

24 Instead everything is full of fruit.  
Praise to you, God, the delight of eternal paradise.

### Ode 12

- <sup>1</sup> He has filled me with words of Truth,  
So that I may speak for him.  
<sup>2</sup> And as the flow of the waters, Truth flows from my mouth,  
And my lips tell of his fruits.  
<sup>3</sup> He has made his knowledge to abound in me,  
Because the mouth of the Lord is the true Word,  
And the door of his Light.  
<sup>4</sup> And the Most High has given it to the generations:  
The expounders of his beauty,  
The speakers of his glory,  
The confessors of his thought,  
And the sanctifiers of his deeds.  
<sup>5</sup> For the lightness of the word is without narration,  
And as the narrative, so also is the swiftness and sharpness,  
Its progression is endless.  
<sup>6</sup> And it never falls, but stands continually,

And no one knows its descent or its journey.  
<sup>7</sup> For as his formation is, so also is his expectation,  
Indeed he is light and the dawn of thought.  
<sup>8</sup> The generations spoke to one another through him,  
And those that were silent were able to speak.  
<sup>9</sup> From him came love and worth,  
And they spoke, one to the other, that which was theirs.

- <sup>10</sup> And they were made right by the Word,  
And they recognized the one who made them  
Because they were in unison,  
<sup>11</sup> Because the mouth of the Most High spoke to them  
And its exposition ran by his hand.  
<sup>12</sup> And the dwelling of the Word is humanity,  
And his truth is love.  
<sup>13</sup> They are blessed, those who by his hand have known everything  
And who recognized the Lord by his Truth.  
Halleluiah.

## An Introduction to The Thunder: Perfect Mind

WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE Gospel of Thomas, no other Nag Hammadi document has been received with as much excitement in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as The Thunder: Perfect Mind. The artistic community has been most active in receiving Thunder. Nobel Prize-winning novelist Toni Morrison has used Thunder citations as the epigraph to her novels *Jazz* and *Parade*. Umberto Eco discussed it in his novel *Foucault's Pendulum*. Julie Dash's award-winning feature film *Daughters of the Dust* opens with a long citation from Thunder, accompanied by beautiful and haunting images. And Thunder's text anchors a 2005 film by Academy Award-winning director Ridley Scott and his daughter Jordan Scott. Numerous music groups and composers have set it to music.

Only one manuscript of The Thunder: Perfect Mind exists. It was found at Nag Hammadi with fifty-one other documents. There is no mention of Thunder in any other known piece of ancient literature. So this discovery at Nag Hammadi is monumental.

There is no indication of an author in the Nag Hammadi pages, and the title, as in many other documents from early Christianity, seems to have been added later. The meaning of the book's title has remained inscrutable and awaits new ideas emerging from its active use in our day. It is possible that Thunder was composed in Egypt, as it was found there and Egypt is the only location mentioned in the text. Many scholars assume that Thunder was originally in Greek, like most early Christian letters and gospels. But recent work on its Coptic text suggests the possibility that Coptic is its original language, highlighting again its possible origin in Egypt. Most difficult is approximating the time of Thunder's composition. The possibilities range from the first century BCE to the third century CE. Recent close study of Thunder has also concluded that column 21, the last of its nine manuscript pages, was almost certainly written later than the rest of the text, most probably in the third century.

The national spiritual leaders in the New Orleans Council expressed delight and surprise as they read Thunder. For the most part it was new to them, and it received positive votes from everyone. This enthusiasm for the way Thunder's divine and mostly feminine voice makes creative room for all kinds of human experience led a number of the council members to propose that Thunder should be the very first thing to be read in *A New New Testament*. As a subcommittee of the coun-

cil worked more thoroughly on the order of this collection, the place of Thunder eventually lodged in the section on "Gospels, Poems, and Songs Between Heaven and Earth."

