats her.

Not only is the "I" the victim of violence, but in her subtle wrecking of all the relationships, discourses, and assumptions she evokes, she perpetrates a violence all her own. "I am compassionate and I am cruel. Watch out!" the voice warns. What does it mean that a text built on declarations of selfhood is so deeply embroiled in violence?

This chapter begins to discuss how gender and identity intersects with violence in the text. For instance, in the most graphically violent passages, the "I" is emphatically a "she," showing awareness of the particular bodily perils and vulnerabilities of being a woman. Yet *Thunder*'s attention to all kinds of social categories and their inadequacies–the acknowledgment and bridging of the gap between the shameless and the ashamed, for example–represents

another kind of awareness.[1] For *Thunder*, identity itself is a kind of violence.

The following discusses some of the ancient contexts and some of the contemporary philosophical modes for thinking about the violence of identity, as well as what the significance of *Thunder*'s own seemingly violent response.

Subjects of Conquest: Barbarians and Women

> Why do you hate me, you Greeks?
> Because I am a barbarian among barbarians? (16,1–3)

In the ancient world, as in the contemporary one, how one identifies (and how one gets identified) has everything to do with how much bodily harm and what kinds one might be subjected to. On another related level, there is an ideological violence inherent to identity–the humiliating power in a slander or a slur, for example. These two aspects of identity coincide in the ancient category of barbarian. As noted earlier, "Barbarian" is not a designation for an actual, discreet group of people–it is rather a dustbin category for many groups of "uncivilized," "lawless," or "outsiders." To Greeks, at least since the conquests of Alexander, all non-Greeks were barbarians, which meant that they somehow deserved military conquest, and their defeat and domination were justified by "civilization"/assimilation into Greek culture.[2]

Scholarship on the ancient world has paid more attention to the ideological nuances of such terms since the advent of postcolonial criticism.[3] Brigitte Kahl's analysis of images on the Hellenistic monument the Altar of Pergamon, for example, shows in vivid detail how the category of barbarian/other was inextricably tied to a certain cosmological "destiny" of subjugation.[4] The altar is a large-scale sculptured staircase, built by the Attalid dynasty around 170 B.C.E. in order to render into mythological terms the historical victory of the Greeks over the Gauls. The scene is Greek gods and goddesses brutally massacring giants, a battle between divinity and monstrosity.[5] Kahl writes that the images on the altar "embody the basic symbolic order of cosmos versus chaos, law versus anarchy, appropriate religion versus blasphemy … civilization and law that needs to be defended and protected against the "other" of lawless barbarism.…"[6] She also notes how Rome "inherited" this monument, along with the kingdom of Pergamon in 133 B.C.E., seamlessly adopting the altar's cosmic proportions of law versus lawlessness and culture versus savagery into its own policy and ideology. Throughout the Hellenistic and Roman

imperial periods, "barbarian" was far from a neutral or harmless designation, and it went hand in hand with defeat, enslavement, impoverishment, and humiliation.

The Roman imperial period (beginning with Augustus in 27 B.C.E.) was also full of its own fresh ways of articulating identity through violence. Roman depictions of the nations it conquered, for instance, offer a glimpse of what it meant to "be" in the Roman world order. In her work with Roman imperial visual representation, Davina Lopez analyzes Roman images in which the nations defeated by Rome were represented as ethnically specific women, at times posed submissively at the feet of a hyper-masculine Roman soldier.[7] Women's bodies are used to personify whole groups of people and their geography in this imagery. Not only does this reinscribe certain cultural particularities as one function of domination, but also "Roman conquest is represented in gendered visual language, and Roman imperial world order is expressed as a gendered world order. Peace comes through patriarchy: feminine submission stabilizes Roman masculinity."[8] The defeated nations are "feminized" nations. Appearing on money and monuments for all to see, these images and their ubiquity worked to reinforce and naturalize relations between men and women, the rulers and the ruled. Such representations, accompanied not only by enslavement or low social status, but also by ritualized public cruelties (e.g., execution in the arena),[9] served as "reminders" for the nations, never allowed to forget precisely who they were.

These images also communicate another important aspect of ancient identity, particularly gender identity. The disturbing depiction of these nations as violated women shows that part of the very making of gender has to do with one's position in relation to another or others: one's "assignment," as it were. In these Roman images, clearly femininity is a sign for subjugation, and masculinity, for dominance and aggression. Such operations occur constantly in the language and images shaping our world, as well, in ways both complex and mundane. They demonstrate how much of gender is about relation, and yet how certain ways of relating constantly solidify and replay gender/social norms. Far from just a collection of inherent personal traits, identity–now and in the ancient world–gets crystallized in a complex set of social relationships. The seeming "flexibility" of gender in these images belies the rigid inequality of relations in the Roman imperial world.

The work of Kahl and Lopez together suggests that in identity there are always the questions of who holds the power to name, and

under what circumstances naming takes place. *Thunder*'s own aware-ness of the power–and instability–of naming appears in a number of places, perhaps most notably:

> I am she whom they call life
> And you all called death
> I am she who they call law
> And you all called lawlessness (16,11–15)

By reciting the vast differences between how "you" and "they" call the "I," and never resolving the difference, the voice of *Thunder* makes the whole business of naming rather ironic, and totally inadequate. Here there is an acknowledgment that how one is called has everything to do with who is calling–identifiers are loosened from their inevitabil-ity. This same acknowledgment is in the lines, "I am the speaking of my name." These lines echo an ancient convention in which the true name of a divine persona remains unknown or unspeakable,[10] as well as the notion–particularly in oral cultures–that to name something is to have knowledge of, or power over it.[11] The way *Thunder* employs these conventions, however, takes such notions to another level. The line "I am the speaking of my name" occurs directly before the fol-lowing set of lines:

> You who loathe me, why do you love me and loathe the ones who
>   love me?
> You who deny me, confess me
> You who confess me, deny me
> You who speak the truth about me, lie about me
> You who lie about me, speak the truth about me (14,15–22)

These lines destabilize the relationship between speech and truth alto-gether. In this context (and the broader context of an "I" who has no name), "I am the speaking of my name" doesn't suggest anything about one "true" name, only a multitude of names, which fall apart when spoken.[12]

   Thunder's interest in the powers and failures in naming might be considered conventional on a theological level, but this text is not solely interested in divine categories.[13] This motif of the unfixing of names appears in a text that is more invested in *human* categories than divine or abstract ones, using the impossibility of the divine name as an inroad for thinking about the inadequacies of human identity cat-egories. "I am a foreigner and a citizen of the city" appears next to "I

am being." Likewise, the "I" is not just the knowledge of the barbarians, but actually *one of* the barbarians. The "I" constantly moves back and forth, claiming name after contradictory name on both fields, foiling them against one another.

Thunder's dissociation of truth from speech is an important response to the violence of identity: it attempts to throw off the destiny articulated in a name. The "I" of *Thunder* confesses who she (and he) is again and again, but the truth of the "I" is unspeakable ("I am what anyone can hear, but no one can say"). Perhaps it disappears when spoken, or only appears inadvertently (in a lie or denial, as in the 14,15–22 excerpt). As a result, words such as whore, foreigner, barbarian (woman, man) are loosened from their referents.

There are other ways to understand how *Thunder* comments on and responds to the relationship between identity and violence. Contemporary philosophy and theory has useful images and language for playing out some interpretive possibilities in *Thunder*, and particularly for how to think about the power out of which the "I" comes.

Identity, Language, and the Law

I am the name of the sound and the sound of the name (20,31–33)
I shall shut my mouth among those whose mouths are shut
and then I will show up and speak (15,32–34)

The very first line of *Thunder* describes where the "I" comes from, "I have been sent out from power." While this has been used to create elaborate cosmological scenarios for *Thunder*, for those familiar with contemporary philosophical understandings of identity and subjectivity, this seems simply to be a true statement: the "I" (the self, the subject) emerges from, and is shaped by, certain power-sensitive and power-interested conditions.[14] Since, for example, this is a country–indeed a world–shaped by racist histories and presumptions, whiteness tends to be experienced and perceived as neutral or blank. One can notice these conditions, and work to alter them. However, no one in this time and place can be born "outside" of those conditions, and those conditions will shape how each person thinks, and imagines her/himself. On a deeper level, race is a mode of cultural comprehension. Like gender, it is a way of characterizing difference through language, and a way of "identifying" someone. The word "identify" should be exploited for its numerous meanings here–ranging from "recognize" to "determine" to "point a finger at." As contemporary

gender theory and critical race theory has observed, though, these specific ways of characterizing and maintaining difference are themselves produced by unequal power relations and abusive economic arrangements.[15]

The range of meanings for "identify" is quite relevant. It is exactly what is at play in a famous paradigmatic moment described by French philosopher Louis Althusser.[16] He illustrates by metaphor how it is that one becomes a culturally recognizable self, and how that happens through language. In what he calls interpellation, the "subject" (or self) comes into being (gets subjected) via being hailed by a police officer, reflecting the meaning "point a finger at." (This moment resonates especially with *Thunder*'s declaration, "I am she whom you chased, and she whom you captured.") The subject responds to this call, and then turns around in acknowledgment of it. In other words, in order to be identifiable, or recognizable, one must "accept" in certain ways the language and conditions that govern existence.[17] This violence is a normalizing violence. Echoing Judith Butler's illustration of this metaphor: one is born and immediately proclaimed to be a girl or a boy. From the moment of birth, one is expected to always to speak or act as a boy or a girl (reflecting the meaning "to determine").[18] To try to be something *other* than what one is proclaimed at birth, or to be something that cannot quite be proclaimed at birth, means one is either confused or confusing–incomprehensible.[19]

Butler has read Althusser's scene of interpellation specifically,[20] highlighting the punitive, finger-pointing aspect of the officer's call (the officer names through an accusation, the subject responds in guilt). In this reading, she also underscores the safety and desirability of being socially "recognizable," as well as the element of agency that the subject has: the choice to turn to the officer or not. The "I" cannot escape the conditions that govern existence, but can refuse them. The *choice* to turn toward or away already shows complicity: the "I" must hear the call to choose to ignore it. However, Butler describes the turn away from the law as "resisting its lure of identity, an agency that outruns and counters the conditions of [the subject's] emergence. Such a turn demands a willingness *not* to be–a critical desubjectivication–in order to expose the law as less powerful than it seems."[21] Since the "I" refuses the conditions that govern existence, by turning away, the "I" also turns away from that existence, from social recognizability–and is no longer much of a subject at all.

There are numerous facets to identity and social recognition, and the governing of existence happens on many fields. Marriage for

instance is a form of social recognition for couples, and bestowal or denial of marriage by the state on certain individuals is a way of codifying and privileging certain kinds of heterosexual relationships. It is interesting then to consider *Thunder*'s inversions and reversals of relations in lines such as "I am she whose wedding is extravagant and I didn't have a husband" or "I am my father's mother, my husband's sister, and he is my child" that send certain forms of social recognition into confusion. The voice mixes and breaks the very terms and relationships that govern social recognition.

Thunder's failed identifications, as the primary tactic throughout the text, should be seen precisely along the lines of Butler's illustration of refusals to fully accept the hailing of the law. The "I" exposes the force and power interests in names, but in doing so must give up recognizability. This tactic is apparently so effective that many readers are still baffled by the question of who the voice of *Thunder* is.[22] Such a confounding of the moment of interpellation means that the "I" must lose itself in a way, or commit itself to loss of (one kind of) social "being."[23]

While this confusion of the "I" is certainly a response to violence and punishment, it is also a move not without its own destructive implications, as we have emphasized, and as Butler suggests in the phrase "willingness *not* to be." *Thunder* seems to leave nothing intact. For sure, the voice of *Thunder* levels everything in its path, dislodges most if not all its structuring discourses and relationships. Yet there seems to be the survival of something, and it seems that the *voice* is the only thing left in the wake of all that has taken apart. Not a stable voice, but a persistent one, always morphing and eluding, answering wrongly, mooring itself on vanishing coasts. This voice exceeds and shatters the speakable, and as a voice, does so by going *through* the speakable. But the question is, what kind of a survival is this; what kind of "I"?

The persistence and excessiveness of the "I" suggests that while the violence of identity may wound, no identifier will "capture" this voice. People's lives and experiences are both too rich and too ambiguous for language to fully track.[24] The "I" in some ways fails to be fully interpellated, and could be seen as reflecting Butler's statement further along in her discussion which claims that one must "re-read 'being' as precisely that potentiality that remains unexhausted by any particular interpellation."[25] For Butler, in refusing to identify, the "I" is no longer an "I," but some manner of "being" persists. Perhaps, though, *Thunder* allows for the imagination of another conclusion: an "I" that persists, even though "being," as static presence, does not.

The "I" often hides or disappears, but always returns in *Thunder*, surprisingly and sometimes painfully. This voice loses itself and its ability to be recognized, it nevertheless shows up to speak again. This voice is not properly a "being": one might say it is "de-ontologized," especially since it has the ability to occupy both a position of being and nonbeing.[26]

While *Thunder* focuses so much on identity through an "I," it would be hard to describe it as ascribing to any kind of individualism, since it repeatedly emphasizes the social nature of identity. Thus one might say that *Thunder* does not abandon *social relationships*, even if it does jeopardize the terms of social recognizability. It may indeed be a move toward a new kind of social living that entails seeing together the ways that determinations of identity are partial at best, and the ways they may in fact support a set of structures that deny people fair and safe conditions. It requires, as Rosemary Hennessy proposes, devising notions of collectivity that hinge on disidentification–that is, on *not* belonging in the ways that one should. Hennessy does not advocate creating new language around identity, but rather acknowledging the "gap between identities promoted by the dominant culture and the lived 'experience' of social relations that is not summoned by these terms."[27] This is right on the pulse of *Thunder*, and Hennessy's suggestions about collectivity might offer the best angle for understanding *Thunder*'s constructive work. As we have noted, *Thunder*'s only stable affiliations are with Egypt and barbarians–both of which refer to a complex and hybrid collective. Perhaps even on a historical level, *Thunder* speaks to or from a situation in which there is no specific shared identity between its constituents, but rather a shared sense of estrangement from their respective identities.

The persistence of the "I," with its commitment to speaking inappropriately and too much, and to reorganizing relationships around the often brutal terms it has been given, models an uncanny resourcefulness. Or said differently, it models the cunning reappropriation of resources. It reworks and therefore sends into confusion the determinatives of existence, and it does so in a constantly shifting and renegotiated scene of address between an "I" and a "you." For where there is identity and its violences, the "I" must remain–always singular but never alone, overturning with necessary creativity the inevitability of being.

CHAPTER 8

STYLE AND POETIC ARTISTRY

Previous chapters have discussed some aspects of *Thunder*'s style and form in terms of its genre, particularly how it transforms and even parodies aretology–the literary genre that consists of a list of a goddess's or god's virtues and powers. We have discussed problems of translation, in terms of how much of the gendered language, particularly gender-bending language, of *Thunder* has been softened in translation. Yet another stylistic aspect of this is its poetic quality.[1] For example, *Thunder* contains highly rhythmic passages (although the rhythm usually only lasts for about six to ten lines at a time), and uses alliteration and wordplay throughout the poem. There are even some occasions of rhyme. Unfortunately, this wordplay and alliteration is untranslatable into English,[2] but its very untranslatability leads one to consider a startling and unforeseen conclusion–it is not retro-translatable either. In other words, the alliteration and wordplay, including highly balanced phrasing in use of sounds, could not be translated from Coptic back into Greek. There are occasional passages that appear to make more poetic sense in Greek,[3] but for the most part we have come to the conclusion that *Thunder*, even if it is a translation from Greek, in its current state is nearly a thoroughly Coptic poem. The Coptic poem is the only version that has survived. It is the only version we know of that ancient people would have written, read, recited, and heard. As such, it is important to listen to how this poem plays on sounds in its current Coptic form.[4]

Additionally, the poem shows many other poetic features, which are luckily more easily translatable. It utilizes parallelism, best known from biblical literature but common throughout the ancient near east, yet it does so in a particularly startling way as discussed in the chapter

on "paradox unhinged." More broadly, contrary to the most wide-spread opinion about this poem that it has no discernable organization or structure, *Thunder* appears to be a highly organized piece of literature in its usage of formal devices and in its distribution of stylistic and thematic patterns.

Its vibrant language in terms of alliteration, wordplay, balanced phrasing, and occasionally rhyme and rhythm and its other poetic devices–such as its distinctive appropriation of parallelism–and its well-crafted organizational patterns in terms of style and theme collude to make one take *Thunder* seriously as an early form of Coptic poetry.

Listening to *Thunder*'s Voice

If one listens to how the Coptic sounds in *Thunder*–its "sonority"–one discovers a rich texture of sounds, a delight in alliteration, wordplay, rhythm, and occasionally rhyme. This delight in the sound of a language can be found throughout the world, whether in completely oral extempore performances or carefully crafted written documents and everything in between. While so many languages use such sensual sounds, their specific occurrence in one language cannot be translated into another without losing the effect and some of its sense: it is untranslatable. Yet, as we have noted, this is part of the problem with *Thunder*: its Coptic soundscapes cannot be fully translated without losing their richness and some of their meaning, whether into English or "back" into Greek. To counterbalance this translator's dilemma, it is helpful to show some English language or more familiar examples alongside the Coptic passages that echo *Thunder*'s technique.

Throughout *Thunder*, there are many examples of wordplay, particularly punning, that rely upon the repetition of sounds in a slightly different way. While in the modern English-language world punning has been relegated as a "low" form of witty wordplay, it was not so in the ancient world, particularly in Afro-Semitic languages. One of the more famous examples from the Bible is found in the story of Adam and Eve. In that very familiar story, Adam and Eve are described as being "naked" *('arum)* and "unashamed" (Gen. 2:25). In the next part of the narrative, the serpent is described as the most "cunning" *('arummim)* creature (Gen. 2:26). "Cunning" *('arummim)* puns on "naked" *('arum)* in this prose narrative as a transition that literarily moves the action forward and relates the serpent and human actors, whose fates will now be intertwined.

Such wordplay occurs throughout the Coptic text of *Thunder*. For example, look at 17.15–18:

> *Ebol hn ou**shipe shopt** erōtn hn oumntatshipe*
> *Auō ebol hn oumntatshipe mn oushipe*

Quite literally, this reads:

> From shame take me in shamelessness
> And from in shamelessness with shame

In this way, these lines create a chiasm, or a mirrored pattern (a, b, b', a'), in terms of shame, shamelessness, shamelessness, and shame. This is a very common literary device throughout literature. But what is more pertinent to our concerns is that the root word for shame repeated throughout *(shipe)* forms a pun with the only verb that shows up in this passage *(shopt)*, literally "take me" or "bring me," playing on the usage of "sh" and "p" sounds in both words.

The next passage (16,16–23) also illustrates Coptic punning, but in the context of an even more complex pattern of alliteration. Alliteration is so common in poetry that it is more difficult to find a poem that does not use it at some point. Take, for example, the opening line to Gertrude Stein's "Tender Buttons [A Chair]":

A widow in a wise veil and more garments shows that shadows are even.

This single line has two instances of alliteration: one with "w" sounds (widow and wise) and one with "sh" sounds (shows and shadows).

In 16,16–23, *Thunder* takes alliteration to such a heightened level that it becomes much of a tongue twister:

> *Anok tentatetnpōt nsōei*
> *Auō anok tentatetnamahte mmoei*
> *Anok te tentatetnjooret ebol*
> *Auō atetnsoouht ehoun*
> *Anok tentatetnshine hōtc*
> *Auō atetnr atshipe nōei*
> *Anok tete macr sha*
> *Auō anok tete nashe nessha*

In our translation, we have rendered this as follows:

> I am she whom you chased
> And she whom you captured

> I am she whom you scattered
>   And you have gathered me together
> I am she before whom you were ashamed
>   And you have been shameless to me
> I am she who does not celebrate festivals
>   And I am she whose festivals are spectacular

While the alternation of "I" and "and" at the beginning of each line and even how the repetition of terms creates a certain degree of rhythm throughout the passage is translatable, the passage's very high density of consonantal sounds is not. When read aloud at a normal reading speed, the passage's rapid-fire alliterative repetition of "t" and "n" sounds make it difficult to pronounce, in the same way a tongue twister would. This effect is created by the repetition of a few grammatical forms. The use of the feminine relative, "she who," by *tenta-* and *tete*, and the second person plural *atetn*. This becomes particularly heightened in the first, second, third, and fifth lines when these two forms are brought together as *tentatetn*, while alternating with the regular *atetn* in the fourth and sixth lines. Moreover, this passage ends with a pun. The last two lines end with the word "festival" *(sha)*, but the last line puns "her festivals" (*nessha*) with the term we have translated as "spectacular" (*nasha*), which means more generally "great" or "many." The juxtaposition of the terms heightens the alliteration, but creates wordplay as well with *nasha nessha*.

Another thing this passage reveals is *Thunder*'s occasional usage of rhyme. The first two lines and the last two lines of the passage rhyme. The first two lines end with *ōei* and *oei*, both of which should simply be pronounced as "oi," while the last two lines and with "sha." But another passage (14,15–25) illustrates this better:

> *Etbe ou netmoste mmoei nnetme mmoei*
>   *Auō tetnmoste nnetme mmoei*
> *Netrarna mmoei erihomologei mmoei*
>   *Auō netrhomologei mmoei eriarna mmoei*
> *Netje me eroï ji chol eroei*
>   *Auō netauje chol eroei je tme eroei*
> *Netcooun mmoei eriatcooun mmoei*
>   *Auo nete mpoucouōnt maroucouōnt*

We have translated this passage as follows with some alterations:

> You who loathe me, why do you love me
>   And loathe the ones who love me?

> You who deny me, confess me
>   And you who confess me, deny me
> You who speak the truth about me, lie about me
>   And you who lie about me, speak the truth about me
> You who know me, ignore me
>   And you who ignore me, notice me

The ending of each line ends with the "oi" sound either from *mmoei* or *eroei*, with translate simply as "me" or "to me." While the repetition of the same word may seem to be an unfitting example of rhyme, it is, in fact, common not only in antiquity,[5] but even in modern English poetry. Edgar Allan Poe uses this type of line ending rhyme in his poem "Ulalume":

> The skies were ashen and sober;
>   The leaves they were crisped and sere–
>   The leaves they were withering and sere;
> It was night in the lonesome October
>   Of my most immemorial year;
>   In the misty mid region of Weir–
> It was down by the dank tarn of Auber;
> It was hard by the dim lake of Auber,
>   In the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir.

While Poe uses traditional rhyme (using different words that end with the same sound) with sober and October and year and Weir, most of the endings derive from the same word: sere and sere, Weir and Weir, Auber and Auber. He, however, mixes how he uses the same word: sometimes in adjoining lines (sere and Auber) or separated (Weir). Poe repeats this pattern of using the same words at the end of lines throughout his poem, even, in fact, repeating sober, sere, sere, October, year, Weir, Auber, Auber, Weir again in the third stanza and again with additional lines with words from other stanzas in his final stanza. The one caveat, however, is that the use of the same word to create rhyme rather than two different words that end similarly makes the rhyme scheme translatable, unlike the extensive use of alliteration and wordplay found in the Coptic text.

In summary, while there is at least one place that probably makes better sense in Greek than in Coptic (18,27–31) and even some usage of rhyme that is translatable because it is based upon the repetition of the same word, there are Coptic features of the text that cannot be recaptured in English or retro-translated into Greek. We have given a sampling of these passages that feature wordplay through punning and

the extensive use of alliteration. As an English speaker would delight in the rich tapestry of sounds in a well-wrought sonorous English-language poem, so does *Thunder* in its Coptic poetic artistry.

The Organizational Patterns of *Thunder*

The use of rhythm, rhyme, alliteration, and punning is only part of *Thunder*'s poetic artistry. The other part is its broader architecture. Discerning the broader organization of the text has been fairly difficult for scholarship. The first notable attempt was Bentley Layton's characterization of *Thunder* as alternating between self-identity riddles (the recurrent "I am") and exhortations.[6] P.-H. Poirier, however, has shown this position to be difficult to sustain because many portions of the poem do not fall easily into one or the other category, containing both "I am" statements and exhortations.[7] Moreover, there are additional types of non-self-identification passages, such as interrogative passages. These other types of passages, in fact, show a bewildering variety of forms. When taken together–self-identity, exhortative, "mixed forms," and the multitude of other types of passages–one is tempted to conclude that there is no discernable organization to *Thunder*.

Poirier, in turn, has suggested a very general organization of introduction, development, and conclusion–in short, *Thunder* has a beginning, middle, and an end. He does, however, attempt greater specificity by suggesting a mid-range organization of a loose assemblage of thematic blocks, but with no clear structure to those blocks.[8] In short, scholarship has reached an impasse in determining *Thunder*'s broader patterns, if it has any at all. To bridge this gap, this section will look at organizational patterns in *Thunder* from the ground up, starting with small patterns at the level of the line and stanza, building upon that analysis to discuss slightly larger poetic patterns, and from this discussion, a broader understanding of *Thunder*'s organization will emerge, one that shows that far from a chaotic assemblage of themes and poetic forms, the text arranges these themes in a carefully constructed manner.

Lines and Stanzas

A line is indicated in the manuscript by a half-raised dot. Occasionally, based upon the length of lines and the rhythm of a passage, a line break does not appear when expected. In these rare cases, we have reconstructed the line break and annotated the reason for it on a

case-by-case basis. The groupings of multiple lines–usually two or three, but sometimes four–in terms of parallelism is indicated by the use of "and" (*auō*) directly after a line break. Occasionally, "or" (*ā*) and "with" (*mn*) also serve in this capacity, and there are places in the poem where parallelism occurs without such indicators, usually in the successive repetition of "I am." Finally, different groupings of parallel lines will form a sense unit somewhat separate but necessarily related to surrounding sense units; in short, there are stanzas. The separation of one stanza from another is usually indicated by other types of words, most of which we have not translated. They include "for" (*gar*) and the weak particle "and/but" (*de*).[9] These indicators usually coincide with a shift in theme and/or a shift in grammatical patterns. When the text is laid out based upon these considerations, very interesting and sophisticated stanzas and patterns begin to emerge.

For example in (14,1–9), we find a sophisticated pattern of parallelism:

> But it is he who gave birth to me at the wrong time
> > And he is my child born at the right time
> > And my power is from within him
> I am the staff of his youthful power
> > And he is the rod of my old womanhood
> > And whatever he wants happens to me

Firstly, the section is partitioned from what comes before by the, here translated, "but." It is thematically related, since the section before this has a mind-twisting discussion of giving birth. Yet there is a shift formally from a series of "I am" statements to a passage where only one line begins with "I am." It is thematically differentiated from what follows, which is a discussion of the voice and idea that is "many."

Within this passage, when applying the criteria of line formation, one sees a complex form of parallelism. The use of parallelism has been discussed in the chapter on "paradox unhinged." It is a poetic form common to much of ancient Afro-Semitic poetry. It is riddled throughout the poetic sections of the Bible, although it is not necessary to create such poetry. *Thunder*, however, revels in the use of this poetic device and utilizes it in very complex ways. This passage forms two sets of three parallel lines. Each set starts out with one statement, is reversed by a second statement that creates a paradox, while the third line "unhinges" the paradox. So the "he" who gives birth to "me" at the "right time" is reversed by becoming "my child" born at the "right time." Likewise, the "staff" of "youthful power" identified

with "I" is reversed by the "rod" of "my old womanhood" identified with "he." These reversals that create paradoxes of who gave birth to whom and the phallic symbols of staff and rod and youth and age are both "unhinged" in the third lines. "My power is from within him" moves the paradox established by the first two lines into a new discussion, anticipating the next set of three lines of the phallic symbols of authority. Those symbols, however, that also create a paradox are unbalanced in the final line that "whatever he wants happens to me," which turns back to the third line of the first set. This highly sophisticated stanza is not unique in *Thunder*, but is one example of how these indications of line and stanza formation begin to show, at least on this level of the poem, a highly sophisticated composition.

Short Poems within *Thunder*

Working through *Thunder*, even more complicated poetic formations emerge, particularly successive interrelated stanzas, which are usually stanzas that show repeated grammatical organizations from stanza to stanza that are also united thematically. These stanza formations, moreover, tend to be more unique, not matching the way stanzas appear in other portions of the text.

There are at least three of these short poems in the non-self-identity passages within the larger architecture of *Thunder* (14,32–15,14; 17,15–32; 18,9–20). When considering the longer string of self-identity passages, the number of such mid-range poetic units increases. One will be sufficient for illustration (17,15–32):

> From within shame, bring me to yourselves, from shamelessness
>   And within shamelessness or shame
>
> Blame the parts of me within yourselves
>   And come toward me
> You who know me and you who know the parts of me
> Assemble the great among the small and earliest creatures
>
> Advance toward childhood
>   And do not hate it because it is small and insignificant
> Don't reject the small parts of greatness because they are small
> Since smallness is recognized from within greatness

This and, in fact, the other non-self-identity short poems all begin with a set of two parallel lines followed by a longer discussion. This example and the one in 18,9–20, moreover, have the same pattern of two

lines, four lines, and four lines, appearing almost like a Shakespearean sonnet in reverse (and with four fewer lines). The first two lines in these short poems announce the theme. In this case, the chiasm of shame already discussed. The theme of shame is picked up in the next stanza, the first set of four lines, in terms of "blame the parts of me within yourself" and ultimately transitioning to a discussion of greatness and smallness.

Grammatically, this particular short poem follows a different line and stanza formation than the rest of *Thunder*. Considering the first two lines, they are the only place where a line begins with a prepositional phrase "from within" in all of *Thunder*.[10] In the two sets of four lines, one sees that parallelism works differently. While the second line in each section uses the usual "and" to indicate parallelism, the parallelism in the subsequent lines is not indicated by "and." One can see this unique pattern in *Thunder* visually in the layout of lines in these excerpts.

Such assemblages of thematically and grammatically related stanzas that appear to form short poems within the larger poem of *Thunder* itself appear throughout the text. They provide indications on a midrange level how *Thunder* has been put together. When passages such as these as well as individual stanzas are set in relationship to one another, a broader distribution of thematic and syntactical patterns will emerge, revealing the architectonic patterns of *Thunder*.

The Organization of *Thunder*

Having discerned highly sophisticated organizations at the level of single lines, parallelism, stanzas, and groupings of stanzas, one can begin to see how *Thunder* more broadly is organized thematically and syntactically. Instead of alternating self-identity and exhortative passages, there are, in fact, many different types of passages.

The self-designation passages are probably the most characteristic of *Thunder*, but they appear primarily in the first two columns (13 and 14) and at about two-thirds into the poem at columns 18 and 19 (13,50–14,1; 14,9–15; 14,26–32; 18,20–26; 19,4–15; 19,15–35). Mixed forms of self-designations and other types of lines, whether by alternation of self-designation with other forms (15,15–21; 15,22–35; 16,33–17,3) or by a transition from one form to another (16,1–33; 18,27–31; 20,26–21,1) mostly fall in between the "pure" self-designation passages with the exception of two "transition" passages (18,27–31; 20,26–21,1), which begin with one form and end in another. So far, there is an overall pattern to how self-designation

passages are organized, with the purely self-designation passages mostly encircling the mixed forms.

Within this framework, one can look at the short poems already identified (14,32–15,14; 17,15–32; 18,9–18,20), all appear within the central columns of the composition. The rest of the poem's stanzas scattered throughout provide the glue that holds the rest of this together, interrelating with these other sections thematically by introducing, elaborating, concluding, or transitioning a theme–such as the introduction and conclusion of *Thunder* themselves. In short, although the different forms overlap and transition from one to another, one could schematically represent the syntactical organization of *Thunder* as follows:

Self-Designations | Mixed Passages | Short Poems | Mixed Passages | Self-Designations

There are exceptions, overlaps, and all of the other forms, but this pattern appears to provide the architecture that the other more exceptional forms embroider.

The patterns of themes show perhaps even greater sophistication. Much like the syntactical organizational pattern, the thematic patterns are initially difficult to see because of the sheer number of topics discussed in this poem. Yet there are several broader themes that interweave throughout the poem and intersect with one another. The themes rarely are developed at the same point, and, therefore, appear like a succession of thematic blocks, but, in fact, the poet will foreshadow a theme, develop it at a later point, and occasionally retrospectively echo it. Particularly prominent in this regard are the themes of speaking and hearing, knowledge and ignorance, theology broadly construed, and social issues.

Speaking and hearing provide the "bookends" of the poem, appearing most clearly at the beginning and the end (13,7, 11–12; 14,9–15; 15,32–35; 19,20–34; 20,26–33; 21,6, 11–14). Knowledge and ignorance, however, appear more frequently throughout the poem, and is perhaps the clearest example of foreshadowing, development, and echoing, being introduced early (13,12–15; 14,23–27; 16,3–5), developed in the middle of the poem (17,21–22, 30–32; 18,4–5, 8–9, 10–15, 29–35) and then echoed (19,31–32). By contrast, theological language (broadly construed to include "powers") appear mostly late. It may appear in the "power" of the opening lines, but does not receive heightened emphasis until after half-way through the poem (16,24–25; 19,15–20; 21,18–19, 20–32).

