

# **Incongruity, Flux, and Multiplicity:**

## **Interpreting the ‘The Gospel according to Thomas’**

Name: Forrest Ashworth Bowne Kentwell

Student Number: S3106969

University: Rijksuniversiteit Groningen / University of Groningen

Program: Research Master ‘Religion and Culture’

First Assessor: prof. dr. dr. F.L. Roig Lanzillotta

Second Assessor: prof. dr. S.N. Mason



## Summary

This thesis investigates the research question ‘how does the *Gospel According to Thomas* (*Thomas/GTh*) authorize a practice of plural, multifaceted interpretive possibilities? This thesis aims to utilize methodologies of intertextuality and discourse analysis to understand better, (1) how *Thomas* engaged with the world around it, (2) how contemporary scholars write texts and understand GTh, (3) how I come to understand myself. I open the text by reflecting on the lessons I have learned over the past few years regarding taxonomies and scholarly categories. This introduction gives shape and possibility to the rest of the text. Then, to excavate *Thomas*, I first detail and then analyze various repetitions and discursive strands within the text. Then, I turn to theories of comical incongruity to enliven my analysis. To further reveal layers of play within *Thomas*, I turned to the fragments of Heraclitus. Lastly, I propose several lines of future inquiry for myself and other scholars by tracing several issues currently plaguing the field. From these investigations, I have drawn three major conclusions (1) *Thomas* is littered with incongruities structurally, rhetorically, linguistically, and metaphorically, which I propose is a two-fold strategy to build a following and explain a particular anthropological monism and world-engaged soteriology of ethical progress; (2) that the fragments of Heraclitus and *Thomas* have a similar theology and circulated within similar discursive circles; (3) scholarship on *Thomas* is at a crossroads, one is stagnantly pondering ‘origins’ and the other is just being to blossom in analyzing social worlds and literary production.

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## Introduction

### Epigraph

“In the study of an ancient document much depends upon the pre-suppositions with which we begin, on the questions with which we approach the examination of text.”

--R. McLean Wilson, *Studies in the Gospel of Thomas* (1960): 14.

“In other words, the challenge of this book is that it takes seriously out won historicity and positionality.

What *Fabrications of the Greek Past* therefore invites readers to do is to take seriously that the way we talk about the world, present or past, speaks primarily of our own interests, positions, situations, and cultural sensibilities, as well as the intended audiences to which we are writing or talking.”

-- Vaia Touna, *Fabrications of the Greek Past* (2017): xiii.

“...the objects could have various meanings:  
a quiver filled with arrows could indicate the approach of war,  
or the abundance of game, or else an armorer’s shop.  
An hourglass could mean time passing, or time past,  
or sand, or a place where hourglasses are made.”

-- Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (1972): 38.

“But with their multi-voiced diversity, ambiguities, and transgressive interconnections, the ancient texts constantly resist and spill across the boundaries that attempt to fix their meanings.”

-- Karen King, “Factions, Variety, Diversity, Multiplicity,” *MTSR* (2011): 229.

“Such a demand for cohesion and certainty is only ever adequately  
-- albeit paradoxically --

addressed through various denials of uncertainty and chaos.”

-- Christopher M. Driscoll, *White Lies* (2016): 9.



## **Section 0.1) Coming to Know Myself: The “White” Imagination**

My scholarly interests have broad historical reach from the contemporary moment to antiquity in the Mediterranean. My training in departments of Religion Studies have encouraged me to consider carefully the theories and methods I use when approaching objects of study. This practice of self-reflectivity led me to historiography: how historians create meaning through their questions and (re)presentations of the past. I have come to understand that it is imperative for historians to grasp their situatedness. To attempt an explicit account of the assumptions, questions, and the implications of my own claims. Reflecting on our methods, helps reveal and mitigate the way social norms influence our work. That is to say, to be scholars of the past we must be attentive to the ideologies and social continuums that are working through us and affecting our imaginations.

I began to grasp the depth and importance of our taxonomical impulses and methodological moves when reading the works of Literary Scholar Toni Morrison and Historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham. Morrison’s short yet powerful book, *Playing in the Dark*, interrogates the ways the white, western imagination implicitly builds racialized dichotomies. Rather than calling out “racism” – the explicit, purposeful claim that a (variously defined) white identity group is superior to all others – Morrison outlines “racialization,” which is the ways past generations and culture norms or racism have invaded our unconscious and tend to control and contour the white psyche’s literary imagination (entwined with cultural, social, and political imaginations).<sup>1</sup> That is to say, without the negative intentions of racism, many people implicitly rely upon racially charged assumptions. I will use the phrase *racialization* and ‘white thinking’ interchangeably. I define them as a particular mode of categorization, one that imagines atomized, hierarchal identity groups, and thus upholds strict boundaries against other, lesser identity-groups. Higginbotham’s essay forced me to reckon with how difficult it is to challenge and break out of concretized racialized thinking.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, The William E. Massey Sr. Lectures in American Studies (Harvard University Press, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> Higginbotham, “African-American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race,” *Signs*, Vol. 17, No.2 (The University of Chicago Press, Winter, 1992): 251-274.

These brilliant ideas from 1992 have been advanced in recent works by Theologians and Scholars of Race and Religion: James Perkinson (2004, 2005)<sup>3</sup>, Willie Jennings (2010)<sup>4</sup>, and J. Kameron Carter (2008)<sup>5</sup> who have been interrogating basic academic and theological models as acutely racialized. Their works, along with historian Nell Painter's *The History of White People*, provide a crucial critique to the ways we as scholars utilize and uphold pure, isolated taxonomies for various groups. Together, these books form a constellation that surgically analyzes claims of uncontaminated, *sui generis* taxonomies. They show that the major premise of 'objectivism' in Enlightenment practices of science and anthropology are weaponized to manufacture bounded categories to support a racially, white supremacist, rooted projects. For example, Painter shows that the historical foundations of whiteness is to be "not-black."<sup>6</sup> The white, racialized imagination defines and maintains borders between the (white) self and an essentially different Other. By violently and coercively limiting the capacities and capabilities of the Other, the categorically empty white-identity is created and sustained.<sup>7</sup>

Noticing the pervasiveness of racialized thinking in science, anthropology, and theology, I began to question my own writing and implicit assumptions, along with those of my fellow historians and religion studies scholars of antiquity (hereafter referred to as we/us). This project grew out of critical questions: what are the ways we build boundaries between (social) groups; what is the purpose and outcome of our taxonomies; and how might these ideas stem (implicitly) from normalized, habitual thinking passed down by the racialized socio-cultural locations we

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<sup>3</sup> I cannot stress enough the importance of James Perkinson's work for studying whiteness. Here is a lengthy quote on what he terms the "Whiteness Amalgamation" from his text *White Theology: Outing Supremacy in Modernity*: "(1) political-economic institution of enslavement, (2) a phenotypical contrast of stark and seemingly unerasable differentiation, (3) a Cartesian self-consciousness crystalizing its identity in a unitary and individualized form of subjectivity claiming universal valance, (4) a scientific form of rationality seeking to prove its own transcendence by metaphysically categorizing the entire objective world (including dark-skinned human beings who were thought to be part of 'nature') in a totalized [hierarchical] taxonomy, (5) a Calvinist notion of predestination that sought eternal confirmations in surface significations (like success in business or skin-color in race), and (6) an Anglo cultural predilection that reacted to the color 'black' with a visceral horror and mental revulsion" (2004): 159.

<sup>4</sup> Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* notes the still-pervasive racist schema touted by a famous British priest: "Colenso offers a highly refined vision of the whiteness hermeneutic, the interpretive practice of dislodging particular identities from particular places by means of a soteriological vision that discerns all people on the horizon of theological identities. This discernment in and of itself is not the problem. The problem is the racialization of that soteriological vision such that racial existence is enfolded inside the displacement operation and emerges as a parasite on the theological identity" (2010): 138.

<sup>5</sup> Carter, *Race: A Theological Account*: "My fundamental contention is that modernity's racial imagination has its genesis in the theological problem of Christianity's quest to sever itself from its Jewish roots" (2008): 4.

<sup>6</sup> Painter, *The History of White People*, (New York: NY Norton, 2010): 457.

<sup>7</sup> See Christopher M. Driscoll, *White Lies: Race and Uncertainty in the Twilight of American Religion* (Taylor and Francis Group: Routledge New York, 2016), particularly Ch. 3 "Battling White Lies: Exaggerated identity and the twilight of American religion," 117-166.

find ourselves in? If we are honest with ourselves, the field of early Christianities is very “white” not only in skin color but in models of thinking (racialization).<sup>8</sup> It seems imperative for scholars of antiquity to ask continually of each other: how might sticky, pervasive categories like orthodoxy, heresy, Gnostic(ism), Neoplatonism, Judaism, and Christianity, among others, be dripping with colonial, racialized, and atomized residues? How might these models and categorical assumptions hinder our capacities to write (accurately) about the past? In particular, I am interested in how the (somewhat) recent findings of codices and scrolls at Nag Hammadi and Qumran help scholars challenge manufactured categories.

## **Section 0.2) Shifting Paradigms: A Movement of Methodologies**

Currently in the field of Medieval studies, there is a monumental controversy over how the knowledge from the field is sometimes used to promote white nationalist agendas.<sup>9</sup> A similarly controversy occurred in the field of antiquity studies in late 1980s and 1990s when Martin Bernal, a sinologist by training, moved across several fields of study to deliver a new view of the ancient world; while simultaneously, positing a devastating critique of Universities and racialized academic positions. His four volume text, *Black Athena* (1986, 1991, 1995, 1996), shocked both the academic and public world. Just three years after, Jacques Berlinerblau attempted to capture this intervention in his text, *Heresy in the University: The ‘Black Athena’ Controversy and the Responsibilities of American Intellectuals* (1999). Berlinerblau gives ample space to both Bernal’s central claim of moving from what he titles the ‘Aryan Model’ to the ‘Revised Model of Antiquity’ and the criticisms of Bernal’s texts by hyper-specialists from several academic fields. I will not rehash all of the minor debate details here, but an incomplete, yet general overview should suffice to make my point. Bernal shows the manufactured nature of

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<sup>8</sup> Again, from Perkinson, “Race is not a problem of the skin. It is a problem of the body, of its place of dwelling, of its source of nurture, of its social scripting, its educational training, its resources of protection, its erotics of desire, its politics of control, its ecology of energy,” *White Theology* (2004): 133.

<sup>9</sup> For an overview see, Chauncey Devega, “Alt-right catches knight fever — but medieval scholars strike back,” *Salon*, December 1, 2017 (12:00 a.m.), <https://www.salon.com/2017/11/30/alt-right-catches-knight-fever-but-medieval-scholars-strike-back/>. For a start to the controversy, see Dorothy Kim, “The Unbearable Whiteness of Medieval Studies,” *In the Middle* (blog), November 10, 2016 (6:10 a.m.), <http://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2016/11/the-unbearable-whiteness-of-medieval.html>. For scholarly community outcomes and bibliographies, see Carol L. Robinson, “Featured Lesson Resource Page: Race, Racism and the Middle Ages,” *Teaching Association of Medieval Studies* (blog), March 30, 2018. [https://teams-medieval.org/?page\\_id=76](https://teams-medieval.org/?page_id=76); and Jonathan Hsy “# MoreVoices: Citation, Inclusion, and Working Together,” *In the Middle* (blog), June 13, 2017 (4:01 p.m.), <http://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2017/06/morevoices-citation-inclusion-and.html>.

this ‘Aryan Model’ that was highly invested in maintaining distinct socio-cultural groups, particularly upholding a view of an undefiled Greek culture. As Painter explains, several European groups have imagined the harnessing of total rational capacities (hierarchically superior to emotions/feeling) in the Enlightenment and Modernity as part of a cultural continuum with an isolated, purified ancient Greek culture. This fabricates a tradition of whiteness.<sup>10</sup> So, by claiming roots in a pure, superior Greek culture isolated from the socio-cultural continuum of regions in the Mediterranean world like Persia and Egypt, the ‘Aryan Model’ has aided the manufacturing of a ‘historical’ basis for superior (white) European identities.

However, what Bernal is not self-reflective of, as Berlinerblau points out, is his saturation in Marxist thought and multicultural idealism of the late 1980’s and early 1990’s that frame the multicultural themes he finds in the ancient world. Berlinerblau, like many academics of antiquity in the 1990s, has reverted to the Enlightenment ideal of objectivity –one can know with full certainty the truth of their claims by way of testing, replication, and properly interpreting data.<sup>11</sup> This directly works against what I see as Bernal’s two important implications for any academic study: a) speak more frequently in terms of plausibility than in certainties and b) engage across disciplines to help reveal assumptions and learn new methods/models. Bernal knew his work was speculative, and he never aimed to build his own certainties. His hope was that philologists, philosophers, religion studies scholars, historians, human geographers, etc. would begin to have more weighty conversations across disciplinary boundaries.

Around the same time, Traditions of Antiquity scholar Michael A. Williams (1996) and Historian of Religion Karen King (2003) wrote powerful critiques of the categories “Gnostic/Gnosticism” and “(proto)-Orthodox/Heresy” to describe the diversity early Jesus movements. Their work resembles Bernal’s on a smaller scale. They take issue with stagnant taxonomies created by theologians and scholars with the outcome of distinctive, often *sui generis*, social groups isolated from their socio-cultural-political context. King especially espouses interdisciplinary models, pointing students of religion to the works of Bourdieu, Foucault,

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<sup>10</sup> Painter, *The History of White People*, (New York: NY Norton, 2010): 1-58. Viewed from a different lens, these are “acts of identification” defined by Touna as “moves people make to make sense of their world – scholar’s included! – and the uses of which concepts are put through such acts as interpretation, description, classification, representation, and the interests that drive those usages in fabricating different selves, we can therefore examine and consequently compare those practices . . .” *Fabrication of a Greek Past* (2017): 14. Also see, Jean-Francois Bayert, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> See Perkinson, *White Theology* (2004), particularly chapter 6: “White Posture,” 151-184.

Ricoeur, and Fiorenza.<sup>12</sup> Despite these warnings, scholars continue to utilize these terms as secondary-order categories and work to build definitions that atomize these imagined communities over and against other groups from the same time despite their acknowledgement of these critiques.<sup>13</sup> Although the default, unreflective mind-set of racialized (taxonomically pure) thinking continues to this day,<sup>14</sup> the various scholarly fields commenting on antiquity are making major steps forward in connecting previously isolated social groups.<sup>15</sup>

Characterizing this shifting trend in scholarship is the abstract of a recent symposium between Duke University and UNC that states, “Increasingly, studies of late antiquity have problematized easy boundaries between religion and philosophy and between labels of identity such as “Neoplatonic,” “Christian,” “Gnostic.” The goal of the symposium this year is to continue such investigation of intersecting identities in late antiquity.”<sup>16</sup> So it is important to properly recognize that antiquity and Early Christianities studies over the past couple decades has seen considerable shifts in taxonomical language and more caution with atomization. However, it cannot be stressed enough that “We must problematize much more of what we take for granted.”<sup>17</sup> I aim to follow this trend in scholarship of profoundly re-thinking singular meanings and racialized identity categories. Furthermore, Philosophers of Religion Russell McCutcheon and Willi Braun have paved the way for discussing identity-meaning constructions.<sup>18</sup> This trend most recently features antiquities scholar Vaia Touna and Philosopher of Religion Brent Nongbri in their questioning of “religion” as a category along with the ways modern scholars have fabricated classifications, definitions, taxonomies, and interpretations.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Harvard University Press, 2003): 334-340.

<sup>13</sup> For examples of this trend see, David Brakke (2010), Roelof van den Broek (2013).

<sup>14</sup> One telling example of the entrenchment of racialized thinking in studies of antiquity are the colonial assumptions underlying *Classics and Colonialism* (2005). See, Richard Fletcher’s review, *The Classical Review* vol. 58 no. 1 (2008): 296-7. However, credit is due to Phiroze Vasunia and Emily Greenwood for their helpful contributions to the volume.

<sup>15</sup> Some scholarly examples of major steps forward are William Arnal, Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta, and the practice of “New Philology” by scholars like Lance Jenott and Hugo Lundhaug.

<sup>16</sup> “Center of Late Ancient Studies Symposium,” March 19, 2018. <https://religion.unc.edu/evernt/duke-unc-center-late-ancient-studies-symposium/>.

<sup>17</sup> Higginbotham, “African-American Women’s History,” (1992): 274.

<sup>18</sup> See McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Donald Wiebe, William E. Arnal, Willi Braun, and Russel T. McCutcheon, *Failure and Nerve in the Academic Study of Religion; essays in honor of Donald Wiebe* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2012).

<sup>19</sup> Nongbri, *Before Religion: a History of a Modern Concept* (2013) and Touna, *Fabrications of the Greek Past* (2017).

My approach aims to notice multiplicity, complexity, and both/and thinking, which is to say this project will muddle categories, play with contradictions, and engage in uncertainty. Rather than force ‘objectivity,’ I propose we gently lay out speculative ideas rooted in complex interactions and rigorous engagement with the data available to us. Perhaps this leaves me open to similar criticisms thrown at Bernal. Critics claim his work was overdetermined by academic trends of multiculturalism and postmodernism. However, it seems to me, theories of cross-group exchange and fluidity between ideas, individuals, and communities embedded within particular socio-cultural-political experiences provides both a better methodological approach (in terms of rigor and questions) and provides an ethical barrier against racialized thinking – a modality that has encourage disastrous actions and consequences for human peoples across the planet over the past 600 years. I would be remiss if I did not explicitly state that I believe abolishing white thinking is an ethical imperative.