Although found in a collection of Christian documents, Thunder itself does not refer to Jesus or Christ at all. This is also true of 3 John in the traditional New Testament, and the Letter of James mentions Jesus only twice. The divine self-proclaiming voice of Thunder is most like the voice of Jesus in the Gospel of John. Like John's Jesus, who is a divine figure both powerful and humiliated, Thunder's divine voice speaks simultaneously of its own deep pain and its glorious boldness:

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 the mother and the daughter  
 I am the limbs of my mother  
 I am a sterile woman and she has many children . . .  
 I am both awareness and obliviousness  
 I am humiliation and pride  
 I am without shame  
 I am ashamed . . .  
 Do not be arrogant to me when I am thrown to the ground . . .  
 Do not laugh at me in the lowest places  
 Do not throw me down among those slaughtered viciously . . .  
 I am she who exists in all fears and in trembling boldness  
 I am she who is timid . . .  
 (1:5-7; 2:7-8, 12, 14-15, 18-19)

Besides the Gospel of John's Jesus and Thunder, no other ancient (or modern) divine voice presents itself as simultaneously both so glorious and so humiliated.

Of course, Thunder's primarily feminine voice shocks and amazes most twenty-first-century readers. Close attention to this gendered dimension of Thunder's self-proclamation points to two striking aspects:

1. The roles and situations with which Thunder identifies correspond to a very wide range of women's roles in the ancient (and modern) world. By associating herself with so many different women characters, Thunder breaks down the many ways in which the ancient world stereotyped women as glorious, shameful, corrupt, powerful, and opaque. This voice does not seem to allow itself to be caricatured in the ways women were/are. In this way, Thunder both associates women with the divine in unexpected ways and makes herself more real relative to life's challenges, promises, and ironies. Of course, it is exactly this dynamic in Thunder that has already made it so popular in twenty-first-century media, art, and feminism.

2. Although most translations of the past thirty years have not attended to this, the Coptic (and the translation used in *A New New Testament*) scrambles Thunder's gender a bit. Although she speaks primarily as a feminine divine figure, occasionally she speaks as a masculine divine figure. This is similar to Jesus in the gospels of John and Matthew, and Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, where Jesus is actively associated with the feminine figure of divine Wisdom and as such becomes a person both feminine and masculine. This is also the case in the way Jesus and the Spirit are described in the Odes of Solomon. This more diffuse engenderedness opens up for the twenty-first-century reader a space where highly prescribed Western ideas of what is feminine or masculine are challenged. It offers readers today the chance to identify with Jesus and Thunder without rehearsing and reinforcing the long-held Western ideas of a defended and prescribed femininity and masculinity. Here the twentieth- and twenty-first-century "queer movements"\* have much to offer in understanding these ancient portraits of Thunder and Jesus.

*A New New Testament* is likely to be Thunder's first major coming-out party in the modern world. Although it has remained mostly unknown to the public since its discovery at Nag Hammadi in the mid-twentieth century, wherever it has surfaced in literature and art it has met with excited surprise.

### A Note on Chapter and Verse Numbering

Since this text is so "new," no version of the otherwise standard chapter and verse format exists. So we have had to add our own chapter and versification to this edition. The Thunder: Perfect Mind has been made available to the public in various formats and translations without chapter and verse over the past thirty years. We do think it also very important that there be a chapter and verse system, since it breaks up the text into units that belong together. We do, however, want to alert readers that the relatively frequent availability of this text in non-chapter and verse form or in the ancient manuscript form of simply noting the column and line numbers of the original document does not match our new chapter and verse format.

\* Some twenty-first-century readers may not know that for many lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people of our day the word *queer*, which originally was an insult to people of these sexual orientations, is now used as a positive term. In this way the term *queer* has come to mean the volatility of sexual orientation and gender in human beings, and it signals a deep receptivity to the vagueness and multiplicity of sexual identity. The term *queer* is now also used widely in literature and is even a relatively frequent term for some scholars of the New Testament and early Christianity. See, for instance, the books of Judith Butler (for general treatment) and Stephen Moore (for its meaning in the interpretation of the New Testament and early Christianity).