Mostly, however, *Thunder* is concerned with different types of social categories, such as familial relationships (13,16–14,9); shame and honor, which is introduced early but receives greater emphasis in the middle sections of the poem (14,27–32; 15,22–30; 16,20–22; 17,15–18); legal language, which appears early with later development (15,13–15; 19,14–15; 20,1–18); and war and peace (14,31–32; 18,23–24). Other singly appearing social categories include the interrelated themes of the stranger and the citizen (18,24–25) and the Greek and the barbarian (16,1–9). The most common social issue handled in the text is the broader category of great and lowly or small, a topic that enmeshes itself in most of the other social themes. Perhaps introduced at the outset (13,15–16), it receives extended discussion several times (14,27–15,14; 17,6–15; 17,18–31; 19,12–14, 29–30; 21,13–20).

The use of foreshadowing, development (sometimes developed in several places), and retrospective echoing, show how the themes are deftly and intricately interwoven with one another: as one theme is being anticipated, another is being developed, while another may be echoed in a single passage. Yet the developments of the passage alone indicate a broader distributive pattern much like the syntactical schematic did.

```
Hearing/Speaking (1)
   Social (1): Family
       Knowledge/Ignorance (1)
           Lowly/Great (1)
   Social (2): Shame
           Lowly/Great (2)
       Knowledge/ Ignorance (2)
           Lowly/ Great (3)
   Social (3): Legal
 Hearing/Speaking (2)
       Theology
```

Again, the developments themselves overlap with one another and there are exceptional themes that do not fit the overarching pattern perfectly, but much like the earlier discussion of syntactical organization, there is a recognizable pattern, in which hearing and speaking broadly frame the discussion, just inside them are social categories, inside of which are knowledge and ignorance (albeit with an important intervening section on lowly and great (3), inside of which are lowly and great sections, placing the second social category of shame at the center of the thematic pattern. Outside of this pattern of developed discussions is the developed discussion of theology.

This development of theology appears in column 21, whereas, as one can see from this pattern, one would expect the conclusion of the poem with the second development of hearing and speaking at the end of column 20. This and other linguistic and stylistic factors have led us to conclude that column 21 was appended to *Thunder* at a later time.[11]

Column 21 picks up on terms, images, and themes that appear in columns 13–20, but handles them very differently, giving a different sense of style and ideology. Continued language and themes include the emphasis on the "name" (14,14–15; 21,11); theology mixed with ontology, or "god" and "being" (16,24–25; 18,27–28; 21,19–20); sin (19,15–17; 21,20–23); and judgment (19,14–15; 20,13–14; 21,19–20). Although there are these thematic similarities, column 21 handles them very differently than their earlier appearances. Stylistically, while each term in the earlier portions was paired paradoxically, there is no paradoxical speech in column 21, indicating a stylistic seem. The terminology turns monistic and ascetic, showing an ideological shift.

Compare, for example, how theology and ontology are handled before column 21 and in column 21. Earlier, statements of being were balanced with nonbeing, "I am being/I am she who is nothing" (18,27–28), while statements of God were equally negated, "I myself am without God/And my God is great" (16,24–25). The paradox of being "being" and "nothing" and being "without God" and with a "God" who is "great" finds no such parallel in the handling of being and God in column 21: "I am he who alone exists" (21,19–20). The juxtaposition of being and nonbeing, of being with and without God, have instead become a highly monistic, perhaps monotheistic, statement only one existing. This passage shifts from bewildering paradoxes to outright statements that recall Exod. 3:14: "I am who I am" or, as translated in the Greek and Coptic Bibles, "I am being."

This shift is matched with the theme of sin. Early statements are again presented with counterstatements in oppositional parallelism: "I myself am without sin, and the root of sin is from within me/I appear to be lust, but inside is self-control" (19,15–17). Being without sin is countered with being the root of sin, lust is countered with self-control. Column 21's handling of these themes of sin and self-control differs: "Since many sweet ideas exist in all kinds of sin/they are uncontrollable and condemning passions/and passing pleasures that people have until they become sober." (21,19–20). Sin is equated with sweet ideas and passing, uncontrollable passions and pleasures. To overcome this, they need to become "sober." The same themes

appear, but have a different evaluation, or, perhaps, are not given a clear value until column 21, which emphasizes self-control over lust, rather than setting them in paradoxical juxtaposition.

The same tendency occurs with the theme of judgment. Early opposing terms are set in juxtaposition without favoring one or the other. For example, early the speaker says, "I am judgment and acquittal" (19,14–15), and, "the judge and favoritism exist within you" (20,13–14). The speaker embodies judgment and its opposing term, acquittal, as well as being the impartial judge and one who plays favorites. These paradoxes are all flattened out in column 21. Here, just following the statement, "I am he who exists alone," the speaker continues, saying, "and no one judges me" (21,19–20).

Finally, column 21 develops a new theme in the context of its monism and asceticism: it speaks of spiritual resurrection. This language comes from the lines, "spirits risen from the dead" (21,17–18), and the final line of the column, "They will live and they will not die again" (21,30–32). Spirits–but not bodies–arising from the dead, and the promise that they will not die "again," which suggests that they had already died once, shows that column 21 promotes the idea of spiritual resurrection. The confluence of monistic, even monotheistic, language, asceticism, and spiritual resurrection all suggest a Christian ascetic behind the composition of column 21, although, by emphasizing "spiritual resurrection," one who would be excluded by the later emergence of "orthodoxy."

In short, while picking up on similar themes, column 21 handles them completely differently. Stylistically, it lacks the usual juxtaposition of opposing terms. While other places in the poem do this (such as the introduction), it never occurs for long and does not necessarily ideologically conflict with the rest of the text. The stylistic shift, however, creates an ideological one as well. While before God is matched with "without god," being with nothing, sinless with the root of sin, judgment with acquittal, judge with favoritism, in Column 21 such opposing juxtapositions are flattened to the one who alone exists, the need to control sin, pleasures, and passions, and being above judgment. Unlike the rest of the poem, column 21 tends toward monism and asceticism and even adds spiritual resurrection. The confluence of thematic patterns (column 21 falls outside the broader thematic pattern), the stylistic disparities, and the discontinuous treatment of themes, all indicate that column 21 was most likely appended at a later date.

Throughout, *Thunder* has shown itself to be a poetic composition of great artistry. Although it could have been translated from Greek, its current sonorous Coptic soundscape creates a rich texture

of sounds through very dense alliteration, wordplay, rhythmic lines, and rhyme. Yet this Coptic play on sounds is only part of the poem's artistry. From single lines, groups of parallel lines, stanzas, groups of stanzas, to broader syntactical and thematic patterns, *Thunder* constitutes a highly sophisticated and intricately organized composition. The broader patterns of concentric patterns of forms and themes create the framework for a well-wrought tapestry. The current Coptic version of *Thunder*, therefore, demands further attention as an important and startlingly beautiful ancient poem that still speaks across the ages.

CHAPTER 9

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PERFORMING *THUNDER*

What scholarship exists on *Thunder* has almost exclusively treated it as a text. All scholarly analyses have viewed it as a written text. There is, of course, no denying that *Thunder* is a text–indeed, the discovery of the manuscript of *Thunder* is of central importance. *But* treating it simply as a written reality misses much of what it was in the ancient world, much of what it already is in the (post) modern world, and perhaps much of what it might become. This chapter explores the strong possibility that *Thunder* was a dramatically performed event or ritual in its ancient contexts. This is motivated by real indications in the text that this was the case, as well as by the fascination of twenty-first-century artists with *Thunder*.

There is indeed ready "textual" indication that *Thunder* was much more than a text in the ancient world. This, of course, is true of a wide range of ancient "texts." Modernity has related to many oral, oral-scribal, ritual, entertainment, and performative literatures from the ancient world primarily as written actualities. Even though ancient songs, stories, sayings, and dramas act now mostly as written matter, in the ancient world they clearly had a life far beyond the textual. As performed events, these ancient "texts" were almost certain to have participated in additional levels of meaning and expression through the settings in which they were performed, audience participation and responses, repetitions of tone and scene, and variations in what was said and sung. In one sense, we can say that most writings in the Hellenistic Mediterranean were performed, in that reading was seldom done alone. But *Thunder* seems to show signs of activity beyond recitation and can also be differentiated from some ancient, more textual, material like annals of commerce, rules and laws, and to some extent, letters.

Thunder was probably a performance for those who related to it. Unfortunately, scholarship on *Thunder* has not yet proceeded along this line enough to know what kind of performance it may have been. Ironically, the primary methods for thinking about this issue of *Thunder* as a performance are literary–that is, based within the crafts of analyzing written material.

WAYS *THUNDER* HINTS AT PERFORMANCE

Parallelism

The text of *Thunder* shows several strong characteristics of performance. It is, for instance, important to notice the ancient rhythmic scheme of parallel clauses or phrases. Much ancient–especially Semitic–poetry repeats phrases with slightly different content to create rhythm. Scholars have termed this rhythmic characteristic "parallelism," which in *Thunder* is more obvious in Coptic. This chapter reviews briefly the general theme of parallelism in *Thunder* using the English translation. This provides a limited set of examples in order to underscore the possible performance of *Thunder*.

The three parallel phrases near the beginning of the self-presentation of *Thunder*'s first person voice are typical of this kind of near eastern rhythms in song and poetry:

> I am the first and the last
> I am she who is honored and she who is mocked
> I am the whore and the holy woman
> I am the wife and the virgin
> I am he the mother and the daughter
> I am the limbs of my mother (13,16–21)

The first two lines mirror one another. Line two repeats with small variations line one. "The first and the last" are mirrored and elaborated socially in "she who is honored" and "she who is mocked." The second two lines do the same, with each clause comparing and contrasting two kinds of a woman's social/sexual status ("whore/holy woman," "wife/virgin"). And the third two lines hold up in parallel clauses the relationship between the mother and the daughter.

This parallelism is common in the ancient near east. Psalm 103:15,16, for instance, is a song and/or prayer example of such performed rhythmic parallelism:

> As for mortals, their days are like grass;
> They flourish like a flower of the field.

The oracle of Isaiah 25 exhibits similar rhythmic parallelism:

> And God will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples;
>
> The sheet that is spread over all the nations God will swallow up death forever.

Sometimes literary studies of these standard parallels in near eastern literature underplay the rhythmic effect of these parallel clauses.[1] For near eastern cultures the effect of these parallels was most powerful when the words were performed, since the repetitions in twosomes established a rhythm. The parallelisms are not simply, or even primarily, repeating the clause for purposes of emphasis. Rather, the impact rhythm makes as such creates an impression as sound. *Thunder*'s heavy use of these parallelisms indicates a performative dimension to the piece itself.

At the same time, the way *Thunder* uses this typical near eastern parallelism is–as has been already noted–more multidimensional. Whereas oral recitation of texts in the ancient world often relied on such parallelisms for effect, once *Thunder* sets the parallel structure, quite quickly it starts playing with and complicating it. It surprises the hearer with unexpected elements in the parallelism, and even seems to set the hearer up to be taken aback at the way the parallels develop. One sees a bit of this even in the three standard parallels quoted earlier, particularly in the second set of parallels. Here the comparison between "the prostitute" and "the holy one" is technically and performatively parallel with "the wife" and "the virgin," but only ironically in terms of the meaning. That is, the rhythm of the parallel words and parallel sentences is clear, but this parallel ironically ends up making almost unthinkable comparisons between the "whore" and the "holy woman" and the "wife" and the "virgin." As has been emphasized earlier, *Thunder* twists the conventional meaning of performed parallel rhythmic structures in order to undermine the conventional roles of (mostly) women. In this case, one expects "the whore" to be compared to something like "the evil one" or "the dangerous one." But when *Thunder* compares the "whore" with the "holy woman" (or in the parallel line the comparison of the fecund "wife" with the abstinent "virgin"), the line parallelism ends up granting a performative structure to unthinkable comparisons. This clever elaboration of parallelism goes even further.

Thunder 14,26–29 serves as one of many examples of this turning of the rhythmic parallelism into humor, conceptual adventurism, and/or mysteriousness:

> I am both awareness and obliviousness
> I am humiliation and pride.

Here each of the two clauses contains a contradiction, and therefore helps in an ironic fashion to establish a parallelism, even while stretching the hearer's imagination. Each clause stretching the imagination with contradiction becomes the terms of the parallelism itself, all the while maintaining the rhythmic parallelism. The performance of the parallel structure gives a frame for the unthinkable comparisons and contrasts in *Thunder*'s elaboration of relationships.

Often then *Thunder* in its elaborations breaks out of the traditional twoness of parallelisms. For instance,

> I am the midwife and she who hasn't given birth
> I am the comfort of my labor pains
> I am the bride and the bridegroom
> And it is my husband who gave birth to me
> I am my father's mother, my husband's sister, and he is my child
>   (13,25–32)

cannot really be charted as proper parallels, although they continue to display some of the technical characteristics of classic parallelism. Here the irony seems to overwhelm the parallels, even while the parallel structure displays itself in order to be undone. The sequence starts relatively tamely with the first parallel established through the topic of birth, although even here there is irony in the implicit contrast between the midwife, the one who facilitates birth, and the one who does not give birth. This then is complicated with a third parallel, in which the speaker unites comfort and pain in birth. The next parallel line explodes any expectation, with the one who is bride and bridegroom suddenly becoming the one who is born from a husband. This is then spun out of control with the quirky combination of paternal grandmother, sister-in-law, and child all in the same identity.

Much of this book examines extensively the delightful and imaginative meaning-making dimensions to this kind of persistent irony and creativity in *Thunder*. Here it is cited primarily because it is another strong sign that *Thunder* ought to be performed. These playful twists of the parallels in continuous ironic elaboration indicate an improvisational character to the piece. In this way, it is quite clear that the "text" actually seeks its own destabilization–it encourages improvisation and thinking about the unexpected. Although the tensive twists of the comparisons are deeply creative, their humor and infectious imagination end up suggesting that one could continue their "logic" by making up one's own risky, category-breaking comparisons. *Thunder* invites an ongoing improvisational elaboration of its themes. As such,

it is at least performance, and perhaps nearly "anti-text," if one thinks of text as stable. Very typical of performance, it observes certain artistic structure and then uses that structural stability to anchor the performance, which in turn takes the liberty of improvising the content.

Rhymes That Give the Words Tone and Rhythm

This, of course, is only evident in the Coptic itself. Such tonal dimensions of *Thunder* occur relatively often. They have been extensively outlined in the Coptic analysis of Chapter 8. These frequent rhymes depend on them being heard out loud. That is, it is only when they are said out loud that they have any effect at all. Perhaps even more than parallelism rhymes depend on performance for their effectiveness.[2] Since when ancient texts in general were read, they were almost always read aloud, in the case of rhymes, the only performance necessary for rhymes to be effective would have been the more or less obligatory reading out loud. To a certain extent, the reading of almost all texts out loud could be seen as a narrowing of the distinction between text and performance. That is, in this sense all ancient texts–inasmuch as they were read (out loud)–had performative dimensions.

However, attention to the ways rhyme makes meaning within a text also underlines the role of the performative in bringing out the meaning of any ancient text. Rhymes in the reading out loud of texts were certainly enhanced or repressed by the ways the texts were read. Whether the rhymes were accentuated in the reading or not would have made a difference. A professional speech maker, an actor, or a musician's performance of a text would have brought much more of the rhymes out into the open than the obligatory reading of a student or government functionary. The playfulness of *Thunder* indicates a possibility that its rhymes would have attracted more emphatic performance. Chapter 8 details the exceptional attention *Thunder* pays to rhymes.

OF WHAT KIND OF PERFORMANCE MIGHT *THUNDER* HAVE BEEN A PART ?

This chapter has shown so far that *Thunder* like many ancient documents may have been performed and that there are important literary clues that it was performed dramatically and with possible settings that encouraged improvisation. It bears asking then what sort of performance this may have been. This unfortunately is an extremely

complex question whose answer requires more research than has been done on *Thunder*. There are already clear indications that *Thunder*'s words exist partially in other "texts,"[3] raising the possibility of a larger social context participating in *Thunder*. Where questions surrounding performance contexts of a "text" have been partially answered by scholars regarding other ancient works, these answers have depended on extensive research. Such research would focus on both matching specific kinds of performance in the ancient world with the literary patterns in *Thunder* and an acute analysis of the particular ways performance functions in relationship to *Thunder*'s attention to particular social issues of its day (e.g., gender roles and being thrown out or cast down).

It is not yet possible to show the kind of performance of which *Thunder* might have been a part. There are some indications that narrow the field, which can be pursued without any final resolution. The objective of the rest of this chapter is to examine and assess some possibilities for the ancient performance setting of *Thunder* without settling on something definitive.

The relatively general suggestion of the pioneer translator of *Thunder*, George W. MacRae, that *Thunder* is "hymnic"[4] may not make much progress in this regard. While the generally poetic character of ancient hymns does apply to *Thunder*, many other characteristics of such hymns do not seem to apply to *Thunder* as a whole.[5] Since smaller parts of *Thunder* do show some elements of hymnic structure, it might have been a kind of performance that involved hymns. But it would not be accurate to characterize the piece's larger performance simply as hymnic.[6]

This book's literary analysis of *Thunder*'s improvisational bent suggests a certain kind of performance that involved improvisation. A wide range of ancient rituals possessed improvisational character,[7] including prophetic oracles,[8] singing at banquets,[9] the reading of the entrails of sacrificed animals,[10] and mourning wailing.[11] The next steps in researching a more exact performance setting for *Thunder*'s improvising would involve both a careful analysis of the kinds of improvisation in each of these performance settings and an attention to which of these performance settings had similar social interests to those found in *Thunder*. Initially, for instance, noting that the kind of improvisations at Greco-Roman rituals for reading the entrails of slaughter make specific reference to the entrails themselves helps eliminate that performance setting from consideration. Although both *Thunder* and the reading of entrails ritual in the ancient world rely on improvisation, the lack of reference in *Thunder* to entrails or body parts makes

it unlikely that *Thunder's* performance was at such a ritual. Similarly, although the improvisational wailing at near eastern funerals is eloquent and extensive, the tone of *Thunder* is far from funereal. On the other hand, prophetic oracles or singing at banquets cannot be so easily ruled out as ancient improvisational performances, since both their form of improvisation and social interests might have contained a piece like *Thunder*. As noted, this kind of analysis in relationship to a number of ancient improvised performances could be explored at a more extensive level.

Although it is not yet possible to place *Thunder* in a particular kind or series of social settings/performances, *Thunder's* hyperattentiveness to gender suggests some additional clues. It seems possible that *Thunder* was located within a situation in which gender was being actively contested.[12] One would then begin research on possible social locations for the performance of *Thunder* in social and ritual contexts in which gender contestation is occurring or called for. An example of such performative gender contestation in the Greco-Roman period would be the experimentation that occurred at meals relative to whether women could attend, recline, and/or speak. But it seems increasingly likely that other ritual performances (e.g., declarations of divorce under Roman law, pledges to certain voluntary associations, or ceremonies asserting property rights) also contested formerly clear gender restrictions, so it would be premature to match *Thunder's* gender contestation definitively with that of the meals.

Similarly, one would wonder whether *Thunder's* attention to social outcasts (e.g., barbarians and those cast down, as Chapter 6 discusses) might also point toward a particular kind of ritual performance. James C. Scott's study of how ritual performance can affect subtle challenge to established social ranking has shown clearly the important role of ritual in subordinated groups' resistance. Scott notices the powerful ways that these subtle changes in ritual performance can adjust one's self-understanding and understanding of the world, and in the process effect what he calls a "hidden transcript."[13] In one of Scott's examples, he amplifies David Gilmore's study[14] of the carnival rituals of Andalusia. Gilmore studied how in the Andalusian carnival performances a "growing animosity … between agricultural laborers and landowners" was acted out and socially processed by the laborers. The laborers used the carnival performances as occasions to ridicule the landowners in a culturally permissible way, eventually occasioning a retreat by the landowners from some of the festival itself. Scott concludes:

Two aspects of this schematic account bear emphasis. First, it reminds us that such rituals are far from static but are rather likely to reflect the changing structure and antagonisms within a society. Second, carnival is, par excellence, an occasion for recrimination from subordinate groups, presumably because normal power relations operate to silence them. (1990:174)

Thunder's tendency to change the terms of relationships and identities is very close to performances' ability to help think about change through nuances and shifts of language and gesture. In the same way that rituals shift gestures slightly from the expected order to challenge social order, *Thunder* takes predictable relationships and twists them. *Thunder*'s parallelism, for instance, sets up expectations of relationships between women around the event of birth, and then those relationships are twisted through unexpected elements in the ensuing parallels. This is very similar to the twists inherent in the Andalusian carnival ritual.[15] *Thunder*'s intense attention to both contested gender and social marginalization may well have been amplified in ritual performance of one sort or another. *Thunder*'s fascination with improvisation and paradox would have fit well with such a performative challenge to existing gender or social patterns. More research would be necessary to test and refine these performance possibilities. Of particular interest would be a search for public festivals in near eastern/ Greco-Roman settings, like the Saturnalia, that on one level endorsed the status quo, but also encouraged the ironic tones of an expression like *Thunder*. The Saturnalia was indeed explicitly a festival for reversing social order for at least the duration of the festival itself. In actuality it seems to have exhibited a range of performance from quite rowdy mockery of given social roles to *pro forma* observation of the festival with only token social role reversals.

Inasmuch as one thinks about *Thunder* as having been performed, its ability to bend, shift, and nuance accepted meaning increases. For *Thunder*'s text to have made fun of established gender roles or to have called attention to the connections between a person who is humiliated and one who is honored has a certain power. But for those same words to have become part of an event that has a palpable rhythm, audience participation and/or response, rhymes pronounced out loud, and spontaneous or rehearsed improvisations multiplies their power. In an actual performance the graphic and comical language of *Thunder* can easily be pictured in relationship to a play or a dance. With an audience in attendance, one can easily hear the murmurs of protest and the delighted laughter. Or *Thunder*'s constant impulse toward improvisation is not at all far from Philo's description of an Egyptian group that

performed music all night long as men and women together created their own songs on the spot.[16] In such a performance, the participating singers doing the improvisations can be seen as those whose own complex social identity was being called forth.

CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCE OF *THUNDER*

That *Thunder* is the subject of numerous twentieth- and twenty-first-century performances does not seem entirely coincidental. That filmmakers,[17] rock musicians,[18] composers,[19] and dancers[20] have all been drawn to the performance of the text with significant public approval seems to indicate that the piece has certain inherently performancial dimensions. Chapter 10 summarizes and reviews these contemporary performances. That both women and men are claiming *Thunder*'s words as a way to be recognized as something more than the social roles assigned them is in itself an unfolding drama. As a part of this book's conclusion, the next chapter examines and assesses a number of these contemporary performances in more detail. That assessment, as a part of our overall conclusions about *Thunder*'s significance for our own time, points to the powerful ways *Thunder* is currently engaging major thinkers of our time. Those *performing Thunder* in the twenty-first century signal a wider range of meaning for this text, by virtue of both the expanded audience and the more varied levels of expression.

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M A K I N G   M E A N I N G   O F   *T H U N D E R*
I N   A N C I E N T   A N D   C O N T E M P O R A R Y
C O N T E X T S

This final chapter has two goals: (1) to summarize major proposals for the interpretation of *Thunder* discussed in the preceding chapters and the translation notes, and (2) to reflect on the significance of *Thunder* for twenty-first-century readers. As such, we explicitly seek to avoid a general tendency in scholarship about the ancient world to work only on a technical level in the study of an ancient work, evading the task of analyzing the major meaning-making components.[1] Such a tendency would violate both the power of *Thunder* and the serious contemporary attention already paid to *Thunder* since its discovery in the mid-twentieth century. *Thunder* clearly deserves serious thought and expression about its place in both the ancient world and the twenty-first century. Its striking voice calls forth such responses. Both this new translation and our scholarly analysis make important advances in this discussion. A way of testing this assertion, we believe, would be to follow this dictum: inasmuch as *Thunder* does not make you uncomfortable, our translation has failed. We propose this dictum not as a wild attempt to be provocative, but as an effort to do justice to the powerful and evocative poetry of *Thunder* in our translation.

The Major Literary and Historical Proposals

Thundering Gender, Engendering Identity

Thunder's explicit and broad use of gender creatively deconstructs a wide range of assumptions about what it means to be women and

men. It accomplishes this in several ways. First, images of and about women dominate its language, and, as such, disorient and invert social order and identity patterns. Second, its paradoxical, ironic, and inverted combinations of gendered language undo assumptions and create an open space where the assumptions had held sway. Third, it bends gender by comically mixing masculine and feminine categories, calling into question the conventional gender boundaries and connections between people.

This stunning set of moves by *Thunder* relative to gender is done in the service of challenging, recalibrating, and deepening identity processes. *Thunder* accomplishes this, perhaps more powerfully than almost any text, and as such deserves to become a literary classic. It does this by using and twisting the conventions of ancient identity assertion, particularly in its commitment to the powerful (perhaps divine) "I," whose self-revelation makes for most of the content of the piece. This twisted "I" corresponds hauntingly to twentieth- and twenty-first-century hyper-attention to the question of "who am I." *Thunder* also exhibits and reveals the violence of "having" or "making" human identity. It lets the woundedness and raw incompleteness of human identity stay revealed, while still holding up the possibility of provisional and negotiated identity. Through the combination of its overwhelming ironies, the focus on the "I," and its endlessly elaborative and improvisational rhythm, it opens up a space for provisional and embodied identities beyond the dominant presumptions. It provides a substantial subtext of other, non-gender-specific social dynamics and identity constructions (e.g., Greek and barbarian) that opens up *Thunder*'s gender-bended process of provisional and embodied identity process for other language worlds as well.

The Parody of Aretalogy

Previous scholarship on *Thunder* has rightly noticed its connection to the ancient literary and performance form of the aretalogy, or the self-revealing speech of a divine persona. Our analysis has also proceeded to show how *Thunder* parodies these divine revealer statements in the ancient world. Whereas the standard speeches of the self-revealing gods provide long lists of obvious virtues and abilities, *Thunder* intentionally presents an "I" that embraces its own contradictions, undoings, and humiliations. While the regular aretalogies served to confirm social power in the hands of the (composers of the) divine revealer, *Thunder* shakes the apparent sureness of identity and the social order

it represents. This parody of aretalogy not only decenters categories of human identity, it also reorders the character of theological language. In staying within a discourse about a more-or-less divine being, yet undercutting and reading ironically all affirmations about such being, *Thunder* opens up a possibility of doing theology in a provisional (not absolute) tense.

Thunder and Egypt

Previous scholarship has assumed that the existing text of *Thunder* in the Coptic language was a translation from the Greek. This analysis of *Thunder* has raised serious questions about the probability of an originally Greek *Thunder*. Although it is not responsible to deny that such a Greek *Thunder* could have existed, this analysis has shown strong reason to consider *Thunder* as possessing a distinctive, indigenously Coptic Egyptian voice. This includes internal textual sympathy for Egypt and Egyptians, extensive word meanings whose nuances rely on Coptic expression, and significant poetic and performance configurations that depend on Coptic for their structure. More research needs to be done, but sustained literary analysis of *Thunder* points toward a revision of the Greek *Thunder* assumption and a serious exploration of *Thunder* as a Coptic document with roots in Egyptian social consciousness.

Thunder as Serious Address to Identity
and Social Formation in the Ancient World

Previous scholarship has scratched its head at what to make of *Thunder* in the ancient world. *Thunder* is indeed quite unusual for the ancient Mediterranean. There are few, if any, parallels. At first, the vocabulary can seem deracinated from the kind of social contexts exhibited in most literature of that time. Initial impressions that *Thunder* is about an otherworldly, divine realm are quite understandable, since the piece's "I" speaks as a god(dess).

Yet our analysis has quite quickly found reason to place *Thunder* in the middle of important ancient Mediterranean social negotiations. In the first place, the (perhaps divine) "I" is revealed in strikingly vivid and contrasting terms of women's experience in a culture dominated by men. Second, a significant portion of *Thunder* is devoted to the Greco-Roman prejudicial categories of Greek and barbarian, with the "I" making its only unequivocal identification as "a barbarian among barbarians." Third, *Thunder* regularly reverts to

portraying the "I" as being cast down into humiliating social contexts, contexts not coincidentally mostly inhabited by women and "barbarians."

When *Thunder* is placed within two important ancient Mediterranean systems of social order (patron-client and honor-shame), its voice is heard clearly as deconstructive of both systems. By using ironically the ancient Mediterranean aretalogical form of establishing the patron, *Thunder* takes jabs at patron privilege. In giving the powerful "I" numerous roles associated with shame and honor simultaneously, *Thunder* mocks and evacuates societal distinctions based on this system. *Thunder* needs then to be brought into conversation with the range of ancient Mediterranean symbol sets that express social values of one kind or another. It cannot simply be relegated to cosmic personages, feminine ideals, or philosophical speculation. It provides a sophisticated and engaged social critique that deserves further scholarly investigation.

The Literary and Performance Organization of Thunder

Our literary analysis of *Thunder* has directly challenged much of scholarship's assumptions that *Thunder* is "gnostic." Reaffirming George MacRae's initial rejection of the gnostic label for *Thunder*, this book has–following Karen King–doubted the overall usefulness of this label.

This book hopes to advance literary analysis of *Thunder by having found* extended patterns of both rhythm and rhyme. The sets of "I" statements have been shown to be in clear patterns. This has led to the identification of a series of smaller units within the larger body. Only in the next stages of scholarship will it be clear what forms these smaller units take (e.g., do they represent a set of smaller songs?) and what to make of the sequences in which these smaller units stand. But this book provides the first basic organization of the *Thunder* beyond the columns of the original manuscript.

The extensive rhymes and rhythms of the text, combined with its explicit address to hearers, have helped develop an initial proposal that *Thunder*'s place in ancient Mediterranean society was probably within performances. We have suggested a number of ways that the basic structure and voice fit within ritual analysis, but have left open what kind of performance *Thunder* might have been.

Finally, in terms of literary organization, our analysis has shown clearly that column 21 of the manuscript comes from another level of authorship than the rest of the poem. Formal, vocabu-

lary, and ideological differences between column 21 and the rest of *Thunder* have been established. What this says exactly about the process of *Thunder*'s authorship and how column 21 might or might not relate to other portions of *Thunder* must await further scholarship.

THUNDER AND TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY MEANING MAKING

There have already been significant artistic uses and interpretations of *Thunder* in the contemporary world. The works of Toni Morrison, Umberto Eco, Julie Dash, Jordan and Ridley Scott, and a variety of musicians demonstrate that *Thunder* does already have meaning in our time. Their uses of the text must be seen as an indication of a broader, although somewhat underground, contemporary constituency for *Thunder*.

Morrison's work with *Thunder* has generated the most studied conversation. As noted in the preface, excerpts from *Thunder* occur in the Morrison novels *Jazz* and *Paradise*. In both cases the references occur in the novel's initial quote. In *Jazz*,[2] however, the reference is most likely more extended. There the novel's narrator is not identified, indeed seems to resist being identified, and a major clue within the novel itself is the narrator's reference to *Thunder*'s "I" in the quote at the beginning of the novel. In addition, the gender of the narrator is curiously problematic throughout the novel.[3]

The Scott film also has received considerable attention because it has been used by Prada in television and internet commercials. Prada commissioned Jordan Scott and her better known film director father, Ridley Scott, to do the film. The work, initially introduced at the Berlin Film Festival of 2005, uses a good deal of the text of *Thunder* as a narrated voice underneath shots of a young woman in Berlin in a cab, the subway, and a night club. She carries a book that she is reading and thinking about, and seems to be *Thunder*. She is dressed in high fashion, and changes clothes both on camera and off.

The Scott film is a haunting cinematic evocation of *Thunder*, not only because it seems acutely sensitive to *Thunder*'s language, power, and poetry, but also because of its compromised status as a commercial for a business promoting elitist and caricatured images of women. Quite beautifully, the film manages to assimilate *Thunder*'s themes. It

does, however, also miss the violence of the text, and stands in ironic opposition to *Thunder'*s basic interest in leveling badly unequal social relations. The Scott film encourages its women viewers to identify with the binaries of the text (rather than to see how these identifiers fail), ostensibly so that they might feel motivated to "put on" these different guises via expensive clothes.

On the other hand, Julie Dash's 1991 award-winning[4] feature film, *Daughters of the Dust*, seems to take a number of the social chords of *Thunder* quite seriously. The film opens with an extensive voice over of *Thunder* as the Gullah setting of an extended African American family off the coast of South Carolina comes into view. The film itself hauntingly explores the complexities of these Gullah women as they contemplate leaving their island home for more mainstream America. The film evokes a kind of complex situation of alienation, oppression, and dignity not at all unlike suggested in this book of *Thunder'*s ancient social and gender implications. Angeletta KM Gourdine's study of the film[5] describes the film itself in terms very much like the *Thunder* text in the film: "Dash rhetorically creates alternative blackwomen selves, and her rhetoric is imagistic.… The film offers a range of image possibilities–personalities, temperaments, creeds, and complexions-all of which fold into and onto each other… Through a subtle yet powerful series of choices in dress and casting, Dash directs viewers away from traditional(ly) limiting images and ideas of blackwomanhood." The contrast between the ways these two films integrate *Thunder* relative to women's consciousness is striking. Although both use film in powerful combination with the *Thunder* text, Dash's film engages a complexity in identity that the Scott film seems to skirt.