### **Section 0.3) Choosing a Case Study: *The Gospel According to Thomas***

In trying to come to terms with these critiques of academic habits, I wanted to limit myself to a specific case study of interest. My studies focus on a wide array of early Christian social formations and theologies, and the challenges posed by the Nag Hammadi codices. I was initially subsumed by the *Gospel according to Thomas*’ esoteric current and the possibility of a demiurgical myth hidden in the text (Thomas or GTh). In the following two years, I wrapped myself in secondary scholarship commenting on *Thomas*. Scholars have detailed strands of thought from Middle Platonism to Jewish Mysticism to the Synoptic gospels in the text.<sup>20</sup> I have find it interesting that most scholars notice their area of expertise in the text. That is to say, New Testament scholars notice connections with Q and the Synoptics, whilst experts in Jewish mysticism notice a theology of ascent. This provoked the question, what type of gravitational pull must a document have to capture people from various interpretive disciplines and philosophical-theological proclivities into its orbit? Certainly within Nag Hammadi there are

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<sup>20</sup> For a detailed discussion of these possibilities, see Christopher W. Skinner *What Are They Saying About The Gospel of Thomas?* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2012).

mysterious, esoteric, Jesus-oriented, philosophical, and Jewish-oriented texts as strange as *Thomas*. Yet these documents are not receiving nearly the same level of attention.<sup>21</sup>

Late Historian of Religions Jonathan Z. Smith taught us that no data has inherent interest,<sup>22</sup> therefore we must be able to trace the methodological assumptions and questions of our peers and ourselves in order to grasp why GTh gains such attention, diverse readings, and at times polemical disagreements. Throughout this project, I have asked myself what questions are being asked of GTh? Where have these questions led scholars? Do these questions still provide fruitful directions of inquiry? How do these methods stack up to current scholarly directions in religion studies and theology? Additionally, how are scholars who write about *Thomas* being attentive to and reflective of their assumptions and implications? Lastly, how do scholars who write about GTh relate to each other in terms of content and method? These questions I ask both of my “peers” and myself, if I may be so bold place myself in a similar to *Thomas* commentators with PhDs.

## **Section 0.4) Chapter Outlines**

My thesis project will utilize various (and sometimes contradictory) methodological tools to analyse *Thomas* and secondary scholarship. In the first chapter, I will treat the text as a literary document by noticing the repetition of terms to build discursive strands for the purpose of analysis. In his introductory texts for undergraduates, Ehrman praises scholars who read texts as discrete units to build interpretations: “These scholars have concluded that the most fruitful way to interpret the New Testament authors is to read them individually rather than collectively. Each author should be allowed to have his own say, and should not be too quickly reconciled with the point of view of another.”<sup>23</sup> Through this exclusive reading of *Thomas*, the disjunctive nature of the structure and individual sayings perplexed me. By applying incongruity theories of humor, the text began to open up. In the second section, I outline comical incongruity theory; the next two sections outline discursive strands of Light-Living and Death-darkness. Lastly, I return to incongruity and interact in depth with the work of William Arnal, by hypothesizing that

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<sup>21</sup> For example, the Nag Hammadi Bibliography Online has ~10,000 references for *Thomas*, ~3,000 references for the *Gospel of Egyptians*, ~2000 for the *Gospel of Phillip*. It seems the only text with more commentary is the *Apocryphon of John* at ~12,000 results.

<sup>22</sup> Touna, *Fabrications of the Greek Past*, (2017): 144-5.

<sup>23</sup> Ehrman, *A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, (2011): 11-12, and Ehrman, *The New Testament and Other Early Christian Writings*, (2003): 4.

*Thomas*'s unexpected turns are a purposeful rhetorical strategy for teaching audiences (1) to be self-reflective and (2) that the world is inherently chaotic and in flux.

In the second chapter, I will utilize various textual comparative approaches to build a reading between *Thomas* and the fragments of Heraclitus. Particularly following intertextuality<sup>24</sup> and source criticism,<sup>25</sup> I consider their stylistic and metaphorical similarities to help highlight anthropological and theological postures prominent in these texts. I explore metaphors of fire and water, textual approaches to binaries, and rhetorical usage of secrecy. The chapter concludes by noting a strand of ethical progress in both texts when they refer to “knowing oneself.” I also hint at literary forms and ideological currents of the 1<sup>st</sup> -3<sup>rd</sup> C.E. in the Roman Empire through these two texts. This direction aims to shift methodological focus from textual origins to broader ideological currents considered in the next chapter.

In the third chapter, I jump across diverse historical reconstructions of the Romans Empire and secondary scholarship claims on *Thomas* to encourage future studies with intricate webs of meaning. My critiques of white thinking made in this introduction underline the investigations in this third chapter. I open by discussing Christopher Skinner's *What Are They Saying About The Gospel of Thomas* and William Arnal's subsequent book review. I do this to outline the ways questions of *Thomas* are evolving in scholarship. Then, I move to detail different approaches to the Roman Empire and encourage scholars to apply theories of absurdism and postcoloniality to the Nag Hammadi codices more generally. Lastly, I discuss various methodologies for the Egyptian Milieu, including hypotheses of freelance experts and heightened intertextuality.

Throughout this project, I aim to be clear in my proclivity for and attentiveness to multiplicity, fluidity of identities, and both/and approaches. I am interested in sitting with and allowing contradictions to stand and to offer the plausibility of multiple GTh community readings and practices in antiquity. To recognize the world, social relations and material artefacts

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<sup>24</sup> “focuses on the transformation of meaning rather than the genealogy of appropriation. The issue then, is not to determine what is creatively new or original, but to understand the literary practices, cultural codes, discursive structures, hermeneutical strategies, and rhetorical ends that constrain and make possible the production of a particular literary work” King, *What is Gnosticism* (2003): 232.

<sup>25</sup> “[The task] is to determine *what resources are being used to think with* and what hermeneutical strategies of intertextual reading are being employed to shape a work's meaning and rhetorical argument,” King, *What is Gnosticism* (2003): 232 [my emphasis].



to be in a “constant flux” of meanings/identities is to promote a past-present-future of togetherness and collectivity, with a critical vigilance to radical Othering.

### *Limitations*

Before continuing, audiences should know I have not yet leaned Coptic.<sup>26</sup> To compensate, I worked with six English translations for this project.<sup>27</sup> On occasion, this barrier will show up in my attempts to analyze metaphors and incongruities within the text. I hope, however, that this thesis will spur further readings of *Thomas* that utilize these methods to fill in the gaps of this project. Readers will also surely note my secondary source list is limited to English. My lack of contemporary language skills has also hindered some potential connections with the work of scholars like Ménard and Marksches.<sup>28</sup>

This short master’s thesis cannot possibly exhaust even my own imaginations with *Thomas*, so I have tried to limit myself to particularly provocative claims in an attempt to spark within scholars more versatile, reflective, and rigorous methodologies when approaching *Thomas*. This is only an end insofar as it is a beginning.

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<sup>26</sup> For future studies with Coptic, I am very interested in how a reading of GTh looks from a rhythmic (poetic) standpoint.

<sup>27</sup> Although, I prefer and often quote from the 2011 Paterson and Robinson translation. See five translations at [http://gnosis.org/naghamm/nhl\\_thomas.htm](http://gnosis.org/naghamm/nhl_thomas.htm) and the interlinear Coptic text by Michael Grondin here: [http://gospel-thomas.net/x\\_transl.htm](http://gospel-thomas.net/x_transl.htm).

<sup>28</sup> In a proper PhD on the subject, I would have the time and resources to dive into various languages.

## Chapter 1) The Incongruous Play of Light and Death in *Thomas*

### Epigraph

“The historian’s task is to complicate not to clarify.  
He strives to celebrate the diversity of manners,  
The variety of species,  
the opacity of things.”

-- J.Z. Smith, “Map is Not Territory,” *Map is Not Territory* (1978): 290.

“It is, therefore, always necessary to ask self-critically  
what kinds of presuppositions lie behind our approaches to *Thomas*.  
What is ultimately at stake when we trace its roots into the  
‘fertile soil of early Christian tradition’ or characterize the gospel  
as a second century ‘Gnostic’ writing?

-- Risto Uro, *Thomas At the Crossroads* (1998): 3.

“The dimensions of incongruity which I have been describing in this paper,  
appear to belong to yet another map of the cosmos.  
These traditions are more closely akin to the joke  
in that they neither deny nor flee from disjunction,  
but allow the incongruous elements to stand.  
They suggest that symbolism, myth, ritual, repetition,  
transcendence are all incapable of overcoming disjunction.  
They seek, rather, to play between the incongruities and to provide an occasion for thought.”

-- J.Z. Smith, “Map is Not Territory,” *Map is Not Territory* (1978): 309.

## **Section 1.1) Introduction**

The necessity to be self-critical about presuppositions forces me to outline my (textual) interactions with Jonathan Z. Smith. Smith's ability to be honest and complicated with his scholarly writing is exemplary, and he has continued to inspire my scholarship. His writings on incongruity have happily haunted my perceptions for years, and it is only fitting that his works sat on my desk during countless encounters with *Thomas*. Similar to Smith, I work as a historian and a religion studies scholar with a flair for the literary (critic), so this chapter contains acute incisions and intricate entanglements. In the analysis that follows, my primary interest and methodological aim is to examine the contents of *Thomas* to locate the force that ensnared so many scholars, including myself. I have long been fascinated with the twinning quality of the text, along with the discursive constellations<sup>29</sup> or discourses of Light-Living and Death-Darkness. I originally began my analysis of these constellations with the idea of the demiurgical myth from Michael A. Williams, and I presented my muddled findings to the SBL in 2017. My hope was to find a single theological claim. However, as I began moving deeper into the text, I began to see a more playful element to the style and content. Perhaps, *Thomas* at its best "provide[s] an occasion for thought," to repeat the epigraph from Smith. My hypothesis being: *Thomas*' unrelenting force is the dynamic capacity to play. To move between and across boundaries, "allow[ing] the incongruous elements to stand," is a dimension not yet considered for *Thomas* to my knowledge.

I will begin by introducing and expounding upon the notion of incongruity theory. In the first two sections, I will display the results of my previously somber and meticulous puzzle-solving attitude towards the question of anthropology and theology in *Thomas*. I will examine the repetitions of the terms Light, Living, Death, and Darkness and organizing these terms into binary strands of Light-Living (section 3) and Death-Darkness (section 4). Coming back to incongruity in the fifth section, I will highlight the ways in which *Thomas* constantly maneuvers to the unexpected. This play with audience conceptions of order forces a profound questioning of the (social) world.

The readings I will enact will be piecemeal rather than as a "whole" text or single discrete sayings. The "Jesus sayings" phraseology with the nomina sacra is a brilliant material feature

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<sup>29</sup> I give credit to Philosopher of Religion Joseph Winters who first introduced this term of Walter Benjamin's into my purview through his text *Hope Draped in Black* (2017).

that creates breaks within the text. These symbols are easily locatable on the text and “[...] their format encourages piecemeal reading and slow consideration of discrete units of a text [...]”<sup>30</sup>

## **Section 1.2) Situating Comical Incongruity Theory**

“Incongruity theory is all about the delight we humans evidently take in the unexpected.”<sup>31</sup>

“Summarizing *provisionally* one version of the incongruity theory, then, someone is comically amused if and only if (i) the object of their mental state is a perceived incongruity, which (ii) they regard as neither threatening or anxiety producing nor (iii) annoying and which (iv) they do not approach with a genuine, puzzle-solving attitude, but which, rather, (v) they enjoy precisely for their perception of its incongruity.”<sup>32</sup>

Before examining *Thomas* in detail, I will briefly introduce my presupposition of incongruity theory. Incongruity is the disjunctive swerve away from anticipations. I will be focusing mainly on the incongruity theory of comic amusement.<sup>33</sup> If one has bracketed their anxieties and puzzle-solving attitude, then they become receptive to the humorous aspects of incongruity. As Rossenwasser confesses, is the paradoxical notion that humor is the most serious medium of rhetoric.<sup>34</sup> So, what might be the purpose of using humor to make serious statements? A profound ideological current found in humor is that “even the simplest joke - the pun - subverts the idea that things have single meanings.”<sup>35</sup> Carroll elucidates his argument by contrasting himself with neurologist Jonathan Miller: “And although I concur with Miller that the service of comic amusement concerns cognition typically through play with our concepts, I

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<sup>30</sup> Arnal, “Blessed Are the Solitary: Textual Practices and the Mirage of a Thomas ‘Community,’” in *The One Who Sows Bountifully: Essays in Honor of Stanley K. Stowers*, Ed. Caroline Hodge Saul Olyan, Daniel Ullucci, Emma Wasserman, Society of Biblical Literature, Brown Judaic Studies, (2013): 276. Petru Moldovan also notes: “*Thomas* has a particular form of a collection of sayings of Jesus loosely connected through the expression ‘Jesus says...’. However, at a closer look, once can notice that *Thomas*’ distinguishing characteristic is its greatest asset because it shows the importance of a *draft*... Its creativity is emphasized by the richness of topics identifiable within its content, like anthropology, epistemology or cosmology, and similar with all those of philosophical and religious continuum of its time.” Found in “Creativity at work: from the ‘Gospel according to Thomas’ to Jorge Luis Borges’ ‘Fragments from an Apocryphal Gospel,’” Graduate symposium: Groningen, (Unpublished: 2018).

<sup>31</sup> David Rosenwasser, “Last Lecture: How many graduating Muhlenberg seniors does it take to screw in a light bulb?” (Unpublished: May 17, 2012): 5.

<sup>32</sup> Carroll, *Humour: A Very Short Introduction*, (2014): 37.

<sup>33</sup> Incongruity theory works for both humor and horror, which is why Carroll’s second piece states the necessity of being in a non-threatening or anxiety producing environment. For further reading on the subject see Noël Carroll, “Horror and Humor,” *JAAC*, Vol. 57, No. 2, Aesthetics and Popular Pleasure (Spring, 1999): 145-160. Also, Bernice Martin, “The Sacralization of Disorder: Symbolism in Rock Music,” *Sociology of Religion*, Vol. 40, No. 2, (July, 1979): 87-124.

<sup>34</sup> Rosenwasser, “Last Lecture,” (Unpublished: May 17, 2012): 1.

<sup>35</sup> Rosenwasser, “Last Lecture,” (Unpublished: May 17, 2012): 6.

am not persuaded that humour has much to do with the production of new and better concepts, as Miller seems to think. I suppose you could say that comic amusement frees us from the tyranny of everyday norms and concepts.”<sup>36</sup> I find myself on the side of Rosenwasser and Miller in my proclivity to view comedy as the ability to re-create concepts *and* protest totalitarianism by reminding audiences that nothing, including life, has a single meaning. In this way, comedy is a powerful tool in pushing against hero scripts taken from modern culture or socialization more generally. This subverts the pressing ‘millennial anxiety’ of worrying about the end through a multiplicity of meanings that always implies new beginnings. We are all the butt of death’s joke. In all the documents I have encountered from Antiquity, few more than *Thomas* evade a single meaning. The ambiguous language and enigmatic parables of *Thomas* seem to splatter themselves into a Jackson Pollock-type meaning system.

The aphoristic style and esoteric beginning of *the Gospel of Thomas* has led most scholars to believe it is a puzzle to solve. As summarized by Carroll, this genuine, serious attitude of the puzzle-solver is an attempt to piece together and unite disjunction, while the comic attitude revels in the incongruity itself. As I admitted in the introduction, I too was intoxicated by this quest for finding a single, essential meaning of the text. I was, in my belief, following the prescribed scholarly activity: taking on the serious task of dissecting and synthesizing information. However, I began to wonder if this limited perspective was causing me to miss pieces of GTh. As I pointed to in the introduction, I do not have an intimate relationship with Coptic or the socio-historical context of GTh to adequately investigate all of potentially intricate avenues of humor that the text may have.<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless, I hope this will be the beginning of a more in-depth exploration in future writings.

### **Section 1.3) The Discursive Strand and Anthropology of the Living-Light**

1 “These are the hidden words that the living Jesus spoke...”

**50) (1)** Jesus says: “If they say to you: ‘Where are you from?’, (then) say to them: ‘We have come from the light, the place where the light has come into being by itself, has established [itself] and has appeared in their (pl.) image.’ (2) If they say to you: ‘Is it you?’ (then) say: ‘We are his children, and we are the elect of the living Father.’

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<sup>36</sup> Carroll, *Humour: A Very Short Introduction*, (2014): 69.

<sup>37</sup> I know that Jonathan Z. Smith would be disappointed in my lack of historical contextualization. This depth would be an interest of mine in a PhD project.

**72) (1)** A [man said] to him: “Tell my brothers that they have to divide my Father’s possessions with me.” (2) He said to him: “Man, who made me a divider?” (3) He turned to his disciples (and) said to them: “I am not a divider, am I?”

**77(1):** Jesus says: ‘I am the light that is above all [...].’

I begin this chapter with three Logia from GTh that offer an exclusive focus on the Light/Living discursive strand. The text immediately introduces readers to the strand by qualifying Jesus as the one “who lives.”<sup>38</sup> Thus, the text’s first claim to authority is that Jesus is alive, and the subsequent second authority is his spoken word(s). Primary importance is placed on orality and living. Its third authority is by way of a secondary character, Thomas, who has written down these statements. Thomas is not identified as a disciple, so his given purpose, at least in this first saying, is simply to be a conduit for Jesus’ energy and ideas.<sup>39</sup> Most of the later numbered logia begin with the phrase ‘Jesus said,’ which repeats the authority of this first saying.