## Recommended Reading

Anne McGuire, *The Thunder: Perfect Mind* website: <http://www.stoa.org/diotima/anthology/thunder.shtml>

Anne McGuire, "Thunder, Perfect Mind," pp. 39–54 in *Searching the Scriptures*, Volume 2:

*A Feminist Commentary*

Hal Taussig, Jared Calaway, Maia Kotrosits, Celene Lillie, and Justin Lasser, *The Thunder: Perfect Mind: A New Translation and Introduction*

## The Thunder: Perfect Mind

- 1 I was sent out from power  
I came to those pondering me  
And I was found among those seeking me
- 2 Look at me, all you who contemplate me  
Audience, hear me  
Those expecting me, receive me  
3 Don't chase me from your sight  
Don't let your voice or your hearing hate me
- 4 Don't ignore me any place, any time  
Be careful. Do not ignore me  
5 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  
6 I am the wife and the virgin  
I am he the mother and the daughter  
I am the limbs of my mother
- 7 I am a sterile woman and she has many children  
I am she whose wedding is extravagant  
and I didn't have a husband
- 8 I am the midwife and she who hasn't given birth  
I am the comfort of my labor pains  
9 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  
10 I am the slave woman of him who served me  
I am she, the lord  
of my child  
11 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
- 12 I am the staff of his youthful power  
And he is the baton of my old womanhood  
Whatever he wants happens to me
- 2 I am the silence never found  
And the idea infinitely recalled
- 2 I am the voice with countless sounds  
And the thousand guises of the word  
I am the speaking of my name  
3 You who loathe me why do you love me and loathe the ones who love me?
- 4 You who deny me, confess me  
You who confess me, deny me  
5 You who speak the truth about me, lie about me  
You who lie about me, speak the truth about me
- 6 You who know me, ignore me  
You who ignore me, know me  
7 I am both awareness and obliviousness  
I am humiliation and pride  
8 I am without shame  
I am ashamed  
9 I am security and I am fear  
I am war and peace  
10 Pay attention to me  
I am she who is disgraced and she who is important
- 11 Pay attention to me, to my impoverishment and to my extravagance  
12 Do not be arrogant to me when I am thrown to the ground  
You will find me among the expected  
13 Do not stare at me in the shit pile, leaving me discarded  
You will find me in the kingdoms  
14 Do not stare at me when I am thrown out among the condemned  
Do not laugh at me in the lowest places

- 15 Do not throw me down among those slaughtered viciously  
 16 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  
 18 Why do you despise my fear and curse my pride?  
 I am she who exists in all fears and in trembling boldness  
 19 I am she who is timid  
 And I am safe in a comfortable place  
 I am witless, and I am wise  
 3 1 Why did you hate me with your schemes?  
 2 I shall shut my mouth among those whose mouths are shut  
 And then I will show up and speak  
 3 Why then did you hate me, you Greeks?  
 Because I am a barbarian among barbarians?  
 4 I am the wisdom of the Greeks and the knowledge of the barbarians  
 I am the deliberation of both the Greeks and barbarians  
 5 I am he whose image is multiple in Egypt  
 And she who is without an image among the barbarians  
 6 I am she who was hated in every place  
 And she who was loved in every place  
 7 I am she whom they call life  
 And you all called death  
 8 I am she whom they call law  
 And you all called lawlessness  
 9 I am she whom you chased and she whom you captured  
 10 I am she whom you scattered  
 And you have gathered me together  
 11 I am she before whom you were ashamed  
 And you have been shameless to me
- 12 I am she who does not celebrate festivals  
 And I am she whose festivals are spectacular  
 13 I, I am without God  
 And I am she whose God is magnificent  
 14 I am he the one you thought about and you detested me  
 I am not learned, and they learn from me  
 15 I am she whom you detested and yet you think about me  
 16 I am he from whom you hid  
 And you appear to me  
 17 Wherever you hide yourselves, I myself will appear . . .  
 18 Receive me with understanding and heartache  
 Take me from the disgraced and crushed places  
 19 Rob from those who are good, even though in disgrace  
 4 1 Bring me in shame, to yourselves, out of shame  
 With or without shame  
 2 Blame the parts of me within yourselves  
 3 Come toward me, you who know me  
 And you who know the parts of me  
 4 Assemble the great among the small and earliest creatures  
 5 Advance toward childhood  
 Do not hate it because it is small and insignificant  
 6 Don't reject the small parts of greatness because they are small  
 Since smallness is recognized from within greatness  
 7 Why do you curse me and reverse me?  
 You wounded me and you relented  
 8 Don't separate me from the first ones  
 Throw away no one  
 Turn away no . . .  
 9 I know those  
 And the ones after these know me