Umberto Eco's reference to *Thunder* opens the fiftieth chapter of his novel *Foucault's Pendulum*, with the lines: "I am the first and the last, the honored one and the hated, the saint and the prostitute." In this chapter there is an extended scene in which the primary characters discuss what they characterize as the "Sophia" of ancient Egyptian tradition. This "Sophia," according to the characters in the novel, is a female divinity and part of a complex cosmology of ancient Egypt. In the chapter, two of the main characters evoke this Sophia as someone they might claim and imitate in breaking out of conventional morality. The reference to *Thunder* at the beginning of the chapter is almost certainly meant to evoke this Sophia the characters discuss, and more particularly a "gnostic" Sophia. As discussed in Chapter 2, there does seem to be a complicated relationship between *Thunder'*s "I" and the ancient figure of Sophia, and in Chapter 3

we have rejected the idea of a "gnostic" Sophia.[6] In Eco's chapter, the "gnostic" hypothesis is, in the end, not a particularly important dimension on the presentation of the *Thunder* "I"/Sophia. However, the conversation partners in Eco's chapter do attempt to make this "I"/Sophia into a metaphysical character not entirely consistent with *Thunder* itself. On the other hand, Eco uses *Thunder* and Sophia to clear a space for a theology, spirituality, or ethics that could provide some alternative to conventional imaginations. This, of course, is somewhat in keeping with both *Thunder* and–to a certain, but lesser, extent–Sophia.

The many musical treatments of *Thunder* vary greatly in quality and the ways the text is used. The musical composition of Julia Haines, which uses primarily solo voice and Celtic harp, deserves special attention. The CD (Ahowl/BMI) carries the title of *Thunder*, and the composition is 21 minutes long, using most of the text, and based primarily on MacRae's translation. It was the primary artistic work performed at the Society of Biblical Literature's conference and celebration at Haverford College of the fiftieth anniversary of the discovery of the Nag Hammadi texts. The composition and performance are strong and delight in the nuances of *Thunder* itself.

Beyond the existing contemporary interpretations of *Thunder*, we can see other important meaning-making possibilities. The appropriate question for this investigation of *Thunder*'s sociocultural meaning in the ancient world is whether *Thunder* also has promise for sociocultural meaning making in our day. Here we are less sanguine about the possibilities. Although we insist that *Thunder* was strongly rooted in social, cultural, and perhaps even political struggles in its own day, its vocabulary is probably less easily transferred to the twenty-first-century world of meaning. This seems relatively clear since *Thunder*'s sociocultural polemic in favor of those slandered as barbarians and against the "Greeks" is relatively similar–even in vocabulary–to the polemic of the far better known apostle Paul. Paul's vocabulary on this front has not been particularly successful in making social meaning in our day, although several scholars are currently investigating this vocabulary to support the larger project of New Testament and Roman Empire studies now gaining a foothold in the academy.[7] Broader connections are beginning to be made by the general public concerning the intersections of religion and empire, especially in the current political climate of the United States. While this type of meaning making has just begun in regard to *Thunder*, it is possible that *Thunder* will be able to contribute to this larger movement.

On another level, *Thunder* has important possibilities for contemporary meaning making around identity. "Who am I?" has been a persistent question of the western world for at least 500 years and for much of the world for at least the last century. The process of what C.G. Jung called individuation has been central to many dimensions of identity during this time, calling forth culture-wide enterprises as diverse as the novel, psychoanalysis, autobiography, Protestantism, and free enterprise. At the same time, "identity politics" emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century to pose questions around self-understanding relative to social justice for specific oppressed demographics. "Who am I" as an individual intersected with "Who am I?" in relationship to larger units of social belonging including African American, woman, queer, Hispanic, and those otherly abled.

Thunder offers significant meaning possibilities at the intersection of individuation and identity politics, with particular address to both the potentials and failures of individuation and identity politics frames of reference. As noted, some of the basic elements of *Thunder* have provocative potential for addressing the persistent "Who am I?" of the (post) modern present.

Almost certainly the most promising possibilities for contemporary identity relate to *Thunder*'s focus on gender and the complexities of gender as pivotal to the "Who am I?" question. *Thunder*'s "I" concentrates much of its attention on terms related to who various women appear to be. This attention to the role of gender and sexuality relative to identity mirrors much of role of gender in the past 200 years of sexual politics, psychology, cinema, theater, and literature's search for identity. The sophisticated and complex consciousness of *Thunder* concerning the simultaneous relativity and importance of gender with reference to the "I" matches well with contemporary postmodern identity searches. This holds especially in that the formerly dominant categories of individuation and identity politics have proved severely flawed on the one hand and still germane on the other as the search for the elusive "I" proceeds. *Thunder*'s poetic and ironic portrait can be a resource in this search.

This is especially true inasmuch as *Thunder*'s constant challenging and dismantling of gender and other identity components is always accompanied by the persistent "I." That is, *Thunder* offers a combined set of perspectives in which final categories of identity are continually critiqued and dismantled, while the possibility of a provisional and persistent "I" remains. These aspects of *Thunder* seem especially germane to today's (post) modern search for identity.

As noted in this chapter's "Thundering Gender, Engendering Identity" section, *Thunder* seems to be a particularly evocative and flexible vehicle in pursuing (post) modern identity through its ability to open "up a space for provisional and embodied identities beyond the dominant presumptions." Contemporary meaning making needs this kind of persistent and open-ended search for provisional and embodied identities. Here either the actual text of *Thunder* or its open-ended rhetorical strategy with different text and content may be interesting to contemporary artists, psychologists, theologians, or philosophers. Since there are elements in *Thunder* that encourage performed improvisation, it may be that artists/performers in our day can use *Thunder* as the basis for improvised and elaborated expressions that go substantially beyond the ancient text. It is our hope that this book can provide resources for those already engaged in *Thunder*-related meaning making in our day and impetus for responsible new efforts in the same arena.

THE THUNDER: PERFECT MIND,
ANNOTATED COPTIC TEXT AND
ENGLISH TRANSLATION

[**13.**1][1] ϯⲉⲃⲣⲟⲛⲧⲏ:[2] ⲛⲟⲩⲥ[3] ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲗⲉⲓⲟⲥ |

[ⲛ̄]ⲧⲁⲩⲧⲁⲟⲩⲟⲉⲓ[4] ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲛ̄ | ϭⲟⲙ·[5]

    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲓ̈ⲉ̄ⲓ̄ ϣⲁ ⲛⲉⲧ|ⲙⲉⲉⲩⲉ ⲉⲣⲟⲓ̈·

    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲁⲩϭⲓⲛⲉ ⲙ̄|ⲙⲟⲓ̈ ϩⲛ̄ ⲛⲉⲧϣⲓⲛⲉ ⲛ̄ⲥⲱⲉⲓ·

ⲉ|[ⲛ]ⲁⲩ[6] ⲉⲣⲟⲉⲓ ⲛⲉⲧⲙⲉⲉⲩⲉ ⲉⲣⲟⲓ̈· |

    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛ̄ⲣⲉϥⲥⲱⲧⲙ̄ ⲥⲱⲧⲙ̄ ⲉⲣⲟⲓ̈ |

ⲛⲉⲧϭⲟϣⲧ̄ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲏⲧ· ϣⲟⲡⲧ̄ | ⲉⲣⲱⲧⲛ̄·

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1 This Coptic text layout of *Thunder* is the first attempt to present the Coptic text itself in a poetic format. The standard critical editions (in English by George W. MacRae and in French by Paul-Hubert Poirier) rightly displayed the layout of the text in terms of columns and lines as they appear in the MS. This layout allows one to identify more easily the patterns in the language, sonoric density, general poetic themes, parallelism, and even rhyme. For some brief explanations on the criteria by which we have laid out the Coptic text in terms of line breaks, indentations, and stanza breaks, see Chapter 9. Our English translation, for the most part, follows the Coptic in terms of stanza breaks, but some of the lines have been altered for ease of the English prose. For an attempt of a similar English layout, see MacRae and Parrot, "The Thunder: Perfect Mind (VI, 2)," in *The Nag Hammadi Library,* ed. Robinson, 297-303, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1997. The reader will find, however, that we follow very different criteria for stanza breaks and line indentations than found in MacRae and Parrot. Throughout, these notes will not note the many discrepancies between our Coptic layout and English translation layouts, for they are too many, but they will transparently discuss how the stanzas are formed through factors such as shifts in syntax, theme, mood, prevalence of particular poetic devices, and more specific indicators.

2 Schenke and Bethge had read ~ ⲛⲉⲃⲣⲟⲛⲧ ⲏ, or "Nebront, or," citing the parallel in *Gos. Eve.* See Schenke, Review of Robinson et al., *Facsimile Edition: Codex VI, OLZ* 69 (1974), col. 230-231. ϯⲉⲃⲣⲟⲛⲧⲏ is Krause's reading, followed by MacRae and Cherix. According to MacRae (236, n. 13,1), Schenke later accepted the reading of ~ ~ϯⲉⲃⲣⲟⲛⲧⲏ in personal correspondence with Robinson (October 2, 1976).

3 ⲛⲟⲩⲥ does not have either a definite or an indefinite article. This occasionally occurs in this text, including our reconstruction of the very next line (see note 11 with ϩⲁⲓ̈). The word ⲛⲟⲩⲥ itself only appears twice more in the text (18.9, 19.32).

4 Reconstruction by Krause.

5 Krause, followed by everyone else, reconstructs this word as [ⲧ] ~ ϭⲟⲙ, but we have determined that there is not enough room on the line to insert a ⲧ without breaking with the left-hand margin of the MS by one letter.

6 Reconstruction by Krause. Cf. Poirier. The verb ⲛⲁⲩ typically takes a prefixed ⲁ to create an imperative, but ⲉ is used here instead. Subachmimic, and Fayyumic for that matter, often uses an ⲉ where Sahidic uses an ⲁ, but the Subachmimic imperative in this case would typically be ⲁⲛⲉⲩ (Till, *Koptische Dialektgrammatik,* 8-11, 51).

THE THUNDER:[7] PERFECT MIND[89]

I was sent from within power	2
I came to those pondering me.	
And I was found among those seeking me	
Look at me, all[10] you who contemplate me	6
Audience,[11] hear me	7
Those expecting me, receive me	

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[7] This word, the Greek word *bronte* has been transliterated into the Coptic. The word does not occur in the text itself of the piece. In the Hebrew Bible and subsequent Jewish and Christian traditions, thunder often accompanies a theophany, underscoring God's power; it is the "thunder of the almighty" (Ex. 20:16; Ezek. 1:24; cf. Job 26:14). Thunder also characterizes a divine, angelic, or heavenly voice. Emphasizing the powerful effect of a theophany alongside the "thunder" of God's voice and reflecting upon the Sinai theophany as depicted in Ex. 20, Ps. 18:13 reads, "The LORD also thundered in the heavens / and the most High uttered his voice, / hailstones and coals of fire." Ps 29:3 also emphasizes the power of God's voice: "The voice of the LORD is upon the waters; / the God of glory thunder, / the LORD, upon many waters." One also finds this in early Christian writings, such as Jn 12:28b-29: "Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.' The crowd standing by heard it and said that it had thundered." Likewise, in Rev. 6:1, one of the four living creatures that upholds God's throne speaks with a voice of thunder. In Greek traditions, Zeus is the "Thunderer" and is usually portrayed as holding a thunderbolt. Finally, thunder was a meteorological omen in antiquity. The study of thunder in the skies began in Mesopotamia, as can be found in the *Enuma Anu Enlil,* tablet 44. A brontologion, or a "thunder-chart," was found at Qumran (4Q318), which predicts events based upon thunder in a particular zodiacal house. This particular text is the oldest evidence for this practice west of Mesopotamia in the Hellenistic and early Roman periods. Other texts can be found in Greek in the Byzantine period (see Greenfield and Sokoloff, "An Astrological Text from Qumran (4Q318) and Reflections on Some Zodiacal Names," 507-525. The word "thunder" does not recur in this text. M. Tardieu has written of the significance of "thunder" in neo-platonism and holds that "the direct literary source of the title of the second writing of codex VI, prodigiously philosophical in its formulation" is Plato's *The Republic* X.621. b 1-4.

[8] These two words are also Coptic transliterations of Greek words *nous (n) teleios*. Neither does the phrase "perfect mind" occur in all of the text that follows this title. The Coptic word ⲛⲟⲩⲥ, which does occur alone (also in a Coptic transliteration of the Greek) twice in the piece in 18.9 and 19.32, does not seem to carry any particular significance for the piece as a whole. ⲛⲟⲩⲥ does not have either a definite or an indefinite article in the title. This occasionally occurs in this text, including our reconstruction of the very next line. The notion of "perfect mind" does occur in a broad range of literature. Its use in neo-platonism participates in a larger psycho-cosmology in which the mind, spirit, and soul (and occasionally body) are principal elements of the human person. In this literature, the mind is seen generally as an integrative human capacity. It is a relatively prevalent notion also in the Nag Hammadi collection itself. Cf. *The Secret Revelation of John* 8.29.

[9] "The Thunder: Perfect Mind" as a title must then be external to the piece itself. As such it belongs to many titles of Hellenistic literature in which the title has been appended to a piece of literature at a later date (e.g., *the Gospel of Mark, the Wisdom of Solomon*, and *the Odes of Solomon*). The second problem with the title is its lack of obvious sense.

[10] Our use of "all you" or "you all" in this translation is an effort to indicate the plural you throughout Coptic *Thunder*. We do not slavishly use this everywhere, since that would falsify the economy of the poetic rhythm of the overall piece. However, we use it strategically in order to remind the reader that the "you" of *Thunder* is a plural you.

[11] We use "audience" here for two reasons, even though it is not an exact rendering of the Coptic: (1) it renders the literal "hearers, hear me" less clumsily, and (2) it reminds the twenty-first-century reader that this piece was most likely performed. Cf. the preface and Chapter 9 in this book.

ⲁⲩⲱ ⲙ̄ⲡⲣ̄ⲡⲱⲧ̄ ⲛ̄ⲥⲱⲓ̈[12] [13.10] ⲙ̄ⲡⲉⲙⲧⲟ ⲛ̄ⲛⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲃⲁⲗ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ <·>[13] |
ⲁⲩⲱ ⲙ̄ⲡⲣ̄ⲧⲣⲉ ⲡⲉⲧⲛ̄ϩⲣⲟⲟⲩ ⲙⲉⲥ|ⲧⲱⲉⲓ·
ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲥⲱⲧⲙ̄·
ⲙ̄|ⲡⲣ̄ⲣ̄ ⲁⲧ̇ⲥⲁⲩⲛⲉ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲉⲓ ⲕⲁⲧⲁ | ⲙⲁ·
ⲏ̄ ⲕⲁⲧⲁ ⲛ̄ⲕⲉⲟⲩⲁⲉⲓϣ·
ⲁⲣⲉϩ [13.15] ⲙ̄ⲡⲣ̄ⲣ̄ ⲁⲧ̇ⲥⲟⲟⲩⲛ[14] ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲉⲓ·

ⲁⲛⲟⲕ | ⲅⲁⲣ ⲧⲉ ⲧ̇ϣⲟⲣⲡ̄ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲑⲁⲏ·[15]
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ | ⲧⲉ ⲧⲉⲧⲁⲉⲓⲁⲉⲓⲧ[16] ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲉⲧ̇ϣⲏⲥ·|

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[12] At this point in the MS, ⲧⲛ is written and crossed out.
[13] Although, in general, we are setting the text on the basis of the half-raised dot that occurs in the MS, indicating a pause, the MS does not show such a pause here. Following the pattern of the rest of the text, which almost invariably indicates a pause after an "and" that conjoins two independent clauses, we have decided to create a line break. Moreover, although line length varies throughout the text, leaving the line intact would make it twice as long as anything in this particular section of the poem.
[14] There is some variance in spelling in just a few lines of the word "ignorance" between ⲉⲧⲥⲁⲩⲛⲉ and ⲁⲧⲥⲟⲟⲩⲛ, both of which are attested spellings of the word. The difference is dialectic. The latter spelling of ⲁⲧⲥⲟⲟⲩⲛ follows the Sahidic and Fayyumic dialects, while the former spelling of ⲁⲧⲥⲁⲩⲛⲉ follows the Achmimic and Subachmimic dialects. Subachmimic is the most prominent dialect in the Nag Hammadi Codices. The text as a whole has a tendency to interchange the Subachmimic ⲁ and the Sahidic ⲟ.
[15] Cf. Isa 44.6; 48.12; Rev. 1.17; 22.13.
[16] MacRae supplies the letter ⲧ to make ⲧⲉ<ⲧ>ⲧⲁⲉⲓⲁⲉⲓⲧ. This is needed for the relative pronoun ⲧⲉⲧ as indicated by the parallel word ⲧⲉⲧϣⲏⲥ. The expected ⲧ has assimilated with ⲧⲁⲉⲓⲁⲉⲓⲧ. This syntactical construction can be found in 18.20-21 (ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲧⲉ ⲧⲉⲧⲧⲁⲉⲓⲏⲟⲩ), which retains the full relative unassimilated with the following ⲧ, as would be expected. Although far less likely, since it would break with the style of the passage, another possibility is that the line could be broken up as follows: ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲧⲉⲧⲉ ⲧⲁⲉⲓⲁⲉⲓⲧ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲉⲧϣⲏⲥ (cf. 16.11-25).

Don't chase me from your sight[17]
Don't let your voice or your hearing hate me   11
Don't ignore me any place, any time[18]
Be careful. Do not ignore me[19]
I am the first and the last[20]   16
I am she who[21] is honored and she who is mocked

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[17] The translation of *bal* is not as earthy as we would have wanted. *Bal* literally means "eye," and there are other Coptic words for sight *(eia, eiorh, nau)*. It seems the text is using quite a poetic flourish, then, when it has, literally, "Do not chase me away from the midst of your eyes." Unfortunately, we have been unable to render this poetic image in English.

[18] Paul-Hubert Poirier's article "Structure et Intention du Traite Intitule 'Le Tonnere: Intellect Parfait'" makes a strong case for the first 16 lines of *Thunder* being an independent introduction with a separate structure, based mainly in three matching positive and negative imperative sentences. Although Poirier does not draw redactional conclusions of this analysis, the clear implication is that these first 16 lines were written later as an introduction to the body of the text and that there is a similarly added epilogue.

[19] Overall, this stanza shows a pattern of sets of parallel lines grouped as follows: 3, 2, 3+, 2, 1. The basic structure is 3-2, but the poet "riffs" on this pattern by adding a flourish in the second 3, and then, as will happen often throughout the text, the author breaks the pattern by a concluding line that has no parallel line(s). Moreover, this stanza shows a great deal of internal rhyme in the assonance of the word endings of "oi" and "ōei" (cf. 14.15-25).

[20] According to the aforementioned Poirier article, "I am the first and the last" is the last part of the separate introduction. With acuity, he notes that the pairing of "the first and the last" does not contain the same kind of irony all of the following contrasts do. In his commentary, he further notices a parallel to *Revelation* 1:8.

[21] Our translation "she who" represents a carefully calibrated rendering of the complexly gendered character of Coptic, a character that has been largely ignored by all the existing translations of *Thunder*. We have worked intensely to do justice to the complexity of the situation and the originality of the language in *Thunder,* since "she who" occurs so often and since both the frequency and unusual applications have central implications for the whole of *Thunder*. The particular dimension of Coptic at issue is the use of the pronominal *te, pe, tete, and pete* in *Thunder*. *Thunder*'s use of these gendered pronominal forms is both conventional and unconventional, especially in relationship to the dominant use of *anok* throughout the piece. Often and conventionally, the *anok* in *Thunder* is paired with a *te* and sometimes with a *pe* as a common Coptic copula gendering device. In this regard the *anok,* and its predicate, is characterized by gendering the basically ungendered *anok* in order to match it gender-wise with its predicate, which as a Coptic noun almost always has its own genderedness indicated in the form of an article. In these cases we have not translated any of the words gender specifically, and have never used the translation "she who" or, more infrequently, "he who" in places where the *te* or *pe* is used as a part of the copula mechanism. We have attended to times in which the relative pronoun *ete* is made gender specific with forms of *tete* and (less frequently, but still in surprising ways) *pete*. In these cases we have honored the gender specificity with a "she who" or less frequent "he who" translation. It will be relatively obvious to even the casual reader of *Thunder* that these gender-specific translations fit with the larger project of *Thunder* to bring to center stage Yesboth characterizations of women and ironic tensions within the representation of women. It is less obvious, but equally interesting that once one attends to the experimentally gendered imagery and grammar of *Thunder,* a gender-bended character within the piece also appears, especially in the somewhat rare appearance of male pronominal and nominal images spliced into the more obvious dominance of images of women and feminine representations.

ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲧⲉ ⲧⲡⲟⲣⲛⲏ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲥⲉⲙⲛⲏ· |
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲧⲉ ⲧⲉⲥϩⲓⲙⲉ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲡⲁⲣ|ⲑⲉⲛⲟⲥ·
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲡⲉ ⲧ̇ⲙⲉⲉⲩⲉ²² | ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧϣⲉⲉⲣⲉ·
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲙ̄ⲙⲉⲗⲟⲥ | ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ ⲧⲁⲙⲁⲁⲩ·
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲧⲉ ⲧⲁϭⲣⲏⲛ· |
    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛⲁϣⲉ ⲛⲉⲥϣⲏⲣⲉ·
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ | ⲧⲉ ⲧⲉⲧⲛⲁϣⲉ ⲡⲉⲥⲅⲁⲙⲟⲥ ⲁⲩⲱ [13.25] ⲙ̄ⲡⲓϫⲉⲓ ϩⲁⲓ·²³
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲧⲉ ⲧⲙⲉⲥⲓⲱ | ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲉⲧⲉ ⲙⲁⲥⲙⲓⲥⲉ·
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ | ⲡⲉ ⲡⲥⲟⲗⲥⲗ̄ ⲛ̄ⲛⲁⲛⲁⲁⲕⲉ·
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ | ⲧⲉ ⲧϣⲉⲗⲉⲉⲧ·
    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡⲣⲙ̄ϣⲉⲗⲉ|ⲉⲧ·²⁴
    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡⲁϩⲟⲟⲩⲧ̇ ⲡⲉⲛⲧⲁϥ|ϫⲡⲟⲉⲓ·

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22 This literally reads, "I am he who thinks" (ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲡⲉⲧⲙⲉⲉⲩⲉ). Because this particular part of the passage focuses upon family relationships, MacRae emends the text to <ⲧ>ⲉⲧⲙ<ⲁⲁ>ⲩ{ⲉ}, or, "she, the mother." However, ⲙⲉⲉⲩⲉ is probably just a variant of mother, since ⲙⲉⲉⲩ is attested in Subachmimic and Fayyumic dialects (Crum 197). Since Subachmimic is the most prominent dialect throughout the Nag Hammadi Codices, it is not too surprising to see it emerge here. On the other hand, as MacRae notes, the MS uses the Sahidic spelling ⲙⲁⲁⲩ in every other instance: in 13.22 and 13.30. Even so, as noted with regard to ⲁⲧⲥⲁⲩⲛⲉ and ⲁⲧⲥⲟⲟⲩⲛ, the text has little difficulty using the Subachmimic and the Sahidic variants of a word in very close proximity to one another. The other issue is the masculine ⲡⲉ, which MacRae has emended to the feminine ⲧⲉ. While this would make the copula agree with the feminine words "mother" and "daughter," we have decided to retain the MS's masculine copula. In this full-length study, we have discovered that the text often plays with, reverses, and deconstructs gender, and whether using the masculine copula with the clearly feminine nouns of "mother" (however spelled) and "daughter" was intentional or not, its current form reflects the gender-bending that is to come in the poem.

23 ϩⲁⲓ "husband" is without a definite or an indefinite article. An indefinite article often drops out during negation, but this usually occurs in statements of negative existence "there is not" or, in this case, ⲙⲛ̄ ϩⲁⲓ. There are several cases in this text in which the article drops out, including the title (13.1) and the subsequent line (13.2). See note 3.

24 This is a rather rare form for the word "bridegroom," literally "man-bride." As MacRae notes, however, it is also attested in *Exeg. Soul* (II.6) 132.9, 15. The usual form for "bridegroom" is ⲡⲁⲧϣⲉⲗⲉⲉⲧ, which is literally the "not-bride."

I am the whore and the holy woman   18
I am the wife and the virgin
I am he the mother and the daughter
I am the limbs of my mother   21
I am a sterile woman and she has many children
I am she whose wedding is extravagant and I didn't have a husband
I am the midwife and she who hasn't given birth
I am the comfort of my labor pain   27
I am the bride and the bridegroom,[25]
And it is my husband who gave birth to me

---

[25] Poirier, noticing the masculinity of the "I" if only in this instance, wants to link this line to a divine androgynous figure (219-220). It is important to note, however, that the text never uses the Coptic word for androgyne, and doesn't seem to aim for any metaphysical state of pure, ungendered wholeness.

ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲧⲉ ⲧⲙⲁⲁⲩ ⲛⲧⲉ | ⲡⲁⲉⲓⲱⲧ·
    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲥⲱⲛⲉ ⲙⲡⲁ|ϩⲟⲟⲩⲧ·
    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛⲧⲟϥ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲁϫⲡⲟ·|
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲧⲉ ⲧⲅ̇ϭⲁⲟⲩⲟⲟⲛⲉ[26] ⲙ̄ⲡⲉⲛ|ⲧⲁϥⲥⲃ̄ⲧⲱⲧ·
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲧⲉ ⲧ̇ϫⲟⲉⲓⲥ[27] [14.1] ⲙ̄ⲡⲁϫⲡⲟ·

ⲛⲧⲟϥ ⲇⲉ[28] ⲡⲉⲛⲧⲁϥϫ[ⲡⲟⲓ][29] | ϩⲁⲑⲏ ⲙ̄ⲡⲉⲟⲩⲟⲉⲓⲱ ϩⲛ ⲟⲩϩⲟ[ⲩ]|ⲙⲓⲥⲉ·[30]
    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛⲧⲟϥ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲁϫⲡⲟ ϩ[ⲙ̄] | ⲡⲉⲟⲩⲟⲉⲓⲱ·
    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲁⲇⲩⲛⲁⲙⲓⲥ ⲟ[ⲩ][31] | ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛ̄ϩⲏⲧϥ ⲧⲉ·[32]
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲡϭⲉⲣϥ[ⲃ][33] | ⲛ̄ⲧⲉϥϭⲟⲙ[34] ϩⲛ̄ ⲧⲉϥⲙⲛ̄ⲧ̇ϣⲏⲙ[·

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[26] This word is peculiar because it uses the singular feminine definite article, but has a plural ending.

[27] The word ϫⲟⲉⲓⲥ or "lord" is often primarily associated with male authority figures, especially for those coming out of the medieval European Christian tradition in which the word "Lord" usually has the association of a feudal (male) lord, and by association, with a god primarily conceived of in male terms. The word has the connotations of "master" and "owner." Indeed, even in ancient Coptic, the masculine form is the most prevalent, and this might be reflected in one of the more accessible dictionaries only listing the masculine for it (Smith, *A Concise Coptic-English Lexicon,* 55). But the use of the feminine form, as here, was quite common in antiquity. It would be equivalent to the word "mistress" used in the medieval sense of the female equivalent of "master" and not with the contemporary connotation of a woman in an ongoing romantic or sexual relationship with a married man who is not her husband. So, for example, the Coptic word ϫⲟⲉⲓⲥ with the feminine definite article was used to translate the Greek equivalent of κυρία, the female equivalent of the male κύριος, or "lord." ⲧϫⲟⲉⲓⲥ is quite often used in the Coptic translation of the Bible, such as in Gen 16:4 to refer to Sarai vis-à-vis Hagar (for other examples, see Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary,* 787b).

[28] The ⲇⲉ, while it is a weak disjunctive form in Greek, usually meaning "but," in Coptic often is untranslatable or loses its disjunctive sense. In this passage, and in much of the poem as a whole, we have determined that it, along with other disjunctive and conjunctive words, such as ⲅⲁⲣ, verbally indicates shifts in thought, which we represent as stanza breaks. ⲇⲉ, here is coupled with an addition shift from an exclusive emphasis on ⲁⲛⲟⲕ or "I" to both ⲛ̄ⲧⲟϥ and ⲁⲛⲟⲕ or "he and I." Alongside this shift in emphasis in subject, the disjunctive ⲇⲉ also allows a continuation of the theme of begetting from the previous section.

[29] Reconstruction by Krause; cf. Cherix: ⲡⲉⲛⲧⲁϥϫ[ⲡⲟⲓⲉ].

[30] The reconstruction of this word is not completely certain. In the MS, the ⲟ clearly has a horizontal stroke, suggesting a possibility of either a ⲑ or more likely an ⲉ, but Browne, "Textual Notes on Nag Hammadi Codex VI," *ZPE* 13 (1974), 306, has suggested that the scribe originally wrote ⲉ, but corrected it to ⲟ. Browne's suggestion has been followed in the major translations. Cf. Funk ⲟⲩϩ<ⲟⲩϩ>ⲉ; Browne ⲟⲩϩⲟ[ⲩ]; Schnenke ⲟⲩ(ϩ)<ⲟⲩ>ϩⲉ; [ⲛ̄] Krause.

[31] ⲟ[ⲩ] by MacRae; cf. Krause.

[32] A copula ends this sentence: although this is not uncommon in Coptic as a whole, it is a relatively rare construction in this text. It recurs at 19.17.

[33] Reconstructed by MacRae; Krause: ⲡϭⲉⲣ[ⲱⲃ].

[34] In just two lines, the text uses two words for "power"; one a Greek loanword, ⲇⲩⲛⲁⲙⲓⲥ, and the other a native Egyptian term, ϭⲟⲙ, which, later in this text is also spelled as ϭⲁⲙ (see n. 42; cf. n. 29). Although the text seems to revel in repetition of the same words and sounds throughout, the difference here could be due to stylistic variation, something more valued in Greek literature, or the two words could have different shades of meaning, much like how in English a loanword and an Anglo-Saxon root could have originally the same meaning, but they attain different shades of meaning by their very presence in the same language. Such differing shades of meaning, however, are not completely recoverable.

I am my father's mother,
my husband's sister, and he is my child   32
I am the slavewoman[35] of him who served me
I am she, the lord[36]**14.1** of my child,   34

It is he who gave birth to me at the wrong time[37]
And he is my child born at the right time
And my power is from within him
I am the staff of his youthful power

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[35] This word is peculiar because it uses the singular feminine definite article, but has a plural ending. In deference to this feminine definite article, we then translate "slavewoman." It is impossible to do justice to the plural ending, and the meaning remains enigmatic in both Coptic and English.

[36] The Coptic word for "Lord" here is written as a combination of the general word for masculine ruler with the feminine definite article. There is, however, no Coptic word for feminine ruler, and using the feminine article with the masculine word to designate a feminine ruler is standard. Poirier, also cued into this, translates this into the French word *maitresse.*

[37] The Coptic is literally "before the time," and this is the way MacRae renders it in translation. We take into account its contrasting expression in line 4 and the overarching contrast of the first birth being premature. It is quite possible that the translation could best be rendered "But it is he who gave birth to me *prematurely,* And he is my child born *on the due date.*" Poirier indeed translates the suggestion of premature birth (221-3). In simultaneous deference to the obvious imaginary contrast between the two, the need for an intelligible translation, and the meanings of the Coptic word in question, we have stopped short of this more graphic imagination, while trying to make sense of the contrast. It is interesting to note that this brief section does not fit well into the "gnostic" category that some propose as *Thunder*'s context. Within the established "gnostic" cosmology Sophia falls in ignorance thus creating the material world and its evil powers. However, in this section we find this elusive figure claiming that "he" gave birth to "her" at the *wrong* time, whereas she gives birth in the *right* time. With this in mind, it is difficult to consider this figure as Sophia or in line with established "gnostic" mythology.

ⲁⲩⲱ]³⁸ | ⲛ̄ⲧⲟϥ ⲡⲉ ⲧ̀ⲕⲉⲗⲉⲉⲗⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲙⲛ̄ⲧ̀ | ϩⲗ̄ⲗⲱ·³⁹
ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡⲉⲧϥ̄ⲟⲩⲟϣϥ̄ ϣⲁϥ|ϣⲱⲡⲉ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲉⲓ·⁴⁰

ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲕⲁⲣⲱϥ [14.10] ⲉⲧⲉ ⲙⲁⲩϣⲧⲁϩⲟϥ·⁴¹
    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲉⲡⲓⲛⲟⲓ|ⲁ ⲉⲧⲉ ⲛⲁϣⲉ ⲡⲉⲥⲣ̄ ⲡⲙⲉⲉⲩⲉ·|
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲧⲉ ⲧⲉⲥⲙⲏ ⲉⲧⲉ ⲛⲁϣⲉ ⲡⲉⲥ|ϩⲣⲟⲟⲩ·
    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡⲗⲟⲅⲟⲥ ⲉⲧⲉ ⲛⲁϣⲉ | ⲡⲉϥⲉⲓⲛⲉ·
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲡⲉ ⲡϣⲁϫⲉ ⲙ̄|ⲡⲁⲣⲁⲛ·

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38 There is no half-raised dot here, but the MS is corrupt where one would expect a half-raised dot to indicate a line break. The line break, as well as the reconstructed auw (reconstructed by Krause), is placed here on the basis of the tightly patterned tricolic sequence that this passage suggests. In short, we are reconstructing a stanza that displays a double tricola or two sets of three lines. Although we tend conservatively to leave all reconstructed words to the notes, the tight structure of this stanza almost demands auw.