Orality and the living strand exhibit prominence in the call and response lesson in Logion 50. This saying deals directly with identity. There are three given questions: a) where do you come from, b) who are you, and c) how do you symbolize your existence?<sup>40</sup> In the first part of the saying, Jesus instructs the readers to declare that they are from a source of Light, a light that makes itself continuously.<sup>41</sup> This ‘place’ of light not only created itself, but it also has blasted into a multiplicity of images. So a singular thing created two things (self-makes-self), one=two, which subsequently spiraled out as a positive chain to create all other things. Humans are a direct result of this Light. In the second part of the saying (#50.2), Jesus goes a step further. Not only are readers part of the light, they are also parcel. He instructs readers to identify themselves as children born of the Father who lives. They are of him. The light that begets light. This relationship is further illuminated in saying 77. Jesus is the light that is of everything, he is everything, everything came from him, and *everything comes back to him*. These children come from, are a part of, and will return to the Kingdom of God (Light). Those who are Living spread forth Light and Light floods into those who are Living. The One becomes Two, the Two becomes Many, and the Many are representing and of the One. Logia #72 solidifies this process:

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<sup>38</sup> See Appendix A for a detailed analysis on the phrase “who lives”.

<sup>39</sup> I will examine this tension between the oral and the written in the third chapter.

<sup>40</sup> The third part will be addressed in sub-section 1.32.

<sup>41</sup> This concept reflects saying 19.1: “Blessed is he who was before he came into being” To be and not to be.

Jesus (God) is not a divider, which I interpret to mean the multiplicitous process is the underlying unity. I will refer to this discursive strand as a theology of anthropological monis. However, does the text offer any more precision to what exactly is this Light/Living [One/All], and how does it relates to human beings [are all Humans the Children of God]?

### **1.31) The ‘Children’ of the Light**

**5 (1)** Jesus says, “Come to know what is in front of you, and that which is hidden from you will become clear to you. (2) For there is nothing hidden that will not become manifest.”<sup>42</sup>

**22 (1)** Jesus saw little (children) being nursed. (2) He said to his disciples: “These little ones being nursed are like those who enter the kingdom.” (3) They said to him: “Will we enter the kingdom as little ones?” (4) Jesus said to them: “When you make the two into one and when you make the inside like the outside and the outside like the inside and the above like the below, – (5) that is, to make the male and the female into a single one, so that the male will no longer be male and the female no longer female – (6) and when you make eyes instead of an eye and a hand instead of a hand and a foot instead of a foot, (and) an image instead of an image, (7) then you will enter [the kingdom].”

**32)** Jesus says: “A city built upon a high mountain (and) fortified can neither fall nor can it be hidden.”

**33 (1)** Jesus says: “What you will hear in your ear proclaim from your rooftops. (2) For no one lights a lamp (and) puts it under a bushel, nor does he put it in a hidden place. (3) Rather, he puts it on a lamp stand, so that everyone who comes in and goes out will see its light.”

**77 (2)** “Split a piece of wood (and) I am there. (3) Lift the stone, and you will find me there.”

**92 (1)** Jesus says: “Seek and you will find.”

**94 (1)** Jesus [says]: “The one who seeks will find. (2) [The one who knocks], to him it will be opened.”

**108 (1)** Jesus says: “Whoever will drink from my mouth will become like me. (2) I myself will become he, (3) and what is hidden will be revealed to him.”

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<sup>42</sup> This is a translation from Stephen Patterson and Marvin Meyer found in Robert J. Miller, ed., *The Complete Gospels: Annotated Scholars Version*. (Polebridge Press, 1994). I chose this translation for the colloquial clarity of the interpretation.

In the aphorism (#5), Jesus relays to disciples that all things will come to be (manifest) in the world, and everything will become revealed. The secrecy of the Kingdom is merely an illusory for those who do not properly interpret the world. All those who seek will find if they come knocking at the doors of heaven – they will be allowed to enter. Furthermore, saying 33 rejects secrecy entirely, by asking disciples to proclaim the truth they hear “from your rooftops.” The Light, like a lamp, cannot be hidden, but must be cast outwards for everyone to experience. The saying describes people who are going into and out of the house (Kingdom), amplifying the circular process of unity and multiplicity (inside and outside) as crucial ventures for the reader/hearer. This Kingdom of God’s cannot be concealed due to its so imminence, like a city upon a high mountain (#32). The concept of something beginning right in front of you without being able to see it is a powerful claim about how one perceives the material world. A stone is a stone; a log is a log. But, for those who know how to hear and see as Jesus, the Kingdom shines brightly from these previously mundane objects. This is a tautological theology that God = [Light] = Human is prominent in logia 22 and 108. A living baby consumes breast milk from a living mother and disciples must drink from Jesus’ mouth to be like him. In both sayings, there is a double process of living. Alternatively stated in Logia 24.3, “Light exists inside a person of light.” Additionally, from saying 22 (along with 3.3 and 18.2), audiences are told to “make the outside like the inside and the above like the below,” which reinforces that the Kingdom of Heaven is an all-pervasive energy. By engaging with this perception, followers of the *Thomas* Jesus fill themselves with God in all their daily interactions. This Living-Light strand in *Thomas* seems to promote an anthropological monism wherein all people have the capacity and ability to engage with the Kingdom of God in all things.

### **1.32) Know Thyself Pt. 1**

**3 (3)** [Jesus said,] “Rather, the kingdom is inside of you and outside of you. (4) When you come to know yourselves, then you will be known, and you will realize that you are children of the Living Father.”

**50 (3)** If they ask you: ‘What is the sign of your Father among you?’, (then) say to them: ‘It is movement and repose.’”

**111 (1)** Jesus says: “The heavens will roll up before you, and the earth. (2) And whoever is living from the Living One will not see death.” (3) Does not Jesus say: “Whoever has found himself, of him the world is not worthy?”



The clearest prescription for practices for obtaining a pure interaction with God seems to come from the third saying, which suggests know yourselves and to be known (another tautology). This concept of knowing oneself as being with the Living One is written in similar fashion during logion 61.5 (at one with himself) and 111.3 (found himself). But, what does it mean to know oneself as the Light? Is it as simple as repeating these short, established statements from Jesus in logion 50? Or is there something more that needs to be done by the children? From a different angle, what does *Thomas* think it means to ‘know’ something? For some direction, let us look back to the third identity question of logion 50: What is the sign of the Father? Readers are informed they must state “Movement and Repose.” It seems readers are faced with a slight interpretive conundrum. Claiming to be a child of a light is simple, but what do these two words mean in relation to the unity-as-multiplicity that the Living Light seems to represent? What follows is my interpretive leap.

The Light is All. The Light underlies all things: it is in repose. Said differently, the All simply Is. Yet, in the same space-time instance, God creates itself and everything else: it is moving. Moving is making is multiplicity. All things are Light in their repose; simultaneously, this Light is constantly in flux by way of moving and creating itself anew. To know oneself becomes much more complicated! Perhaps then, to be human is to constantly re-create oneself. This hits on the idea that identity is constantly in flux. Knowing the Unity of the self with all things as the Light in repose is just one-half of a (non-dualistic) equation. The other half is multiplicity of the self with all things as the Light in movement. This boundless Light may truly be in All things. If this Light is in all things, then it follows that all humans would be capable of entering into the Kingdom.

In summation, the Living strand I have identified seems to match up well with the notion of “Becoming like God” from the pre-Socratics. I will consider this connection in chapter two. What I have left out of this section are the eight moments of dichotomy between Living-Light and Death-Darkness (GTh 1, 11, 24, 52, 59, 60, 61, 111). The drunk (hidden) are seemingly different from the sober (manifest), which breaks the unifying quality of the Living strand. Leaving behind my presumptuous anthropological monism, in this next section, I will explore the discursive strand of Death-Darkness by investigating: how does *Thomas* organize around and against death?

## **Section 1.4) The Discursive Strand and Anthropology Against the Dead**

1) "...Whoever finds the meaning of these words will not taste death."

The discursive strand of death also appears in the first saying. Jesus apparently speaks the hidden words, but knowing the hidden words is not enough. There is a second layer of secrecy. The readers also need to find the meaning of the spoken-written words found in *Thomas*. More than concealing its aims, the text further motivates audiences to engage by asserting they "will not taste death" if they properly interpret this document. GTh goes on to use the phrase not "taste/see/ death" in Logia 18, 19, 85, and 111, while it uses "will not die" in logia 11.2 and 59. So, what exactly does this text mean when using the sense words 'taste' and 'see' [often interpreted in English as 'experience'] as adjectives for death? Is death literal and/or metaphorical?

### **1.41) The Unworthy World**

**56) (1)** Jesus says: "Whoever has come to know the world has found a corpse. (2) And whoever has found (this) corpse, of him the world is not worthy."

**80) (1)** Jesus says: "Whoever has come to know the world has found the (dead) body. (2) But whoever has found the (dead) body, of him the world is not worthy."

**85) (1)** Jesus says: "Adam came from a great power and great wealth. But he did not become worthy of you. (2) For if he had been worthy, (then) [he would] not [have tasted] death."

Logion 85 provides a helpful vantage point for these statements. Adam, most likely a reference to the Old Testament Adam, first 'child' of God, came from great power and wealth. Presumably, this power and wealth refers to the Light. However, Adam tasted death. Pagels has written a fantastic article detailing *the Gospel of Thomas'* interactions with *Genesis*.<sup>43</sup> If this is indeed the Adam from *Genesis*, then it is fair to say GTh is noting that as Adam fell from the graces of God he transformed from an immortal being to a mortal. God removed Adam from Paradise. Adam must now deal with worldly existence. However, Adam's descendants still have part of this immortal divinity in them, which enables them to become re-worthy of the Kingdom. GTh informs its audience that Adam was not able to make it back to Heaven in life and he tastes death. The similar sayings 56 and 80 bolster the division between a divine Paradise and an evil

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<sup>43</sup> Elaine Pagels, "Exegesis of Genesis 1 in the Gospels of Thomas and John," *JBL* Vol. 118 No. 3 (1999): 477-496.

earth. In these sayings, someone has ‘found’ the world. A dead body or corpse represents the world. Jesus claims that through this act of finding the world as a dead body readers should realize that the world is not worthy of them. The connecting term between these two sayings and GTh 85 is ‘worthy.’ Adam, in his failure, was not worthy of Paradise. Those who once were seeking and now have found will come to understand that the earth is actually not worthy of them.<sup>44</sup> Put differently, to be a being of Light is to reject the world. This creates a binary between Heaven and earth, which directly opposes the discursive strand of Light-Living. This goes directly contrary to the hypothesis in the first section. How divided could this binary between earth and Heaven be?

### **1.42) Destroying the World**

**19 (1)** Jesus says: “Blessed is he who was before he came into being. ...(3) For you have five trees in Paradise that do not sway in summer (nor) winter, and their leaves do not fall. (4) Whoever will come to know them will not taste death.”

**40 (1)** Jesus says: “A grapevine was planted outside (the vineyard) of the Father. (2) And since it is not supported, it will be pulled up by its root (and) will perish.”

**57 (1)** Jesus says: “The kingdom of the Father is like a man who had (good) seed. (2) His enemy came by night. He sowed weeds among the good seed. (3) The man did not allow (the slaves) to pull out the weeds. He said to them: ‘Lest you go to pull out the weeds (and then) pull out the wheat along with it.’” (4) For on the day of the harvest the weeds will be apparent and will be pulled out (and) burned.”

**71)** Jesus says: “I will [destroy this] house and no one will be able to rebuild it [except me].”

**86) (1)** Jesus says: “[Foxes have] their holes and the birds have their nest. (2) But the son of man has no place to lay his head down (and) to rest.”

In saying 57, a comparably long parable for *Thomas*, readers encounter an anonymous enemy.<sup>45</sup> The “Father” – owner of the land – patiently waits until harvest to collect the crops and destroy the weeds. The good seeds might be the All that emanates from the Light (Kingdom) or the seeds might represent individual humans. This relegates the bad seeds as various heavens/earths or even individual human beings as inherently corrupted. For now, I will focus on

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<sup>44</sup> For a lengthy discussion on complex notions of “Seeking” in Gth, see Appendix B.

<sup>45</sup> For more on the anonymous enemy, see Appendix C regarding the Demiurgical Myth.

the first variation and will return to the individual differences in a later section when discussing the “elect.” Both saying 40 and 71 are fragments, which distorts their interpretive potency. However, both supplement the notion of worldly destruction. Rehashing saying 28, Jesus is worried about all of the “drunk” children, who are in a “wine frenzy,” presumably the symbolic wine of the place outside the Light. The provider of wine – the evil grapevine realm, mimicking the allusion of weeds – must be pulled up and destroyed. Although not as violent as the previous three sayings, logion 86 is surprisingly ominous. Jesus separates birds and foxes, animals whose home is this planet, from himself, who has no place on this earth to rest (“son of man”). It is notably different than saying 77 where trees, humans, and rocks share the same substance as Jesus. In this previous section, rest meant an indicator for the Light emanating from and into itself timelessly. Here, rest means to reject the earth as a viable place for human kind. Logia 19 encapsulates this whole trajectory. In Paradise, nothing changes. Those who “come to know” the Paradise of rest will not taste death. Here, only rest, rather than rest and motion, symbolizes the Kingdom. The theological hypothesis here being: the world is a horrific realm, which is innately separate from Heaven. Following this potentiality, is there a prescription for readers who come to know themselves and the Kingdom? What are they to do whilst they are still on this dead, dark planet?

### **1.43) Rejecting the World**

**27) (1)** “If you do not abstain from the (entire) world, you will not find the kingdom. (2) If you do not make the (entire) week into a Sabbath, you will not see the Father.”

**29) (1)** Jesus says: “If the flesh came into being because of the spirit, it is a wonder. (2) But if the spirit (came into being) because of the body, it is a wonder of wonders.” (3) Yet I marvel at how this great wealth has taken up residence in this poverty.

**53) (3)** But the true circumcision in the spirit has prevailed over everything.”

**114) (2)** Jesus said: “Look, I will draw her in so as to make her male, so that she too may become a living male spirit, being similar to you.”

Saying 29, and the similarly stated logia 87 and 112, takes the notion of understanding oneself to a deeper anthropological level. These three show a radical distinction between the soul and the body. Even the all-knowing Jesus wonders exasperatedly at how the unchanging soul took up residence within the poverty of a changing corpse. Despite his apparent confusion, Jesus has prescribed some critical responses to this great problem of a soul clinging to a body. Both of

them are direct responses to the Jewish context.<sup>46</sup> Explicitly in Logion 27 and implicitly in Logion 53, Jesus informs the disciples (and *Thomas* relays to the audience) that they should “abstain” from the world. Cleverly playing with the notion of the Sabbath as the day of rest, Jesus declares that everyday should be a day of Rest. The world and the human body are inherently unstable in their ever-changing nature. From the perspective of ethical progress, the corrupt world tarnishes and distracts the spirit’s perfection, and perhaps, only total abstinence from all human and worldly activities can liberate the soul to be with the Kingdom of Heaven. Furthermore, women have the possibility of becoming male within this anchorite system through training to become like men. The body seems to trap the soul, and disciples of Jesus must take responsibility to remove themselves from the world and train their souls to escape to the Kingdom.

#### **1.44) Dichotomies or Incongruous Theology?**

This section has attempted to explore thoroughly a diametrically opposed anthropology from the third section. Here, I have identified and traced an anthropology of a perfect human soul of the Kingdom of Light that is radically opposed to the corpse of the material world. This soul requires careful cultivation and abstinence from any worldly existence. I will call this anthropological dualism. Such a reading seems to promote a monastic or cynic existence living separately from socio-political organization. What some scholars might call “anti-World.” What does *Thomas* expect audiences to make of this discursive dichotomy of Light against Death? In this chapter’s final section, I will to place these two theologies conversation through the lens of incongruity theory.

#### **Section 1.5) Incongruities Abound**

The two previous sections have helped me highlight textual contradictions surrounding Light/Darkness, Hidden/Secret, Dead/Living, and Rest/Motion. Arnal previously interrogated a similar line of thinking stating that the strange structure of words and meaning: “[...] suggest an ideal use of *Thomas* as a text to be consulted repeatedly, returned to, pondered over.”<sup>47</sup> Arnal has hypothesized the esoteric, secret posturing of the text forces audiences into an eternal return of

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<sup>46</sup> I believe this gives key evidence for a strong Jewish current, which I will discuss in chapter three, wherein I point to the most potent discursive influences within *Thomas*.

<sup>47</sup> Arnal, “Blessed Are the Solitary,” (2013): 275.

puzzle solving.<sup>48</sup> Over the next several pages, I will engage deeply with Arnal's four major texts, since he is working most closely to my own project. Through this interaction, my own ideas have become clearer. However, rather than a puzzle-solving attitude, I will approach the following literary features to enjoy the incongruity in them to see where it takes me.<sup>49</sup>

#### Back-to-Back Contradiction of Claims:

- Above and Below (18, 22) // Paradise separate from Earth (19)
- Destroying Home (71) // I am not a Divider (72)
- Single Sheep (107) // Drinking from Jesus (108)
- Two cannot be One (47) // Make two into One (48)
- Help your Brother (26) // Abstain from the World (27)

#### Other times the sayings create binary categories only to break them down:

- Male/Female (22, 114)
- Beginning/End (18)
- Inside/Outside (3, 22, 89)
- Two/One (11, 22, 23, 30, 48, 106)

Furthermore, the doubles throughout the text are not exact repetitions. Most of them have particular linguistic differences that would be unexpected for the reader. Below are the key differences:

- 5.2 and 6.5-6, and 108.2-3: Hidden, Manifest, Revealed Slightly Changes
- 29, 87, and 112: Soul / Spirit and Body / Flesh
- 56 and 80: Body / Corpse
- 48 / 106: "son of man" is added in the latter version
- 6, 14, and 104: All have different tones towards Alms, Fasting, and Prayer
- 1: Didymus ("Twin" in Aramaic), Thomas ("Twin" in Greek)

#### Other times sayings outright oppose each other's content at distance in the text:

- Hands: Connected in (22) // Opposed (66.2)
- Heaven/Paradise: Immortal in (19) // It will pass away (11)
- Manifestation: Positive (5.2, 6.5, 6.6, 32 and 33) // Negative in 84

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<sup>48</sup> For more on esotericism, see Kocku von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge*, trans. Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, (Equinox Publishing: London, 2005), particularly 1-30.