- 10 I am the mind and the rest  
 I am the learning from my search  
 And the discovery of those seeking me  
 11 The command of those who ask about me  
 I am she who shouts out and I am thrown down on the ground  
 25 I am the one who prepares the bread and my mind within  
 I am the knowledge of my name  
 26 I am she who shouts out and it is I that listens  
 I appear . . . and walk in . . . seal  
 27 I am he . . . the defense  
 I am she they call truth, and violation  
 You honor me . . . and you whisper against me  
 28 You conquered ones: judge them before they judge you  
 Because the judge and favoritism exist in you  
 29 If he condemns you, who will release you?  
 If he releases you, who can detain you?  
 30 Since what is your inside is your outside  
 And the one who shapes your outside is he who shaped your inside  
 31 And what you see on the outside, you see revealed on the inside  
 It is your clothing  
 32 Hear me, audience, and learn from my words, you who know me  
 I am what everyone can hear and no one can say  
 33 I am the name of the sound and the sound of the name  
 I am the sign of writing and disclosure of difference
- 10 I am judgment and acquittal  
 22 I myself am without sin, and the root of sin is from within me  
 I appear to be lust but inside is self-control  
 23 I am what anyone can hear but no one can say
- 10 I am the mind and the rest  
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## Appendix

## 5 1 And I . . . light . . . and

- Hearers . . . to you . . . the great power  
 2 And . . . will not move the name . . . he who created me  
 But I will speak his name  
 the name

It is he who created me  
 But I will speak his name  
 3 Look then at his pronouncements  
 and all the writings that have been completed.

Listen then, audience  
 And also you angels  
 4 Along with those who have been sent  
 And spirits who have risen from among  
 the dead  
 5 For I am he who exists alone

And no one judges me  
 6 Since many sweet ideas exist in all  
 kinds of sin,  
 Uncontrollable and condemning passions  
 7 And passing pleasures that people  
 have  
 Until they become sober and go up to  
 their resting place,  
 8 And they will find me in that place  
 They will live and they will not die again

## An Introduction to the Gospel of John

**S**TRIKINGLY DIFFERENT FROM the gospels of Thomas, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the Gospel of John begins its story of Jesus with a poem portraying him as an everlasting figure at one with God. In John, Jesus exists before the creation of anything and then strides through Galilee and Jerusalem with the authority of a divine figure. This very distinct gospel seems to have been written from within a movement that felt both powerful and embattled from all sides. Not unlike The Thunder: Perfect Mind, John portrays a cosmic figure in the crosshairs of human trauma, loss, and potential.

The author is not identified in the text, and the title itself is probably later than the gospel. The book is thought to have been written in the 90s CE. Speculations on where it was written vary from Palestine to Asia Minor. It is written in Greek.

This gospel is organized primarily around paired units of what it calls the "signs" (its particular word for Jesus's healings and feeding of the five thousand) and long speeches of Jesus. Each sign/miracle is followed by a speech from Jesus. Almost all of his speeches use an ancient formula for a divine figure revealing who he or she is. The formula begins with "I am . . ." and, in the case of the Gospel of John, concludes with phrases like "the bread of life," "the resurrection and the life," and "the good shepherd." Jesus does not speak like this at all in Matthew, Mark, or Luke, and he does so sparingly in the Gospel of Thomas.

### Living in God

The Gospel of John makes a steady case for people to be a part of God. This invitation comes through a number of poetic images. Often Jesus describes a dynamic in which people are in him, he is in God, and God is in him. In this elliptical connection, people are in God by virtue of their being in Jesus (14:20). Jesus explains this in chapter 15 in terms of his being the vine and people being the branches and then extends this comparison: "If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love; just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love" (15:10).

This relationship among Jesus, people, and God seems very similar to the way Jesus in John talks about the Advocate, which is sometimes called the holy Spirit or the Spirit of Truth: "[Jesus said,] and I will ask the Father, and he will give you another helper, to be with you always — the spirit of truth . . . you recognize it, because it is with you, and is in you" (14:16, 17b). This same interlocking identity among Jesus, people, Spirit, and God occurs in the story itself. Throughout there is an unnamed man called the one "whom Jesus loved." In John he is the only male