39 "Staff" (ⲡⲥⲉⲣⲱⲃ) and "baton" or "rod" (ⲧⲕⲉⲗⲉⲉⲗⲉ) are two symbols of authority in antiquity that were often paired together. In the immediate Egyptian context, pharaohs are often depicted holding a scepter and a crook, the latter being a stylized staff to represent the pharaoh as the "shepherd" of the people. The two are also often paired in biblical sources, such as in the very famous Psalm 23: "[Y]our rod and your staff—they comfort me" (v. 4). It is difficult to read these two images outside of *Thunder*'s larger pressing interests in gender and sexuality. Perhaps the most consciously phallic passage comes in Gen. 49:10, in which Jacob blesses Judah: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet." In the two lines from *Thunder,* there is an additional play on gender. The staff, which is a masculine word, is of "his power" and is equated with "youth," while the baton, a feminine word in Coptic, is of "my," here a female voice, "old age." The word "old age" is extremely literally rendered "old-womanhood." Although an abstract noun, which by definition in Coptic is feminine, the word can be inflected by gender, abstracting the word for "old man" or "old woman." In that sense, the word, although an abstract noun, has a subtle adjectival sense. The gender play is complicated by the fact that the first person singular female voice in this passage *is* the masculine staff, while "he" *is* the feminine baton. Moreover, the word ⲕⲉⲗⲉⲉⲗⲉ has an interesting variety of meanings in Coptic. According to Crum (103b), it can be a "sonorous wooden board" that is struck to call a meeting to order or to assemble a congregation, it is used to call people to prayer, and it can just mean staff. It also connotes weapons used for punishment, and indeed, when the word is abstracted, it means "punishment." The choice of the translation of "baton" is meant to catch the different connotations that call people to order and, as in a police baton, can be used in a punitive manner.

40 This stanza has a dense gender play between the feminine "I" and the masculine "he" and a sophisticated interplay between the lines. Structurally, it forms a "double tricola," or two sets of three parallel lines. In this particular stanza, each set of three begins with a statement, the second line is a counter-statement meant to contrast the first line, while the last line concludes each set of three. The third line of the first set and the first line of the second set are tied together by different forms of the word "power," the first in Greek and the second in Coptic. Moreover, each set of the third lines seems to form parallel statements, the first being that her power derives from him and the second being his power over her (translated as, "whatever he wants happens to me").

41 This section signals a shift in subject, moving from the double-subject of "he and I" and the emphasis on "power" to a focus on terms of sound, word, voice, and silence alongside the repetition of the word ⲛⲁϣⲉ, which can mean "great," "many," "manifold," "multiple," and so forth. In addition, one can see another shift in stanza organization from two sets of three to two sets of two with a concluding line. As before, there is also an intricate play on gender here. Every two lines indicates a shift in gender, beginning with masculine in the first line, shifting to feminine in the third line, and back to masculine in the concluding line. The final masculine noun, ⲡϣⲁϫⲉ, may be playing alliteratively off the previous repetition of the word ⲛⲁϣⲉ.

And he is the baton[42] of my old womanhood
Whatever he wants happens to me

I am the silence never found   9
And the idea infinitely recalled
I am the voice with countless sounds
And the thousand guises of the word
I am the speaking of my name   14

---

[42] *Tkeleele* can sometimes mean the instrument that calls people to worship (cf. Lambdin and Crum). In an attempt to maintain the phallic symbolism of the section and the violence of the following line—"Whatever he wants happens to me"—we decided to translate *Tkeleele* as "baton," which evokes notions of performance as well as punishment.

ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲟⲩ ⲛⲉⲧⲙⲟⲥⲧⲉ ⲙ|ⲙⲟⲉⲓ ⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲙⲉ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲉⲓ·
  ⲁⲩⲱ | ⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲙⲟⲥⲧⲉ ⲛ̄ⲛⲉⲧⲙⲉ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲉⲓ·⁴³ |
ⲛⲉⲧⲣ̄ⲁⲣⲛⲁ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲉⲓ ⲉⲣⲓϩⲟⲙⲟⲗⲟⲅⲉⲓ | ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲉⲓ·
  ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛⲉⲧⲣ̄ϩⲟⲙⲟⲗⲟⲅⲉⲓ [14.20] ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲉⲓ ⲉⲣⲓⲁⲣⲛⲁ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲉⲓ·
ⲛⲉⲧ̄ϫⲉ | ⲙⲉ ⲉⲣⲟⲓ̈ ϫⲓ ϭⲟⲗ ⲉⲣⲟⲉⲓ·
  ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛⲉ|ⲧⲁⲩϫⲉ ϭⲟⲗ ⲉⲣⲟⲉⲓ ϫⲉ ⲧⲙⲉ ⲉⲣⲟⲉⲓ·
ⲛⲉⲧⲥⲟⲟⲩⲛ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲉⲓ ⲉⲣⲓⲁⲧⲥⲟ|ⲟⲩⲛ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲉⲓ·
  ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛⲉⲧⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲟⲩ|ⲥⲟⲩⲱⲛⲧ̄ ⲙⲁⲣⲟⲩⲥⲟⲩⲱⲛⲧ̄·⁴⁴ |

ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲅⲁⲣ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲥⲟⲟⲩⲛ ⲁⲩⲱ | ⲧⲙⲛ̄ⲧ̄ⲁⲧ̄ⲥⲟⲟⲩⲛ·⁴⁵
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲡⲉ | ⲡϣⲓⲡⲉ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲡⲁⲣϩⲏⲥⲓⲁ· |
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲟⲩⲁⲧϣⲓⲡⲉ·⁴⁶

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⁴³ This is a peculiar couplet, because it breaks any pattern of parallelism. MacRae (237) suggests that one could emend the first ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲉⲓ to ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲟⲩ to translate, "Why do you love those who hate me and hate those who love me." Yet the reading in the MS is perfectly clear, and, in current form, it places incongruent actions upon the hearers: "Why, those who hate me, do you love me, and you hate those who love me?" The question also signals a thematic shift, not only between love and hate, but moving the emphasis from the speaking "I" to "you" or "they/those."

⁴⁴ Regarding content, this section exhorts listeners to the opposite behavior; thus, those who confess, must now deny and vice versa. While the speaker remains the same throughout the poem, the subject does not. Here the speaker has switched from self-designations to commands, focusing on "those who" and "you." This section has a great deal of rhyme as well, although this is not a particular or necessary characteristic of the poetics of the text as a whole (although cf. 13.2-15); the word ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲉⲓ or its rhyming counterpart ⲉⲣⲟⲉⲓ both conclude every line except the last one and show up in the middle of each line. Moreover, overall the stanza uses very dense alliteration and assonance, very often repeating "m," "n," "t," "o," and "ei" sounds. The contrariwise repetition of each couplet alongside the internal and ending rhymes gives the stanza a rhythm, all of which is broken with the last line. For a more extensive discussion of this section, see Chapter 8.

⁴⁵ The transition between the previous stanza and this one is very smooth here in terms of content of knowledge and ignorance, but the poem switches back to the earlier syntactical structure as found in what has been separated into the second section of the poem. As in that section, here the ⲅⲁⲣ signals a shift in focus that depends upon the previous section: it signals a new stanza while providing some continuity with the previous stanza. This alternation suggests an architectonic organization to the poem amongst the variety of sentence and stanza formations that can be found throughout.

⁴⁶ The shift from definite to indefinite predications eliminates a need for the copula, reducing much of the gender play inherent in the copular construction. At the same time, the text has shifted from indicating lines that contain two opposing qualities to having the opposing qualities between lines. The definite article and the use of opposing qualities in the same line returns at the end of the stanza, making bookends, or an *inclusio,* for the indefinite forms. As such, so far, each section of "I" statements has used a different format.

You who loathe me, why do you love me and loathe the ones who
    love me?
You who deny me, confess me
You who confess me, deny me
You who speak the truth about me, lie about me
You who lie about me, speak the truth about me
You who know me, ignore me
You who ignore me, notice me

I am both awareness and obliviousness[47]
I am humiliation[48] and pride[49]
I am without shame   29
I am ashamed   30

---

[47] There is a density of uses of the term *cooun* (meaning "to know") in 13.23-13.27, creating a clever set of wordplays. Poirier surveys these occurrences, concluding that quite contrary to referencing a complex conceptual system, the uses of "to know" are inconsistent, and instead simply represent a spectrum of uses of the word (235).

[48] The root *shipe* is legitimately translated "shame" as it is in the following line. We use the synonym "humiliation" in order to avoid repeating the word "shame" in three successive lines. By using "shame" roots in lines 29 and 30 we keep the poetic use of the *shipe* sound in lines 28 and 29. The choice of "humiliation" is made for the way it corresponds to the way *Thunder* plays on the ancient Mediterranean system of honor and shame. Cf. discussion of honor and shame in Chapter 6.

[49] The translation of *tparhecia* with "pride" is also meant to underline the honor/shame dynamics. Cf. immediately previous note and Chapter 6 for more discussion on this section and honor/shame.

ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲟⲩ|ϫⲡⲓⲏⲧ·
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲟⲩⲛⲁϣⲧⲉ·
    ⲁⲩⲱ | ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲟⲩϩⲣ̄ⲧⲉ·
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲡⲉ ⲡ̄ⲡⲟ|ⲗⲉⲙⲟⲥ ⲁⲩⲱ ϯⲣⲏⲛⲏ·

    † ϩⲧⲏ|ⲧⲛ̄ ⲉⲣⲟⲉⲓ ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲧⲉⲧϭⲁⲉⲓⲏⲟⲩ | ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲛⲟϭ·[50]
    † ϩⲧⲏ|ⲧⲛ̄ ⲉⲧⲁⲙⲛ̄ⲧ̄ [15.1] [ϩⲏ]ⲕⲉ·[51]
        ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲁⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲣⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲟ·
    [ⲙ̄]ⲡ̄ⲣ̄ϫⲓⲥⲉ[52] ⲛ̄ϩⲏⲧ̄ ⲉⲣⲟⲉ̄ⲓ ⲉⲉⲓ|ⲛⲏϫ[53] ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲓϫⲙ̄ ⲡⲕⲁϩ·[54]
        ⲁ[ⲩⲱ][55] | ⲧⲉⲧⲛⲁϭⲓⲛⲉ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲉⲓ ϩⲛ̄ ⲛ[ⲉ|ⲧ]ⲛ̄ⲛⲏⲟⲩ·[56]

    ⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲣ̄ⲛⲁⲩ[57] | [ⲉⲣ]ⲟ̣ⲉⲓ[58] ϩ̄ⲓ ⲧⲕⲟⲡⲣⲓⲁ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲃⲱⲕ | [ⲛ̄]ⲧ̣ⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲕⲁⲁⲧ̾[59]
        ⲉⲉⲓⲛⲏϫ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ· |
            ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲉⲧⲛⲁϭⲓⲛⲉ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲉⲓ ϩⲛ̄ | ⲙ̄ⲙⲛ̄ⲧ̄ⲣ̄ⲣⲁⲉⲓ·
    ⲟⲩⲇⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡ̄ⲣ̄ⲛⲁⲩ ⲉⲣⲟⲉⲓ ⲉⲉⲓⲛⲏϫ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲛ̄ ⲛⲉⲧϭⲁ|ⲉⲓⲏⲟⲩ·
        ⲁⲩⲱ ϩⲛ̄ ⲛⲉⲗⲁⲭⲓⲥⲧⲟⲥ | ⲧⲟⲡⲟⲥ[60] ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲥⲱⲃⲉ ⲛ̄ⲥⲱⲉⲓ· ⲛ̄ⲥⲱⲉⲓ· |

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[50] The movement from a string of self-predications to the imperative to "give heed/heart to me," which we have translated as "pay attention to me," gives a clear indication of a new theme and syntactical formations. We have decided to indent the following two stanzas, because they seem to be a poem within a poem. The two stanzas are so intricately connected that one could almost as easily group them into one stanza. They have overlapping themes and even overlapping sentence forms, somewhat like a fugue style, but not quite.

[51] Reconstructed by Krause.

[52] Reconstructed by Krause.

[53] Reconstructed by MacRae; cf. Krause: ⲉⲉⲓ[ⲛ]ⲏϫ.

[54] A similar phrase occurs again in *Thunder* in 19.29-30.

[55] Reconstructed by MacRae; cf. Krause.

[56] Reconstructed by MacRae; cf. Krause and Poirier: ϩⲛ̄ⲛ[ⲁⲓ̈ ⲉ]; Cherix ϩⲛ̄ⲛ[ⲁⲓ̈ ⲉⲧ]. [ⲧ]ⲛ̄ⲛⲏⲟⲩ by MacRae; Krause [ⲧ̄]ⲛ̄ ⲛⲏⲟⲩ; Giverson [ⲧ̣̄]ⲛ̄ ⲛⲏⲟⲩ; Cherix ⲛ̄ⲛⲏⲟⲩ.

[57] Reconstructed by Krause.

[58] Reconstructed by MacRae; Krause [ⲉⲣⲟ]ⲉⲓ.

[59] Reconstructed by Krause.

[60] MacRae, 238, supplies the ⲛ̄ to create <ⲛ̄>ⲧⲟⲡⲟⲥ, which is usually necessary to connect a noun and an adjective; cf. Krause (note) and Poirier (note).

I am security and I am fear
I am war and peace

> Pay attention to me
> I am she who is disgraced and she who is important
> **15.1** Pay attention to me, to my impoverished state and to my
> extravagance 1
> Do not be arrogant to me when I am thrown to the ground
> You will find me among the expected.[61]
>
> Do not stare at me in the pile of shit,[62] leaving me discarded
> You will find me in the kingdoms[63]
> Do not stare at me when I am thrown out into the condemned
> Do not laugh at me in the lowest places

---

[61] The Coptic meaning here is unclear. Literally, this sentence can be translated "You will find me in the ones that are to come." This sentence is to be paired with the one preceding it: "Do not be arrogant to me when I am thrown to the ground," and forms an important couplet with the following two sentences: "Do not stare at me in the pile of shit, leaving me discarded. You will find me in the kingdoms." In both pairs of sentences, the first sentence is an imperative that demands that the addressee not look at *Thunder*'s "I" in distress, and the second sentence justifies this demand by asserting that *Thunder*'s "I" will be ascendant again. The second couplet's descriptions of this future ascendancy is that *Thunder*'s "I" will be found in the "kingdoms," or the ruling places. So "You will find me in the ones that are to come" should somehow indicate an ascendancy for *Thunder*'s "I." In order to make this ascendancy clearer, we contemplated translating this sentence in question "You will find me in the ones of destiny" or "You will find me in destiny." This meaning seemed to be speculative for the Coptic. So we left it with the translation of those "expected," which is still more directly connected to those "to come," the more literal Coptic meaning.

[62] We have translated *kopria* (a Greek loanword to Coptic) as "shit" in order to keep with the graphic language of the Coptic. The word can also, of course, be translated "dung," "dungheap," "manure," "excrement," or "feces." We have rejected "dung" and "dungheap" inasmuch as they are rarely used in contemporary English, and as such connote an antiquitarian setting and meaning. "Manure" seems too rural, and "excrement" and "feces" too technical for the evocative language of *Thunder*.

[63] The use of "kingdom" in the plural suggests a possible imperial context. The Romans often depicted conquered nations as abused and stripped women, as exemplified in the Forum of Augustus. In this regard, this section can be both individual and collective in its understanding.

ⲟⲩⲇⲉ ⲙ̅ⲡⲣ̅ⲛⲟϫⲧ̅ ⲉϩⲣⲁⲓ̈ ⲉⲛⲉⲧ|ϣⲁⲁⲧ ϩⲛ̅ ⲟⲩⲙⲛ̅ⲧⲁⲩⲥⲧⲏⲣⲟⲥ·[64]

[15.15] ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲇⲉ ⲁⲛⲟⲕ[65] ⲟⲩϣⲁⲛ ϩⲧⲏⲥ·|
　　　ⲁⲩⲱ ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲟⲩⲁϩⲓ̅ⲏⲧ·
ⲁⲣⲏϩ | ⲙ̅ⲡⲣ̅ⲙⲉⲥⲧⲉ ⲧⲁⲙⲛ̅ⲧⲥⲧⲙⲏⲧ· |
　　　ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲁⲉⲅ̅ⲕⲣⲁⲧⲉⲓⲁ ⲛ̅ⲧⲉⲧⲛ̅ | ⲙⲉⲣⲓⲧⲥ̅[66] ϩⲛ̅ ⲧⲁⲙⲛ̅ⲧϭⲱⲃ·[67]
ⲙ̅ⲡⲣ̅|ⲃⲱ̅ ⲧⲏⲛⲉ ⲉⲣⲟⲉⲓ·
　　　ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛ̅ⲧⲉ|ⲧⲛ̅ⲧⲙ̅ⲣ̅ ϩⲟⲧⲉ ϩⲏⲧⲥ̅ ⲛ̅ⲧⲁϭⲟⲙ· |

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[64] This forms a tightly constructed poetic unit, organized around the Greek loanwords ⲟⲩⲧⲉ and ⲟⲩⲇⲉ. ⲟⲩⲧⲉ literally means "and not" and is usually rendered as "neither" or "nor." ⲟⲩⲇⲉ likewise means "but not" or "nor." These negative disjunctives organize the entire passage. As such, for the phrases in the middle, we have decided not to carry the negative through the conjunctives as previous translators have done. The "neither…nor" construction operates on a larger level in three parts rather than within each line. In addition, one may notice the much longer lines that characterize this section in contrast with the rest of the poem thus far. These five lines form a tightly constructed unit, but they are strongly syntactically tied to the previous two lines by the repetition in the second part of the parallel lines of ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲉⲧⲛⲁϭⲓⲛⲉ ⲙ̅ⲙⲟⲉⲓ ϩⲛ̅ ⲛⲉⲧⲛ̅ⲛⲏⲟⲩ (literally, "and you will find me in the coming ones") from the line just preceding the "neither, nor, nor" section with ⲧⲉⲧⲛⲁϭⲓⲛⲉ ⲙ̅ⲙⲟⲉⲓ ϩⲛ̅ ⲙ̅ⲙⲛ̅ⲧⲣ̅ⲣⲁⲉⲓ (literally, "and you will find me in the kingdoms"). The only thing that differs is the final word in each line, indicating that the "neither, nor, nor" section is a continuation of these lines. The entire theme of this section, however, is introduced by the lines that begin with "Pay attention to me," emphasizing the speaker's poverty and wealth, disgrace and greatness. The passage, moving on from this, expands more upon the first terms of poverty and disgrace, but the wealth and greatness are not far away (e.g., "the kingdoms").

[65] The double "I" is relatively rare in this text (but see 16.24 and 19.15), and here functions at the beginning of a self-designation stanza in dialectical tension to the entire previous stanza. The double-I is a jolting after hearing about the speaker's lowliness, shifting focus to the speaker's compassion and cruelty.

[66] Again, one is faced with the choice of carrying the negation through the conjunction. There is nothing in the passage that would push the translator one way or another, but the interpretive differences are significant. With the negation, the passage reads, "Do not hate my obedience and [do not] love my self-control," the second "do not" being supplied to fill out the suggested meaning in the Coptic. On the other hand, the passage could read, "Do not hate my obedience and love my self-control." In this second rendering, it is doing both actions at once that are forbidden, hating the speaker's obedience while loving her self-control. The second construal is preferable because, although it holds a different nuance than the first, it still can contain the first meaning.

[67] As MacRae notes, the division of the lines here is uncertain. The ϩⲛ̅ ⲧⲁⲙⲛ̅ⲧϭⲱⲃ could conceptually be placed at the end of the previous line or the beginning of the next one. We have strictly followed the indications in the text for the Coptic layout, which places "in my weakness" with the line "and love my self-control," but for the sake of translation, the phrase does make more sense with the following, "in my weakness, do not forsake me."

Do not throw me down into those slaughtered viciously
I myself am compassionate
And I am cruel
Watch out!
Do not hate my compliance and do not love my restraint   17
In my weakness do not strip me bare[68]
Do not be afraid of my power[69]

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[68] A primary meaning of *bosh* is to strip or lay bare. Other translators seem to have shied from the graphic character of the verb. Almost all the translators seem to have followed MacRae in the translation of the more buffered term "forsake."

[69] Here, as elsewhere in the translation, we have not translated *gar*, which can be translated as "for," "because," or "since." We see *gar* in this case as an indication of transition, but not causality. This is often the case with words like *gar* and *de*, which are taken directly from the Greek.

ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲟⲩ ⲅⲁⲣ ⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲣ̄ⲕⲁⲧⲁ|ⲫⲣⲟⲛⲓ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁϩ̄ⲣ̄ⲧⲉ·[70]
     ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲉ|ⲧⲛ̄ⲥⲁϩⲟⲩ ⲙ̄ⲡⲁϣⲟⲩϣⲟⲩ·
[15.25] ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲇⲉ ⲧⲉⲧ̄ϣⲟⲟⲡ̄ ϩⲛ̄ ⲛ̄|ⲫⲟⲃⲟⲥ ⲧⲏⲣⲟⲩ·
     ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡⲛ̄ϣⲁⲧ[71]| ϩⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲥⲧⲱⲧ·
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲧⲉ ⲧⲉⲧ̄|ϭⲟⲟⲃ·
     ⲁⲩⲱ ⲉⲉⲓⲟⲩⲁϫ ϩⲛ̄ ⲟⲩ|ϩⲏⲇⲟⲛⲏ ⲛ̄ⲧⲟⲡⲟⲥ·
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲟⲩ|ⲁⲑⲏⲧ· ⲁⲩⲱ ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲟⲩⲥⲁⲃⲏ· |

ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲟⲩ ⲁⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲙⲉⲥⲧⲱⲉⲓ | ϩⲛ̄ ⲛⲉⲧⲛ̄ϣⲟϫⲛⲉ·
ϫⲉ ϯⲛⲁⲕⲁ|ⲣⲱⲉⲓ ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ϩⲛ̄ ⲛⲉⲧ̄ⲕⲁ ⲣⲱⲟⲩ·[72]|
     ⲁⲩⲱ ϯⲛⲁⲟⲩⲱⲛϩ̄ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁ|ϣⲁϫⲉ·
[16.1] ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲟⲩ ϭⲉ ⲁⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲙⲉⲥⲧⲱⲉⲓ ⲛ̄ϩ[ⲉⲗ]|ⲗⲏⲛ·[73]

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[70] The introduction of a question and the use of ⲅⲁⲣ together with a shift in emphasis from imperatives to interrogatives and indicatives all suggest a new sense unit.

[71] According to MacRae, this spelling of ⲛ̄ϣⲁⲧ, which can be translated as "strength," "boldness," or "hardness," is otherwise unattested as a noun. It is usually spelled ⲛ̄ϣⲟⲧ. While this is true to the extent that the Sahidic ⲛ̄ϣⲟⲧ is typically substantivized in Subachmimic via the qualitative form of the verb in the form ⲡⲁϣⲧ, this rare form of the word most likely simply follows the dialectical tendencies of Subachmimic in which the Sahidic o was replaced by the Subachmimic ⲁ. The form in this MS actually meets the two dialects half way. In fact, it is a tendency of this text as a whole, see the switch from the usual spelling of ϭⲟⲙ to ϭⲁⲙ (see nn 17 and 42).

[72] Note the playful use of the transposition of sounds in this line in ϯⲛⲁⲕⲁ and ⲛⲉⲧⲕⲁ. The ⲁⲛⲟⲕ half way between the two balances and intensifies the alliteration of "n" and "k" sounds. The entire doublet breaks the previous pattern, introducing the sentence with the rare (for this text) introductory ϫⲉ, although, interestingly, the couplet also ends with this sound through the word ϣⲁϫⲉ, providing bookends for this couplet. In fact, this stanza evinces a pattern of beginning a line with a question, ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲟⲩ, with a subsequent line that begins with ϫⲉ. The only difference between the two is that the first set has an explanatory expansion in the third line with ⲁⲩⲱ. The second couplet, then, begins a shift in topic to be elaborated much more extensively in the subsequent stanza on an interplay of ancient identity categories of Greek and Barbarian with an additional single reference to Egypt itself. For more on the poetic and sonorous aspects of this section, see Chapter 9. For more on "Greek and Barbarian," see chapters 2, 6, and 7.

[73] Reconstruction by MacRae; Cf. Krause ⲛ̄ϩ[ⲉⲗ]ⲗⲏⲛ. Poetically, this stanza and the next show some interesting plays in sounds at the end of each line. ⲃⲁⲣⲃⲁⲣⲟⲥ is the final word on four lines, ϩⲉⲗⲗⲏⲛ concludes two lines, and plays on the sounds in the word ϩⲉⲗⲗⲏⲛ account for the rest. ⲕⲏⲙⲉ reproduces the long ā sound from ϩⲉⲗⲗⲏⲛ, while introducing an "m" sound that will be reproduced in the final two lines with a long ī sound in ⲛⲓⲙ. In short a rhyme scheme could be set as follows: ABABBA`BCC.

Why do you despise my fear and curse my pride?
I am she who exists in all fears and in trembling boldness
I am she who is timid[74]   26
And I am safe in a comfortable place
I am witless and I am wise.

Why did you hate me with your schemes?
I shall shut my mouth among those whose mouths are shut[75]
and then I will show up and speak

16.1 Why then[76] did you hate me, you Greeks?[77]

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[74] *Koob* can mean "weak," "feeble," or "timid," according to Lambdin (351). We have preferred "timid" for two reasons. First, it is a striking contrast to the "boldness" of the previous line, which wants to be in tension with *koob*. Second, we have relied on the verb form *kbee,* which emphasizes timidity and feebleness (also Lambdin, 351).

[75] The verb *karw* generally connotes silence, but uses the actual root for closed mouth. Hence we have used the more graphic translation of being silent, reflecting the Coptic root imagery as well.

[76] Here, we have somewhat exceptionally translated the *de,* one of the several Greek transitional words that we have often left untranslated. In this case we have rendered *de* with "then" in order to recognize that it seems to want to connect this subject matter about Greeks and barbarians to the immediately previous themes of having one's mouth shut, being timid, and being afraid. As discussed in chapters 2, 6, and 79, *Thunder* takes on the problematic vocabulary of Greek and barbarian, and deconstructs it through inversion and paradox. As Chapter 9 notes, this attack on the social construction of Greek superiority and barbarian shame is part of a larger strategy in *Thunder*. The connection *de* makes ideationally between 15:22-34 and 16:1-10 integrates the threat of shame and fear with the specific shaming of "barbarians" at the hands of "Greeks."

[77] "Greeks" in the Greco-Roman world refers to more than those of Greek national origins. Greek represents a major cultural ideal and ethos, acknowledged and admired even by the politically dominant Romans. Inasmuch as one places *Thunder* in Egypt, this more expansive understanding of "Greeks" still applies. For instance, the Egyptian city of Alexandria had a centuries-long legacy of literary activity in the Greek language.

ⲭⲉ ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲟⲩⲃⲁⲣⲃⲁⲣⲟⲥ ⲉⲛ̄[ⲛ̄|ⲃ]ⲁⲣⲃⲁⲣⲟⲥ·⁷⁸

ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲅⲁⲣ⁷⁹ ⲧⲉ ⲧⲥⲟⲫ[ⲓⲁ⁸⁰ | ⲛ̄ⲛ̄ϩ]ⲉⲗⲗⲏⲛ·⁸¹
    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲅⲛⲱⲥⲓⲥ⁸² ⲛ̄[ⲛ̄]|ⲃ̣[ⲁ]ⲣ̣[ⲃ]ⲁⲣⲟⲥ·⁸³
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲡⲉ ⲫⲁⲡ̄ ⲛ̄[ⲛ̄]|ϩⲉⲗⲗⲏⲛ⁸⁴ ⲙⲛ̄ ⲛ̄ⲃⲁⲣⲃⲁⲣⲟⲥ·
ⲁ̣[ⲛⲟⲕ]⁸⁵ | ⲡⲉⲧ̇ⲛⲁϣⲉ ⲡⲉⲥⲉⲓⲛⲉ ϩⲛ̄ ⲕⲏⲙⲉ [·]⁸⁶|

    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲉⲧⲉ ⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲥⲉⲓⲛⲉ⁸⁷ϩⲛ̄ ⲛ̄ⲃⲁⲣ|ⲃⲁⲣⲟⲥ·⁸⁸

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⁷⁸ Reconstructed by Krause.

⁷⁹ ⲅⲁⲣ both indicates a new stanza or thought unit and continues the theme of "Greeks and barbarians" posed in the question from the previous stanza. The two stanzas, therefore, constitute one larger unit, but differ in terms of syntax as well as line and language patterns. The previous stanza has a clear line pattern in which line 1 parallels line 4 and line 2 parallels line 5. 1 and 4 both begin with ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲟⲩ ⲁⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲙⲉⲥⲧⲱⲉⲓ, or "Why did you hate me," and the subsequent lines both begin with ⲭⲉ, which means "for/that/because," following by a rhetorical answer to the question. The two instances of ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲟⲩ link this stanza to the one preceding it, which also begins with the question "why" or ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲟⲩ, suggesting a very long, well-crafted section. The significance of the repetition of ⲭⲉ also lies in the fact that these two lines are the only ones in all of *Thunder* that begin with this particular word. The subsequent stanza, then, continues and expands upon the theme of Greeks and barbarians in terms of wisdom and knowledge as well as images, or the lack thereof. The final two lines return to the theme of the previous stanza of "hate," or she is the one who is "hated" and "loved" everywhere.

⁸⁰ The word ⲥⲟⲫⲓⲁ or wisdom has a long history in ancient Israelite, Jewish, Greek, and Christian thought. In monotheistic trajectories, she is a hypostasis or personified female divine attribute of God. In these same trajectories and in other places she is or may be a goddess in her own right (see Proverbs; Wisdom of Solomon; Sirach; and many of the documents in the NHC). This line might be picking up on some of these traditions, but the passage itself puts "wisdom" in a parallel line with "knowledge," at the very least muting that association or reworking in terms of the next word, ⲅⲛⲱⲥⲓⲥ, which was not ever personified or deified. For the relationship of *Thunder* to ancient wisdom literature, see Chapter 3.

⁸¹ Reconstructed by Krause.

⁸² The word ⲅⲛⲱⲥⲓⲥ along with ancient word ⲅⲛⲟⲥⲧⲓⲕⲟⲥ (or "gnostic") is part of the nexus of ancient terminology whence the modern construction of "Gnosticism" derives. Along with MacRae, we do not think that this text fits within any modern reconstruction of "Gnosticism" or invokes even those other texts that have been placed in these categories, but probably just reflects the ancient Greek emphasis, such as in the philosophical traditions, on knowledge and knowing more generally. The word appears again in this text in 18.14-15, regarding "my knowledge of angels," and in 19.32-33 as "the knowledge of my name." For a discussion on *Thunder* and "Gnosticism," see Chapter 4.

⁸³ Reconstructed by Krause.

⁸⁴ Reconstructed by Krause.

⁸⁵ Reconstructed by Krause.

⁸⁶ The text does not indicate a break at this point, but the MS is corrupt here. Breaking the line here creates two parallel lines that center around the word ⲉⲓⲛⲉ or image.

⁸⁷ The word for image ⲉⲓⲛⲉ is feminine in this line (ⲧⲉⲥⲉⲓⲛⲉ), whereas it is masculine in the previous line (ⲡⲉⲥⲉⲓⲛⲉ).

⁸⁸ Poirier (*Tonnerre,* 116-7, 170, 252-4) argues, on the basis of this line alone, that *Thunder* must be Jewish. This particular line may, in fact, refer to the well-known, although not always adhered to, Jewish prohibition on images. One cannot, however, characterize an entire text on the basis of a single line, since the speaker identifies with the images in Egypt just as easily as with the lack of them among the "barbarians," or possibly Jews. It seems, rather, that the text is referring to a very well-known group of perceived outsiders or "barbarians" (from a Greek's point of view), adding another permutation to the multiply identifying voice of *Thunder*. See further Chapter 2.

Because I am a barbarian among barbarians?[89]

I am the wisdom of the Greeks and the knowledge of the barbarians
I am the justice of both the Greeks and barbarians   7
I am he whose image is multiple in Egypt[90]
And she who is without an image among the barbarians

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[89] This sentence is the only straightforward identity proposed and accepted by *Thunder*'s "I." All other "I am" phrases in *Thunder* are spoken with complex irony and paradox. However, to a certain extent this straightforward identity statement without additional twist, contradiction, or paradox is in itself a paradox--there is no one in the Hellenistic world who would self-proclaim her/himself a "barbarian."