<sup>49</sup> I read these insights of Arnal's after I was deep into the gathering process of these ambiguities, twists, and unexpected disjunctions. My lists differ slightly from his own, while others I have utilized his formula's for brevity in my own thesis. I do not cite each piece title by title. For his own formulations see: "The Rhetoric of Social Construction: Language and Society in the 'Gospel of Thomas'" (2005): 34-37; and "Blessed Are the Solitary," (2013): 274-5.

- Peace: Negative in (16) // Positive (48)
- Are those who seek able to find? Yes (92.1 and 94.) // No (38 and 92.2)
- Little: Positive (22, 37, 41, 46, 96) // Large: Positive (8, 20, 96, 107)
- Poverty: Negative in (3, 29) // Positive (54)
- Robbers: Antagonistic in (21,103) // Protagonists (35, 98)
- Drunkenness: Negative in (28) // Positive or Ambiguous: (13)
- Collecting Interest: Negative in (95) // Positive (109)
- Wealth: Negative in (63-65) // Positive (29, 81, and 110)
- Merchant: Negative in (64) // Positive (76)
- Division: Negative in (61, 72) // Positive (16)
- Kings/Rulers: Negative in (78) // Positive (2 and 81)
- Kinship: Negative in (55, 101, 105) // Positive (25, 26, 99, 101)

### **1.51) Incongruity as a Philosophy of Life**

*Thomas* is consistently inconsistent with its viewpoint on taxonomies and dichotomies. These moments come as unexpected turns for the reader, which makes the text perplexing for the puzzle-solver. To summarize Arnal's (2005) analysis of these features: *Thomas*' literary practices are an indication of an anti-worldly social vision wherein readers not only *devalue* language, but also reject classification all together and proclaim a Kingdom of destroying linguistics and distinctions and then promote a perfect escape from human social order. He notes that this failure is inherent in the text's use of language and connection.<sup>50</sup> Slightly different than Arnal is the perspective of comical incongruity. Though this lens, the back-to-back contradiction of claims, the opposing usages of ideas such as drunkenness, robbers, and hands (to name a few), and the minor differences in saying 'repetitions' like Spirit to Soul or Didymus to Thomas all becoming revealing of the inherently unexpected disjuncture's inherent to life. Rather than attempting to create an ordered world, *Thomas* continually reminds readers that the world is chaotic and they should not feel forced to live life with a single meaning or theology. Each situation requires critical thinking and is inherently meaningless (in a positive sense). Sometimes bigger is better and at other times, little is best. Sometimes you expect to see a body (#56), but you get a corpse instead (#80); sometimes you expect manifestation, but nothing happens. The comic does not hate the world, nor wish to escape it, but instead "provide an occasion for

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<sup>50</sup> Arnal "The Rhetoric of Social Construction,"(2005): 37 "Something even more basic than social criticism is going on here. *Thomas*'s contrary use of images in opposing ways is fundamentally anti-taxonomic: it calls into question the stability of words and the cogency of metaphoric language."

thought,”<sup>51</sup> allowing audiences to reflect upon their lives and the world. To the horror of those who are serious about theology and ordering the world, *Thomas* presents a terrifying schema. The text is acutely aware of the texts and ideologies of its time, as noted by scholars across areas of expertise in Middle Platonism, cynicism, stoicism, Jewish strands of thought (from mysticism to apocalypticism), and Christianity (from the Synoptics to Q to Clement of Alexandria).<sup>52</sup>

Modern researchers are still unable to reach a consensus about the precise theological vision of *Thomas*, and are perplexed by the ways that *Thomas* may or may not be familiar with such a vast array of discourses.<sup>53</sup> As Arnal notes, *Thomas* refuses to give citation. Referring to a possible Philo reference in logia 11, Arnal poses that this “implicit textual reference is used here to *obscure*, rather than to illuminate [...]”<sup>54</sup> For me, this rhetorical strategy of implicit citation would force readers who recognized the similarity with Philo to seek out the reference and compare the two. By not citing yet engaging with these various texts and ideas, *Thomas* may be teaching audiences about the need of creating new concepts. There is never one way to present an idea or meaning. *Thomas* promotes multiplicity by playing with the ideas of others.

Perhaps in this way, *Thomas*’ writer and later compilers utilized the text to warn audiences of the failings that come from single structures of thought and social practices: tyranny. In laughing with *Thomas*, audiences break away from the ‘millennial anxiety’ built up from eschatological thinking that was pervasive in the first few centuries C.E. The text opens up audiences to a multiplicity of meanings and an endless cycle of new beginnings. Therefore, I cannot agree with Arnal’s characterization that *Thomas*’ “apparent failure to engage the outside world seriously.”<sup>55</sup> Rossenwasser so astutely points out the joke is the most serious of all rhetorical mediums. From this vantage point, *Thomas* is a tricky philosopher or a philosopher of trickery. In the following section, I will examine one more crucial incongruity in the text that for me solidifies (as much as that is possible) *Thomas*’ proclivity for and purposeful engagement with incongruity.

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<sup>51</sup> Smith, *Map is Not Territory* (1978): 309.

<sup>52</sup> For a lengthy introduction into these various connections, see Christopher Skinner, *What Are They Saying About the Gospel of Thomas?*, (Pauline Press, 2012). Future studies might document the similarities between *Thomas* and various texts from antiquities that subvert expectations.

<sup>53</sup> Skinner, *What Are They Saying About the Gospel of Thomas?*, (2012).

<sup>54</sup> Arnal, “Blessed are the Solitary,” (2013): 275.

<sup>55</sup> Arnal, “The Rhetoric of Marginality,”(1995): 491.



## **1.52) Becoming Full and Empty**

- Becoming “Full”
  - Positive Connotations:
    - “Full of Light”(24, 61.5, 85)
    - “Single One” or “Solitary” (4, 16, 22, 23, 49)
    - Guard Against Robbers (keep inside, full) – (21.7, 103)
  - Negative Connotations:
    - “Fill my storehouses... so I won’t lack,”then dies (63)
    - Full of Drink/Excess (28)
    - Full of Darnkess (7, 24.3, 61.5) – Anti-Consumption/Mixing
- Becoming “Empty”
  - Positive Connotations:
    - Becoming Empty at Birth and Death (28)
    - Losing Grain from Bag (97)
    - Naked/Undressed (21, 36, 37 – without shame/worry, 22)
  - Negative Connotations:
    - Empty Well, Many Standing Alone (74)
    - “If he is lacking on thing, he has been lacking everything” (67)

The complex, incongruous rhetoric of *Thomas* is exemplified in the texts changing descriptions about becoming full and empty. Audiences read that they must become full of Light as a way to connect with the divine, and that this is directly opposed to being full of darkness (24, 61). The connotation of GTh67 reinforces this by noting, one must be whole or else they are insufficient. From the perspective of ethical progress, *Thomas* might work towards a bipartite schema wherein the body’s passions are controlled, emptied, in order to become full of Light. One must empty themselves of all negative, unethical actions and thoughts, and guard against the world (robbery of their soul). To clean the body, so the soul can totally fill it. Different, however is GTh 37. De-robing and tramping of clothing, becoming empty, is a way to reach Heaven. This comical scene works against positive connotations of fullness. In my view, to detach oneself from any single piece of the multiplicity that is the world is to be empty or naked. Audiences learn to flow with the changes of the world, rather than becoming overly intoxicated by a particular piece of knowledge. To be empty gives Jesus and hearers the ability to perceive and engage with the continual movement of incongruities. To be drunk or full may mean having a dogmatic conception of the world that refuses to acknowledge the ever-changing nature of God and the Kingdom. Despite these positivistic usages of the terms, *Thomas*

insists on using fullness and emptiness as negative devices in GTh 28, 63, and 74 to describe the evils of accumulating material resources, filling with worldly desires, and engaging with a world empty of Jesus. This back and forth play that stimulates readers to develop their beliefs and practices might be a device for teaching ethical progress.

### **1.53) Rhetorical Toil as Ethical Progress**

**58)** Jesus says: “Blessed is the man who has struggled. He has found Life.”

**69 (1)** Jesus says: “Blessed are those who have been persecuted in their heart. They are the ones who have truly come to know the Father.”

**96 (1)** Jesus [says]: “The kingdom of the Father is like [a] woman. (2) She took a little bit of yeast. [She] hid it in dough (and) made it into huge loaves of bread.

**98 (1)** Jesus says: “The kingdom of the Father is like a man who wanted to kill a powerful one. (2) He drew the sword in his house (and) stabbed it into the wall to test whether his hand would be strong (enough). (3) Then he killed the powerful one.”

**107 (3)** “After he had toiled, he said to the sheep: ‘I love you more than the ninety-nine.’”

There seems to be an extensive system of laboring to cultivate the soul properly. Although there are no direct prescriptions here to the particular type of laboring necessary, *Thomas’* riddles force readers to practice mental gymnastics and strengthen their rational mind. From an ethical perspective,<sup>56</sup> those are blessed who struggle or toil (58). They have found the Kingdom of Heaven. To persecute your heart is to go against your own body, and to take only refuge in the soul. When heated (practiced) the yeast (light within) grows into huge, beautiful loaves, or people worthy of the Father. The growth of the loaves reflects the growth of one’s wisdom. Like the shepherd who has 100 sheep, the human being has hundreds of possibilities on earth, but one should only follow the One that is important: the Light. Disciples should toil, chase this sheep, and focus their attention only on this goal. Readers must overcome the distractions of the world and learn how to take up their own mental weapons to combat a world trying to stir the heart (21, 103). So what does this one sheep represent? In my view, this mental toil represents staying on guard against totalitarian constructions. This reflects the use of

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<sup>56</sup> Roig Lanzillotta defines ethical progress as “a means to attain the divine and thereby achieve salvation.” See, “A Way of Salvation: Becoming Like God in Nag Hammadi,” *Numen* Vol. 60 (2013): 71 (abstract).

incongruous humor throughout the text. The Kingdom of God is inherently oppositional, chaotic, and incongruous. It is easy to be subsumed by an idea or a way of being, so *Thomas* encourages readers to stay mentally sharp against the powerful one hidden in comfortable houses (98).

### **Section 1.6) Concluding Remarks: The Coming of War and Fire**

In this chapter, I have presented my research aimed at a unified theology about a Living Jesus of the Light and the subsequent frustration when noticing a dense discursive strand of Death-Darkness that subverts this reading. Then, I sat with the textual disjunctures by way of comical incongruity theory and concluded that these unexpected twists of the text could be the very substance of the text itself that encourages ethical progress. I believe in viewing *Thomas* as a text with comical elements (rather than a comedy in whole) provides an expansive space for thought. The text challenges audience proclivities and acts to subvert any dogmatic (unified theological) claims to anthropology, cosmology, and anthropology. This incongruous play on various registers forces the reader into self-reflection. Each person who touches GTh faces, during one saying or another, something they recognize that is slightly different than they assumed. I am trying to walk a tightrope between “presumptions of a unified inner meaning that requires correct understanding”<sup>57</sup> and a hermeneutics of play that opens up the document. Paradoxically, *Thomas* might hold a universal message of the unexpected, which is a funny, incongruous concept.<sup>58</sup>

In trying to better contextualize this version of an incongruous *Thomas*, the following chapter will entertain the complimentary ideas of a comic trickster; multiplicity of meanings; the character of the ‘many’; the flux of the universe; and the theme of fire, war and dissension that can be found in both *Thomas* and the fragments of Heraclitus. Heraclitus’ writings are famous for their engagement with paradoxes and placing opposites in unity. The fragments that have survive to modernity match *Thomas*’ form and content. Furthermore, there is evidence that both Heraclitus and *Thomas* were circulating within the same discursive milieu by way of secondary citation. Despite these connections, there have not been significant academic pieces in English connecting these texts. I will aim to elucidate these connections and differences, particularly examining the possibility of bipartite soul, ethical progress, and *homoiosis theo* in each.

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<sup>57</sup> Touna, *Fabrications of a Greek Past*, (2017): 99.

<sup>58</sup> For more play with incongruous interpretive possibilities, see Appendices D-H.

## Chapter 2) Playing with Fire: Heraclitus and Thomas

### Epigraph

“[...] And Polo said:  
‘The inferno of the living is not something that will be;  
If there is one, it is what is already here,  
The inferno where we live everyday,  
That we form by being together [...]’”  
-- Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (1972): 165.

“Césaire’s text [*the discourse on colonialism*] plumbs the depths of the unconscious so that we might comprehend colonialism through his entire being.  
It is full of flares, full of anger, full of humor.  
It is not a solution or a strategy or a manual  
or a little red book with pithy quotes.  
It is a dancing flame in a bonfire.”  
-- Robin Kelly, “The Poetics of Anticolonialism” (1999).

“The more people we exclude, the more people will want to join.  
That’s what exclusivity means.  
-- Arturo to N.S.”  
-- Katherine Dunn, *Geek Love* (1989): 228.

“I am what I always was,  
Gleaming and Empty”  
-- Deafheaven, “From the Kettle to the Coil” (*Adult Swim Singles Program*, 2014).

## **Section 2.1) Introduction**

The “unique” style of *Thomas* is well documented.<sup>59</sup> There is not a proper parallel to the other Nag Hammadi texts, and scholars have looked elsewhere for possible stylistic influences. For example, William Arnal and scholar of Earliest Christianities Stephen J. Patterson have linked the aphoristic style of *Thomas* with strands of Middle Platonism that had discursive strength in the first three centuries C.E.<sup>60</sup> On a different register of investigation, New Testament scholars have closely examined metaphors in *Thomas*. The metaphor of fire made an impression upon me, which appears in sayings 10, 13.8, 16, 57, and 82. Scholar of Early Christianities, April DeConick made a compelling argument by genealogically tracing *Thomas*' fire and destruction references within Jewish apocalyptic and mystical literature.<sup>61</sup> All of these associations certainly hold merit. However, my aim in this chapter is to present a comparison between *Thomas* and the fragments of Heraclitus. There are certainly issues with this comparison; the most obvious is the chronological distance between the texts. Paleographers have dated the Coptic version of *Thomas* from Nag Hammadi that I am analyzing to ~340 C.E.<sup>62</sup> and scholars speculate Heraclitus lived between 535 – c. 475 B.C.E. This distance of ~800 years compels me to close the gap. I would like to offer three justifications for a fruitful comparison.

Firstly, there is evidence that both Heraclitus and *Thomas* were circulating within the same discursive milieu. Important writers Clement of Alexandria (150-215 CE) and Ps. Hippolytus of Rome (170-235 CE)<sup>63</sup> wrote directly about *Thomas* and Heraclitus. Ps. Hippolytus writes about a ‘*Gospel entitled According to Thomas*’ that shows some similar relation to *Thomas* logion #4 in *Refutatio* 5.7.20 and 5.8.32. (ed. P. Wendland, GCS 26). Dated between 222-235 C.E. I cite both at length to highlight the connection.

Hippolytus primary text: “They (the Naassenes) say that not only the mysteries of the Assyrians and Phrygians, but also those of the Egyptians support their account of the

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<sup>59</sup> Recent examples: Patterson (1992), DeConick (2006), and Arnal (2013).

<sup>60</sup> Jackson (1985), Crossan (1994), Patterson (1999), Arnal (2013), and the most recent, detailed addition Miroshnikov (2018: doctoral dissertation).

<sup>61</sup> April DeConick, *Seek to See Him* (1996), *Recovering the Original Gospel of Thomas* (2006). DeConick builds a strong connection, in her tenth chapter of *Recovering*, between *Thomas* and the works of Clement of Alexandria. Pseudo-Clementine texts [*Rec. 1.1, IV, IX, and XXXI*] have some fantastic references to fire, peace, and the destruction of the world that also match nicely with *Thomas*. I would like to explore these in future writings.

<sup>62</sup> Of course, this gap is much closer to 500 years depending on when one dates the initial writing, orality, or some spark of ideas in GTh. The earliest of which is 30 C. E. by DeConick and Crossan. Additionally, the Greek Papyri versions of *Thomas* from the Grenfell and Hunt Oxyrhynchus collection date to the second century.

<sup>63</sup> For a further discussion on the changing attribution of ‘Hippolytus’ to the *Refutation of All Heresies* see M. David Litwa, *Refutation of All Heresies: Translated with an Introduction and Notes*, Writings from the Greco-Roman World 40, (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016): xli-xlii.

blessed nature of the things which were, are, and are yet to be, a nature which is both hidden and revealed at the same time, and which he [the Naassene] calls the sought-for kingdom of heaven which is within man. They transmit a tradition concerning this in the *Gospel entitled According to Thomas*, which states expressly, ‘The one who seeks me will find me in children from seven years of age and onwards. For there, hiding in the fourteenth aeon, I am revealed.’”