[90] In the larger rhetoric of Egypt in the Greco-Roman world, "Egypt" was often, but not always, associated with "barbarian." The Coptic *khme* literally means "black" or "dark." More significant than this, however, is the high Greek identity of Egypt's main cosmopolitan city of Alexandria. Cf. chapters 2, 6, and 7 on the tension between the "Greek" Egyptian city of Alexandria and the rest of Egypt, especially the contrast between sophisticated Alexandria and rural Egyptians. It appears quite possible here that the "honor" of Alexandria is being ironically confused and caricatured in this section of *Thunder*. This would help make sense of the two paired sentences: "I am he whose image is multiple in Egypt and she who is without image among the barbarians." The comparisons/contrasts of "he/she" and "multiple image/without an image" are given ironic power by the similarity between Egypt and barbarian.

ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲧⲉⲛⲧⲁⲩⲙⲉⲥⲧⲱⲥ [16.10] ϩⲛ̄ ⲙⲁ ⲛⲓⲙ·
    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲉⲛⲧⲁⲩⲙⲉⲣⲓⲧⲥ̄ | ϩⲙ̄[91] ⲙⲁ ⲛⲓⲙ·

ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲧⲉⲧⲉ ϣⲁⲩⲙⲟⲩ|ⲧⲉ ⲉⲣⲟⲥ ϫⲉ ⲡⲱⲛϩ̄·
    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲁⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄|ⲙⲟⲩⲧⲉ ϫⲉ ⲡⲙⲟⲩ·
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲧⲉⲧⲉ | ϣⲁⲩⲙⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲉⲣⲟⲥ ϫⲉ ⲡⲛⲟⲙⲟⲥ [·][92]
    [16.15] ⲁⲩⲱ ⲁⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲙⲟⲩⲧⲉ ϫⲉ ⲧⲁⲛⲟⲙⲓⲁ·[93]|

ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲧⲉⲛⲧⲁⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲡⲱⲧ̄ ⲛ̄ⲥⲱⲉⲓ·
    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲧⲉⲛⲧⲁⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲁⲙⲁϩⲧⲉ | ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲉⲓ·
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲧⲉ[94] ⲧⲉⲛⲧⲁⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄ϫⲟ|ⲟⲣⲉⲧ̄ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ·
    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲁⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲥⲟⲟⲩ|ϩⲧ̄ ⲉϩⲟⲩⲛ·
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲧⲉⲛⲧⲁⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄|ϣⲓⲡⲉ ϩⲏⲧⲥ̄·
    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲁⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲣ̄ ⲁⲧϣⲓ|ⲡⲉ ⲛⲏⲉⲓ·
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲧⲉⲧⲉ ⲙⲁⲥⲣ̄ ϣⲁ· |
    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲧⲉⲧⲉ ⲛⲁϣⲉ ⲛⲉⲥϣⲁ·[95]|

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[91] In this line, the ⲛ in ϩⲛ assimilates to ⲙ, whereas in the previous line it remains the same even in the exact same placement.

[92] At every other similar point in the stanza, the text indicates a break with a half-raised dot, but does not do so here. The break has been supplied to follow the pattern in the passage.

[93] These four lines syntactically alternate between the habitual and the perfect tenses. The lines also always couple the habitual with the relative form ⲧⲉⲧⲉ or "she whom." Moreover, the lines alternate between "they" and "you" as the subjects with "they" always in the habitual and "you" always in the perfect.

[94] Note the use of the copula here, where the previous and subsequent sentences omit it. In fact, the last two lines are different enough to be considered a new thought unit, but placing them in the next stanza creates unnecessary awkwardness with the double "I" statement, which, in the Coptic, seems to "wake up" the reader/hearer; it punctuates the prose like an exclamation point. Therefore, we have chosen to consider the lines concerning celebrating festivals as a conclusion to the previous stanza, while recognizing that the copula helps the transition to the next stanza.

[95] The use of the feminine relative form of ⲧⲉⲛⲧⲁ or "she whom" and the second person plural perfect ⲁⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄, creates a tongue twister with an extremely high density of "t" and "n" sounds. One might also note that this stanza both begins and ends with two parallel rhyming lines. The first two lines end on the "ei" sound and the last two on the "sha" sound. The very last line plays with the sonority to an even greater extent, playing on the "n" and "sha" sounds in ⲛⲁϣⲁ and ⲛⲉϣϲⲁ. One might also note that the concluding lines change from the relative form of ⲧⲉⲛⲧⲁ or "she whom" to the relative form of ⲧⲉⲧⲉ, which is here "she who." For the sonority of this passage, see Chapter 9.

I am she who was hated in every place
And she who was loved in every place

I am she whom they call life
And you[96] all called death
I am she whom they call law
And you all called lawlessness   15

I am she whom you chased and she whom you captured[97]
I am she whom you scattered
And you have gathered me together
I am she before whom you were ashamed
And you have been shameless to me
I am she who does not celebrate festivals
And I am she whose festivals are spectacular

_____

[96] Cf. Chapter 4 for a thorough discussion of the curious personages of "you" and "they" in *Thunder*.
[97] This stanza is full of depictions of the "feminine" "I" of *Thunder* in desperate and humiliating circumstances: being chased, captured, scattered, shamed, unlearned, and detested. This strong grouping of such characteristics in typical *Thunder* fashion is not left without ironic contrasts of being at the same time "she whose festivals are spectacular" and "whose God is magnificent." There may be some contrast with the "feminine" characterization of "I" and the "I am he the one you thought about" and "I am he from whom you hid."

ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲁⲛⲟⲕ[98] ⲟⲩⲁⲧⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ·
    ⲁⲩⲱ [16.25] ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲧⲉⲧⲉ ⲛⲁϣⲉ ⲡⲉⲥⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ· |
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲡⲉⲛⲧⲁⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲙⲉⲉⲩⲉ ⲉⲣⲟⲓ̈ | ⲁⲩⲱ ⲁⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄ϣⲟⲥⲧ̄·
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲟⲩ|ⲁⲧ̈ⲥⲃⲱ·
    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲉⲩϫⲓ ⲥⲃⲱ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ | ϩ̄ⲓⲧⲟⲟⲧ̈·
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲧⲉ ⲧⲉⲛⲧⲁⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄|ⲕⲁⲧⲁⲫⲣⲟⲛⲉⲓ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲉⲓ·
    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲉ|ⲧⲛ̄ⲙⲉⲉⲩⲉ ⲉⲣⲟⲉⲓ·
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲡⲉⲛ|ⲧⲁⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄ϩⲱⲡⲓ̈ ⲉⲣⲟⲉⲓ·
    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲉ|ⲧⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲟⲛϩ̄ ⲛⲁⲓ̈ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ·[99]

ϩⲟⲧⲁⲛ ⲇⲉ | ⲉⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄ϣⲁⲛϩⲱⲡⲓ̈ ⲙ̄ⲙⲱⲧⲛ̄·[100] |
    ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ϩⲱⲱⲧ̈ ⲧ̄ⲛⲁⲟⲩⲟⲛϩ̄ⲧ̄ [17.1] [ⲉⲃⲟⲗ·
ϩⲟⲧⲁⲛ] ⲅⲁⲣ[101] ⲉⲣ[ϣ]ⲁⲛⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄[102]| [ⲟⲩⲟⲛϩⲧⲛ̄ ⲉ]ⲃⲟⲗ·[103]
    ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ϩⲱⲱⲧ̈ | [ⲧ̄ⲛⲁϩⲱⲡⲓ̈ ⲉ]ⲣⲱⲧⲛ̄·[104]

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[98] The double "I" as an indicator of a new topic to the extent that it breaks or punctuates the prose in an exclamatory fashion (cf. 15.15 and 19.15).

[99] This stanza has an interesting play on gender. After the initial two lines that begin with ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲁⲛⲟⲕ, the subsequent lines flip back and forth between masculine and feminine relative pronouns.

[100] The last stanza ended with the theme of hiding and appearing, which provides a transition into the theme of these four lines. The break in this stanza is given primarily by syntactical indications of a shift to the ϩⲟⲧⲁⲛ form, meaning "whenever," which does not appear anywhere else in the poem, and by the disjunctive ⲇⲉ. We left the reconstructions in the prose because the parallelism makes the reconstructions virtually certain. The reconstructed ⲉⲃⲟⲗ was retained because the word ⲟⲩⲟⲛⲟⲛϩ takes an ⲉⲃⲟⲗ. The rest of the words were reconstructed by the parallel forms. Overall, the passage plays back and forth between the presence and absence or the "appearance" and "hiding" of the "I" and the "you." Although it is a continuation of the same theme from the previous stanza, it differs, in terms of content, in one crucial respect. In the previous stanza, it was the "you" who both hid and appeared. In this stanza, however, whenever the "you" hides, the "I" appears, and vice versa. Whether the following lines that begin with ⲛⲉⲛⲧⲁⲩ belong to this stanza or to its own stanza is uncertain due to the lacunae in the MS.

[101] [ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲟⲧⲁⲛ] ⲅⲁⲣ MacRae; [ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲟⲧⲁⲛ ⲅ]ⲁⲣ Krause.

[102] Reconstructed by Krause.

[103] Reconstructed by Krause and Bethge; Cherix and Poirier: [ⲟⲩⲱ̄ⲛ̄ϩ̄ ⲛⲁⲓ̈ ⲉ]ⲃⲟⲗ.

[104] Reconstructed by Krause.

I, I[105] am without God[106]   24
And I am she whose God is magnificent
I am he the one you thought about and you detested me
I am not learned[107] and they learn from me
I am she whom you detested and yet you think about me
I am he from whom you hid
And you appear to me

Whenever you hide yourselves, I myself will appear   35
17.1 Whenever you hide yourselves, I myself will appear
Whenever you, I myself [.......] you [..]

---

[105] The Coptic emphasizes this statement with a rare doubling of the "I" *anok anok.*

[106] We have chosen to capitalize "God" here in order to retain the enigmatic assertion about *Thunder* 's "I" as without (a) divinity. This represents an effort to translate into contemporary English, in which the term "god" mostly serves as an antiquarian reference. However one might want to interpret this line, it is clear that *Thunder* is not treating the topic of the divine in such an antiquarian manner. Other translations use "god" in some form, leaving the reader with much less irony and tension. The ancient reader/hearer--whether in a monotheistic or polytheistic frame of reference--would almost certainly have experienced "I, I am without God" as massively ironic, in that the form of literature *Thunder* most closely represents is the aretalogy or self-revelation of a God/god. Cf. Chapter 2 for ways *Thunder* turns out to be a parody of this common literary form of divine self-revelation.

[107] This translation needs the proper pronunciation to make sense, with the accent on the second syllable, "learn-ed."

ⲛⲉⲛⲧⲁⲩ [|] ϩⲓⲧⲟⲟⲧϥ̄ ⲙ̄ⲡ[| ·][108]
    [   ] ϩⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲙⲛ̄ⲧ̇ⲁⲑ[ⲏⲧ̇[109] |] ⲧⲉ·[110]
ϥⲓ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲉⲓ. [ ]ⲧⲟⲩ[111] | [ⲉⲡⲓⲥⲧⲏ]ⲙⲏ[112] ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲛ̄ ⲟⲩ[ⲙ̄]ⲕⲁϩ[113]| ⲛ̄ϩ̇ⲉ[ⲏ]ⲧ̇·[114]
    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄ϣⲟⲡⲧ̄[115] | ⲉ̇[ⲡⲱ]ⲧⲛ̇[116] ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲉⲡⲓⲥⲧⲏⲙ[ⲏ | ⲙⲛ̄ ⲟⲩ]
        ⲙ̄ⲕⲁϩ[117] ⲛ̄ϩⲏⲧ̇·[118]
ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄ϣⲟ|[ⲡ]ⲧ̄[119] ⲉⲣⲱⲧⲛ̄ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲛ̄ ϩⲉⲛⲧⲟⲡⲟⲥ [17.12] ⲉⲩϭⲁⲉⲓⲏⲟⲩ·
    ⲁⲩⲱ ϩⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲧⲁⲛⲟ· |
ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲧⲱⲣⲡ̄[120] ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲛ̄ ⲛⲉ|ⲧⲛⲁⲛⲟⲩⲟⲩ ⲕⲁⲛ ϩⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲙⲛ̄ⲧ̇ϭⲁ|ⲉⲓⲉ<·>[121]

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[108] Due to the extremely fragmentary condition of this section of the MS, this line break is hypothesized on the basis of the approximate average of number of letter spaces that the line breaks have in this section.

[109] Reconstructed by Krause; Cherix ⲟⲩⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲑ[ⲏⲧ ⲙ̄ⲛⲟⲩ]; Poirier ⲟⲩⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲑ[ⲏⲧ ⲁⲩⲱ]

[110] Cherix [ⲙ̄ⲛ̄ⲧϣⲁϥ]ⲧⲉ.

[111] Reconstructed by MacRae; Krause ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲉⲓ [ⲛ̄]ⲧⲟⲩ; Cherix ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲉⲓ ϩ[ⲛ̄]ⲧⲟⲩ; Poirier ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲉⲓ ϩ[ⲛ̄]ⲧⲟⲩ.

[112] Reconstructed by Krause.

[113] Reconstructed by Krause.

[114] Frg. Pl. 11*d; Reconstructed by MacRae and Cherix; Krause [ⲛ̄ϩⲏ]ⲧ.

[115] Cherix ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄ϣⲟ[ⲡ]ⲧ.

[116] Frg. Pl. 11*d; Reconstructed by MacRae; Krause [ⲉⲣⲱ]ⲧⲛ̄.

[117] ⲟⲩⲉⲡⲓⲥⲧⲏⲙ[ⲏ | ⲙⲛ̄ ⲟⲩ]ⲙ̄ⲕⲁϩ reconstructed by Krause; Poirier: [ϩⲛⲟⲩ]ⲙ̄ⲕⲁϩ.

[118] This is an unusually long line for this text, but I am unsure, on the basis of the current reconstruction, of how it could have been broken up differently. In fact, it parallels the previous line very well. The first line in the set uses one form of "take" (ϥⲓ) and the second line, another form (ϣⲟⲡ̄). Both lines most likely use the word ⲉⲡⲓⲥⲧⲏⲙⲏ or "understanding," although this must be reconstructed for the first line, and they also both use a phrase, ⲟⲩⲙ̄ⲕⲁϩⲛ̄ϩⲏⲧ, that means "heartache." Parallel lines, especially when they use almost virtually the same vocabulary, highlight whatever differences there may be. The differences here are the different forms of the word "take." The first has the connotation of "to carry" or "bear," while the second has the connotation of "to receive." The other difference is the position of the prepositions. Indeed, while the exact same prepositions are used, they are placed slightly differently to bring out different nuances of meaning. The first line literally means, "understanding from within heartache," while the second line means, "from within understanding and grief."

[119] Reconstructed by Krause.

[120] Funk and Poirier: ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲧⲱⲣⲡ̄<ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲉⲓ>.

[121] There is no indication of a line break at this point in the text, but one is postulated based upon the parallelism it creates with the subsequent lines both in terms of syntax, beginning both clauses with ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲛ̄, and in terms of content, with the marked emphasis on "shame" and "shamelessness."

[.......] Those who have [....]
[.....] to it [….……..] take me[………….]from
   within[………]   6
Receive me with understanding and heartache
Take me from the disgraced[122] and crushed places
Rob from those who are good, even though in disgrace

---

[122] *Baeie* occurs in this line and the following one, and is translated "disgraced" and "in disgrace." It can also have the meaning of "ugly," but disgrace seems more appropriate to the ancient Mediterranean dynamic of honor and shame that *Thunder* seems to target so often as object of deconstruction.

ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲛ̄[123] ⲟⲩϣⲓⲡⲉ ϣⲟⲡⲧ̄[124] | ⲉⲣⲱⲧⲛ̄ ϩⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲙⲛ̄ⲧ̇ⲁⲧϣⲓⲡⲉ· |
    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲙⲛ̄ⲧ̇ⲁⲧϣⲓⲡⲉ | ⲙⲛ̄ ⲟⲩϣⲓⲡⲉ·[125]

ϫⲡⲓⲟ ⲛ̄ⲛⲁⲙⲉ|ⲗⲟⲥ ϩⲛ̄ ⲧⲏⲩⲧⲛ̄·
    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ|ⲧⲛ̄ϯ ⲡⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲟⲉⲓ ⲉϩⲟⲩⲛ ⲉⲣⲟⲓ̈ |
ⲛⲉⲧ̇ⲥⲟⲟⲩⲛ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲉⲓ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛⲉⲧ|ⲥⲟⲟⲩⲛ ⲛ̄ⲛⲁⲙⲉⲗⲟⲥ·
ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄|ⲥⲙⲓⲛⲉ ⲛ̄ⲛⲟϭ ϩⲛ̄ ⲛ̄ⲕⲟⲩⲉⲓ ⲛ̄|ϣⲟⲣⲡ̄ ⲛ̄ⲕⲧⲓⲥⲙⲁ·

† ⲡⲉⲧⲛ̄|ⲟⲩⲟⲉⲓ ⲉϩⲣⲁⲓ̈ ⲉⲧⲙⲛ̄ⲧϣⲏⲣⲉ|ϣⲏⲙ·
    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲙ̄ⲡⲣ̄ⲙⲉⲥⲧⲱⲥ | ϫⲉ ⲥ̄ⲥⲁⲃⲉⲕ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲟⲩⲕⲟⲩⲉⲓ|ⲧⲉ·
ⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲣ̄ⲧⲥⲧⲟ ⲛ̄ϩⲉⲛ | ⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲛⲁϭ ϩⲛ̄ ϩⲉⲛⲙⲉⲣⲟⲥ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ | ϩⲛ̄ ⲙ̄ⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲕⲟⲩⲉⲓ·
ⲉϣⲁⲩ|ⲥⲟⲩⲱⲛ ⲙ̄ⲙⲛ̄ⲧ̇ⲕⲟⲩⲉⲓ ⲅⲁⲣ | ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲛ̄ ⲙ̄ⲙⲛ̄ⲧ̇ⲛⲟϭ·[126]

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[123] This is the only place in the poem where ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲛ̄ begins a line as a prepositional phrase, although compare the conjunctive use of ⲉⲃⲟⲗ with a meaning of "because" or "since" to begin a new line in 20.13. The use of this prepositional phrase at the beginning of a line forces a different syntactical arrangement than anywhere else in the poem, suggesting that it is introducing a new stanza. The next two lines, in fact, speak of the theme of "shame," employing various permutations of the root word ϣⲓⲡⲉ.

[124] ϣⲓⲡⲉ ϣⲟⲡⲧ̄ or "shame, take me" is a play on words in Coptic. Both words use the root consonants of ϣ and ⲡ. See further Chapter 9.

[125] The ordering of these two lines forms a chiasm of shame, shamelessness/shamelessness, shame.

[126] These last two stanzas have parallel organizations, suggesting that they belong together; thus, they are indented to highlight their similarities. They each begin with a line followed by a line that begins with ⲁⲩⲱ, followed by two parallel lines without the usual parallelism indicator of ⲁⲩⲱ, making these two stanzas syntactically unique in the poem. In fact, we contend that these three stanzas form a poem within a poem, and, thus, belong together (again, indicated by indenting the entire stanza). The first two lines introduce the new poem with the theme of shame and shamelessness, which seems to be somewhat connected to the next stanza's line that commands one to "blame my parts in you." The last part, in turn, overlaps with knowing those "parts," by which time the poem within a poem has reached a new structural and syntactical form that links smallness and greatness with the command to "come forward to childhood," a line that links back up to the command to "come forward to me," both using the phrase ⲡⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲟⲉⲓ.. Therefore, there are many intricate links between the stanzas both grammatically and thematically that point to a very sophisticated and largely self-contained composition. For an extensive discussion of this entire passage, see Chapter 9.

Bring me in shame,[127] to yourselves, out of shame
With or without shame[128]
Blame the parts of me within yourselves
Come toward me, you who know me   20
and you who know the parts of me
Assemble the great among the small and earliest creatures

Advance toward childhood[129]   25
Do not hate it because it is small and insignificant
Don't reject the small parts of greatness because they are small
since smallness is recognized from within greatness

---

[127] The alliteration of these two lines is especially strong. It also forms a chiasm of shame, shamelessness/shamelessness, shame. These strong oral or performancial elements would make less sense in a written form. Cf. Chapter 9's discussion of performance of *Thunder*.

[128] This sentence that we have translated "Bring me in shame, to yourselves, out of shame, with or without shame" confirms our larger translational attention to ancient Mediterranean social systems of honor and shame and to *Thunder*'s eagerness to burst them open. Because of obscurity of meaning, we have been tempted to paraphrase the Coptic in order to gain meaning. But, as noted in the translator's preface, we have not allowed paraphrasing in the translation out of a longer-term commitment to meanings that may emerge in further study of *Thunder*. In notes then, we speculate on some possible paraphrasing that might make more sense. Such a paraphrase might be: "Bring me and my shamefulness to yourselves in order to escape from your shamefulness. Whether you are ashamed or not, just bring me to yourselves."

[129] "Advancing" toward "childhood" is another kind of irony, over against the dominant ancient Mediterranean ethos that values maturity and wisdom of those aging. Note another such irony in *Matt* 18:3: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

ⲉⲧⲃⲉ | ⲟⲩ ⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲥⲁϩⲟⲩ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲉⲓ·¹³⁰|

    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲉⲓⲟ¹³¹ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲉⲓ·|

ⲁⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲱ̄ϣⲉ·

    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲁⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄|ⲛⲁ·¹³²

ⲙ̄ⲡⲣ̄ⲡⲟⲣϫⲧ̄ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲛ̄ ⲛ̄ϣⲟⲣⲡ̄ [18.1] ⲛⲁⲓ̈ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁ[ⲧⲉ]ⲧⲛ̄ⲥ[·]¹³³

[ ]¹³⁴ | ⲙ̄ⲡⲣ̄ⲛⲉϩ ⲗⲁⲁⲩ [ⲉⲃⲟⲗ·]¹³⁵

    [   ] | ⲧⲥ̄ⲧⲉ¹³⁶ⲗⲁⲁⲩ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛ̣̄¹³⁷ [| ·]

    [ ]ⲧⲥⲧⲁ ⲧⲏⲛⲉ ⲁⲩ[ⲱ¹³⁸| ⲥⲟⲟ]ⲩⲛ¹³⁹ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟϥ ⲁⲛ·

ⲁⲛ[¹⁴⁰ |]ϥ·

---

¹³⁰ There are many indications that this line begins a new stanza. It begins by asking a question, and we have seen elsewhere that asking a question with ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲟⲩ often signals a change of topic. Moreover, the line lengths are much shorter than the previous stanzas, and this stanza shows no real connection to the previous three stanzas, which had several interrelationships between them.

¹³¹ The MS reads ⲧϭⲁⲉⲓⲟ, which would mean "condemn," but the letter ϭ appears to be erased. The reconstruction of ⲧⲁⲉⲓⲟ provides an antithesis to ⲥⲁϩⲟⲩ, which means "curse." As MacRae notes, however, elsewhere the MS erasures are indicated by dots above the letters or by strokes through them, while here the letter ϭ has been singularly rubbed out.

¹³² This is the shortest set of parallel lines in the piece, with the paralleled aspects being only one word in each line connected by the usual ⲁⲩⲱ. This creates a strong possibility of these lines and the two before them being a separate unit unto themselves because of the very long subsequent lines. Although, given the poor state of the MS in the following section, it is difficult to determine any larger syntactical or thematic patterns.

¹³³ MacRae ⲛ̄ⲧⲁ[ⲧⲉ]ⲧⲛ̄ⲥ[ⲟⲩⲱⲛⲟⲩ]; Krause ⲛ̄ⲧⲁ[ⲧⲉ]ⲧⲛ̄ⲥ[ⲟⲩⲱⲛⲟⲩ]. The new stanza, as noted in the last footnote, is predicated upon line length and a shift in topic, although, as also noted, the lacunaes make any formatting much more hypothetical than usual. MacRae reconstructs this lacuna as ⲛⲧⲁ[ⲧⲉ]~ ~ ⲧⲛ̄ⲥ[ⲟⲩⲱⲛⲟⲩ.]. We agree that the first reconstruction of ⲧⲉ is virtually certain, while the latter insertion of ⲟⲩⲱⲛⲟⲩ is probable, but we have chosen to exercise caution in applying this word to this lacuna since only one letter, ⲥ, remains in the text. This caution, then, extends to the rest of the lacuna, which appears on our subsequent line with the reconstruction of ⲟⲩⲇⲉ.

¹³⁴ Krause and MacRae: ⲟⲩⲇⲉ.

¹³⁵ This reconstruction is virtually certain based upon the subsequent line with a parallel phrase.

¹³⁶ Krause's reconstruction of [ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄]ⲧⲥ̄ⲧⲉ or the nominative "you" is highly likely given use of ⲧⲏⲛⲉ, or the accusative "you" in the parallel line, which most likely reverses whatever relationship this line portrays in terms of "turning away." Cf. Cherix: [ⲟⲩⲇⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲣ̄]ⲧⲥ̄ⲧⲉ.

¹³⁷ Reconstructed by MacRae; Krause ⲉⲃⲟⲗ[.

¹³⁸ MacRae's reconstruction; Krause ⲧⲥⲧⲁ ⲧⲏⲛⲉ ⲁⲛ[; Poirier ⲧⲥⲧⲁⲧⲏⲛⲛⲉ ⲁ̣[.

¹³⁹ Krause's reconstruction here is virtually certain given the only word consistently used in the MS that ends with ⲩⲛ is ⲥⲟⲟⲩⲛ.

¹⁴⁰ Following MacRae; Krause ⲁⲛ̣[; Cherix ⲁⲛ[ⲟⲕ].

Why did you curse me and revere me?
You wounded me and you relented
Don't separate me from the first **18.1** ones
you[……….]
throw away no one[………..]   3
turn away no[………….]

ⲧⲉⲧⲉ ⲧⲱⲉⲓ [¹⁴¹   ·] |
†ⲥ̣[ⲟ]ⲟⲩⲛ¹⁴² ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲛ̄ⲛ̄ϣ[ⲟⲣ]ⲡ̄ⲛ̄[·] |
 ⲁⲩⲱ¹⁴³| ⲛⲉⲧⲙⲛ̄ⲛ̄ⲥⲁ ⲛⲁⲓ̈ ⲥⲉⲥⲟ̣ⲟ̣[ⲩⲛ¹⁴⁴ ⲙ̄]ⲙ̣ⲟⲉⲓ [·]¹⁴⁵ |

 ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲇⲉ¹⁴⁶ ⲡⲉ ⲛⲟⲩⲥ ⲛ̣[·]¹⁴⁷ |
  [18.10] ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲁⲛⲁⲡⲁⲩⲥⲓⲥ ⲙ̄ⲡ[.] .. [·]¹⁴⁸

 ⲁ̣|ⲛⲟⲕ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲥⲟⲟⲩⲛ ⲙ̄ⲡⲁϣⲓⲛⲉ·
  ⲁⲩⲱ | ⲡϭⲓⲛⲉ ⲛ̄ⲛⲉⲧ̄ϣⲓⲛⲉ ⲛ̄ⲥⲱⲉⲓ·
  ⲁⲩⲱ | ⲡⲟⲩⲁϩⲥⲁϩⲛⲉ ⲛ̄ⲛⲉⲧⲣ̄ⲁⲓⲧⲉⲓ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲉⲓ |
  ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧϭⲁⲙ ⲛ̄ⲛ̄ϭⲁⲙ¹⁴⁹ ϩⲛ̄ ⲧⲁⲅⲛⲱ|ⲥⲓⲥ¹⁵⁰ ⲛ̄ⲛⲁⲅⲅⲉⲗⲟⲥ·

ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲩⲧⲁⲟⲩⲟ|ⲟⲩ ϩⲙ̄ ⲡⲁⲗⲟⲅⲟⲥ <·>¹⁵¹

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¹⁴¹ Following MacRae; Krause ⲧⲱⲉ̣ⲓ[; Cherix ⲧⲱⲉⲓ [ⲧⲉ.

¹⁴² Following Krause; Cherix †ⲥ[ⲟ]ⲟⲩⲛ.

¹⁴³ Fr. Pl. 12*d; MacRae's reconstruction; Krause ⲛ̄ⲛ̄ϣ[ⲟⲣⲡ ⲁⲩⲱ]; Bethge ⲛ̄ⲛ̄ϣ[ⲟⲣ]ⲡ̄ ⲁⲩⲱ.

¹⁴⁴ Krause's reconstruction.

¹⁴⁵ Fr. Pl. 12*d; MacRae's reconstruction; Krause ⲙ̄ⲙⲟ̈.

¹⁴⁶ ⸗ indicates a change in topic.

¹⁴⁷ Krause reconstructs that this lacuna with = ⲛ̣[ⲧⲉⲗⲉⲓⲟⲥ], which would make, "I am he the perfect mind," the only allusion to the title in the entire poem. Perhaps due to the complete lack of reference to the title in the text, we should be suspicious of such a reconstruction. Outside of the title (13.1), the word nous itself appears again in 19.32. Marvin Meyer, does, however, reconstruct "perfect mind" at this point in his translation (Meyer, *Nag Hammadi Scriptures*, 376); cf. MacRae (18.9 note).

¹⁴⁸ Following MacRae; Krause ⲙ̄ⲡ[ ] . . [ⲁ]; Giversen ⲙ̄ⲡ[ϩⲣⲟ]ⲩ̣[ⲙⲡⲉ]; Cherix ⲙ̄ⲡ[ⲛ]ⲟⲩ[ⲥ]; Poirier ⲙ̄ⲡ [. .]ⲟ̣ⲩ[. .] .

¹⁴⁹ The word "power" shifts in spelling from ϭⲟⲙ (13.3) to ϭⲁⲙ; the former is the standard Sahidic spelling and the latter is the typical Subachmimic spelling (cf. nn. 17 and 29).

¹⁵⁰ Cf. the use of the word ⲅⲛⲱⲥⲓⲥ in 16.4, in which it is used in parallel to ⲥⲟⲫⲓⲁ, and in 19.32-33, in which it is the "knowledge of my name."

¹⁵¹ There is no line break indication here in the MS, but it is tempting to place it here to create a parallel structure of two sets of four lines.

she who[.....]
I know those
And the ones after these know me

But I am the mind[152][.......] and the rest [.......]   9
I am the learning from my search
And the discovery of those seeking me
The command of those who ask about me
And the power of powers[153] [154]   14
In my understanding of the angels[155]
Who were sent on my word

---

[152] One of two occurrences of the word *nous* from the title. It, however, does not contain any allusion to the "thunder" in the title.

[153] Lines 9-14 display a clear thematic resonance with the beginning of *Thunder*: mind, power, pondering/learning, searching, and finding. Both sections are also followed by an extended "I am" segment.

[154] The repetition of "power" and its connection to the repetition of "God" in line 17 seems reminiscent of *The Gospel of Peter* 5:5.

[155] Lines 14 to 17 seem to mark a departure in vocabulary from the piece to this point. The use of "power of powers", "angels," "word," and "God among Gods" imply a kind of cosmic or metaphysical vocabulary not noted in *Thunder* by and large. It does have some particular similarities to *the Gospel of Peter* 5:5, in which there is a doubling of "power" as a parallel for the doubling of "God" in *the Gospel of Mark*'s 15:34.

ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛ̄ⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ | ϩⲛ̄ ⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ[156] ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲙ̄ ⲡⲁϣⲟϫⲛⲉ·|
ⲁⲩⲱ ⲙ̄ⲡ̄ⲛ̄ⲁ̄ ⲛ̄ⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲛⲓⲙ ⲉⲩ|ϣⲟⲟⲡ̄ ⲛⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲉⲓ·
ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛ̄ϩ̄ⲓ̄ⲟⲙⲉ [18.20] ⲉⲩϣⲟⲟⲡ̄ ⲛ̄ϩⲏⲧ·[157]

ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲧⲉ ⲧⲉⲧ|ⲧⲁⲉⲓⲏⲟⲩ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲉⲧⲟⲩⲥⲙⲟⲩ | ⲉⲣⲟⲥ·
ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲉⲧⲟⲩⲣ̄ⲕⲁⲧⲁⲫⲣⲟ|ⲛⲓ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲥ ϩⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲱⲥ·
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ | ⲧⲉ ϯⲣⲏⲛⲏ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲡ̄ⲡⲟⲗⲉⲙⲟⲥ | ϣⲱⲡⲉ ⲉⲧⲃⲏⲏⲧ·

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[156] This is a difficult passage. It may be a clever play on words that works only in Coptic in which the first ⲛ̄ⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ means "gods" and the second ⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ means "in their times/seasons." MacRae notes that for this translation to work, the word should be ⲛⲉⲩⲧⲏ. The word ⲧⲏ or "time/season" is also attested spelled as ⲧⲉ. The only nonstandard variation would be the third person plural possessive, usually being ⲉⲩ but here potentially as ⲟⲩ. Even so, while in Sahidic, one invariably expects ⲉⲩ, Subachmimic attests both ⲉⲩ and ⲟⲩ as third person plural possessive pronouns (Till, *Dialektgrammatik,* 30). Another possible understanding would be "the gods among the gods." To do this, one would have to emend the text as suggested by Krause and followed by Poirier: ⲛ̄ⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ ϩⲛ̄ <ⲛ̄> ⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ. Even so, while in other bodies of literature, the second ⲛ drops, throughout the NHC three ⲛ's regularly recur in a row, and, in fact, usually with the noun, ⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ. One final possibility is "the gods in/among god/a god." In such case, one would expect the following: ⲛ̄ⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ ϩⲛ̄ <ⲡ>ⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ or ⲛ̄ⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ ϩⲛ̄ <ⲟⲩ>ⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ. Nevertheless, ⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ often appears without definite and indefinite article throughout the NHC, and, while sometimes it is translated as plural (in very special circumstances), the singular understanding seems to be the default. With such a tendency in mind, perhaps the best translation is "Gods in God," but given the very close vocalization between ⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ and ⲛⲉⲩⲧⲉ, it is possible that it could have been understood either way. Moreover, the text may be playing upon and reversing the earlier example of the "power of powers," moving from singular to plural, with "Gods in/among God," moving from plural to singular. In sum, this could be considered a place of a polysemous play on words, in which the text can be taken in two different ways, as either "Gods in/among God" or "Gods in their seasons."