From Attridge’s commentary: “This saying shows some similarities to saying 4 of the GTh, yet the differences are also apparent. Interpretation of these differences is controversial. On the one hand, they may indicate that the Naassenes’ text of the GTh represented a very different recension from that of both the Coptic and P.Oxy. 654. However, caution is required in drawing text-critical inferences from this testimony. For on the other hand, it may well be that the citation in Hippolytus is but a garbled form of saying 4, distorted either by Naassene exegesis or by Hippolytus or perhaps by both.”<sup>64</sup>

Appearing in the same document are fragments 50-67 of Heraclitus (*Refutatio* 9.1-10.8). In a similar fashion, fragments of Heraclitus flash across Clement of Alexandria’s writings from *Protreptic* to *Pedagogue* to *Stromata* (15-36, 86, 99). *Stromata* has several short (possible) references to GTh sayings (2, 5, 27, 37, and 114).<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, most Heraclitus fragments that survived are from the first two centuries C.E. in the writings of Seneca, Plutarch, and Marcus Aurelius.<sup>66</sup>

The second piece of evidence is the aphoristic style of both documents.<sup>67</sup> Scholar of Ancient Philosophy Edward Hussey introduces Heraclitus’ text as “... [consisting] of a series of aphoristic statements without formal linkage. The style is unique.”<sup>68</sup> This description of

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<sup>64</sup> Harold W. Attridge in Bentley Layton, *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2-7*, (1989, p 103-104), found by way of Grondin, <http://gospel-thomas.net/hippo.htm> (Published Online: May, 2016). To be clear, I am aware of the redactive differences of both the fragments of Heraclitus and from the version of Thomas presented in Hippolytus and the Coptic version I will be analyzing in the latter sections of this chapter. I am making a leap to compare these two texts rhetorical and structural devices when they would be in flux for various readers. My presupposition here is that the general form and aim of these texts would have stayed relatively similar throughout their transmission. That is to say, whilst I am promoting scholars to expect the unexpected, my own expectations at the current moment are that Thomas versions would not contain radically distinct theological and philosophical enterprises. We can only hope that archaeologists or laypersons will dig up more textual evidence from antiquity to confirm or break this expectation.

<sup>65</sup> DeConick, *Recovering the Original* (2006): 21.

<sup>66</sup> Marković, Miroslav. Heraclitus. Ed. Maior. ed. Mérida, Venezuela, (1967).

<sup>67</sup> Unfortunately, we moderns do not have complete or even fragments of Heraclitus’ “original” writing. Here, by original, I mean a direct copy of the text that is distinct or separate from a secondary commentator’s text. Each Heraclitus fragment we can analyze comes to us from one of these secondary accounts. There is no certainty to the aphoristic style of Heraclitus’ writings, but it is highly plausible that he would be inclined towards such a dense, cryptic style.

<sup>68</sup> Hussey, “Heraclitus,” In A. Long (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy*, Cambridge Companions to Philosophy, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 88.

Heraclitus also accurately describes *Thomas*. Smith reminds us ‘unique’ is a *sui generis* term that discloses the possibility for comparison, but here (ironically) the tight similarity of uniqueness encourages me to compare analogically rather than genealogically.<sup>69</sup> Hence, I posit that the closest parallel to *Thomas*’ rhetorical design are the fragments of Heraclitus. They both circulated during the first few centuries of the Common Era and share a common genre. This leads to a third, in-depth investigation: are there also metaphoric and rhetorical resemblances to justify interpretive similarities? Following comical incongruity explored in the first chapter, this chapter will compare Heraclitus and *Thomas* to illuminate the meaning making strategies (philosophies) of these texts.<sup>70</sup>

## **Section 2.2) Playing with Contradictions**

**GTh 47)** (1) Jesus says: “It is impossible for a person to mount two horses and to stretch two bows. (2) And it is impossible for a servant to serve two masters, or else he will honor the one and insult the other.” (3) “No person drinks old wine and immediately desires to drink new wine. (4) And new wine is not put into old wineskins, so that they do not burst; nor is old wine put into (a) new wineskin, so that it does not spoil it. (5) An old patch is not sewn onto a new garment, because a tear will result.”

**DK B48)** “The bow’s name is life, though the bow’s work is death.”<sup>71</sup>

*Thomas* is famous for its doubling of sayings, including the text’s double name Didymus and Thomas meaning ‘twin’ in two different languages, Aramaic and Greek respectively. However, in #47 doubles are a contradiction. This saying differentiates new and old wineskins along with stating the impossibility of one person using of two bows, serving two masters, and mounting two horses. Heraclitus has several moments of open contradiction, some of which also reference the bow. DK B 48 reads, “The bow’s name is life, though the bows work is death.”

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<sup>69</sup> See Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine* (1990), Ch. 2 “On Comparison” (p. 36-53), particularly pages 36-38 when he cites and discusses William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, [1904]: 10. I think it is important for me to honestly add that I do not live up to Smith’s standards of a comparative model in this section. He promotes utilizing comparison to parse out differences, whilst I utilize comparison to help further identify a position within *Thomas* that matches with Heraclitus. In later investigations of the two, focusing more on differences may be fruitful as well.

<sup>70</sup> This chapter will mainly explore interpretive similarities between these texts. For more information regarding differences between the authors/texts, see Appendix I on issues of authority.

<sup>71</sup> All translations are from Randy Hoyt, “The Fragments of Heraclitus,” <http://www.ou.edu/logos/heraclitus> and double-checked in Charles Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus* (1979) and Miroslav Marković, *Heraclitus*, Ed. Maior. ed. Mérida Venezuela, (1967).

According to Kahn, fragment 48 in the first part plays upon a double entendre of *biós* and *bíos* (bow and life) and in the second part jokes that both the bow and life are the work of death.<sup>72</sup> This juxtaposition of life and death is a comical incongruity.<sup>73</sup> We as readers do not expect the idea of a bow and life to move to the dark theme of death.

The bow appears again in DK B51 to expound a profound point: “Men do not know how what is at variance agrees with itself. It is an attunement of opposite tension, like that of the bow and the lyre.” Depending on how a person is oriented (attuned) they will have particular proclivities. This reflects the second crucial piece of incongruity theory from Carroll in chapter 1: a mental state of enjoyment is necessary to perceive incongruity as humorous; otherwise, the audience will be perplexed, threatened, or annoyed.<sup>74</sup> Audiences must be prepared for the unexpected to enjoy Heraclitus’ investigations properly. From here, we can see the comical incongruities littered across Heraclitus’ writings. “Asses prefer straw to gold” [and humans do not] (DK B9); how “The sea is the purest and the impurest water” (DK B61); and how “Pigs delight in the mire” [unlike humans] (DK B13). All of these fragments play with human perceptions of purity and enjoyment. They break audiences out of quotidian perceptions of the world: sea water as impure, mud as disgusting, and straw being worse than gold. By utilizing humorous anecdotes, Heraclitus opens up readers to enjoy the unexpected and to consider other ways of thinking about the world. In laughing, we begin to imagine the world from the perspective of asses, fish, and pigs.

Furthermore, reviewing comical incongruities in Heraclitus reveals the potential humor in *Thomas*, particularly the image of riding two horses or firing two bows. These strict but playful statements might also drive readers to imagine that maybe *Thomas* is wrong: you could twist the saying slightly and proclaim that one can ride two horses by way of a chariot! The latter sections on wine skins filling and garment repair follow Heraclitus’ lesson (the lesson of the joke) that particular situations (rather than universals) should guide our actions. The next section continues the line of incongruity by considering Heraclitus’ play with binaries as a way to reconsider the various opposing yet united dichotomies from *Thomas* presented in chapter one.

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<sup>72</sup> Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus* (1979).

<sup>73</sup> Recall humorous incongruity is, “all about the delight we humans evidently take in the unexpected,” from Rosenwasser, “Last Lecture” (May 17, 2012) 5.

<sup>74</sup> Carroll, *Humour: A Very Short Introduction*, (2014): 37.



## **Section 2.3) “Unity-in-Opposites”**

**GTh #42)** Jesus says: “Become passers-by.”

**DK B12)** “On those who enter the same rivers, ever different waters flow.”

**GTh #77)** (1) “Jesus says: ‘I am the light that is above all. I am the All. The All came forth out of me. And to me the All has come.’”

**DK B41)** “Wisdom is one thing. It is to know the thought by which all things are steered through all things”

Edward Hussey calls attention to an ontological organization in Heraclitus that he titles: “unity-in-opposites.”<sup>75</sup> In DK B 41, Wisdom is “steered through all things.” This goes deeper in DK B 84, “It rests by changing.” The tautology here is that the One is also all things in their unending variety. Put simply: the One is the All. The term “rest” signifies the unifying, indivisible nature of the universe where the only substance that never changes is change itself. Heraclitus symbolizes this restless rest with fire and water metaphors. Usually seen as diametrically opposed, Heraclitus litters both fire and water throughout the text with (almost) identical meaning.<sup>76</sup> DK B12, 49a, and 91 present the metaphor of water.<sup>77</sup> The fragments, similar to the doublets in *Thomas*, have different word choices, although in Heraclitus’ case the fragmentary nature of the text makes it more by chance than intentional play with audience perception. The general lesson of these sayings is as follows: humans cannot step in the same place of a river twice, because the rapid water movement unequivocally means the particularities of this ‘same’ river are different in each moment. There is a single flow to each river, but within there are countless H<sub>2</sub>O molecules.<sup>78</sup>

I outlined a similar ontology for *Thomas* in chapter one section three by way of the discursive strand of Living-Light. The Light Jesus speaks of in GTh 77 is flowing through all matter: above, coming forth and moving through all things. This, paired with GTh 42, implies a

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<sup>75</sup> Hussey, “Heraclitus,” In A. Long (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy*, (Cambridge Companions to Philosophy, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>76</sup> These differences in elements are not reconciled. In fact, the close proximity shows Heraclitus is comfortable with their disjuncture. This occurs similarly in DK B 76: “The death of fire is the birth of air, and the death of air is the birth of water.”

<sup>77</sup> Despite the links between fire and war, GTh (perhaps surprisingly) is silent on the topic of water.

<sup>78</sup> Interestingly, the brilliant comedian Mel Brooks parallel’s Heraclitus’ river: “My mind is a raging torrent, flooded with rivulets of thought cascading into a waterfall of creative alternatives.” *Blazing Saddles* (1974; United States: Crossbow Productions/Warner Bros, 1974), DVD.

continuous becoming. At all times, the Kingdom circulates through All things as they transform. The ontological connections between these texts goes deeper, since GTh 50.3 states: “‘What is the sign of your father among you?’ (then) say to them: ‘It is movement and repose.’” This strand in *Thomas* mirrors the tautology of a restless rest in Heraclitus: All things are One. Wisdom and Light are the underlying substance infused with all material things. I regard these sections as the nucleus of these texts, which are interested in a particular perception. Rather than viewing division between separate objects, divergences eventually converge by way of the unique view of unity (All). However, there remains the issue of *Thomas*’ Death-Darkness discursive strand that remains opposed to this reading. My only hypothesis thus far is that *Thomas* is presenting audiences with further trickery by placing even this most fundamental point – there is no division at an essential level – in opposition with the idea of death as a negative force/concept always-already. Incongruities abound, this Light-Death binary may just add to *Thomas*’ brilliance. I will return to this conundrum in the chapters conclusion. For now, reader, suspend disbelief and take the vantage point of Heraclitus and incongruity. The fragments have two key lessons: (1) all substances are One, unity, on a fundamental register; (2) this same fundamental register is also in flux, thus incongruous. I will now examine fire as a metaphor in both Heraclitus and *Thomas* with these lessons in mind.

## **Section 2.4) Fire as a Guiding Metaphor**

**GTh 10)** “Jesus says: “I have cast fire upon the world, and see, I am guarding it until it blazes.”

**GTh 16)** (1) “Jesus says: ‘Perhaps people think that I have come to cast peace upon the earth. (2) But they do not know that I have come to cast dissension upon the earth: fire, sword, (and) war.’”

**GTh 82)** (1) Jesus says: “Whoever is near me is near the fire. (2) And whoever is far from me is far from the kingdom.”

**GTh 13)** (8) Thomas said to them: “If I tell you one of the words he said to me, you will pick up stones (and) throw them at me, and fire will come out of the stones (and) burn you up.”

**DK B30)** “This world, which is the same for all, no one of gods or men has made. But it always was, is, and will be: an ever-living Fire, with measures of it kindling, and measures going out.”

**DK B90)** “All things are an interchange for Fire, and Fire for all things, just like goods for gold and gold for goods.”

**DK B53)** “War is the Father of All and the King of All.”

**DK B 67)** “he [God] takes various shapes, just as fire...”

**DK B80)** “We must know that war is common to all and strife is justice, and that all things come into being through strife necessarily.”

**DK B43)** “Wantonness needs putting out, even more than a house on fire.”

This section will carefully dissect each statement in order as provided above. Firstly, GTh 10 informs readers that God has cast a blazing fire across the world. Moreover, in GTh 16 Jesus is bringing “fire, sword, (and) war” and dissention to the world. However, readers should not fear the casting of dissention and destruction upon the world, in fact, this fire symbolizes the Kingdom of God as told in GTh 82. Heraclitus has a similar lesson for his audience. Fire is the world, all things, all beings, and ever changing (DK B 30, 76, 90). Fire is in continuous exchange, as are all things. This bears similarity to how *Thomas* portrays Jesus as the Father and the King of All that bring War; Heraclitus asserts ‘War’ to be the ‘Father and King of All.’ These texts exhibit the same rhetorical posture regarding fire: the world, like fire and the river, is in eternal flux as existence is constantly transforming but always one. Heraclitus claims that destruction is justice, and in GTh 10, there is a tone of judgement from Jesus as he casts fire upon the world. It is evident from the use of evocative language, such as ‘war’ and ‘destruction’ that these texts aim to shock the audience. Jesus admits he is aware of audience expectations for peace in GTh 16.1, and he explicitly subverts them.<sup>79</sup> It seems possible that these metaphors of violence are a rhetorical tactic to change audience opinion towards an ontological view of an every-changing cosmos. Additionally, this trains readers to expect the unexpected. Lastly, DK B 80 teaches audiences that strife is part of life: destruction and violence should be expected and not feared.

Yet GTh 13.8 is a perplexing use of fire. In this saying, Jesus takes Thomas aside to tell him “three secret words.” Then, readers encounter a fascinating description of stones picked up

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<sup>79</sup> Another moment when Jesus anticipates and comically flips expectations is in saying 14, when fasting becomes sinning, praying leads to condemnation, and giving alms harms the reader.

and thrown by the disciples at Thomas. While in flight, these stones cast fire back at the disciples. The stones have agency, or the ability to enact meaningfully in the world. This seems to be a moment of violence to fear for the disciples. On one register, audiences could interpret the logia as though the disciples are judged, for not trusting or believing in Thomas. They could not handle the truth. Still, fire is a negative experience for these disciples. Fire here is no longer the Kingdom, or a positive source. This is incongruous with the positive view of fire I examined in the previous paragraph. However, if, as outlined, these texts are both interested in ceaseless change and situational importance, than it would follow that fire can have positive and negative connotations. In fact, Heraclitus has moments where fire is negative.

In fragment 65, Heraclitus reminds readers of the importance of unity-in-opposites by stating that, “[...] Fire is want and surfeit [...].” Additionally, in fragment 43, Heraclitus claims that sometimes putting out fires on earth is necessary, like the fire of pride. In light of this exposure to negative connotations of fire, I see three layers of meaning for GTh 13.8. Firstly, (and simply) this is a negative connotation of fire and violence to continue the rhetorical flair of contradictions. Secondly, maybe this shocking use of fire shooting from rocks is supposed to make the audience laugh. In this act of recognizing incongruity, the reader knows something fundamentally true about the universe: the unity of ceaseless change brings about the unexpected. Thus, audiences should expect that as contexts change new experiences will bound to happen. This imagery might be a distraction to test the reader's perception. Rather than focus on this fantastical story, we should not that Jesus spoke three words to Thomas and Thomas only offers this story in relation to telling one word.<sup>80</sup> All of a sudden, this saying becomes comical; Thomas is playing a joke on the reader. Thirdly, Thomas might be playing a joke on the disciples with this playful use of imagery. Readers tuned to incongruity might imagine that he tells the disciples these words in the next, non-written line of the text; but ultimately, these three words are no more important than any other words. Thomas is being goofy. Still, the puzzle-solving, pensive part of me cannot shake the rhetorical contradiction of the disciples becoming outsiders

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<sup>80</sup> However, if I were to hypothesize what these three words were it would be a slight change from the proposals of Denzey-Lewis and Arnal's shared hypothesis of Jesus' three spoken words: "I am Divine" to the phrase "We are divine." This fits better with my reading of all humans and material substances having divine potential. For a lengthy description of the three-word saying discussion, see Charles Steng, *Our Divine Double*, (Harvard University Press, 2016): 99-100.

due to Jesus and Thomas.<sup>81</sup> In this next section, I will examine the various ways that both *Thomas* and Heraclitus proclaim a distinction between those who know the “Common” or Kingdom of God (that seems available to all), while simultaneously stating that most people are ignorant, drunk, or generally unworthy of knowing the truth about the world (or joining God in Heaven).

### **Section 2.5) Rhetorical Play: The Status of the Many**

**DK B2)** “So we must follow the common, yet the many live as if they had a wisdom of their own.”

**DK B21)** “All the things we see when awake are death, even as we all see in slumber are asleep”

**DK B89)** “The waking have one common world, but the sleeping turn aside each into a world of his own.”

**GTh 62 (1)** Jesus says: “I tell my secrets to those who [are worthy] of [my] secrets.”

**GTh 49 (1)** Jesus says: “Blessed are the solitary ones, the elect. For you will find the kingdom. (2) For you come from it (and) will return to it.”

**DK B17)** “The many do not take heed of such things as those they meet with, nor do they recognize them when they are taught, though they think they do.”

**DK B104)** “For what thought or wisdom have they? They follow the poets and take the crowd as their teacher, knowing not that there are many bad and few good.”

**GTh 73)** “Jesus says: ‘The harvest is plentiful but there are few laborers. But beg the Lord that he may send laborers for the harvest.’”

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<sup>81</sup> Another way of considering the stone throwing is building a relation of “stones” in the text (13, 19, 77). In 19, Jesus says “listen to my words, these stones will serve you.” By throwing fire at the disciples, the stones, perhaps, are serving them, since they have listened to the words (through Judas). Alternatively, and in my opinion more likely, in hearing the words from Thomas the disciples are abandoning the “Living Jesus” who speaks to them. This re-enforces the first saying wherein Thomas was a side character to the crucial importance of Jesus’ direct engagement with audiences.

<u>Ideal:</u> Waking – Common
<b>Heraclitus:</b>
<u>Real:</u> Sleeping - Private

<u>Ideal:</u> Living – Kingdom
<b>Thomas:</b>
<u>Real:</u> Taste Death - ??

The two texts have a similar structure of their ideal and real worlds. A shared, universal understanding of the “Common” represents Heraclitus’ ideal world.<sup>82</sup> He refers to those who recognize the Common world as “waking.” There are ‘few’ of these waking people with wisdom of the Common. However, the reality is that many people are “sleeping.” To be asleep is to live within a private world. These people usually follow the “crowd,” which is paradoxically the common interpretation of the world. Heraclitus implies that he, or others, has tried to teach these sleeping people, but they do not heed the message. Similarly, a shared, universal understanding of the Kingdom of God (Heaven) represents *Thomas*’ ideal world. The text refers to those who recognize the Kingdom as Living (or Light). However, the reality is that most people are living in a corpse and taste death. Much like Heraclitus, *Thomas* tries to tell secrets, but the text qualifies that people must be worthy to know.<sup>83</sup> Unlike Heraclitus, *Thomas* never qualifies exactly what it means to be dead or taste death. It is a threat without given consequence.

*Thomas*’ rhetoric of secrets and elect compels audiences to ‘search’ further for the interpretations of these sayings. The utilization of secrecy creates an insider-outsider culture that attracts readers and creates a sense of belonging.<sup>84</sup> These outsiders are encouraged to make the outside like the inside. Thus, become part of the Kingdom. The harvest is plenty, but there are few laborers. God wishes for there to be more. By presenting a dichotomy between the real and the ideal, both Heraclitus and *Thomas* create urgent motivation for audiences to change their beliefs. This distinction does not necessarily have an ontological basis. It is primarily a rhetorical

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<sup>82</sup> I am purposely using a capitalization of “Common” for Heraclitus’ ideal world to distinguish the term from the quotidian, normal view of the world that most people hold.

<sup>83</sup> When slightly harsher or mocking, both texts call ignorant people “drunk” (GTh 28, DK B 117).

<sup>84</sup> For more on theories of secrecy see Georg Simmel, “The Sociology of Secrecy and of Secret Societies,” *AJS* Vol. 11 No. 4 (1906): 441-498. Also Hans G. Kippenberg and Guy G. Stroumsa, *Secrecy and Concealment: Studies in the history of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Religions*, Studies in the History of Religions, Vol. 65, (Leiden: Brill, 1995), especially Ch. 2 by J.N. Bremmer, Stroumsa, and Kippenberg, “Religious secrets and secrecy in classical Greece” (61-78).

device.<sup>85</sup> In a way, at least for the authors (and those who consider themselves the ‘elect’ ‘few’), these moments of building anxiety are humorous. These elect might laugh at those who panic at not feeling included into the Common/Kingdom. In conclusion, it seems neither of these texts are actually committed to this distinction of sleep/awake in a literal sense.

So far, I have outlined claims in these texts that build a world in constant flux where the only expectation is the unexpected. Each situation requires a new way of understanding, which happens through a posture of Light, Wisdom, and Waking (consciousness). These texts rhetorically utilize incongruities and disjunction to train and prepare readers. This last section examines the anthropological claims in the text (spirit/soul-flesh/corpse) to understand if these texts rely upon an essential division of the two conceptions that pervaded arguments in antiquity.

## **Section 2.6) Know Thyself Pt. 2: Training the Soul, Understanding the Body**

**DK B78)** “Human character does not have understanding, but divine character does.”

**DK B101)** “I looked for myself.”

**DK B108)** “Craftsmanship has to be learned and refreshed by practice, and the craft is logically prior to the craftsman.”

**DK B113)** “All share the capacity to understand.”

**DK B115)** “To the soul belongs a *logos* that increases itself.”

These fragments suggest two crucial metaphysical claims from Heraclitus. From B78, the human and divine are differentiated. Both mingle and exist within the body, but, on one register, there is a distinction. The terms soul and mind, are of the same substance as the divinity called *Logos*. Therefore, the mind (*Logos*) has an ability to see through false perceptions of the world. The mind can directly perceive itself as the Common *Logos*. This is a classic pre-Socratic idiom: God is “Like knows Like.”<sup>86</sup> Nowhere in the fragments do I locate evidence for a claim that Heraclitus rejects the body. Instead, the text aligns itself with a world in flux, which is to be suspicious of the sense perception and body-world interactions. In my view, Heraclitus teaches

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<sup>85</sup> The concept of ‘tasting death’ in *Thomas* receives further credence as a rhetorical device, because “death” in GTh never refers to the physical end of life. In GTh 12, the disciples ask Jesus what will happen when he “departs.” The text utilizes a very different term; perhaps, this is to maintain a separation between the rhetorical devices from physical death.

<sup>86</sup> Roig Lanzillotta, “A Way of Salvation,” (2013): 90.

readers to cultivate the soul's rational capacities, so that one can grasp the multiplicity (polyvalence) of each occurrence and input. The better-trained one is, the better they can interact with and in the world. I would like to suggest that Heraclitus does not try to escape his body, but rather engage through it by relying upon the *Logos* from within: he is both absent (sought) and present (seeker) in his quest. From the perspective of theology, Heraclitus promotes a "paradoxical chiasmus of many-one (or one many)."<sup>87</sup> This suggests that the quest of seeking knowledge is always expansive for Heraclitus. To live is to play.<sup>88</sup> There will be war and justice but they do not have to be violently antagonistic. If all people come to recognize the ever-changing nature of reality, then we can leave in harmony in so much as we are all improving our minds. The human life reflects the cosmos; like a craft, both are (re)made continuously. Therefore, death is insignificant in-so-far as humans are always in a process of decay and growth: there is no end, just new beginnings.<sup>89</sup> How can Heraclitus' endless seeking be helpful for interpreting the notion of 'seeking' in GTh? How does this message about inner self-knowledge and the *Logos* from Heraclitus help illuminate prescriptions in GTh? There are seemingly two plausible, incongruous interpretations.

**GTh 2** (1) Jesus says: "The one who seeks should not cease seeking until he finds. (2) And when he finds, he will be dismayed. (3) And when he is dismayed, he will be astonished. (4) And he will be king over the All."

**GTh 108** (1) Jesus says: "Whoever will drink from my mouth will become like me. (2) I myself will become he (3) and what is hidden will be revealed to him."

**GTh 111** (2) And whoever is living from the Living One will not see death." (3) Does not Jesus say: "Whoever has found himself, of him the world is not worthy?"

**GTh 61** (3) Jesus said to her: "I am the one who comes from the One who is (always) at one with himself.

**GTh 20** (1) The disciples said to Jesus: "Tell us what the kingdom of heaven is like!" (2) He said to them: "It is like a mustard seed. (3) It is the smallest of all seeds. (4) But when it falls on soil that is cultivated, it (the soil) produces a large branch (and) it (the branch) becomes a shelter for the birds of the sky."

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<sup>87</sup> Patrick Lee Miller, *Becoming God: Pure Reason in Early Greek Philosophy*, Continuum Studies in Ancient Philosophy, (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011): 38. Miller further defines chiasmus or syllapsis as "whole and not wholes, convergent divergent, consonant dissonant, from all things one and from one thing all" (36).

<sup>88</sup> DK B 52: "Eternity is a child playing; the kingly power is a child's."

<sup>89</sup> Miller, *Becoming God* (2011): 35, citing Kahn, (1979): 226-227.



The language of the second saying in GTh tells readers to seek until you find, and in finding, you will become ruler over All. In GTh 108, the disciples must drink from Jesus' mouth to become like him. Both logia 111 and 61 reiterate the importance of knowing oneself, and the linkage between the self and God.<sup>90</sup> If humans are like Jesus when finding themselves, this raises two questions, 1) what is the relationship between Light, Jesus, and the earthy, fleshy human existence; 2) what are the prescribed practices for coming to know oneself, or put differently, how is the audience supposed to drink from Jesus' mouth? I outlined these theologies in the first chapter, so I will dive into two tentative hypothesis regarding anthropology and soteriology that reflect the incongruous nature of the Light-Death discursive strands.

The first tentative hypothesis reproduces the notion of Gnosticism as an existential or nihilist philosophy outlined by Hans Jonas in the 1950s. In this view, ancient Christian Gnostics are attempting to escape what they viewed as an evil, material world by way of their divine souls.<sup>91</sup> To know oneself means recognizing the soul is of great wealth. The soul comes into the body at birth and leaves the body empty at death. Thus, the body is empty (of importance). At the beginning of this existence, the soul, a light Being, enters into and becomes trapped within a fleshy, unworthy body, which it finally leaves upon the 'death' of this body. To cultivate the mustard seed (soul) within is an ethical practice to train the soul to leave the body and reject the world. Of central importance is escaping from this world.

My second tentative hypothesis applies Heraclitus' hermeneutical key of chiasmus to *Thomas*: valuing inner, self-knowledge of an ever-changing world. Rather than a pessimistic view of the world, this interpretation is optimistic.<sup>92</sup> Following this interpretive clue, I propose a different extrapolation of the second saying. If GTh sees a chiasmus unity-in-opposites, it is strange to leave a hierarchy at the end of the saying (part 4): "to rule over All." Perhaps, to rule over All is to be underneath the influence of All as well. This is the Light in communion with itself (Like knows Like). From the perspective of ethical progress, *Thomas* is optimistic that all

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<sup>90</sup> My interpretation comes from a recognition of opposites in the text. The world juxtaposed against the Kingdom; so whoever has knowledge, the world becomes "unworthy."

<sup>91</sup> Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God & the Beginnings of Christianity*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), particularly his description of the main tenets of Gnosticism on pages 42-47.

<sup>92</sup> For a comprehensive explanation of Gnostic optimism, see Roig Lanzillotta, "Gospel of Thomas Logion 7 Unravelling: An Intertextual Approach to a *locus vexatus*," in *Between Text and Text: The Hermeneutics of Intertextuality in Ancient Greek Cultures and Their Afterlife in Medieval and Modern Times*, ed. Michaela Bauks, Wayne Horowitz, and Armin Lange, *Journal of Ancient Judaism Supplements* 6, (Hubert & Co. Gottingen: Germany, 2013), Also, Roig Lanzillotta, "A way of Salvation" (2013).

human beings have redemption through knowledge. Like Heraclitus, the soul can fill the body through “perpetual dialectic between unity and plurality, moving to ever higher levels of understanding.”<sup>93</sup> In my view, the play with opposites suggests particular interpretive possibilities.

Firstly, *Thomas* seems to promote a non-essential bipartite view of the soul and body.<sup>94</sup> That is to say, there is rhetorical play with this anthropology so that readers will embrace their rational mind and (positively) use their body, even if the body takes a lesser status. Secondly, due to the recognition of multiplicity, *Thomas* embraces a nuanced view of *ataraxia* or *metriopatheia*, the moderation of passions, rather than *apatheia*, the eradication of passions.<sup>95</sup> Audiences should negate and avoid passions, but not totally reject the body. Thirdly, this optimism embraces the world and community, and thus, the use of the body. Exemplified by GTh 25 and 26 wherein audiences learn to cultivate their inner wisdom and help their brothers attain higher levels of understanding. This reflects messages found in Plato’s *Republic* 613 A 8-b and *Laws* where: “By being pure and just, we maintain a life that is beneficial both for ourselves and for the community. In both works, humans liken themselves to god by being virtuous, that is, by acting in and facing the world as they find it.”<sup>96</sup> Furthermore, this communal perspective has been noted in several Nag Hammadi texts: *The Interpretation of Knowledge* (NHC XI,1), *The Letter of Peter of Philip* (NHC VIII,2), and the *Gospel of Philip* (NHC II,3).<sup>97</sup> To become one with God is to recognize the divinity within oneself and act divinely in the world. So although there may be a distinction between the soul and the body in *Thomas*, both must work together for God. Hence, a monistic theology.

## **Section 2.7) Concluding Remarks: Can anything Conclude?**

In this chapter, I have tried to place *the Gospel of Thomas* and the fragments of Heraclitus in conversation. Both embrace content of paradoxes, tricky statements, and shocking metaphors to enhance their aphoristic, cryptic styles. Utilizing the methodology of (comical)

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<sup>93</sup> Miller, *Becoming God* (2011): 38.

<sup>94</sup> For a fuller and more particular example of the bipartite schema in GTh see Roig Lanzillotta, *Gospel of Thomas Logion 7 Unravalled*,” (2013).

<sup>95</sup> Used to describe *ApJohn*, Roig Lanzillotta, “A Way of Salvation,” (2013): 92.

<sup>96</sup> Roig Lanzillotta, “A Way of Salvation” (2013): 76.

<sup>97</sup> Roig Lanzillotta, “A Way of Salvation” (2013): 84-86.

incongruity theory, I have proposed that these rhetorical and stylistic choices are purposeful in order to propel audiences question their normal, quotidian perceptions. I have hypothesized that these texts claim that nothing has a singular interpretation. In a world of destruction and flux, humans should expect only the unexpected. The only singularity, so to say, is continuous transformation, leaving an ambiguity between process and product. Furthermore, the aphoristic nature of these texts leads to fascinating interpretive possibilities, often in disjunctive currents. Let me be clear, I do not believe that *Thomas* has taken direct influence from Heraclitus, but rather, they both represent a similar strand of thought that was circulating within antiquity. One of anthropological and ontological monism. It is paradoxical to ‘conclude’ this chapter (let alone anything!) after proposing that these two texts promote audiences to evolve, train, and change their identities always.<sup>98</sup> However, the incongruous, riddled nature of these texts inherently forces readers to come back repeatedly, and continually leave with new, dissimilar interpretations. It is for this reason that my next chapter will suggest several lines of investigation that have fruitful pastures for understanding *Thomas* in new, disjunctive directions.

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<sup>98</sup> Further studies might find it helpful to consider *Thomas* alongside the concept of “closure” from Derrida, described as “circular repetition of difference indefinitely,” by Andrew Benjamin, Ch. 7, “Deconstruction,” in Ed. Paul Wake and Simon Malpas, *The Routledge Companion to Critical Theory*, (London: Routledge, 2006): 81.

### **Chapter 3) Confluence, Curation, and Community: *Thomas and Modern Scholarship***

#### **Epigraph**

“A ‘term’ is a boundary line, a line of demarcation.  
It defines a field in which work can be done, within the limits of the term.  
But like all boundaries, even those meticulously surveyed,  
terms are social and arbitrary, not natural and inevitable.”  
-- Thomas McLaughlin, *Critical Terms for Literary Study* (1995): 8.

“[...] the entire question of origin is a non-issue  
whose seemingly urgency arises only because of its rhetorical function  
in the discourse of orthodoxy and heresy. We can and should  
feel free to set it aside and move on, turning instead to analysis of  
the practices of literary production and social formation.”  
-- Karen King, *What is Gnosticism* (2003): 190.

“What aspects of the past will be singled out for the effort of restoration?”  
-- Eric Hobsbawm, “The Social Function of the Past: Some Questions” (1972): 7.

“Of course, the present should not be understood as static, either,  
but, as it is, in constant flux, always changing and transforming the *imaginaire*;  
that is, the meaning/identities of material artifacts.  
In fact, even the past itself is in flux,  
since new situations in which contemporary social actors find themselves  
provoke new responses to those seemingly ancient artifacts,  
and those responses may range widely.”  
-- Vaia Touna, *Fabrications of the Greek Past* (2017): 144.

“The Nag Hammdi collection presents us with one fourth-century snapshot  
from what was a long and much wider history of  
recycling and repackaging religious innovations.”  
-- Michael Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism* (1996): 262.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> However, I disagree with Williams’ next few sentences that claim the Nag Hammadi collection to be of “failed religious movements of earlier generations” in so much as the ‘failure’ is tangible only through a lack of historical evidence, nor were they gathered necessarily for the purpose of “scaveng[ing] for precious enduring truths.”