[157] These three stanzas represent yet a third example of a "poem within a poem." Like the second example, as found in 17.15-32, this section follows a stanza pattern of sets 2, 4, and 4 parallel lines. As before, the relationship of the first two introductory lines with the last two stanzas is a bit more tenuous than the intricate interrelationships between the two longer stanzas themselves. The introductory lines may have had a stronger relationship with the succeeding stanzas, but the lacunae make this unknowable. The "mind" and "rest" probably introduce the themes of "knowledge" in the second stanza and "dwelling" or "existence" with the speaker in the last stanza. The second two stanzas of four parallel lines each are rather unique in Thunder in that they have one line with three parallel expansions of that line rather than the usual one additional parallel or the occasional two additional parallel lines. While based upon line organization the last two stanzas are separate, based upon syntax, they are not. In fact, the first line of the last stanza is a relative clause expanding upon the last word of the previous stanza of ⲙ̄ⲛⲁⲅⲅⲉⲗⲟⲥ. With the second stanza being a long expansion of the end of the first stanza, these last two stanzas could be rendered as a single, very long sentence about the knowledge of supra-mundane powers, including the angels or messengers (first set of four lines), and by whom those messengers have been sent (second set of four lines). For this kind of analysis of *Thunder*, cf. Ch.apter 8.

And the Gods in God, according to my design?   17
And spirits of men who exist with me
And the women who live in me[158]

I am she who is revered and adored
And she who is reviled with contempt
I am peace and war exists because of me

ⲁⲩⲱ ⲁⲛⲟⲕ | ⲟⲩϣⲙⲙⲟ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲟⲩⲣⲙ̅ ⲛ̅ⲡⲟⲗⲓⲥ·¹⁵⁹ |
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲧⲉ ⲧⲟⲩⲥⲓⲁ·
        ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲉⲧⲉ ⲙⲛ̅|ⲧⲉⲥ ⲟⲩⲥⲓⲁ·
ⲛⲉⲧⲟϣⲟⲟⲡ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ | ϩⲛ̅ ⲧⲁⲥⲩⲛⲟⲩⲥⲓⲁ·¹⁶⁰ ⲥⲉⲣ̅ⲁⲧ̅ⲥⲟⲟⲩⲛ [18.30] ⲙ̅ⲙⲟⲉⲓ·
        ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛⲉⲧϣⲟⲟⲡ̅ ϩⲛ̅ ⲧⲁ|ⲟⲩⲥⲓⲁ ⲛⲉⲧⲥⲟⲟⲩⲛ ⲙ̅ⲙⲟⲉⲓ·¹⁶¹|

ⲛⲉⲧϩⲏⲛ ⲉⲣⲟⲉⲓ·¹⁶² ⲁⲩⲣ̅ ⲁⲧ̅ⲥⲟⲟⲩⲛ | ⲙ̅ⲙⲟⲉⲓ·
        ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛⲉⲧⲟⲩⲏⲟⲩ ⲛ̅ⲥⲁ ⲛ̅ⲃⲟⲗ ⲙ̅ⲙⲟⲉⲓ ⲛⲉⲛⲧⲁⲩⲥⲟⲩ|ⲱⲛⲧ̅·
ϩⲙ̅ ⲡⲉϩⲟⲟⲩ ⲉⲉⲓϩⲏⲛ ⲉϩⲟⲩ̅¹⁶³ [19.1] [ⲉⲣⲱⲧⲛ̅ ⲧⲉⲧ]ⲛ̅ⲟⲩⲏⲟⲩ¹⁶⁴ ⲛ̅ⲥⲁⲙⲟⲗ¹⁶⁵ | [ⲙ̅ⲙⲟⲉⲓ·
        ⲁⲩ]ⲱ¹⁶⁶ ϩⲙ̅ ⲡⲉϩⲟⲟⲩ¹⁶⁷ ⲉⲓ̈|[ⲟⲩⲏⲟⲩ ⲛ̅ⲥⲁ]¹⁶⁸ ⲛ̅ⲃⲟⲗ ⲙ̅ⲙϣ[ⲧⲛ̅ ϯ|ϩⲏⲛ·

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¹⁵⁹ This section lacks the usual connecting terms that allow clearer indications of stanza breaks. There is a shift in parallel patterns, however. This stanza returns to the normal mode of two parallel lines (here two sets of two), unlike the previous two stanzas that used four at a time. We also have a distinctive shift from supra-mundane entities to clear social categories. The first falls into the category of honor and shame, construed broadly, which permeated the ancient Mediterranean world, drawing upon the terms of honor, praise, despising, and scorn. The next social category is peace and war. And the final category is the alien and the citizen. These social categories all have a bearing upon social belonging, delineating degrees of who belongs and who does not, whether within a society (honor and shame), between rival groups (peace and war), or an interaction between these two (alien and citizen). For a more extensive discussion of honor and shame as well as other social categories, see Chapter 7.

¹⁶⁰ Although the text indicates a line break here with a half-raised dot, and, indeed, this is a natural pause, but I have combined to two lines to illustrate the parallelism much more clearly.

¹⁶¹ This stanza shifts from the issues of social location of the previous stanza to more abstract existential themes of "being and nothingness," to borrow a phrase from Heidegger. The entire stanza plays on the words ⲟⲩⲥⲓⲁ, a Greek loanword for "being," and ⲥⲩⲛⲟⲩⲥⲓⲁ, which we have translated as "presence," but literally means "being with."

¹⁶² Like the previous stanza, the MS indicates a line break here, and, in fact, in reading or reciting this poem, this would be a natural pause, but the parallelism in these lines can actually best be illustrated by combining the two lines together in an oppositional parallel to the subsequent line.

¹⁶³ One would expect the word to be spelled ⲉϩⲟⲩⲛ rather than ⲉϩⲟⲩ̅ with a rare supra-linear stroke over a vowel. This abbreviated form with the supra-linear stroke typically occurs at the end of a line or column when the scribe has run out of room, as is the case here. Note the probable reconstruction of the final line uses ⲉϩⲟⲩⲛ in the exact same situation as one would expect. Cf. 20.24, which has ⲙ̅ⲡⲉⲧⲛ̅ⲥⲁⲛⲛⲟⲩ̅ rather than the expected ⲙ̅ⲡⲉⲧⲛ̅ⲥⲁⲛⲛⲟⲩⲛ.

¹⁶⁴ MacRae' reconstruction; Krause [ⲉⲣⲱⲧⲛ̅ ⲉ]ⲓ̣ ⲟⲩⲏⲟ[ⲩ̅]; Cherix [ⲉⲣⲱⲧⲛ̅ ⲉⲉ]ⲓ̣ ⲟⲩⲏⲟⲩ.

¹⁶⁵ ⲛ̅ⲥⲁⲙⲟⲗ appears to be a form of ⲛ̅ⲥⲁ ⲛ̅ⲃⲟⲗ in which the ⲃ has dropped out and the = ⲛ has changed to ⲙ̅. See the reconstructed phrase in MS 19.3 (or the very next line in our formatting).

¹⁶⁶ Following MacRae; Krause [ⲙ̅ⲙⲱⲧⲛ̅ ⲁⲩ]ⲱ.

¹⁶⁷ Following MacRae and Poirier; Krause ϩⲟⲟⲩ.

¹⁶⁸ Following Krause.

I am a foreigner and a citizen of the city[169]   26

I am being[170]
I am she who is nothing[171]
Those who participate in my presence[172] know me[173]
Those who do not share in my being,[174] don't know me

Those who are close to me, did not know me   32
Those who are far from me, knew me
On the day that I am close to you **19.1**[.............]are far away
[........]on the day that I[........]

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[169] Considering *Thunder*'s Coptic provenance, it is quite possible that this is a reference to the city of Alexandria and the Coptic countryside.

[170] The term *ousia* (which also occurs in the parallel line after this first reference) is taken directly from the Greek, and is, of course, well-known within early Christian christological and trinitarian debates. In many translations of those debates, "substance" is used as a translation, although "being" is not uncommon. Our translation, however, is not meant to link *Thunder* to those debates, inasmuch as no other vocabulary similarities are found. Our decision to avoid a dominantly philosophical translation is reflected especially in the second line: "I am she who is nothing."

[171] MacRae ignores the *te* without copula here and simply translates "no substance." Maguire, Meyer and Layton do recognize the gendered twist created by the *te* in the second clause about "being" or "substance." Maguire has "she who has no substance." Meyer has "a woman without substance," leaving out the humanity/divinity ambiguity of the "I" in *Thunder*. Layton somewhat experimentally has "she who has no riches." Our translation of "she who is nothing" aims more for the poetic power rather than the philosophical reading. Cf. Chapter 8's discussion of the complexly gendered poetry of this line.

[172] The word *synousia* continues the use of Greco-Coptic words. It is a clever poetic continuation of the play with *ousia*. We have found it difficult to reflect this clever Coptic/Greek improvisation on associated words. Instead we have preferred to highlight the inherent poetic clashes created in the next four lines of the text (lines 28-34 in the manuscript). In order to receive the ironies of these four lines, it is most important to focus on the ironic relationships portrayed. Maguire solves the complex translation problem by not translating at all, simply putting the Greco-Coptic *synousia* into the translation itself. This could relate to Meyer's larger push for associating *Thunder* with so-called gnostic texts by translating *synousia* with "union." Layton once again is experimental with the translation of *synousia* as "sexual intercourse." See Poirier for ancient examples of this usage (299).

[173] Lines 29 and 30 may have been understood by some Christians as a reference to the Eucharist. "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him" (*John* 6:56).

[174] Here our preference for a poetic, less philosophical reading of *ousia* continues with the translation "being."

εϩο]ⲩⲛ[175] ⲉⲣⲱⲧⲛ̄[·][176]

ⲁⲛ̣[ⲟⲕ[177] |]ⲱⲃⲥ̄[178] ⲙ̄ⲫⲏⲧ·
ⲁ[[179] |] ⲛ̄ⲙ̄ⲫⲩⲥⲓⲥ·[180]
ⲁ[ⲛⲟ]ⲕ ⲡⲉ[181]| [   ]ⲧⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲕⲧⲓⲥⲓⲥ ⲛ̄ⲛ̄ⲙ̄ⲡ̄ⲛ̄[ⲁ·][182] |
   [ⲁⲩⲱ ⲙ̄ⲡ]ⲁⲓⲧⲏⲙⲁ[183] ⲛ̄ⲛ̄ⲯⲩⲭⲟⲟⲩⲉ· |
[ⲁⲛⲟⲕ] ⲡⲉ[184] ⲡⲁⲙⲁϩⲧⲉ·

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[175] Following MacRae; Cherix ⲛ̄ⲙⲱ[ⲧⲛ̄ ⲉⲉⲓ | ϩⲏⲛ ⲉϩⲟ]ⲩⲛ; Krause ⲛ̄ⲙⲱ[ⲧⲛ̄ ⲉⲓ̣ϩⲏⲛ ⲉϩⲟ]ⲩⲛ . This part of the MS has many difficult lacunae, but these lines can be confidently reconstructed based upon the parallel line structure. Therefore, the reconstructions of "you" (ⲉⲣⲱⲧⲛ̄) and "me" (ⲛ̄ⲙⲟⲉⲓ) in the third line of this stanza are virtual certainties. The reconstructions of the verb "to be distant from" with its accompanying preposition (ⲉⲓⲟⲩⲛⲟⲩ ⲛ̄ⲥⲁ) and the first person singular form of "to be near to" with its accompanying preposition (†ϩⲏⲛ ⲉϩⲟⲩⲛ) in the last line are virtual certainties based upon the parallel use in the previous line.

[176] Reconstruction of line break follows MacRae. This stanza continues the theme of the previous one. The "being" stanza ended with parallel lines of knowledge and ignorance based upon whether one was "apart from" or "in" the speaker's "being." This stanza, likewise, speaks in terms of knowledge and ignorance with regard to being near to or far from the speaker. But there is a slight shift in identification. In the previous stanza, those who were apart from the speaker's "presence" were ignorant, while those who were "in" her "being" had knowledge. In this stanza, the situation is reversed. Those who are near to the speaker now have ignorance, while those who are far from the speaker, "have known" her. As such, we have a very sophisticated play of near and far and knowledge and ignorance that is expressed in different ways in these two stanzas. Instead of just having antithetical parallel lines, here we seem to have antithetical parallel stanzas. They, therefore, demonstrate more strongly interrelationships to each other than is usually the case between stanzas in *Thunder* as a whole. And, indeed, we would indent to demonstrate this, but the line lengths in the last stanza are much longer than average.

[177] Following Krause; MacRae ⲁⲛ̣[ⲟⲕ ⲡⲉ.

[178] MacRae's reconstruction; Krause ⲡⲉ ⲡ]ϩⲃ̄ⲥ; Cherix ⲡⲧ̄]ⲱⲃⲥ; Poirier]ϩⲃ̄ⲥ.

[179] This word could just as easily be ⲁⲩⲱ or ⲁⲛⲟⲕ. If the former, then the line probably began as ⲁⲩⲱ ⲁⲛⲟⲕ. Krause ⲁⲩ[ⲱ ⲁⲛⲟⲕ];MacRae ⲁ[ⲛⲟⲕ ⲡⲉ; Cherix ⲁ[ⲩⲱ ⲡⲟⲩⲟⲛ̄ϩ]; Poirier ⲁ[ⲩⲱ . .].

[180] Krause [ⲡⲉ]; Cherix [ⲉⲃⲟⲗ]; Poirier [. . . . . . . ⲛ̄].

[181] Following Krause.

[182] Following Krause.

[183] Krause [ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡ]ⲁⲓⲧⲏⲙⲁ (note); Krause [ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡⲁ]ⲓⲧⲏⲙⲁ; MacRae [. . . . .]ⲁ-ⲓⲧⲏⲙⲁ. Our reconstruction rests upon the following. There is only room for four or five letters, partly depending upon which letters. This line is most likely is a parallel expansion on the latter part of the previous line, or "creation of spirits" is expanded and paralleled by "request of souls"; therefore, following the tendencies of this text, the first three letters constitute the conjunctive ⲁⲩⲱ. This leaves room only for one or two additional letters, including the definite article ⲡ. Since the ink traces for the letter before ⲓ is most certainly ⲁ, the only Greek loanword that could fit what is outside of the lacuna, namely ⲁⲓⲧⲏⲙⲁ, which means demand or request. The other possible Greek loanwords that MacRae postulates would all be too long: diai/thma, e)ndiai/thma, sundiai/thma, and a)nai/ thma, which mean "food," "dwelling-place," "intercourse," or "demand," respectively (MacRae 248). The most likely reconstruction is [ⲁⲩⲱ ⲙ̄ⲡ]ⲁⲓⲧⲏⲙⲁ~, "and of the request of the souls." This would take up the full five spaces, but may necessitate a variation in word width to squeeze in the ⲛ̄, which the text often does with regard to the ⲡ.

[184] Following MacRae; Krause [ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲡ]ⲉ.

from you[……..]

[……….]of the heart[…..]
[…….]of the natures
I am he[…….]of the creation of the spirits[….]request of the souls
[……]control

ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡⲁⲧⲁ|[ⲙⲁ]ϩⲧ[ⲉ·][185]
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲡⲉ ⲡϭⲱⲧⲣ̅ ⲙⲛ̅[186] ⲡⲃⲱⲗ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ·
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲡⲉ ⲧ̇ⲙⲟⲛⲏ·[187]|
    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲃⲱⲗ·[188]
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ | ⲡⲉ ⲡⲓⲉⲡⲓⲧⲛ̅ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲉⲩⲛ̅ⲛⲏⲟⲩ | ⲉⲡ̅ϩⲁⲓ̈ ⲉⲧⲟⲟⲧ·
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲡⲉ ⲫⲁⲓ̇ [19.15] ⲙⲛ̅ ⲡⲕⲱ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ·

ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲁⲛⲟⲕ[189] | ⲟⲩⲁⲧⲛⲟⲃⲉ·
    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲛⲟⲩⲛⲉ | ⲙ̅ⲡⲛⲟⲃⲉ ⲟⲩⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛ̅ϩⲏⲧ̇ ⲧⲉ·[190]|
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲧⲉ ⲧⲉⲡⲓⲑⲩⲙⲓⲁ ϩⲛ̅ ⲟⲩ|ϩⲟⲣⲁⲥⲓⲥ·
    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲉⲅ̇ⲕⲣⲁⲧⲉⲓⲁ [19.20] ⲙ̅ⲫⲏⲧ̇ ⲉⲥϣⲟⲟⲡ̇ ⲛ̅ϩⲏⲧ̇·

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[185] Following MacRae; Krause [ⲙⲁ]ϩⲧ[ⲉ].

[186] Note the increased use in this passage of ⲙⲛ̅ as a conjunction on the same line rather than ⲁⲩⲱ, which, in this passage, only conjoins entire lines.

[187] While generally the gender of the copula follows the predication, in this line the copula is masculine and the predication is feminine. This might indicate that the pronoun ⲁⲛⲟⲕ should be predominantly understood as masculine in this section. In fact, in the stanzas as they stand in this reconstruction, every single pronominal copula in this particular stanza is masculine. On the other hand, this might provide some clearer evidence of the volatility or perhaps indeterminacy or deconstruction of the I's gender throughout the piece. These explanations are by no means mutually exclusive and they both challenge the past consensus of this entire poem being about a female divine revealer figure. The speaker is predominantly feminine throughout the text, but, as this passage shows, the gender identifications are more fluid than previously considered. For a more extensive discussion of the copula and the "I," see chsapters 5, 6, and 8.

[188] Krause ⲡⲃⲱⲕ (note).

[189] This is one of three instances of a double ⲁⲛⲟⲕ (see also 15.15 and 16.24). As with the other instances, it punctuates the text, and, as such, indicates a shift in topic or theme, which we have represented by a stanza break. The entire theme of the previous section cannot be fully determined due to the lacunae at the beginning of it. Stylistically, however, there are stronger grounds for a shift or break. The earlier stanza tended toward short, succinct juxtapositions and oppositions without adjectival or adverbial modifiers in the same line or opposing lines. Beginning with the double ⲁⲛⲟⲕ, the sentence structure becomes more complex and elaborated. For example, the final line of the previous stanza can be translated as, "I am the judgment and the dismissal." This typical line for this stanza has two somewhat oppositional words. The first line of the new stanza can be translated as, "I, I am sinless, and the root of sin derives from me." While the first part has remained relatively simple, the second part, instead of just saying "sinful" or "with sin" has elaborated the opposing term. This example is actually one of the least complicated of this stanza, which become increasingly elaborate and complex as it goes along. Because of this greater elaboration, the opposing terms are consistently on different lines, whereas the previous stanza, with its simpler organization, usually held both terms on the same line, although occasionally having very short separate lines.

[190] Although using a copula at the end of a sentence is normal in Coptic as a whole, it is only one of two occurrences in this text (see also 14.5).

and the uncontrollable

I am the coming together and the falling apart
I am the enduring and the disintegration
I am down in the dirt[191] and they come up to me
I am judgment and acquittal

I myself[192] am without sin and the root of sin is from within me
I appear[193] to be lust but inside is self-control

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[191] *Epitn* is a form of *eitn* with the straightforward meaning of "ground, earth, dust." For a translation that seeks connections to so-called gnosticism, cf. Meyer's and Maguire's more abstract translation "descent."

[192] We have translated "I myself" for the rare *anok anok*.

[193] We have taken into account the *ouhorass*, which means "according to outward appearance," as adverbial qualifier of the normal *anok te*, which would normally be rendered simply "I am." Hence, our "I appear to be."

ⲁⲛⲟⲕ | ⲡⲉ ⲡⲥⲱⲧⲙ̅ ⲉⲧϣ︤ⲏ︦ⲡ ⲛ̅ⲟⲩⲟⲛ | ⲛⲓⲙ·
   ⲙⲛ̅[194] ⲡϣⲁϫⲉ ⲉⲧⲉ ⲙⲁⲩϣⲉ|ⲙⲁⲣⲧⲉ ⲙ̅ⲙⲟϥ·
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲟⲩⲉⲃⲱ | ⲉⲙⲁⲥϣⲁϫⲉ·
   ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛⲁϣⲉ [19.25] ⲧⲁⲙ̅ⲛ̅ⲧ̅ⲣ̅ⲁ︦ϩ ⲛ̅ϣⲁϫⲉ·
ⲥⲱⲧⲙ̅[195] | ⲉⲣⲟⲉⲓ ϩ︤ⲛ ⲟⲩϭⲱⲛ·
   ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛ̅ⲧⲉ|ⲧⲛ̅ϫⲓ ⲥⲃⲱ ⲉⲣⲟⲉⲓ ϩ︤ⲛ ⲟⲩⲛ̅ϣⲟⲧ· |
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲧⲉⲧⲁϣ ϭⲏⲗ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ·[196] |
   ⲁⲩⲱ ⲉⲩⲛⲟⲩϫⲉ ⲙ̅|ⲙⲟⲉⲓ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩ︤ⲓⲭⲙ̅ ⲡⲣⲟ ⲙ̅ⲡⲕⲁϩ·[197] |
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲉⲧⲥⲟⲃⲧⲉ ⲙ̅ⲡⲟⲉⲓⲕ ⲙⲛ̅ | ⲡⲁⲛⲟⲩⲥ ⲉϩⲟⲩⲛ·[198]
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲧⲉ ⲧ̅|ⲅⲛⲱⲥⲓⲥ ⲙ̅ⲡⲁⲣⲁⲛ·[199]

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[194] This is the only place in this entire poem of ⲙⲛ̅ conjoining two lines.

[195] While this section places a lot of emphasis on the themes of hearing, speech (including "crying out"), this lone switch of these two parallel lines from the first person singular indicative mood to the imperative mood is surprising and somewhat jolting. Right afterwards, the text immediately returns to the first personal singular indicative predications. Other than the jolting effect, I am not quite sure what to make of this singular instance of an imperative in a section full of "I am" statements.

[196] At this point in the MS, between ⲉⲃⲟⲗ and ⲁⲩⲱ, the scribe wrote ϩ︤ⲓⲭⲙ ⲡⲣⲟ ⲙ̅ⲡⲕⲁϩ, "upon the face of the earth, but recognizing it was a dittography (see the next line), deleted it, indicated by the dots above the letters.

[197] This phrase also occurs in 15.2-3.

[198] The meaning of this line is very difficult to discern. Literally, it reads, "I prepare the bread with/ and my mind within/inside." Most likely, the text is, through poetic substitution, creating an association between "mind" and "yeast," which is what one would normally expect to find inside bread. This line would, then, be making a connection between the dynamic growth and productivity of yeast in making bread rise and some similar dynamism and life with "mind." Another possibility is that this is not the Greek loanword, but a native Egyptian form. The word ⲛⲟⲩⲥ is elsewhere attested as a term of opprobrium, although its exact meaning is obscure. Another rather remote possibility is that it has something to do with the word ⲛⲟⲩⲧ (not to be confused with ⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ or "god"), which means to "grind" or "mill," whence the word ⲛⲟⲉⲓⲧ, which literally means ground meal. Of these possibilities, the poetic substitution of "mind" instead of something like "yeast" is the most likely, making this line one of the rare occurrences of the Greek loanword nous or "mind" in the text itself (cf. 18.9, and, of course, the title, 13.1). Funk with Poirier reconstruct this as ⲙ̅ⲡⲟⲉⲓⲕ ⲙⲛ̅< . . . > | <ⲁⲩⲱ ⲉⲩ ⲙ̅>ⲡⲁⲛⲟⲩⲥ ⲉϩⲟⲩⲛ.

[199] This is the third occurrence of the Greek loanword ⲅⲛⲟⲥⲓⲥ or "knowledge." The other two occurrences can be found in 16.4 and 18.14-15. The first occurrence places "knowledge" in parallelism with "wisdom." The second occurrence deals with the knowledge of "angels." Here the "knowledge of my name" refers to the inherent power in a name in antiquity (cf. the "speaking of my name" in 14.14-15 and the "sound of the name and the name of the sound" in 20.31-33). To know and then to invoke a deity's true, usually esoteric, name was to have power over that deity. Specifically in Egypt, there is an ancient story of, most appropriately, Isis tricking the older sun-god, Re, into revealing his true name to her, by which she gained some power over him (see Chapter 8). Perhaps there is a subtle reference to this or this type of understanding is being invoked in 21.10-11: "[H]e who created me / and I will speak his name." Powerful names were often invoked for "magical" purposes, to make a god, often Apollo, to do one's bidding, as can be found in the *Greek Magical Papyri* (Betz), as well as in the New Testament, where people invoke Jesus' name for the purpose of exorcism (*Mark* 9.38-41; *Luke* 9.49-50; cf. *Luke* 11:19-20; *Acts* 19.13-20).

I am what anyone can hear but no one can say   21
I am a mute that does not speak and my words are endless
Hear me in tenderness, learn from me in roughness
I am she who shouts out and they throw me down on the ground[200]
I am the one who prepares the bread and my mind within
I am the knowledge of my name

---

[200] Our more plain spoken translation of "they throw me down on the ground" fits with the strong, tangible, and violent images that recur in *Thunder*. Almost every other translation agrees on "cast upon the face of the earth" or a close derivative. For us, this illustrates three tendencies in the relatively small family of *Thunder* translations in publication: (1) many translations follow MacRae's original translation without much further examination, (2) there is a general bias in these translations toward making *Thunder*'s language cosmic or philosophical when it is not, and (3) a curious predilection exists in translating ancient Mediterranean texts that makes them "antique" by making them sound vaguely Elizabethan. Cf. this example at hand in almost all translations, "cast upon the face of the earth."

ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲧⲉ|ⲧⲁϣϭⲁⲕ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ·
  ⲁⲩⲱ ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲉⲧ̈|ϫⲓ ⲥⲙⲏ·

[20.1] †ⲟⲩⲟⲛⲍ̄[201] ⲉ̣ⲃⲟⲗ ⲁⲩ[ⲱ][202]][203] | ⲙⲟⲟϣⲉ ⲅ̄ⲛ ⲟⲩⲡ[ ]·[204] |
ⲥ̣ⲫ[ⲣ]ⲁ̣ⲅⲓⲥ[205] ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲙⲁ̣[206]][207] ·|
[ ] ⲉ̣ⲓⲟⲛ[208] ⲙ̄ⲡ̣ϫ̣ⲛ̣ [209]] | [ ]ⲁ̣ⲉ[·][210]
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲡ̣ⲉ [ ][211] | [ ] ⲧⲉ ⲧⲁⲡⲟⲗⲟⲅⲓⲁ[·][212]
ⲁⲛ[ⲟ]ⲕ̣[213] ⲧⲉⲧⲉ ϣⲁⲩⲙⲟⲩⲧ[ⲉ ⲉⲣⲟⲥ ϫⲉ][214] | ⲧⲙⲉ·
  ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡϫⲓ ⲛϭⲟⲛⲥ̄[215] [·][216] |
ⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲉⲓⲟ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲉⲓ ⲛ[·][217] |
  [20.10] ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲕⲁⲥⲕ̄ⲥ̄ ⲉⲣ[ⲟⲓ·][218]

[201] Following MacRae; Krause †ⲟⲩⲟⲉ̈ⲓ ⲉ̣ⲃⲟⲗ; Schenke †ⲟⲩⲟⲛⲍ̄ ⲉ̣ⲃⲟⲗ; Cherix †ⲟⲩⲟⲛⲍ̄ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ.

[202] Following Poirier; Krause ⲁⲩ[ⲱ; Schenke ⲅ̣ⲏ[; MacRae ⲁⲩ[ⲱ.

[203] Krause ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄]; Cherix †].

[204] Although there clearly is a change in syntax from the string of "I am" statements to other forms, overall the text is too fragmentary to determine line breaks with confidence.

[205] Following MacRae; Krause ⲥ̣ⲫ[ⲩ]ⲥ̣ⲓⲥ; Cherix ⲛ̄ⲫ[ⲣ]ⲁ̣ⲥ̣ⲓⲥ.

[206] MacRae's reconstruction; Krause ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲙ. [.

[207] Cherix ⲡ].

[208] Following MacRae; Krause [ⲥⲏⲙ]ⲉ̣ⲓⲟⲛ; Cherix [ⲥⲏ]ⲙⲉⲓⲟⲛ; Poirier [ⲡⲥⲏ]ⲙⲉⲓⲟⲛ.

[209] Following MacRae; Krause ⲙ̄ⲡϫ . . [; Cherix ⲙ̄ⲡϫⲡ̣ⲓ̣ⲟ̣; Poirier ⲙ̄ⲡϫⲡⲓ̣ⲟ̣.

[210] MacRae's reconstruction; Krause [ ]ⲁ̣ⲉ[.]Poirier [. . . .]ⲁ̣ⲉ[.].

[211] Following Krause; Bethge ⲡⲉ [ⲡⲉⲕⲣⲓⲧⲏⲥ].

[212] Following MacRae; Krause [ ] ⲧⲉⲩⲁⲡⲟⲗⲟⲅⲓⲁ [; Cherix [ⲁⲛⲟⲕ] ⲧⲉ ⲧⲁⲡⲟⲗⲟⲅⲓⲁ [.

[213] Following Krause.

[214] Following Krause and MacRae. This reconstruction is virtually certain due to the required syntax for the word ⲙⲟⲩⲧⲉ or "to call." The verb is in the third person plural habitual, which can be rendered in a passive sense as it is here. ⲙⲟⲩⲧⲉ takes an indirect object indicating the person who is called, which is ⲉⲣⲟⲥ or "she," as well as the word ϫⲉ, which, in this case, is untranslatable, but often means "that" and is used to indicate direct speech, much like quotation marks. This exact same construction can be found in 16.11-15. As such, the reconstructed line can be very literally rendered, "I am she whom they call her 'truth.'"

[215] Following MacRae; Krause ⲛⲟϭⲛ̄[ⲥ].

[216] Krause [ⲡⲉ ⲡⲁⲣⲁⲛ]

[217] Following Krause; Cherix ⲛ[ⲉⲧϫⲣⲟⲉⲓⲧ].

[218] Krause ⲉⲣ[ⲟⲓ].

I am she who shouts out and it is I that listens

20.1 I appear and[………]walk in[…………]seal of my[………..]
[…….]I am he[…………]the defense[…….]
I am she they call truth and violation[…….] 7
You honor me[………]and you whisper against me

ⲛ[ⲉⲧ]ⲟⲩ|ϫⲣⲟⲉⲓⲧ[219] ⲉⲣⲟⲟⲩ·
ⲉⲣⲓⲕⲣⲓⲛⲉ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟ|ⲟⲩ ⲉⲙⲡⲁⲧⲟⲩϯ ϩⲁⲡ̄ ⲉⲣⲱⲧⲛ̄· |
ⲉⲃⲟⲗ[220] ϫⲉ ⲡⲉⲕⲣⲓⲧⲏⲥ ⲙⲛ̄ ⲡϫⲓ ϩⲟ[221] ⲉⲩ|ϣⲟⲟⲡ̄ ϩⲛ̄ ⲧⲏⲛⲉ·
ⲉⲩϣⲁⲛϩⲁⲉⲓⲉ [20.15] ⲧⲏⲛⲉ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲙ̄ ⲡⲁⲓ̈ ⲛⲓⲙ ⲡⲉⲧⲛⲁ|ⲕⲁ ⲧⲏⲛⲉ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ·
    ⲏ̄[222] ⲉⲩϣⲁⲛⲕⲁ ⲧⲏ|ⲛⲉ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛ̄ϩⲏⲧϥ̄ ⲛⲓⲙ ⲡⲉⲧⲛⲁϣ|ⲁⲙⲁϩⲧⲉ ⲙ̄ⲙⲱⲧⲛ̄·[223]

ⲡⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲡⲉⲧⲛ̄|ⲥⲁⲛϩⲟⲩⲛ ⲅⲁⲣ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲡⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲥⲁⲛ|ⲃⲟⲗ·[224]
    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡⲉⲧⲣ̄ⲡⲗⲁⲥⲥⲉ ⲛ̄ⲥⲁⲃⲟⲗ | ⲙ̄ⲙⲱⲧⲛ̄·
ⲛ̄ⲧⲁϥⲣ̄ⲧⲩⲡⲟⲩ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟϥ | ⲙ̄ⲡⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲥⲁⲛϩⲟⲩⲛ·
    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡⲉⲧⲉ|ⲧⲛ̄ⲛⲁⲩ ⲉⲣⲟϥ ⲙ̄ⲡⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲥⲁⲛⲃⲟⲗ· |
ⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲛⲁⲩ ⲉⲣⲟϥ ⲙ̄ⲡⲉⲧⲛ̄ⲥⲁⲛϩⲟⲩ̄[225] [20.25] ϥⲟⲩⲟⲛϩ̄ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ·
    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄ϩ̄ⲃⲥⲱ|ⲧⲉ·[226]

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[219] Following MacRae; Krause m?[. .]ou; Cherix m?[ar]ou; Poirier n?[et]ou.