### **3.1) Introduction: Coming to Know What is in Front of Our Faces**

In this chapter, I will follow a naïve line of thinking by asking could there be a both/and scholarly approach to the ancient world that authorizes multiple communities, ideologies, and practices in which (various versions of) *the Gospel According to Thomas* may have circulated? Put differently, what might be *Thomas*' relationship to the Mediterranean regions "religious" and philosophical milieu of the first four centuries? In GTh 5, translated by Patterson and Meyer, Jesus comes to say, "Know what is in front of your face, and what is hidden from you will be disclosed to you." In front of my face is a shelf full of scholarly books and articles about *Thomas*. I see a diversity of probable explanations; which is to say, scholarship already excavated multiple threads of interpretive possibilities and diverse communities for *Thomas*. Embracing constant flux for categories rather than exacting lines of demarcation, this chapter is an attempt to a) move from origins to reception and b) from singular theological claims to a focus on literary production and social formation by recognizing the cross-fertilization of discourses in [Late] Antiquity. One chapter cannot properly work through every nuanced claim made in the last sixty years of scholarship, but my aim is to authorize methodically new webs of relation and scholarly attitudes of boundary crossings in future studies. For me, there is no objective truth to a document or situation, but rather multiple truths circulating.<sup>100</sup> The present and past are in flux and influencing each other; therefore, our interpretations of *Thomas* will continue to transform. Being attentive to terminologies we utilize is crucial, because words will begin to control us if we are not continuously reflective of their social and arbitrary existences. As people in the ancient world negotiated between local traditions, freelance experts, and changing socio-cultural dynamics, we too, as scholars, negotiation between theories, methods, and interpretations that secondarily attempt to describe these happenings.

### **Section 3.2) Coming to Know the Field with Skinner**

Over the past two decades, several authors have attempted to summarize the research on the *Gospel of Thomas*.<sup>101</sup> The most thorough version is from Biblical Scholar of Early

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<sup>100</sup> My own interests and cultural sensibilities emboldens a vast array of approaches to understanding social worlds.

<sup>101</sup> Nicholas Perrin, "Recent Trends in Gospel of Thomas Research (1991-2006): Part I, the Historical Jesus and the Synoptic Gospels," *Currents in Biblical Research* Vol. 5 No. 2 (2007): 183–206. ; Nicholas Perrin, and Christopher W. Skinner, "Recent Trends in Gospel of Thomas Research (1989–2011): Part II, Genre, Theology and Relationship to the Gospel of John," *Currents in Biblical Research* 11 (1): 65–86. ; Eds. Merrill P. Miller and Ron Cameron,

Christianities Christopher Skinner: *What Are They Saying About the Gospel of Thomas?* The text operates as an introduction for undergraduate students and scholars looking to become acquainted with contemporary research questions, methods, questions, and interpretations of *Thomas*. On the back cover, Skinner presents the books guiding questions:

“Three major questions remain ‘up for grabs’ in contemporary research on the *Gospel of Thomas*: (1) When [and where] was *Thomas* composed? (2) What is *Thomas*’s relationship to the canonical gospels? (3) What theological outlook is found in the *Gospel of Thomas*?”<sup>102</sup>

These three questions show there is a long-standing trend for studies conducted with a heavy focus on “origins.” Thus, most research attempts to ‘know’ the dating, canonical gospel relationships to GTh, and theological implications of the first two. A clear structure example from the text regarding this density of scholarship is that possible canonical gospel relationships receive twice as much page space than all other possible influences from antiquity combined, including wisdom texts from various communities, philosophical groups, and other Nag Hammadi texts (which are almost absent from this volume). Furthermore, Skinner frames these non-canonical connections underneath the forceful hand of “theology” as if no other significant discourses could possibly appear within *Thomas*. Certainly, as this thesis has also shown, there are fascinating possibilities for theologies in *Thomas*, but Skinner’s presentation severely limits scholarly imaginations. As already noted, the search for origins overvalues a document in an attempt to establish some historical, yet ephemeral uniqueness.<sup>103</sup> Ultimately these lines of inquiry by scholars to assert a true *Christian* story – rather than a story about Christ followers who were also dynamic individuals and groups – functions as a reverberation of Christian theology in the field of antiquity. Although, at times, Skinner recognizes the dangers in his text that seem to reinforce problematic debates over orthodoxy/heresy inherent in origin tales.<sup>104</sup> Skinner’s seems most valuable when he points to future possibilities, particularly in relation to

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*Redescribing Christian Origins* (2004). ; Lisa Haygood, “The Balle to Authenticate ‘The Gospel of Thomas’,” *LUX: A Journal of Transdisciplinary Writing and Research from Claremont Graduate University*, Vol. 3 Iss. 1, Article 6 (2013): 1-12. Also see, Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta project with Brill, “Nag Hammadi Bibliography Online” that is continuing the work of David M. Scholer.

<sup>102</sup> Skinner, *What Are They Saying About the Gospel of Thomas* (2012): Back Cover and 86.

<sup>103</sup> For a thorough example of a scholarly attempt to solve Skinner’s three proposed questions, see Appendix J. Additionally, the absurdity of locating an “original” community for *Thomas* is well documented by Greg Given in his article “‘Finding’ the Gospel of Thomas in Edessa,” *J ECS* 25:4 (John Hopkins University Press, 2017): 501-530. In addition, Karen King’s critic is indispensable, *What is Gnosticism* (2003).

<sup>104</sup> Skinner, *What Are They Saying*, (2012): 87.

his own expertise: connections between Pauline writings and *Thomas*. However, the future of *Thomas* is much more expansive. This chapter now turns away from these three questions towards a different path. A hermeneutical journey through research less traversed.

### **3.21) Reviewing the Field with Arnal**

In his review of Skinner, William Arnal offers important, divergent scholarly directions for *Thomas* not addressed by Skinner. Firstly, to characterize the three central questions as a) ‘major’ and b) ‘up for grabs’ seems to imply that other questions about our object of study (GTh) have either been ‘solved,’ are not relevant, or that these three questions are worth our time. Arnal points out that while Skinner may perhaps “represent things as they are”<sup>105</sup> in contemporary scholarship, these questions, especially pertaining to whether or not *Thomas* is dependent or independent from (direct) influence of the synoptic gospels, are just spinning wheels in the mud.<sup>106</sup> Secondly, Arnal points out that Skinner fails to acknowledge work on the margins of his three-question purview. Arnal outlines future directions: “[1] work on Thomas’s explicitly esoteric hermeneutic, [2] work on Thomas’s genre, [3] work on Thomas’s relationship to other literary forms and [4] to the ideological currents of the Roman Empire, and [5a] work on Thomas’s social history, the identity and characteristics of the people who composed and/or [5b] transmitted this text.”<sup>107</sup> To which I would only add that within the question of Thomas’s social history, the identity and characteristics of the people who transmit this text, we as scholars of religion must include our own acts of identification and categorizations.<sup>108</sup> Arnal’s suggestion expands the compositional conversation about Thomas. The idea of social history [5] encompasses dating-influences-theology of Skinner without the pitfalls of essentialism, because he dares to ask questions of transmission [5b] and general ideological currents [4]. Additionally,

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<sup>105</sup> Arnal, Book Review, *JAAR*, Vol. 80, No. 4, (Dec. 2012) 1115.

<sup>106</sup> Since Skinner’s publication in 2012, there have been three major commentary contributions to the Synoptic debate by biblical scholars, which argue for a ‘familiar’ influence rather than direct. See, Mark Goodacre, *Thomas and the Gospels: The Case for Thomas’s Familiarity with the Synoptics*, (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2012) and Simon Gathercole, *The Composition of the Gospel of Thomas: Original Language and Influences*, (Cambridge University Press, 2012) and *The Gospel of Thomas: Introduction and Commentary*, (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

<sup>107</sup> Arnal, (Dec. 2012): 1115-6.

<sup>108</sup> I originally wanted to organize this chapter around Touna’s valuable insights into scholarly culture. To show how when we overdetermine claims, we fabricate in unfortunate (and sometimes violent) ways that hinder future scholarly endeavors. A prime example is the way Skinner’s text is constructed. He spatially exhibits how modern scholars are still struggling with white thinking. Although there are certainly moments of boundary crossing, the boundaries remain intact, and it might benefit us to alter radically the spatial-discursive mapping of “religions” and philosophies in antiquity.

by inquiring into genre [2] and esoteric connections [1] Arnal has built a critical and overlapping network of inquiry. Arnal further pressures the issue of “origins” and singular interpretations by stating: “Indeed, although Skinner does not explicitly address the possibility, it strikes me as feasible to conclude that Thomas was sapiential, ‘Gnostic,’ ascetic, mystical, *and* Platonic, all at the same time.”<sup>109</sup> It is clear Arnal targets isolated categories and shares my proclivity for both/and thinking.

Scholars have already done an excellent job of tracing important conceptual affinities like “familiarity” with the Gospels, particularly between the Gospel of John and *Thomas*, usually through the lens of oral transmission, sometimes termed ‘secondary orality.’<sup>110</sup> Unfortunately, these claims usually foreclose other influential possibilities or overdetermine affinities. Following Arnal, I imagine scholars finding fruitful pastures in considering a conglomeration of oral and written continuums within *Thomas*, including Cynics, Platonists, and Stoics.<sup>111</sup> I am interested in investigating *Thomas*’ esoteric hermeneutics, genre, and literary relationships with other forms of communication circulating within the discursive socio-cultural and political atmosphere of the Roman Empire.<sup>112</sup> Skinner’s text reveals to me that scholarly imaginations have been stifled into boxes that do particular work for preserving modern, categorical identities of Christian theology and ‘new age’ Gnosticism, which both overly focus on what Arnal terms the “value” of *Thomas*.<sup>113</sup> Put simply, we as scholars should move from questions of (isolated, pure) ‘origin’ to questions of (diverse) transmission and reception.

### **Section 3.3) Social Conditions that Produce *Thomas*’**

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<sup>109</sup> Arnal (Dec. 2012): 1115.

<sup>110</sup> Mark Goodacre, *Thomas and the Gospels* (2012). ; Elaine Pagels, *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas*, (New York: Random House, 2003). ; Ed. Risto Uro, *Thomas at the Crossroads: Essays on the Gospel of Thomas*, (T&T Clark: 1998), particularly Ch. 1 “Thomas and the oral gospel tradition” by Risto Uro and Ch. 2 “*Thomas*’ I-sayings and the Gospel of John” by Ismo Dunderberg. ; Ismo Dunderberg, *The Beloved Disciple in Conflict?: Revisiting the Gospels of John and Thomas*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). ; K.R. Snodgrass, “The Gospel of Thomas: A Secondary Gospel,” *SecCent* 7.1 (1989-90): 19-38. ; Hoelmut Koester, ‘One Jesus and Four Primitive Gospels,’ in JM. Robinson and H. Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971). See Skinner (2012) chapter 2 for an extensive discussion and citation list.

<sup>111</sup> Arthur Dewey and Ron Cameron in *Redescribing Christian Origins* (2004) have briefly touched upon these potential themes. Unfortunately, this project overly focuses on historical Jesus and origins of Christian doctrine.

<sup>112</sup> My second chapter (hopefully) exemplifies this trajectory by noticing a discursive relation between Heraclitus and *Thomas*. The larger implications of this chapter to the atmosphere of the Roman Empire is still incomplete.

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<sup>113</sup> Arnal, (Dec. 2012): 1115-6.



I have chosen to title this section with a plural (*Thomas*'s) to indicate the continual process of re-writing and changing interpretations. Stories of *Thomas*' "origin" transport the text from its found locations in Nag Hammadi or Oxyrhynchus, Egypt north to Jerusalem, Syria, and Antioch. Scholars can determine that some version of the text traveled at least by ear in Antiquity to Rome and Gaul, as written by Ps. Hippolytus and Irenaeus. As Attridge has noted, Ps. Hippolytus' reference to *Thomas* contains some significant differences from the Egyptian *Thomas* texts, reading: "The one who seeks me will find me in children from seven years of age and onwards. For there, hiding in the fourteenth aeon, I am revealed."<sup>114</sup> Aeon's are absent in the Egyptian versions of *Thomas*, which comes as a slight surprise, since Aeon's are littered across the Nag Hammadi corpus. I am inclined to think this is a valuable piece of evidence from Ps. Hippolytus. This piece of text (whether a direct quote or paraphrase) gives evidence for a changeable *Thomas*. That is to say, I imagine *Thomas* was seen as a draft in antiquity – an openly redactable repository for guidance. This problematizes notions of a "Thomasine Community" that wrote all or even most of the text as a repository, particularly for direct social memory. Instead, I conceive of the document as circulating and transforming across the Mediterranean, taking up new forms of meaning in localized contexts, and continually adapting and changing the text's contents through these travels. Certainly, communities may have blossomed with the guidance of a *Thomas*, which makes questions of reception more fruitful than questions of origins.

How do we come to understand literary production and social contexts of *Thomas* if it is travelling so much? Furthermore, since we currently only have versions of the *Thomas* found in Egypt, how can we properly 'move' *Thomas* across the Mediterranean without an overdetermination of our conclusions? Moreover, what does it mean to understand the social context of Antiquity?<sup>115</sup> How we as scholars imagine the social situations will have crucial impacts on our analysis. Continuing my interest in multiplicity, the following sub-sections investigate different claims from historians that detail particular social worlds in Antiquity, in an attempt to open up several lines of inquiry for future studies.

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<sup>114</sup> Harold W. Attridge in Layton, Bentley, *Nag Hammadi Codex II*, 2-7, (1989): 103-104.

<sup>115</sup> In an interview with Christopher Skinner, Arnal poses the general question: "[what are the] social conditions of possibility for a text like *Thomas*?" In this way, scholars allow *Thomas* to open up the social world, rather than imposing social understandings upon the text. I think the most fertile ground is between these two methodologies. <https://cruxsolablog.com/2014/04/16/interview-with-william-arnal-on-the-gospel-of-thomas-part-two-skinner/>.

### **3.31) The “Age of Anxiety” Hypothesis and Nuanced Challenges**

In this section, I will briefly examine an academic tradition that posits oppressive, imperialistic tactics of the Roman Empire generated nihilistic, anti-world apocalyptic texts, attitudes, and actions. As noted in chapter two, Hans Jonas first noted this ‘radical reevaluation’ of thinking in the Hellenistic period. Smith documents the trend: “[...] led classicists such as Gilbert Murray to speak of a ‘failure of nerve,’ E. R. Dodds to describe the period as ‘an age of anxiety,’ [...]”<sup>116</sup> and most recently DeConick.<sup>117</sup> According to this “age of anxiety” hypothesis, the “Hellenistic man suffers from what might be termed cosmic paranoia. He experiences himself to be naked and helpless; he sees danger and threat everywhere.”<sup>118</sup> This view of the Roman Empire has drastic effects on the conclusions of our analysis. In seeing *Thomas* as a reaction to an oppressive situation, DeConick writes of her imagined Thomasine Community: “They were teaching about an end of the present social structure and the beginning of a new world” and “The End became the Now” to describe the social upheaval or eschatology strand in the text.<sup>119</sup> Somewhat similarly, in the 1990s, Arnal and Patterson utilize social memory theory to posit “[...] alienation and marginality mark the stance of this group [GTh] toward the social order” due to “exploitation of the countryside by the urban wealthy, an intensification of the market.”<sup>120</sup> However, while these hypothesis show merit for a particular Syrian context, how might this apply to the two locations in Egypt, where scholars found the three *Thomas* versions? More generally, how can conceptions of an imperialist or colonialist Roman Empire be more nuanced in particular places, times, and communities? It is important to understand when, where, how, and why different inclinations towards the Empire occurred. I find it probable that citizens and non-citizens of the Roman Empire from various classes, locations, and status positions held a medley of outlooks on their social-economic situation.<sup>121</sup> It seems obvious to note that some

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<sup>116</sup> J.Z. Smith, “Birth Upside down or Rightside up?” *History of Religions*, Vol. 9 No. 4, (May, 1970): 295.

<sup>117</sup> Particularly see, April DeConick, “The Countercultural Gnostic: Turning the World Upside Down and Inside Out,” *Gnosis* Vol. 1 No. 1 (2016): 7-35.

<sup>118</sup> Smith, “Birth Upside down,” (May, 1970): 295.

<sup>119</sup> Both from *Recovering the Original* (2006). The first reference is on page 145 and the second on page 155. Several authors, including Arnal (2005, 2013), Richard Valantasis (1997), corroborate this anti-world hypothesis. I tend to agree with this theory having dense discursive value (although not singular authority).

<sup>120</sup> Arnal, “The Rhetoric of Marginality,” (1995): 491.

<sup>121</sup> For helpful texts on the Roman Empire, see e.g J.E. Lendon, *Empire of Honour: the art of government in the Roman World*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) and John Rogan, *Roman Provincial Administration*, (Stroud, Amberley, 2011).

people who are rich and powerful can feel alienated, whilst sometimes more socially disenfranchised people feel positively about their situation.

All having different relationships with the Roman Empire that change over the first four centuries C.E., how does *Thomas* change if it appears in the general areas of Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Middle Egypt? How might a group of happy, rich, and urban benefactors in Upper Egypt interpret *Thomas* differently than alienated, relatively poor, and rural peoples of Edessa? Various scholars have posited both of these hypotheses. So, what might scholar's make of this apparently widely engaged text; perhaps, there is a type of universal quality to the message? I will address these questions more directly in sub-section 3.33. Noting these methodological issues, in the following sub-section, I will briefly comment on two areas of research for *Thomas* regarding social setting that I have not seen applied to the text.

### **3.32) Two Possible Trajectories: Absurdism and Postcoloniality**

The first direction is the notion of the absurd, most prominently found in the work of Albert Camus.<sup>122</sup> The absurdist lens swerves the debate about an oppressive empire causing people to rebel; Camus' absurd man insists that the world *inherently* causes alienation and suffering to humans, because humans wish to impose order on an innately chaotic world.<sup>123</sup> These two paradoxical truths together govern the absurd man's world, so to know, is to know that as a human any totalizing Truth claim or systematic order will be undone. This can happen at any moment, when just turning a corner.<sup>124</sup> As Classicist Jennifer Larson outlines in her recent book *Understanding Greek Religion*, the cognitive abilities of human beings in the first centuries C.E. are almost identical to our own in the modern period.<sup>125</sup> This is to say, human beings encountered the absurd in antiquity. No matter what someone believes about the Empire's benevolence or atrocities, the absurdity of life might still propel them into a rebellion against order.