[220] This is the second instance of the use of the word ebol to begin a line. In the first instance (17.15), it formed a prepositional phrase ebol ϩⲛ_, whereas here it functions in the conjunctive sense of "since" or "because."

[221] The word ⲡϫⲓⲟ is a nominalized form of a verb that literally means to "take face." It has a wide range of connotations. It can mean to give respect to a person or "pay heed." In this sense, it can also mean to show "favor." These are largely very positive understandings of the word. In a juridical context, however, "favor" can also be extended to "favoritism" or "partiality" (MacRae's translation, 251) in direct contrast to what a good judge would be; namely, impartial.

[222] This is the only time ⲏ̄ or "or" is used to begin a new line.

[223] Although it is difficult to reconstruct any stanza or even many line breaks in this section, and there are probably more than one stanza here, this passage, as can be reconstructed, has some thematic coherency surrounding judgment and justice. Some of the scattered words toward the beginning suggest this theme, such as ⲁⲡⲟⲗⲟⲅⲓⲁ, a Greek loanword, whence we get the word "apology," but has a more specific meaning of a legal defense. The text then moves to "truth" and "iniquity," after which we find a high prevalence of "judgment" words after talk of being "vanquished" or "defeated." This includes being a "judge" and, somewhat problematically, being "partial." This section finally ends with a play on condemnation (in a juridical meaning) and acquittal versus detainment. See Chapter 2.

[224] Although stanza breaks are uncertain due to the fragmentary nature of this column, the use of the word ⲅⲁⲣ signals, here, a shift in thought from a primary emphasis on legal terminology to a major emphasis on "inside" and "outside." Concerning this motif, cf. *Luke* 11.40; *Act. Thom.* 147; *GThom* 37.26-27; *GPhil* 68.4-6.

[225] The expected spelling here would include n at the end of a line. Instead, we receive the rare supra-linear stroke above the last vowel. This occurs in 18.35, where we find ⲉϩⲟⲩ̄ instead of ⲉϩⲟⲩⲛ.

[226] The repetition of petn_, pet, petetn_, and tetn_ gives this stanza a highly rhythmic quality in addition to the alliterative density of "p," "t," and "n" sounds.

You conquered ones: judge them before they judge you
Because the judge and favoritism exist in you
If he condemns you, who will release you?
If he releases you, who can detain you?

Since what is your inside is your outside   19
And the one who shapes your outside is he who shaped your inside
And what you see on the outside, you see revealed on the inside
It is your clothing[227]

---

[227] This expression is most likely to be taken in the sense of *I Peter* 5:5: "Humility towards one another must be the garment you wear constantly;" or even *Ephesians* 6:15: "with truth a belt round your waist, and righteousness a breastplate, wearing for shoes on your feet the eagerness to spread the good news of peace…" As in the words of *Thunder,* here clothing represents the unity of the inside and outside of a person. This use of clothing seems quite distinct from other literature like *II Corinthians* 5:4 or *Gospel of Mary Magdalene* 9:5, in which clothing is seen as an illusion or an inadequate expression of something real. Meyer, in his translation commentary, however, seems to take this clothing in *Thunder* to be characteristic of a distinction between two realities of the body and the inner person: "The garment is the body that clothes the inner person" (378).

ⲥⲱⲧⲙ̅ ⲉⲣⲟⲓ̈ ⲛⲁⲕⲣⲟⲁⲧⲏⲥ[228] | ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛ̅ⲧⲉⲧⲛ̅ϫⲓ ⲥⲃⲱ ⲉⲛⲁϣⲁϫⲉ· |
ⲛⲉⲧ̇ⲥⲟⲟⲩⲛ ⲙ̅ⲙⲟⲉⲓ ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲡⲉ | ⲡⲥⲱⲧⲙ̅ ⲉⲧ̇ϣⲏⲡ̇ ⲛ̅ϩⲱⲃ ⲛⲓⲙ·[229]
[20.30] ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲡⲉ ⲡϣⲁϫⲉ ⲉⲧⲉ ⲙⲁⲩ|ϣⲁⲙⲁϩⲧⲉ ⲙ̅ⲙⲟϥ·
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲡⲉ | ⲡⲣⲁⲛ ⲛ̅ⲧ̇ⲥⲙⲏ·
    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲧⲉⲥⲙⲏ|ⲙ̅ⲡⲣⲁⲛ·[230]
ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲥⲏⲙⲉⲓ|ⲟⲛ ⲙ̅ⲡⲥ̇ϩ̇ⲁ̈ⲓ·[231]
    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡⲟⲩⲱⲛϩ̇ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ | ⲛ̅ⲧⲇⲓϩⲉⲣⲉⲥⲓⲥ·
    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲁⲛⲟⲕ [21.1] [·][232]
[·]
[·]
[·][233]

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[228] The line "hear me, hearers," or "hear me, audience," forms an *inclusio* for the entire poem of *Thunder,* since this phrase was used in the opening stanza. On the other hand, a new word for "hearers/audience" is used in this line. While the poem, until now, has preferred the Egyptian-based word, ⲥⲱⲧⲙ̅ for hearing related terms, it now switches to the Greek loanword ⲁⲕⲣⲟⲁⲧⲏⲥ for "hearers." This is the first occurrence of this loanword and it appears again in a highly damaged portion of the MS in 21.6. See chapters 9 and 10.

[229] The total number of lines breaks for the past two lines are unsure, meaning, one could postulate more than the two given in the text, but this is ultimately highly uncertain.

[230] For the importance of the name, speaking a name, or, here, the "sound of the name," see the note to 19.33-34 with "the knowledge of the name." See also Chapter 8.

[231] It appears that the scribe originally wrote ⲙ̅ⲡⲥⲁⲓ and then squeezed in the ϩ. The scribal correction here brings the text in line with the subsequent use of the word ⲥϩⲁⲓ or "letter/writing" in the subsequent column. See Chapter 9.

[232] In general, this stanza places a special emphasis on hearing, words, speech, and sound (especially the "name of the sound and the sound of the name." This oral/aural emphasis has been one of the most important aspects of the entire poem until now, strongly suggesting a setting in which the poem was meant to be recited and heard. This oddly shifts in the final three lines (the last line, however, is mostly missing), in which the language shifts from speaking/hearing language to writing language, which continues into the final column. See Chapter 9.

[233] Column 21 is very badly damaged, missing three entire MS lines at the top of the page. The number of equivalent poetic lines cannot be fully determined. Moreover, any attempts of stanza breaks or line breaks are impossible to determine until the MS improves around 21.10-11. At the end of the third line, going into the fourth, Schenke reconstructs ⲁ|ⲛⲟⲕ ⲡⲉ].

Hear me, audience, and learn from my words, you who know me
I am what everyone can hear and no one can say
I am the name of sound and the sound of the name
I am the sign of writing[234] and disclosure of difference
And I **21.1**

---

[234] This may well be the first sign within the *Thunder* manuscript of an awareness of itself. In the subsequent manuscript page, a number of striking stylistic and ideational departures from the piece thus far occur alongside other references to writing (21:12,13) occur (Cf. Chapters 4 and 8 for an explanation of these differences). Because of a manuscript issue (cf. footnote on Coptic page) the word for "writing" *(shai)* may indeed be "beauty" *(sai)*. So, although our judgment is that the word to be translated is *shai* (hence, "writing"), it is not completely clear that this verse--so near Chapter 21--should be considered a part of the departure from the original piece that seems to occur on manuscript page 21.

[   ]²³⁵ ⲡⲟⲩⲟⲉⲓⲛ [   ]²³⁶ | [·]²³⁷

    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲑ[·]²³⁸ |

[ⲛ]ⲁⲕⲣⲟⲁⲧ[ⲏⲥ   ]²³⁹ | [   ]²⁴⁰ ⲉⲣⲱⲧⲛ̄·

ϥⲟ ⲛ[   ] . [   ]²⁴¹ | [ⲛ̄]ⲧⲛⲟϭ²⁴² ⲛ̄ϭⲟⲙ·²⁴³

    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡ.²⁴⁴ | [   ]ⲧϥ̄²⁴⁵ ⲛⲁⲕⲓⲙ ⲁⲛ ⲙ̄ⲡⲣⲁⲛ·

[21.10] [   ] ⲉⲣⲁⲧϥ̄²⁴⁶ ⲡⲉⲛⲧⲁϥⲧⲁⲙⲓⲟⲓ̈·²⁴⁷|

ⲁ[ⲛ]ⲟⲕ²⁴⁸ ⲇⲉ ϯⲛⲁϫⲱ ⲙ̄ⲡⲉϥⲣⲁⲛ·²⁴⁹|

ⲁⲛⲁⲩ ϭⲉ ⲉⲛⲉϥϣⲁϫⲉ ⲙⲛ̄ ⲛ̄ⲥϩⲁⲓ̈ | ⲧⲏⲣⲟⲩ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲩϫⲱⲕ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ·²⁵⁰

† | ϩⲧⲏⲧⲛ̄ ϭⲉ ⲛⲁⲕⲣⲟⲁⲧⲏⲥ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛ̄|ⲧⲱⲧⲛ̄ ϩⲱⲧ̇ⲧⲏⲩⲧⲛ̄ ⲛ̄ⲛⲁⲅⲅⲉ|ⲗⲟⲥ ⲙⲛ̄
    ⲛⲉⲛⲧⲁⲩⲧⲁⲟⲩⲟⲟⲩ· |

    ⲁⲩⲱ ⲙ̄ⲡⲛ̄ⲁ̄ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲩⲧⲱⲱⲛ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ | ϩⲛ̄ ⲛⲉⲧ̇ⲙⲟⲟⲩⲧ̇·

ϫⲉ ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲡⲉⲧ̇|ϣⲟⲟⲡ̇ ⲟⲩⲁⲁⲧ̇·²⁵¹

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²³⁵ Krause [ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲡⲉ].

²³⁶ Schenke [ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ ⲑⲉ].

²³⁷ Cf. MacRae, Krause, and Cherix; Schenke [ϣⲣⲉⲓ]ⲁ.

²³⁸ Following MacRae; Krause ⲑ . [ⲥⲱⲧⲙ̄]; Schenke ⲑ[ⲉⲱⲣⲉⲓⲁ ⲙ̄ⲡ]; Cherix ⲑ[ⲁⲓⲃⲉⲥ ⲥⲱⲧⲙ̄]; Poirier ⲑⲁ[ⲓ̈ⲃⲉⲥ ⲥⲱ].

²³⁹ Following MacRae; Krause [ⲉⲣⲟⲓ̈ ⲛ̄]ⲁⲕⲣⲟⲁⲧ[ⲏⲥ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲧⲛ̄]; Schenke [ⲟⲩⲟⲉⲓⲛ ⲛ̄]ⲁⲕⲣⲟⲁⲧ[ⲏⲥ ϯⲧⲏ]; Poirier [ⲧⲏ ⲉⲣⲟⲓ̈ ⲛ̄]ⲁⲕⲣⲟⲁⲧ[ⲏⲥ . . . . .]. See note to 20.26. Cf. the usage in 21.14.

²⁴⁰ Following MacRae; Schenke [ⲧⲏ ϭⲉ]; Cherix ⲡⲉ[ⲧ].

²⁴¹ Following MacRae; Krause ϥⲟⲛ[; Schenke ϥⲟⲛ[ϩ ⲛ̄ϭⲓ ⲡ]; Cherix ϥ[ⲟⲛ]ϩ̄ ⲛ̄ϭ]ⲓ [. .]

²⁴² MacRae's reconstruction; Krause [ⲛ̄ⲧⲛⲟϭ; Schenke [ⲣⲁⲛ ⲛ̄]; Cherix [. . . .] ⲛ̄ ⲧⲛⲟϭ.

²⁴³ Cf. the use of ϭⲟⲙ or ϭⲁⲙ in 13.2-3 and 18.14.

²⁴⁴ MacRae's reconstruction; Cherix ⲡⲉ[ⲧ].

²⁴⁵ MacRae's reconstruction; Krause [ ]ⲧ̄ϥ; Cherix [ⲁϩⲉⲣⲁ]ⲧϥ̄.

²⁴⁶ Following MacRae; Schenke [ⲡⲉⲧⲁϩ]ⲉⲣⲁⲧϥ̄; Krause [ϥⲛⲁϩⲁϩⲟ] ⲉⲣⲁⲧϥ̄; MacRae [ⲡⲉⲧⲁϩ(ⲉ)] ⲉⲣⲁⲧϥ̄ (note).

²⁴⁷ One might note that elsewhere in the poem, the emphasis is on giving birth (13.22-14.4), whereas here the more general term for "create" is used.

²⁴⁸ Following Krause.

²⁴⁹ See note to 19.33-34 concerning the importance of knowing or uttering a name in order to gain power over a person or especially a divinity. Two lines before this, the damaged text also reads, "will not move the name." Cf. 14.14-15 and 20.31-33.

²⁵⁰ The theme of writing was introduced for the first time in 20.33-35. This sets a marked departure from the major emphasis on oral/aural terms throughout *Thunder*. See further Chapter 9.

²⁵¹ These two lines, "I am he who alone exists / and no one judges me," are markedly different from most of *Thunder*. Elsewhere, the speaker refuses to get so existentially pinned down without some sort of antithesis, paradox, or oppositional terminology, however asymmetrical, which sets the hearer/reader off balance. These lines, and column 21 as a whole for that matter, tend toward statements without opposition. This particular line, changing pace with the rest of the poem, drifts toward monotheism. Indeed, the very lofty statements in this passage stand in contrast to the antitheses of power and lowliness that have been integral heretofore. One might also note the slow drift in the poem toward an increasing emphasis on "male" terminology and the increased use of the masculine copula and relative pronouns. For a more extensive discussion of this and its implications for *Thunder*, see chapters 4 and 8.

[......................]light[.......]
[........]and[...........]hearers[...........]to you[...........]
[...........]the great power.
And[...........]will not move the name...........
[...........]he who created me
But I will speak his name
Look then at his pronouncements and all the writings[252] that have
    been completed
Listen then, audience
And also you angels
Along with those who have been sent
And spirits who have risen from among the dead[253]
Since I am he who exists alone

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[252] This clear reference to actual writings may indicate that manuscript page 21 represents another stage of development of *Thunder*. Cf. chapters 5 and 9 for a fuller examination of these differences in 21.

[253] Here a relatively distinct vocabulary appears in manuscript page 21. Up until this point, *Thunder* has shown no interest in questions like life after death. Cf. chapters 4 and 8 for a fuller examination of these differences in 21.

ⲁⲩⲱ ⲙ̄ⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲉⲓ [21.20] ⲡⲉⲧⲛⲁⲕⲣⲓⲛⲉ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲉⲓ·²⁵⁴

ⲅⲁϩ ⲅⲁⲣ | ⲛ̄ⲉⲓⲇⲟⲥ ⲉⲩϭⲟⲗⲉϭ ⲛⲉ ⲛⲉⲧ|ϣⲟⲟⲡ ϩⲛ̄ ϩⲉⲛⲛⲟⲃⲉ ⲉⲛⲁϣⲱ|ⲟⲩ·
ⲁⲩⲱ ϩⲉⲛⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲧⲁⲙⲁϩⲧⲉ | ⲙⲛ̄ ϩⲉⲛⲡⲁⲑⲟⲥ ⲉⲩϭⲁⲉⲓⲏⲩ· |
ⲁⲩⲱ ϩⲉⲛϩⲏⲇⲟⲛⲏ ⲡⲣⲟⲥ ⲡⲉ | ⲟⲩⲟⲉⲓϣ·
ⲉⲩⲁⲙⲁϩⲧⲉ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟ|ⲟⲩ ϣⲁⲛⲧⲟⲩⲣ̄ⲛⲏⲫⲉ ⲛ̄ⲥⲉ|ⲡⲱⲧ ⲉϩⲣⲁⲓ̈ ⲉⲡⲟⲩⲕⲏⲙⲏ|ⲧⲏⲣⲓⲟⲛ·
ⲁⲩⲱ ⲥⲉⲛⲁϭⲓⲛⲉ ⲙ̄|ⲙⲟⲉⲓ ⲙ̄ⲡⲙⲁ ⲉⲧⲙ̄ⲙⲁⲩ ⲛ̄ⲥⲉ|ⲱⲛϩ̄·
ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛ̄ⲥⲉⲧⲙ̄ⲥⲱⲧ̄ | ⲉⲙⲟⲩ:²⁵⁵

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²⁵⁴ It is difficult to determine any patterns in this section. This is partly due to poor state of the MS, but also due to the style of what remains. There is a clear difference in style of this column from any previous passage in the poem. The line lengths in this section, until the last six lines of the entire poem, are erratic, and there are little to no indications of antithesis, paradox (or paradox unhinged), or oppositional statements in this entire column. There is also a lack of parallelism throughout, excepting the simple listing of vices in the last six lines or the listing of inferior beings in 21.14-18. See further Chapter 8.

²⁵⁵ This final stanza is set off by the usual ⲅⲁⲣ and a shift from the list of beings that must "pay heed" to the speaker and the final reasoning for why all creatures, human, spirit, and angelic, must do so ("For I am he who alone exists / and I have no one who will judge me") to an ascetic emphasis on things to avoid. Indeed, one might note that the literary tendency of the final column as a whole is not to use parallelism per se, but to make lists. The entire poem, in its current iteration, ends with a double tricola, or two sets of three lines. Unlike other sets of parallel lines elsewhere throughout the poem, however, these provide absolutely no contrasts. In fact, there are no contrasting lines in column 21 as a whole, making it differ stylistically and thematically from the rest of the poem. These last six lines, moreover, have an ascetic tone lacking in the rest of *Thunder*. Here the emphasis is on resisting sin, incontinency, "disgraceful passions," and "fleeting pleasures." The language of becoming sober, while found in places such as Hermetic literature (itself an Egyptian product), also has a strong ascetic connotation. The last line on not dying again and the reference to resurrection ("spirits who have risen from the dead") in 21.17-18 also is very new imagery and language for this poem. Given all of the differences in literary style, line length, language patterns, and theme in the final column compared with the entire previous poem, we have postulated that it was added by a later scribe (considering the new language of writing). The location of the exact seam is more difficult to apprehend. One possibility is after the line, "I am the name of the sound and the sound of the name." After this, the language of writing emerges and head-spinning antitheses like the one just quoted disappear. On the other hand, the very large lacunae at the beginning of column 21 warn against any exact determinations. In fact, perhaps the safest guess at this stage would be that the seam is somewhere in the missing section of the MS. For a fuller discussion of this hypothesis, see Chapter 8.

And no one judges me[256]

Since many sweet ideas exist in all kinds of sin[257]
They are uncontrollable and condemning passions
And passing pleasures that people have until they become sober[258]
They go up to their resting place,[259]
And they will find me in that place
They will live and they will not die again[260]

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[256] This assertion of authority of the author is in a more defensive and less ironic style than the rest of the book. Here the "I" claims unquestioned authority, whereas in manuscript pages 13-20 such an assertion of authority is always accompanied by an ironic twist or a complete reversal. Cf. chapters 4 and 8 for a fuller examination of these differences in 21.

[257] This polemic against sin seems foreign to the way sin is treated on manuscript pages 13-20. There, for instance, sin is treated with more ambiguity: "I myself am without sin, and the root of sin is from within me" (19.17). Cf. chapters 4 and 8 for a fuller examination of these differences in 21.

[258] Polemic against passion and pleasure does not fit with the style of the manuscript pages 13-20. Cf. chapters 4 and 8 for a fuller examination of these differences in 21.

[259] Interest in life after death does not fit with the general style of manuscript pages 13-20. Cf. chapters 4 and 8 for a fuller examination of these differences in 21.

[260] Assertion of returning to life after death is not hinted at before manuscript page 21. Cf. chapters 4 and 8 for a fuller examination of these differences in 21.

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Notes

Preface

1. Premiered at the Berlin Film Festival in February 2005. Ten minutes in length.
2. Prada commissioned Scott to do the film, but then cut the original length to fit its commercial formats.
3. Cf. music by the bands Nurse With Wounds, Tulku, Nino, and Current 93. Composer and Celtic harpist Julia Haines has recorded a 20-minute musical version of the text.
4. Cf. Chapter 3.

The Thunder: Perfect Mind

1. The large numbers indicate the manuscript page in the codex.

Chapter 1

1. We use the term "Greco-Roman" with apprehension. By it we mean to talk about the culture of the Mediterranean under Roman political power, but dominated by many Greek cultural notions. In general, we prefer the term "Hellenistic" for this period, but do not use it in this context, since it is a term from scholarship that is not readily understood by our lay readers.
2. We have assembled a comprehensive bibliography in the Works Consulted section. The many items listed in this bibliography should not mislead the reader into thinking that *Thunder* has been studied extensively. An attentive reading of the works listed in our bibliography shows that only a narrow range of technical studies have been done on *Thunder*.
3. One might consider the persistent work of Anne McGuire over a period of more than 20 years an exception to this generalization. But McGuire's work has received little attention and has not established traction within either scholarship or the public.
4. Paul-Hubert Poirier, *Le Tonnere, Intellect Parfait*
5. George W. MacRae, the initial translator of *Thunder* into English, is an important exception to this. Cf. the important recent works by Karen King and Michael Williams challenging the analytical category

of "gnosticism." King's three books, *What is Gnosticism?*, the *Gospel of Mary of Magdala*, and *The Secret Book of John*, form a massive case against using "gnosticism" to describe any literature. Williams's *Rethinking Gnosticism* also makes a similar case.

6. Cf. our discussion of these characteristics of the MacRae translation in this book's annotations in the translation section and in the translators' preface.

7. Cf. the translation of Bentley Layton in *The Gnostic Scriptures*. Professor Layton is also the author of two prestigious volumes on Coptic itself, one a 2007 introductory textbook and the other perhaps the most comprehensive Coptic grammatical study. We have some significant disagreements, however, with some other aspects of Layton's *Thunder* translation.

8. We use the term "queer" as a part of the larger, sometimes activist and sometimes scholarly conversation that for the past ten years has been used as a way of thinking about gender ambiguities and complications outside of the heterosexually determined binaries man/woman or masculine/feminine. This term, as a reclaimed slander, owes its beginnings to conversations within activist circles of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons. However, it has taken root quickly in gender theorists in academic circles. Cf. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Epistemology of the Closet*.

9. Previous scholarship has tended to see these references as primarily cosmic and mythological rather than social. For instance, considering the final line in the *Thunder* quote about being chased and captured, Marvin Meyer comments: "Eve is often described as being seized and raped in gnostic literature," although the character of Eve is not ever mentioned in *Thunder*.

Chapter 2

1. Layton in his article "The Riddle of the Thunder" has successfully demonstrated some parallels between *Thunder* and some ancient riddles. Ancient riddles, as modern ones, present a series of apparent contradictions that are resolved by an answer. For instance, he cites the following two riddles form the ancient Mediterranean as having images very similar to *Thunder*: 'No one seeing sees me, but one who does not see beholds me. One who does not speak speaks; one who does not run runs. And I am a liar, yet say all things true. *Solution*–a dream.' 'I am a virgin woman, and the daughter of a virgin, and the daughter of a virgin; And I give birth once a year, remaining a virgin. *Solution*–a date palm.' We find these parallels important, and the similar imagery to *Thunder* is significant. However, the missing element of parallels is the solution, in which *Thunder* seems to have no interest. Indeed, *Thunder* seems to delight in confusing the possibility

of a "solution" or an "answer" to the contradictions it constructs. So the dynamic of the actual form of riddles is quite different from that of *Thunder*, and to us seems to limit what one can make of a formal comparison between riddle and *Thunder*.

2. This is from a stela cited by Diodorus Siculus 1.15.

3. Apuleius: *Metamophoses* or *The Golden Ass*, Book 11, Chap 47

4. The scholarly literature on these ancient divine self-revelations is extensive, but relatively diffuse. There is no book-length overview in English, and most of the studies are found in specialized journals. Much of the original scholarship remains in German. A relatively broad review of aretalogy can be found in Roger Beck's "Mystery Religions, Aretalogy, and the Ancient Novel," in G. Schmeling (ed.), *The Novel in Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 131–150. Poirier reviews the literature on aretalogy in his commentary *Tonnere*, 98, 99, 168–174.

5. The Hellenistic and the Greco-Roman ages were fascinated by Isis. A number of authors (e.g., Lucius and Plutarch) of this time frame seemed to have reworked earlier praises of Isis. For our purposes, it is interesting to note that the ancient Egyptian praises tend to be in the third person, not the first person. That is, the aretalogical form of these Isis speeches may be of later (Hellenistic) origin. It is a possibility that the aretalogical form gained special energy in this later era, which is also *Thunder*'s. For the most extensive review of primary sources, cf.Vidman, *Isis und Serapis bei den Griechern und Roemern*.

6. The connection between Isis and wisdom traditions goes back to a range of nineteenth-century scholarship, made popular by the nineteenth-century book *Isis Unveiled* by (Madame) Helen Blavatsky. A more recent summary of the long-standing connection between wisdom and Isis is found in Gerda Jeannette Boiten's 1996 dissertation at the University of Groningen, "Wisjeid in context." A somewhat earlier summary that focused more on the connection between Israelite wisdom and Isis and that built on the prior work of Burton Mack and J. Reese is John Kloppenborg's "Isis and Sophia in the Book of Wisdom."

7. The texts about Wisdom/Sophia in biblical or Israelite/Jewish literature (e.g., *Job* 28; *Proverbs* 1, 3, 8, 9; *Ben Sirach* 24; *Wisdom of Solomon* 7–10) have extensive and often exact parallels in the literature especially of Egypt (the most exact parallels are with the goddess Maat, although some Isis takes also clearly are similar), and occasionally of Babylon and Greece. But these Wisdom/Sophia texts–although having much of the same texture, rhythm, and words of the other more explicitly goddess literature–take some pains to guard a somewhat monotheistic framework for the praise of Wisdom/Sophia. Cf. the introductory section of the book of *Proverbs* 1:1–7, in which the point is to affirm the God of Israel: "The beginning of Wisdom is the fear of Yahweh" (1:2).

8. Cf. Susan Cole, Marian Ronan, and Hal Taussig, *Wisdom's Feast: Sophia in Study and Celebration*, Harper and Row: 1989, pp. 19–22

9. Poirier, *Tonnere*, 157–161, reviews the range of scholarly opinion on this comparison, lays out a set of similarities, and concludes that "biblical" Wisdom/Sophia probably inspired *Thunder*, but that *Thunder* is not so much like "the Sophia of the classical Gnostic myths."

10. This special and relatively productive scholarly interest in linking *Thunder*'s speaker with Wisdom/Sophia has most likely been occasioned by two influences. The first influence is an eagerness to discern how closely *Thunder* is connected to Israelite or Jewish traditions, and a puzzlement on how much (or little) *Thunder* is Christian. Cf. Karen King's analysis of how scholarship supporting the existence of "gnosticism" has framed early Christian literature as having either too much or too little reference to Judaism. In this keen analysis, King notes that such scholarship proposes that too much Judaism is "Jewish Christianity," too little Judaism is "gnosticism," and correct Christianity is a happy medium between the two (the *Gospel of Mary Magdala*: 155–190 and *What is Gnosticism*: 1–54, 218–238). Since Wisdom/Sophia is Israelite/Jewish and since the earliest Christian writings referred to Wisdom/Sophia relatively often, a connection between *Thunder*'s speaker and Wisdom/Sophia could help think about how Christian *Thunder* might be. (Cf. the section on "Is *Thunder* Christian" in Chapter 2.) The second influence on scholarly interest in connecting Wisdom/Sophia to *Thunder* has been the proposal (not endorsed by this book) that *Thunder* is "gnostic." Such an assertion could be supported by a strong identification with Wisdom/Sophia (cf. again King cited earlier), since Wisdom/Sophia occurs often in the so-called gnostic literature. We cite this possible connection between a "gnostic" Wisdom/Sophia and *Thunder*'s speaker here simply as an acknowledgment of some scholarship's interest in it, and lay out our problems with this association in Chapter 4. Although there may indeed be some connections between *Thunder* and the figure of Wisdom/Sophia in the Bible, it is not at all clear to us that a ready equating of *Thunder*'s "I" and Wisdom/Sophia describes the relationship adequately. It is clear to us that the background of Wisdom/Sophia literature is a factor in understanding *Thunder*. However, as will be noted later in this chapter, the relationship is more complex than most scholarship has intimated. It is especially the case that the equation of *Thunder*'s "I" and Wisdom/Sophia as a so-called gnostic phenomenon cannot be accepted (cf. Chapter 4). Similarly, drawing a continuum between Wisdom/Sophia and *Thunder* as a way of explaining how orthodox and "heretical" Christianities distinguished themselves, serves, as Chapter 3 points out, other normativizing interests in contemporary Christian discussion better than it does disciplined study of either set of texts.

11. See ch. 8

12. Cf., for instance, George W. Huston's article that analyzes how literature in the Greco-Roman period goes out of its way to make everything look small in relationship to Isis ("Lucian's *Navigum* and the Dimensions of Isis," *American Journal of Philology*, Vol. 108, No. 3 (Autumn, 1987), pp. 444–450.

13. Cf. Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, pp. cxxii-cxxv, in which Brown argues strongly that Jesus' self-presentation in John finds its strongest precedent in the figure of Wisdom.

14. The queen-like dominance of Wisdom/Sophia and its relationship to portraits of the numerous Hellenistic queens that (surprisingly) ruled alone in the Mediterranean is examined in Hal Taussig's "Wisdom/Sophia, Hellenistic Queens, and Women's Lives."

Chapter 3

1. For example, Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*; Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*; Rudolph, *Gnosis*; or the more popularized works such as Ehrman, *The Lost Gospels*; Meyer, *The Gnostic Discoveries*; and Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*.

2. For further discussion of the classic attributes of "Gnosticism," see King, *What is Gnosticism?*, and Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism."*

3. Cf., Poirier, *Tonnerre*, 144–153, for a survey of *Thunder* and Gnosticism.

4. G.W. MacRae, "The Thunder: Perfect Mind," 232. It is important to note that while MacRae does not see *Thunder* as a gnostic text per se, the category of Gnosticism itself is not an issue.

5. These include Justin Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyons, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian of Carthage, Hippolytus of Rome, and Epiphanius of Salamis. (See King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 20. For a full discussion of these writers, see Chapter 2 in King, "Gnosticism as Heresy.")

6. An excellent example of this can be seen in the life and works of Origen of Alexandria, who is both revered and condemned by different members of "proto-orthodox," and later Orthodox circles for his contributions to Orthodox Christian thought as well as to what others consider heretical stances.

7. The lower case "c" is used in this instance to stress, once again, the point that what we now know as Christianity did not exist at the time.

8. King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 24.

9. This does not necessarily mean that most Christians today fit under this specific heading of "orthodoxy."

10. Morton Smith makes a similar analogy in his essay "History of the Term Gnostikos," written in 1978, asking what the history would

look like "fifteen hundred years from now, if the Communists should win their present struggle for control of the world," 804.

11. King, *What is Gnosticism?*, 8.

12. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* I:25:3, in Rev. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (eds.), *Ante-Nicene Christian Library: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325* (Boston: Adamant Media Corporation, 2005), 94.

13. Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, xix.

14. See King, *What is Gnosticism?*, and Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism*. This trend is beginning to be seen in other scholarly work, cf. Antti Marjanen "The Mother of Jesus or the Magdalene?" but in many cases it is the classification of an individual text as gnostic that is being scrutinized rather than the category itself. It is also important to note Smith's early essay "The History of the Term Gnostikos," in which he concludes by saying, "I am sure that this recommendation [to reconsider the use of the term Gnosticism] will not be widely followed. Not only is it psychologically repulsive, but it neglects a much neglected subject–the influence of modern economics on ancient history. The term 'Gnosticism' has become in effect a brand name with a secure market. 'Gnosticism' is salable, therefore it will continue to be produce. Indeed, our lack of information about true, ancient Gnosticism will probably prove a great advantage to manufacturers of the modern, synthetic substitute. They need no longer be distracted by consideration of ancient data, since those prove to be mostly unreliable. Now they can turn without restraint to the important question, the philosophic definition of the concept. As gnostics themselves, they can follow the gnostic saviour, escape from the lower world of historical facts, and ascend to the pleroma of perfect words that emanate forever from the primaeval void," 806–807.

15. Meyer, *The Gnostic Bible*, 14.

16. Although *Thunder* is one of the few texts found at Nag Hammadi that does not mention biblical characters, see Chapter 2 of this book of Christianity and *Thunder*. Similarly, other "Gnosticisms" fit within the plurality of their primary religious affiliation, rather than as a part of a "gnostic sect."

17. NRSV, cf. *Mark* 4:10–12; *Luke* 8:9–10.

18. Obviously, every use of *ginosko* and its derivatives does not fall into this specific context. The widespread use of the word *gnosis*, especially in Paul, is attributed to a "using of the enemy's language," that is, that Paul and others such as Clement use "gnostic" terms to combat "Gnosticism." Generally assuming that Gnosticism is a later phenomenon (as is done in these scholarly circles) creates an anachronistic problem when contemporizing it with Paul.

19. It is important to note that this is the only time that the Greek word *gnosis* appears in *Thunder*. There are other forms of the Coptic word

"to know" found within the text, though one would be hard-pressed to argue that these refer to any type of knowledge, other than in a general epistemological sense. Also, cf. Poirier, *Tonnerre*, 235.

20. Poirier seems to agree with this assertion, showing the inconsistent use of the words "knowledge" and "ignorance" throughout Thunder, making a clear survey and case that they are not governed by some metaphysical system, but simply represent a spectrum of various uses of the terms, *Tonnerre*, 235.

21. Williams thoroughly treats the issues of Gnosticism and self-definition/designation in 31–43 of *Rethinking "Gnosticism."*

22. Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 77–79. Barbelo is identified in six different texts: the *Secret Revelation of John*, the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, *Zostrianos*, the *Stranger (Allogenes)*, the *Three Forms of the First Thought (Trimorphic Protennoia)*, and the *Gospel of Judas*. Barbelo is both a power and a realm, a female entity that emerges from the overarching One in the *Secret Revelation of John*. See John Dillon, "Monotheism in the Gnostic Tradition," in Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede (eds.), *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 69–80.

23. Ibid., 77.

24. Ibid.

25. For Layton, this is based on two pieces of textual evidence. The first occurs in line 13.2, in which the speaker says, "I was sent from the power"; the second occurs in 14,10, "And the idea *(epinoia)* infinitely recalled." Layton concludes that these two pieces of evidence (though he admits that they are somewhat "ambiguous") clearly point to the "gnostic myth," thus including *Thunder* in the category of gnostic literature (77). Poirier is the only one who acknowledges that Barbelo is indeed absent from the text, although he still cites the link between *Thunder* and Barbelo.

26. These conclusions are based on Layton's interpretations of the *Secret Gospel of John*. King's recent book, the *Secret Revelation of John*, applies the methodologies she first explores in *What is Gnosticism?* providing a lucid counterpoint to gnosticizing scholarship that usually claims this text.

27. Barnstone & Meyer, *The Gnostic Bible*, 224–226.

28. Ibid., 224.

29. Sethianism is another traditional category of "gnostic" literature. Cf. *What is Gnosticism?* 154–169 for a full treatment of Sethianism and the issues regarding this category.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid., 224–226.

33. Poirier, Introduction to *Thunder*, 367–371. See also *Tonnerre*.

34. Intro., 367.

35. Cf. Chapter 2.

36. Poirier, Intro., 367. Poirier admits that *Thunder* is not so much like "the Sophia of the classical Gnostic myths," *Tonnerre*, 157–161.

37. Poirier, Intro., 369. Poirier sees both Sethian and Simonian themes within the text and concludes that *Thunder* is closely related to Simonianism, with certain elements from Gnosticism, the whole document clearly redacted by gnostics, *Tonnerre*, 141–153.

38. Poirier, Intro., 370.

39. Cf. notes 17–19 in this chapter.

40. *Tonnerre*, 157–161.

Chapter 4

1. Cf. discussions in Poirier *Tonnerre*, Layton "The Riddle of the Thunder (NHC VI, 2)," and McGuire "Thunder, Perfect Mind" in *Searching the Scriptures.*

2. Cf. note 12 of the annotated translation.

3. We must note McGuire here, who has helped make the way for such nuanced literary work, even while not fully delivering on her promises. For instance, while on numerous occasions she notices the "dissolution" in the text, and that the text tends to "nullify," she backs away from the possibilities of a radically deconstructive agenda in *Thunder*.

4. Halperin *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, Introduction.

5. Freud, most famously, in "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality."

6. Other iterations of elements of lines 13, 18–14, 9 occur in both the *Hypostasis of the Archons* (aka the *Nature of the Rulers*) and *On the Origin of the World*. Poirier suggests that due to this commonality, they might be seen as a "family" of texts. *Tonnerre*, 128–132.

7. These are relationships that are already subtly gender-bended through the particularities of the Coptic language, as the feminine article on the masculine word for "lord" suggests.

8. The lines that follow directly after this section (rod/staff) also play with this disordering of power, and while doing so use markedly phallic imagery.

9. As Judith Butler writes of the title character in Sophocles' *Antigone*, "…she hardly represents the normative principles of kinship, steeped as she is in incestuous legacies that confound her position within kinship." *Antigone's Claim*, 2.

10. As McGuire notes, "In this way, the paradoxical mixing of gender and kinship relations undermines a rigid stratification of male dominance and female subordination and *sets in its place* a more dynamic structure of reciprocity and exchange" (italics ours, 45). We would, however, calibrate this claim. We do not believe that *Thunder* is constructing a new vision of relation in this particular section, and instead suggest that the text is more interested in the *confusion* of the terms of

intelligibility (such as gender and kinship) that govern relation–cf. *Antigone's Claim*.

11. *Luke* 10:30–37
12. Cf. especially Chapter 7
13. More will be said about the specific workings of gender in *Thunder* in Chapter 5.
14. Layton, in particular, associates the voice of *Thunder* with various characters from the gnostic myth, especially Barbelo. Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 77–79.
15. McGuire likewise notes, "… [S]he has solidarity with the vulnerable, the oppressed, and the outcast" 46.
16. Note the use of the terms *ousia* (substance/being/existence), *noyte* (God), *nnangelos* (angels), and *logos* (word) alongside social categories, and terms that reflect honor-shame categories.
17. These misunderstandings of negative strategies for reclaiming agency have also been addressed in recent studies in asceticism, most notably in the work of Vincent Wimbush, Richard Valantasis, and Leif Vaage. See Wimbush and Valantasis *Asceticism*.
18. See the more detailed discussion of Kristeva and negativity in Chapter 5.
19. Cf. Chapter 7
20. The Coptic word that we have translated "appear" *(ouonh ebol)* does also contain the meaning of "reveal."
21. It is important to qualify this term. *Thunder* invites "identification" with an "I" that refuses/fails final identification. And, as we note later in this paragraph, even this identification fails.
22. Cf. Chapter 9 regarding the performance/address context of *Thunder*.
23. Cf. Chapter 7 for an expansion of the function of the category "barbarian."
24. "They" are a ghostly presence as well, since "they" are the implicit subjects of the passive voice in Coptic.
25. Cf. Chapter 7 for an expanded discussion on the power of naming in *Thunder*.
26. Interestingly, even this one "I am" does not employ the copula structure that is so frequently used throughout the rest of the poem.
27. This echoes *Exodus* 3. It is particularly awkward since even though the "I" exists alone, he has just referenced having been created by another "he."
28. Earlier in *Thunder*, "I am without sin, and the root of sin is within me."
29. Pun intended. See a more detailed argument and textual analysis in Chapter 10.
30. As it is common in Markan studies to focus on the "original" ending of the *Gospel of Mark*.

Chapter 5

1. As McGuire notes, "The antithetically paired terms of these self-predications mirror the bipolar constructions of the female gender in the patriarchal culture of antiquity. At the same time, however, the paradoxical conjunction of terms in divine self-predication breaks down some of the restrictive functions of these polarities." McGuire, "Thunder, Perfect Mind" in *Searching the Scriptures*, 42–43.

2. See again Chapter 4.

3. Cf. though it is also important to note that this declaration, "I am he who exists alone," as part of column 21 in the manuscript, is most likely a later addition. See the discussion of column 21 in chapters 4 and 8.

4. As Layton puts it, "... but gender is ultimately irrelevant since she is only a traveling voice." Layton, "The Riddle of the Thunder (NHC VI, 2)," 41. This neglect of gender as a category is only trumped by the total avoidance of *Thunder*'s evocation of social categories as something other than a spiritual metaphor.

5. McGuire ("Thunder, Perfect Mind" in *Searching the Scriptures*) is an important exception to both this statement and the statement preceding. Yet, while she notices some of the masculine moments of the "I," she translates much of the masculine language as the neutral term "one," causing her to lose most possibilities for gender-bending in the text, as well as leading her to conclude that the voice of *Thunder* "reveals" a feminine identity. In at least one key place this becomes quite problematic. The line "I am he who alone exists" is translated "I am the one who alone exists," and McGuire subsequently comments, "[I]ndeed, *she* is 'the one who alone exists,' whom knowing readers will discover within themselves..." (italics ours, 49).

6. See our discussions in the first and final chapters.

7. Rosemary Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure*, Chapter 4.

8. Deconstruction refers to a process of critical analysis of texts, ideologies, and discourses that seeks to expose their internal assumptions.

9. Our thanks to Karen King for discussions that helped clarify our position in this section.

10. For one rather famous explication of performative notions of gender, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*.

11. McGuire disagrees, and finds that these lines "... reinscribe conventional or patriarchal patterns of gender relations, with the image of a superior male power empowering a subordinate female figure to realize his will ... She may be the 'staff of his power,' but ultimately the power appears to be his" 45.

12. As we also noted in our chapter on literary patterns, this very pattern is repeated again in lines 13,22–27.

13. lines 16,20–22 and 17,15–19

14. lines 16,11–15

15. lines 15,2–14,

16. lines 18,27–28
17. lines 16,6–9 and 16,26–31
18. This is especially true in the oddly persistent debates over whether or not one is "born" gay or straight.
19. Categorization is only one way to conceptualize identity. The dominance and persistence, not to mention the inadequacy, of categories as descriptors for identity, however, mean that they deserve particular attention and challenge. It is also important to note that where we have translated "I am" for the copula structure, no state of being verb technically exists, so all English translations of *Thunder* must necessarily ontologize the association between the "I" and the predicate.
20. See Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*.
21. MacRae, "The Thunder: Perfect Mind (VI, 2)."
22. Layton, for example, translates "he" only once in the text (in 16.6), apparently arbitrarily.
23. McGuire, "Thunder, Perfect Mind."
24. Poirier, *Tonnerre*.
25. He translates "I am she who exists in all fears," but then later chooses "I am the one who alone exists" in what would by the same logic be "I am he who alone exists." Compare: MacRae lines 15,25–26 and 21,18–19.
26. See Buckley, "Two Female Gnostic Revealers." Buckley, however, cautions against over-generalized approaches to *Thunder*: "In fact, she seems to elude most categories reserved for revealers and goddesses" 259.
27. In one iteration: "Females Who Can Wreck the Infinite" Kristeva *Powers of Horror*. For Kristeva's more specific thoughts on the identification of women with lack, see "Women's Time" in *New Maladies of the Soul*.
28. From Kristeva's interview, "Woman Can Never Be Defined" in *New French Feminisms*, 137–141.
29. For a nice summary and problematizing of Kristeva's notion of negativity, and her ambivalent relationship to terms such as "Woman" and "femininity," see Cornell and Thurschwell, "Feminism, Negativity, Intersubjectivity."
30. See Butler's critique of Kristeva on the maternal body in *Gender Trouble*, 101–103.
31. Recent psychoanalytic theory has illustrated that multiply gendered identifications are a constitutive part of all identities, straight or queer (see the work of Jessica Benjamin), and Jasbir K. Puar, for example, has discussed the problematics of aligning "queer" with "transgression." *Terrorist Assemblages*, 22.
32. This is indebted to Rosemary Hennessy's suggestion of disidentification as an effective strategy for interruption of structures (capitalism, in her analysis) that thrive and profit from not just powerful and discreet

identifications, but the fetishized shifting of identities as well. *Profit and Pleasure*, 230–232. See Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, which we will discuss explicitly in relation to *Thunder* in Chapter 7

33. Contestation of gender also happens within a contestation of rigid, naturalized social stratification and colonized identities, as we will address in chapters 6 and 7.

34. This may be contra McGuire, who sees *Thunder* as expanding notions of the divine to include dualities and the human, rather than shattering conventional notions of the divine, 51.

35. This is particularly true of *Thunder*'s exposure of the aretalogical genre as underwriting patron-client relations. Cf. Chapter 6.

36. Of course, in many religious identities, these coincide.

Chapter 6

1. Previous scholarship has primarily occupied itself with situating *Thunder* within particular philosophical or religious settings of the ancient world, comparing it to other kinds of literature, and occasionally remarking on the curious gender content. No attention, however, has been paid to the social and cultural milieu of *Thunder*. Indeed, a few scholars have implied that *Thunder* seems to avoid engaging social worlds with preference for more ethereal divine settings. For instance, Barnstone and Meyer, *Gnostic Bible*, propose that *Thunder* is distinguished from "traditional religious poems" by "gnostic ideas such as liberation from the material world," 224. Also Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, claims that *Thunder* proposes that "souls that respond will gain liberation from the material world and ascend to a place in the metaphysical universe where the speaker herself resides." These assertions are loaded with the assumptions of so-called gnosticism, and *Thunder*'s alleged belonging to this supposed phenomenon. But *Thunder* is full of real world social and cultural dynamics and situates itself consistently in the middle of weddings, cultural slanders, family relations, war, the dust and dirt, festivals, and citizenship with hardly any cosmological intimations. Similarly, the suggestion that *Thunder*'s "I" lives in another metaphysical universe is never even alluded to, and stands in contrast to the many social and cultural settings that she claims as her own.

2. Cf. Stamenka Antonova's unpublished Columbia University dissertation, "Barbarian or Greek," for the best summary of the term *barbaros*. Antonova also cites a number of early Christian authors who claim the term of "barbarian" for themselves.

3. In this section the "I" is explicitly feminine five times and explicitly masculine once.

4. Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Commentary*, 121–124, provide a clear summary of the scholarship on the pervasiveness of the categories of honor and shame as "the core, the heart, the soul of social life in

Mediterranean antiquity." See further Davd D. Gilmore, ed., *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean*, Special Publication of the AMA 22 (Washington, D.C.: AMA, 1987); John G. Peristiany, ed., *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1965); Jane Schneider, "Of Vigilance and Virgins: Honor, Shame, and Access to Resources in Mediterranean Societies," *Ethnology* 9 (1971): 1–24; for a more recent treatment, see Carlin Barton, *Roman Honor: The Fire in the Bones* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

5. Cf. her essay "The Thunder: Perfect Mind" in *Searching the Scriptures*, Volume II, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza.

6. Again Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Commentary*, 117–118, provide an overview of this scholarship: "Patronage is a system of generalized reciprocity between social unequals in which a lower status person in need (called a client) is granted favors by a higher status, well-situated person (called a patron) … By being granted a favor, the client implicitly promises to pay back the patron … By granting the favor, the patron, in turn implicitly promises to be open to further requests at unspecified later time. Such open-ended relations of generalized reciprocity are typical of the relationship between the head of a family and his dependents." The classic study on Roman patronage is Richard P. Saller, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); see also Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Patronage in Ancient Society* (London: Routledge, 1989), and Ernest Gellner and John Waterbury, eds., *Patrons and Clients in Mediterranean Societies* (London: Duckworth, 1977). For the reverse side of the coin, on euergetism or beneficence, see the classic study, Paul Veyne, *Bread and Circuses: Historical Sociology and Political Pluralism*, ed. Oswyn Murray, trans. Brian Pearce (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1990), and more recently Kathryn Thomas and Tim Cornell, *Bread and Circuses: Euergetism and Municipal Patronage in Roman Italy* (London: Routledge, 2003).

7. The longer speech of Wisdom/Sophia in *Proverbs* 8–9 is very typical of patronage and aretalogy in which she recites all the benefits she has provided (8:1–20) and eventually offers help from a higher position in 9:1–6. However, a number of scholars have suggested that much of the Wisdom/Sophia aretalogical material is ironic. That is, it is spoken in voices that imitate the patron or queen/king, but from a position of questionable authority. Cf. the major work of Claudia Camp on this theme. In *Wisdom and the Feminine* she studies carefully the social location of Wisdom/Sophia and concludes that in most of Proverbs, it is not a privileged social location. This means then that the use of the patron/regal language is ironic in that it is a non-monarch/patron that is claiming the monarch/patron position, and therefore asserting the divine right of the monarch/patron. In this way, the aretalogy becomes an occasion for inverting the patron-client societal order. Camp also has

analyzed other Wisdom/Sophia literature in which she finds the irony missing, and used to support the privileged claim. Cf. Claudia Camp's "Woman Wisdom and Strange Woman." Cf. also Taussig's analysis of the complex relationship between the queen imagery in Wisdom/Sophia literature, the figure of Wisdom/Sophia as queen, and the social identities generated in this complex in "Wisdom/Sophia." This ironic use of aretalogy is, however, different from the irony of *Thunder*. *Thunder* deconstructs aretalogy by contrasting and contradictory images. Some of the Wisdom/Sophia literature seems to do it by ironically applying conventional aretalogical imagery to those who are not patrons.

In addition, cf. other work asserting an inversion of authority in the Wisdom/Sophia voice in the extensive work of Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her, But She Said*, and *Jesus: Miriam's Sister and Sophia's Daughter*.

Chapter 7

1. This indeed places *Thunder*'s critique of gender within a deeply material frame. For *Thunder*, and as this chapter illustrates, no discussion of gender can or should be separated from its historical function and reiterations within the social matrix of imperialism and colonialism.

2. In this way "barbarian" includes a plurality of more specific identities as well. The use of the term barbarian and its connotations occurred with different nuances later in the history of European colonization, and was applied to Native American, Caribbean and African peoples, to name just a few, in order to justify the takeover of land and resources, as well as the forceful "conversion" to Christianity.

3. Postcolonial criticism refers mainly to a stream of theory that attends to the history and consequences (material and ideological) of colonization of land and peoples.

4. Brigitte Kahl, "Reading Galatians and Empire at the Great Altar of Pergamon."

5. In one ironic scene, for instance: "Aphrodite, the goddess of love, steps on the face of a defeated giant." Kahl, "Reading Galatians and Empire at the Great Altar of Pergamon," 33. Indeed love/sex and war/violence were often quite closely linked in Greek mythological language.

6. Ibid., 25

7. In this article, Lopez works specifically with the *Judea Capta* coin, issued under Vespasian after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. She notes how important such materials are for understanding government programs and ideology: "As a form of state-sanctioned public communication, coin iconography naturalized the universality and inevitability of Roman state domination." See Davina Lopez "Before Your Very Eyes," 120.

8. Ibid., 149. Lopez also reads depictions of the body of the emperor relative to constructions of gender, and not incidentally, history. Of the war images sculpted onto the body of a statue of Augustus (Prima Porta), Lopez writes, "Regardless of what "actually" happened, these images on Augustus' cuirass tell the story of masculine Romans saving the world from the barbarian …," 130.

9. For the mythological and spectacular dimensions of punishment under Rome, as well as some of the social-identification implications, Coleman "Fatal Charades," 44–73.

10. The tetragram (YHWH) is a famous example. Or in an Egyptian story from the Ramessid period, no human knew the name the sun god Re until Isis tricks him out of revealing it. See Hornung *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt*, 97–98.

11. For example, Walter Ong writes, "Oral peoples commonly think of names (one kind of words) as conveying power over things. Explanations of Adam's naming of the animals in Genesis 2:20 usually call condescending attention to this presumably quaint archaic belief. Such a belief is in fact far less quaint than it seems to unreflective chirographic and typographic folk. First of all, names do give human beings power over what they name…." *Orality and Literacy*, 33.

12. The inability of speech to "capture" is also reflected later, though in a different way, in the lines, "I am what anyone can hear, but no one can say" (19.20–23 and 20.28–.31)

13. This separation itself of "divine" and "human" is more contemporary than it is ancient, since human heroes were often hailed as gods (e.g., Alexander, Caesar), and mythological characters often had mixed divine-human parentage.

14. This statement references the work of Michel Foucault and its influence in postmodern theory. See particularly Foucault *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*.

15. On gender theory, for example, Wittig, "One is Not Born a Woman." For a summary of feminist positions on the construction of "sex," see Butler *Gender Trouble*. On critical race theory, Gates and Appiah *"Race" Writing and Difference*. Ania Loomba in *Colonialism/ Postcolonialism* also nicely summarizes theories on how the modern category of race, developed in the Enlightenment period, is inextricably tied to colonial history and interests, 53–62.

16. Althusser *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*.

17. Althusser is specifically interested in how the machinery of the state "governs" existence. This is particularly apt here, in relationship to the discussions regarding Roman imperial iterations of identity. Though the use of the term "accept" here perhaps implies too much conscious will, as the proceeding analysis of Butler's reading of Althusser illustrates, this scene produces agency even as it subjects.

18. Likewise there is always the forecast of the instruction to "be a man" implicit in the proclamation of "it's a boy."

19. Butler writes: " 'Sex' is, thus, not simply what one has, or a static description of what one is: it will be one of the norms by which the 'one' becomes viable at all, that which qualifies a body for life within a domain of cultural intelligibility." *Bodies That Matter*, 2.

20. We are interested in her reading of Althusser in *The Psychic Life of Power*. She has written about it in *Bodies That Matter* as well.

21. Butler *The Psychic Life of Power*, 130.

22. Responding to speculation on who the "I" is, Meyer and Barnstone note, "However, her mystery is that one cannot know for certain who she is and whom she represents." In *The Gnostic Bible*, 224.

23. Butler *The Psychic Life of Power*, 130.

24. This relates closely to Rosemary Hennessy's notion of "outlawed needs," which are "sensations and affects that do not fall into any prescribed categories …" She also notes that "The human potential for sensation and affect that comprises 'experience' is always much richer that sanctioned identity categories capture." *Profit and Pleasure*, 218.

25. Butler *The Psychic Life of Power*, 131.

26. As in lines 18,27–28

27. She continues, "This is the 'excess' that is often 'experienced' as an inchoate affect of not belonging, of not fitting in or not feeling at home within the terms that are offered for identity. The process of disidentification can zero in on the affective component of this misrecognition and invite consideration of the ways it is named and rooted in emotions (of shame, denial, resentment, etc.) that can naturalize existing categories. Disidentification invites the renarration of this affective excess in relation to capitalism's systemic prouction of unmet need," 230–231.Our conclusions here are not only indebted to Hennessy's work in *Profit and Pleasure*, but some suggestions made by Vincent L. Wimbush in his essay " '… Not of This World …': Early Christianities as Rhetorical and Social Formation," in *Reimagining Christian Origins*, ed. Elizabeth Castelli and Hal Taussig, 23–26.

Chapter 8

1. This chapter relies upon the technical arguments in Jared C. Calaway, "The Organization of *The Thunder: Perfect Mind* (NHC VI, 2)" (Forthcoming), and idem, "The Conversions of *The Thunder: Perfect Mind*: Its Copticization and Christianization" (Forthcoming).

2. Although we have attempted to reproduce alliteration and wordplay as much as possible in our translation, it was not always possible to do this in the same places in the poem that these devices appear in Coptic.

3. See 18,27–31, for example, "I am being/I am she who is nothing/ Those who don't participate in my presence, don't know me/Those

who share in my being, know me." The wordplay relies upon three similar terms translated as "being," "nothing," and "presence." The first and the third terms are the Graeco-Coptic terms *ousia* and *synousia*, literally "being" and "being with." The middle term is *tete mntesousia* or literally "she who is without her being." The middle part breaks up the wordplay, which in Greek probably would have simply been *anousia*, creating three basic terms for being, nothingness, and presence as *ousia, anousia*, and *synousia*. *Anousia* may not be part of the Graeco-Coptic vocabulary; that is, Greek terms absorbed into the Coptic language. On the other hand, there are Coptic ways of negation that could have retained the rhythm that are attested elsewhere, such as *atousia* (*Three Steles of Seth* 121,25–32; 124,25–29).

4. It is the general assumption that like every other document found at Nag Hammadi, *Thunder* was originally written in Greek (James R. Robinson, "Introduction," in *Nag Hammadi Library*, 38; Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 77; Layton, "Riddle of Thunder," 38), and Paul-Hubert Poirier (*Tonerre*, 6, 97, 172) uses the other documents' likely Greek origins to argue that the burden of proof is on anyone who would argue to the contrary for *Thunder*. Likewise, Poirier has provided the most thoroughgoing attempt to reconstruct the Greek original from the Coptic text. Trying to reconstruct a Greek original using only the Coptic text is highly speculative, although could occasionally be valuable if it could clarify a meaning in the Coptic. If the translation is too good, however, as we argue it is in *Thunder*, then such a retro-translation is becomes less helpful. Such retro-translations, in fact, would lose the rhythms, the alliteration, and wordplay present in the Coptic version. The proof we provide may not overturn conjectures of the document's Greek origins–and, for the most part, we are unconcerned with the original language of the document–but we hope will convince readers to take the Coptic version seriously.

5. The Hebrew Bible, for example, also uses pronouns, particularly possessive pronouns, to create a sense of rhyme (e.g., Jer. 9:18; 12:7). See S.E. Gillingham, *The Poems and Psalms of the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford Bible Series; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 25–26, 191–192.

6. Bentley Layton, "The Riddle of Thunder," in *Gnosticism and Early Christianity*, ed. C. Hedrick and R. Hodgson (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1986), 37–54; *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 77–85.

7. Poirier, *Tonerre*, 103–104; "Structure et intention du traité intitulé 'le tonnerre, intellect parfait.' "

8. Poirier, *Tonnerre*, 104–112, 341–348; "Structure et intention."

9. Cf. Poirier, *Tonnerre*, 105, 112, 136, 211–213.

10. The first word, *ebol*, does appear elsewhere at the beginning of a line (20.13), but has a different grammatical function, meaning "since" or "because" rather than "from" or "out of."

11. Poirier, "Structure et intention"; *Tonnerre*, 111–112.

Chapter 9

1. In scholarship on *Thunder* attention to these parallelisms has not only underplayed the performative aspect of this device. Rather, scholarship has used this poetic and performative device to propose that *Thunder* fits into a "gnostic" category of dualism, since a number of scholars have proposed that cosmic or philosophical dualism is a defining characteristic of "gnosticism." Cf., for example, Layton, "The Riddle of the Thunder," 37, 38, 50, 51, 54. In Chapter 3, the problematic character of both gnosticism as a category and *Thunder* as "gnostic" is discussed at some length. To propose *Thunder's* parallelisms as indication of its "gnosticism" is to miss the clear irony that *Thunder* uses its parallelisms to undermine and deconstruct dualistic categories. Similarly this undermines the role parallelism plays in establishing the performative character of *Thunder*.

2. It is telling that modern poetry practically abandoned rhyme when poetry became so much associated with writing that the visual composition of a poem on a page often counted for more than any effort at rhyme.

3. Cf. remarks in Chapter 2, based on Poirier, Paul-Hubert. *Le Tonnerre: Intellect parfait (NH VI, 2)*. Quebec: Presses de l'Universite Laval, 1995., 122–132.

4. MacRae, *Introduction*.

5. The typical use of gerund and participial forms in ancient hymns does not apply regularly to *Thunder*. Similarly, although the tendency of ancient hymns to organize themselves in stanzas or chiasmic patterns occurs occasionally in smaller units of *Thunder* (cf. Chapter 8), the larger organization of *Thunder* does not have these characteristics.

6. In some cases sustained scholarship can come up with reasonable suggestions about the particular kind of ancient performance at which a text may have been used. For instance, it is widely concluded that the hymn fragments discovered in the letters of Paul and Paul's literary progeny were sung when early Christians gathered for worship. This literary analysis of portions of Paul's letters (e.g., Philippians 2:6–11) has been matched with knowledge that hymns were regularly a part of a larger ritual complex of the Greco-Roman meal at which Paul's letters were most likely read. This match helps identify the performance context of those (pre) Pauline hymns. Cf. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 28, 30.

7. There is sometimes a curious double take about performances' changeability. For instance, often ritual performance–and many of the ancient performance settings were ritual in character–pretends to always be the same, and then consistently makes changes. This allows the performance to carry an assumption of permanence, even while working on changes. As Catherine Bell in *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* notes, "Ritualizing schemes invoke a series of privileged

oppositions that, when acted in space and time through a series of movements, gestures, and sounds, effectively structure and nuance an environment.... This environment, constructed and reconstructed by the actions of social agents within it, provides an experience of the objective reality ..." 141. So the repetition of the performances helps build an assumption/presumption of stability. When those at/ in the event are assured of this "objective" stability, performance as a significant part of the participants/attendants' lives can raise the possibility of change in ordinary life through the person's ability to change gestures, words, and relational dynamics in particular performances. Bell notes, "[T]he (ritual performance) environment appears to be the source of the schemes and their values" (1992:140). Within this assumption of stability, ritual performance, according to Bell, then builds in constant variations. The ability of each performance to change (or not change) is a primary way it both nuances and structures the participants/attendants' understanding. Ritual performance then becomes a major way for people to make subliminal adjustments in defining their identities. This aspect of ritual is not simply for those in difficult social standings. Jonathan Z. Smith shows in his *To Take Place* shows how the relationship between the high priest and the king in ancient Israel was continually adjusted through rituals of seating within the Temple, 55–70. As Bell summarizes, "Basic to ritualization is the inherent significance it derives from its interplay and contrast with other practices. From this viewpoint, there would be little content to any attempt to generate a cross-cultural or universal meaning of ritual. Likewise, this view suggests that the significance of ritual behavior lies not in being an entirely separate way of acting, but in how such activities constitute themselves as different and in contrast to other activities.... Acting ritually is first and foremost a matter of nuanced contrasts and the evocation of strategic, value-laded distinctions," 90. Performance meaning making regularly has a strategy of comparing and contrasting the way life is inside and outside the performance. Here again the work of Jonathan Z. Smith has been illustrative. Smith shows how the ritual of killing a Siberian bear cub by villagers each year is a way of dealing with the dangers and failures inherent in the real hunts for polar bears by the same people, *Imagining Religion*, 3–65. That is, the safe ritual in the village with a bear cub helps think about the real dangers of hunting adult bears.

8. Cf. the study of Lindblom in *Prophecy*, 168–172.
9. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 211–214.
10. Cf. Hans-Joseph Klauck, *Herrenmahl*, 82–90 and Stowers, "Greeks Who Sacrifice," 299–320.
11. Sawicki's *Seeing the Lord* studies extensively the improvisational character of women's laments in Hellenistic settings.
12. It is important here, however, for the significance of gender and gendered language to be given full range of reference. As is noted

several times in this book, it is a mistake to think that gender is just about the social issues connoted in the language.

13. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*.

14. Gilmore, *Aggression and Community*, Chapter 6

15. A similar social change toyed with by a ritual is the contestation between the Israelite king and the chief priest, as outlined in Jonathan Z. Smith's *To Take Place*, 68–93.

16. *On the Contemplative Life*, 48.

17. Jordan Scott, Berlin Film Festival 2005; Julie Dash, *Daughters of the Dust*, 1991

18. Nurse With Wound, Tulku, Nino, and Current 93.

19. Julia Haines, *Thunder Perfect Mind*, 1995.

20. MeLinda Tatum Kaiser, Lisa Lovelace, Chestnut Hill United Methodist Church, Philadelphia, Pa. 2008.

CHAPTER 10

1. The term "meaning making" is meant here to connote a combination of two dimensions of interpretation often avoided by literary and historical scholars: (1) the including of an actual proposed meaning and (2) that meaning is "made," and not inherent.

2. The quote is "I am the name of the sound, and the sound of the name. I am the sign of the letter and the designation of the division" (MacRae translation). This also conforms with some of Morrison's interest in the function of the novel (cf. her speech upon receiving the Nobel Prize in Literature in Stockholm in 1993).

3. For a more extended discussion cf. Veronique Lesoinnne's essay "Answer Jazz's Call," which examines the voice in *Jazz* and notices that although to a certain extent the narrator of the novel does identify with *Thunder*'s "I," the conclusion that this is a feminine voice cannot be confirmed.

4. The film won both the cinematography award at the 1991 Sundance Festival and the 2004 National Film Registry from the National Film Preservation Board.

5. Angeletta KM Gourdine, "Fashioning the Body (as) Politic in Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*," *African American Review* 38 (2004), 2, 8.

6. It is, however, true that some parts of the Nag Hammadi collection do have Sophia as a participant in a complex cosmology, not too far from the conversation of Eco's fiftieth chapter.

7. Cf., for example, Brigitte Kahl's work, *Galatians Reimagined: Through the Eyes of the Vanquished*; Davina Lopez's work *Apostle to the Conquered*; and Richard Horsley's edited volume *Paul and Empire*.

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