The second direction stems from recent approaches to postcoloniality. In the past three decades, scholars have published a number of crucial texts that apply this methodology to studies

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<sup>122</sup> Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (Penguin Publishing House: 1942, 1955); *The Stranger* (1942); *The Fall* (1956).

<sup>123</sup> Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, (1942, 1955): 36-45.

<sup>124</sup> Camus *The Myth of Sisyphus*, (1942, 1955): 17.

<sup>125</sup> *Understanding Greek religion: A cognitive approach*, London and New York: Routledge, (2016), especially p. 5-15.

of antiquity.<sup>126</sup> One of the most valuable insights from this camp is that those who rhetorically claim they reject the world or wish to destroy the world are not necessarily ascetics or anti-social. Instead, the postcolonial lens opens up the analytical possibility for noticing how texts, individuals, and communities promote the death of the world in order to build and cultivate new social structures that are more caring and ecumenical. Already, biblical scholars have embraced the approach to the synoptic gospels and New Testament, but the turn has yet to be properly established for non-canonical texts. DeConick's notion of "counterculture" does not reach the analytical or embodied depths represented in postcolonial (or decolonial) studies.<sup>127</sup> Thus, I believe that by engaging with this literature new inferences for these documents will be fruitful.

In the following section, I will examine the notion of "freelance experts" in the Roman Empire outlined by Professor of Religions of the Greco-Roman World, Heidi Wendt. In the conclusion of *At the Temple Gates*, Wendt warns that ascribing texts to freelance experts is "methodologically dubious,"<sup>128</sup> however; my aim is to touch lightly this theory rather than ascribe it fully to *Thomas*.

### **3.33) The Freelance Expert: Orality and Bricolage in the Roman Empire**

*At the Temple Gates* provides depth and breadth to Smith's claim that people living in the Mediterranean during the first few centuries C.E. were interested in diverse, yet interconnected beliefs and practices.<sup>129</sup> Rich and poor, urban and rural would interact with self-authorized

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<sup>126</sup> I greatly appreciate the nuanced, careful approach to colonialism and imperialism by David J. Mattingly, *Imperialism, power, and identity: experiencing the Roman Empire*, Miriam S. Balmuth Lectures in Ancient History and Archaeology, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014). Also, see *Roman Imperialism: post-colonial perspectives*, Ed. Jane Webster and Nicholas J. Cooper, (School of Archeological Studies: University of Leicester, 1996). Martin Hose, "Post-Colonial Theory and Greek Literature in Rome," *GRBS* Vol. 40 (1999): 303-326. Michael Labahn and Outi Lehtipuu, *People Under Power: Early Jewish and Christian Responses to the Roman Empire*, Early Christianity and the Roman World, 1, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015).

<sup>127</sup> DeConick, "The Countercultural Gnostic," (2016): 14-17. DeConick primarily pulls from the work of Theodore Roszak (1968) *The Making of a Counter Culture*, which in my view is underwhelming and shallow in its analysis and critic of modernity, and holds too heavy of an individualistic (ego identity, revelatory) focus. Additionally, for those interested in commenting on theology in *Thomas* following the work of Liberation theologians like James Cone may provide a powerful understanding, particularly in direct responses to "alienation." Regarding engagement with the world Cone writes "Because the church knows that the world is where people are dehumanized, it can neither retreat from the world nor embrace it" in *A Black Theology of Liberation*, (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1975): 234. This middle ground may be a brilliant insight into *Thomas* and a move beyond the simple binary of rejecting or embracing the world.

<sup>128</sup> Heidi Wendt, *At the Temple Gates: The Religion of Freelance Experts in the Roman Empire*, Oxford University Press (2016): 219.

<sup>129</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, "Here, There, and Anywhere," in *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004): 323-39, particularly 330-32.

freelance experts who cultivated a bricolage of skills in divination, philosophy, astrology, rhetoric, medicine, jurisprudence, and religion, among other areas. Wendt notes that innovation and versatility amongst these traveling experts was crucial for their survival. Freelance experts, usually found in urban centers but would often travel through rural areas, would adapt their messages to particular local contexts and resemble improvisation performances.<sup>130</sup> “Given the dramatically changing territory and population demographics of the early Roman Empire, as well as the networks of trade and connectivity that enabled its administration, it is to be expected that a large number of freelance experts were foreigners—from either the Roman provinces or even farther afield—who capitalized on interest in wisdom, teachings, rites, and techniques perceived to be novel or exotic among certain audiences.”<sup>131</sup> In this way, freelance experts in antiquity seem more invested in ascertaining support for their own intelligence rather than preaching any specific doctrine of worship/belief.<sup>132</sup>

Arnal has hypothesized this connection by noting the nonlocalized and portable ideas within *Thomas*. According to Arnal, “It thus produces exegetes from readers and so creates a kind of commonality *without* community, united not by class or ethnicity or direct contacts or even distinctive beliefs, but by the shared practice, over distance and time, of continual interpretation and reinterpretation of the *Gospel of Thomas* itself.”<sup>133</sup> Where I diverge from Arnal is with relation to the *status* of this non-community, or universal group. Arnal claims, “Above all else, *Thomas* seems to represent an act of cultural imitation [...]” by a sub-elite group who is relatively new to the literary scene.<sup>134</sup> I disagree with this stance, seeing *Thomas* as a purposeful engagement with a diverse philosophical milieu that holds legitimate views, particularly with regard to anthropology. For example, DeConick has already imagined that *Thomas* “reflects adaptation to oral performances”<sup>135</sup> and holds “ideological struggles and

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<sup>130</sup> Arnal, “The Rhetoric of Marginality,” (1995): 489-90.

<sup>131</sup> Wendt, *At the Temple Gates* (2016): 12. Wendt cites “See e.g., Simon R.F. Price, “Religious Mobility in the Roman Empire,” *JRS* 102 (2012): 1–19; Greg Woolf, “Female Mobility in the Roman West,” in *Women and the Roman City in the Latin West*, ed. Emily Hemelrijk and Greg Woolf (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 351–68; Anna Collar, *Religious Networks in the Roman Empire: The Spread of New Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013)” in footnote 32.

<sup>132</sup> “The religious actors on whom I have trained my focus were “freelance” with respect to the nature of their authority and their peripheral relationship to existing institutions and groups. At the same time, they bore complex, even mutually beneficial, relationships with other forms of religious activity, blending seamlessly into the different social ecologies of the Roman world.” Wendt, *At the Temple Gates* (2016): 218.

<sup>133</sup> Arnal, “Blessed are the Solitary,” (2013): 280.

<sup>134</sup> Arnal, “How the Gospel of Thomas Works,” (2016): 279.

<sup>135</sup> DeConick, *Recovering the Original*, (2006): 239.

shifting constituencies,”<sup>136</sup> but her study must be integrated with a more comprehensive set of philosophical texts. Wendt reminds us, “It is unsurprising that many infused their religious programs with philosophical and other intellectual elements that were highly sought-after by Roman elites.”<sup>137</sup> *Thomas’* esoteric flair and its combination of so many literary themes may have made it a particularly enticing document to behold for rich benefactors.<sup>138</sup> Furthermore, the use of parables in the text is revealing of *Thomas’* particular relation to the social world. “What one observes in the case of the *Gos. Thom.* is a genre at once produced by the technology of writing and yet still faithful to oral interests and sensibilities. In the terminology of media studies, it constitutes an interface, bordering both on orality and textuality, and seeking a rapprochement with both worlds.”<sup>139</sup> Wendt observes a similar trend with the documents utilized by freelance experts: “This aspect of writings is important, inasmuch as they tend to be regarded foremost as *repositories of thought* with insufficient attention to their materiality and the range of social practices that were encoded in their production, reading, and interpretation.”<sup>140</sup> *Thomas’* parable structure and flexible discursive strands conceivably would enable freelance experts to adapt their teachings to local contexts (appeals) and thus convince audiences of their credibility and wisdom. This enables me to imagine *Thomas* traveling with freelance experts across the Roman Empire preaching a multitude of ideologies.<sup>141</sup> Inhabitants of antiquity were negotiating and maneuvering through a disperse array of meaning making activities and rarely allowed one

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<sup>136</sup> DeConick, *Recovering the Original*, (2006): 248.

<sup>137</sup> Wendt *At the Temple Gates*, (2016): 19. She cites “Ripat, Pauline. “Expelling Misconceptions: Astrologers at Rome.” CP 106 (2011): 114–54, 125.” in footnote 55.

<sup>138</sup> Several scholars have hypothesized a single private benefactor or a group of elites commissioned the Nag Hammadi texts. See Martin Krause and Pahor Labib, *Die drei Versionen des Apokryphon des Johannes im koptischen Museum zu Alt-Kairo* (1963); Armand Veilleux, *La liturgie dans le cénobitisme pachômien au quatrième siècle*, Pontificum Institutum S. Anselmi (1968). Nicole Denzel-Lewis “Rethinking the Rethinking of the Nag Hammadi Codices.” *BSR* 45 No. 2 (June, 2016) and Tony Burke “What Do We Talk About When We Talk About the Nag Hammadi Library?” *BSR* 45 No. 2 (June, 2016) are using the phrase “Private Collectors.”

<sup>139</sup> Werner Kelber: “In the Beginning: The Apotheosis and Narrative Displacement of the Logos,” *JAAR*, (Spring 1990): 79. Risto Uro also (2003) imagines these enigmatic parables as holding places for more extensive stories performed across the empire, see *Thomas: seeking the historical context of the Gospel of Thomas* (London: Clark, 2003).

<sup>140</sup> Wendt, (2016): 219, my emphasis. This moves scholars away from a direct social repository claimed by DeConick.

<sup>141</sup> This logic is locatable within *Thomas* by way of Logion 14.4, 31.2 and 42. Now this text as a repository of thought does not necessitate that I prove within the text a proscribing of this practice; however, it does appear to a degree. For example, GTh 31: “(1) Jesus says: ‘No prophet is accepted in his (own) village. A physician does not heal those who know him.’” The polyvalence marks interpretive possibilities of (1) in a traditional synoptic way that within the Jewish tradition prophets are not accepted, which gives credence to Jesus and (2) it points to a wandering (traveling) healer or in Wendt’s terminology: a freelance expert.

text or thinker to fully determine their position or social existence.<sup>142</sup> To wrap up this section, I find it plausible that *Thomas* circulated amongst freelance experts as part of their repertoire for divulging knowledge. This helps explain the eclectic ideological and thematic schools of thought that scholars have identified in *Thomas*, since this multiplicity aides freelance experts to innovate and negotiate several settings and human interests. The universalization of particular sets of knowledge's (such as Genesis, Platonisms, Hermeticism, etc.) helps explain the diverse readership/listenership across physical distance and socio-economic classes hypothesized by countless scholars. The final section will return *Thomas* to its locations in Egypt and unearth the potentialities of leaving it there.

### **Section 3.4) Egyptian Milieu: Forwarding Syncretism and Intertextuality**

[Scholars should read] “the texts exactly as we have them in the Nag Hammadi Codices in an effort to reconstruct the reading experience of whoever owned each of the codices.”<sup>143</sup>

Leading Coptologist Stephen Emmel has been advocating for years that scholars examine the Nag Hammadi texts together.<sup>144</sup> Rather than moving across the Roman Empire, this subsection will examine the only location where *Thomas* has been unearthed: Egypt. As evidenced throughout this text, my proclivity for multiplicity makes me skeptical of limiting any searches to one line of research, so in the second subsection, I will delve into recent research regarding general interpretive possibilities for the religious-philosophical milieu of Egypt. What may never be understood is how exactly *Thomas* traveled to Egypt, but what kept *Thomas* in Egypt – that is to say, what makes *Thomas* relevant in this cultural milieu – can and should be investigated. To start this exploration, a broader question is essential: what is the cultural or intellectual milieu of Egypt in the first few centuries C.E.?

#### **3.41) Determining a Generalizable Egyptian Milieu**

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<sup>142</sup> Arnal, “How the Gospel of Thomas Works,” (2016): 280.

<sup>143</sup> Stephen Emmel, “Religious Tradition, Textual Transmission, and the Nag Hammadi Codices,” in *The Nag Hammadi Library After Fifty Years* (ed. John D. Turner and Anne McGuire; NHMS 44 (Leiden: Brill, 1997): 42.

<sup>144</sup> This call has been echoed most recently by PhD candidate and history of ideas scholar Petru Moldovan in “*The Gospel of Thomas* within the Egyptian Milieu: An Artifact between Conventions and Promises” *ISBL* (Berlin, August 2017 Unpublished), 1-11.

Prominent Historians Bagnall and Frankfurter detailed the methodological difficulties in determining a socio-cultural milieu in Egypt, especially from lack of information from the first few centuries. Ancient Historian Roger Bagnall has dedicated several helpful texts describing the social world of Egypt in [Late] Antiquity.<sup>145</sup> Firstly, Bagnall's careful demographic charts reveal an exponential growth of Jesus followers from ~4,000 in 150 C.E. to 20,000 in 200 C.E., and booming to 116,000 in 250 C.E. (2% of population).<sup>146</sup> These sizable increases are most likely due to financial crises of the Roman Empire that caused a decrease in cult (public) activities, festivals, and ritual ceremonies during the third and fourth centuries C.E.. Secondly, the bloody revolt against Hadrian (132-135) devastated Jewish communities in Egypt. The outcomes of this revolt on community rites, beliefs, and texts is a key point of disagreement amongst scholars. Bagnall does not believe this sparked much change and it surprises him that there is a rise in Jewish names from the revolt until 337 C.E., while Church Historian Carl B. Smith II insists that this event had a strong affect, ultimately infusing Judaism with the rising following of Jesus.<sup>147</sup> However, the lack of textual evidence from this period limits a clear path forward.<sup>148</sup> Lastly, for the purposes of illuminating the socio-economic situation, Bagnall comments on the practices of clergy and monastic communities in Late Antiquity. He shows that desert groups and individuals, in particular, the Cenobite Pachomian monastic communities, were heterogeneous concerning ideological and reading practices/interests. These groups were open to uneducated and undisciplined members and had "extensive links to 'worldly society'" through trade, preaching, and maintaining family relations.<sup>149</sup> This works against the ideal vision propagated by many of the texts from monasteries and ascetics [and modern scholars], which claim to be anti-world and anti-blood family. Bagnall provides a crucial reminder that texts often present an ideal not followed in reality. For example, despite rhetorical fighting between some "Christian" monastics, like the vitriolic language from Athanasius denouncing Arianism in the fourth

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<sup>145</sup> Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (1993) and *Early Christian Books in Egypt* (2009).

<sup>146</sup> Roger Bagnall, *Early Christian Books in Egypt* (2009): 20.

<sup>147</sup> Smith II, *No Longer Jews: The Search for Gnostic Origins* (2004). Particularly see Ch. 2 and 3 (44-112) and end of book (232-245).

<sup>148</sup> Even more difficult, for *Thomas* to arrive in Oxyrhynchus and Nag Hammadi it plausibly had to travel through Alexandria, a city with a very complex history containing a growing Roman citizenry, discontented Greek elites, and the world's largest, generally well treated Jewish community in the first two centuries. How might disparate people from this conglomeration have received *Thomas*?

<sup>149</sup> Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (1993): 301-2. Bagnall also references the work of Janet Timbie "The State of Research on the Career of Shenoute of Atripe" in Pearson and Goehring, *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity* (1986): 258-270.



century, Bagnall notes monastic cohesion between “orthodox” and “Melitian” Christians in the 6<sup>th</sup> century who were sharing cells.<sup>150</sup>

In terms of practice stemming from or circulating in the group(s) that had them, there is little evidence from textual sources and even less from archeological materials. According to calendars, Christian authorities did not take over cult festivals until the fifth century. Particularly perplexing is the lack of known non-monastic worship spaces. Bagnall notes it is likely that wealthy individuals would have hired clergy for private ceremonies like Eucharist and baptism, but most likely, there was a heavy emphasis on oral preaching.<sup>151</sup> This reinforces Wendt’s idea of freelance experts. Additionally, scholar of ancient Mediterranean religions David Frankfurter’s work has shown the fluid “syncretism” and promotes that “[...] in the vaguest formulation, Christianity amounted to a system of authority and a repository of symbols and stories, variously combined and recombined with local traditions according to the goals, crafts, and everyday circumstances of specific types of people.”<sup>152</sup> In this formulation, magic like amulet charms, practices of baptism, and cultic rites are interconnected, not isolated from each other.<sup>153</sup> Overall, both Bagnall and Frankfurter are critical reminders that Jesus worshiping individuals and groups were tremendously diverse, contentious, and friendly in Egypt and across the Roman Empire. Both push scholars to move away from “origins” and “authentic” Christianity to an analysis emphasizing local freedom of readings and practices.<sup>154</sup> Unfortunately, the lack of archeological evidence continues to stymie scholarly inquiry into specifics of these beliefs and practices.

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<sup>150</sup> Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (1993): 303-309.

<sup>151</sup> Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (1993): 287. He notes that Palladius claims the Eucharist is a defense against magic. I see this as evidence for the overlap of magic and ‘religion’ by freelancers who were battling in the same current for followers and financing. It also seems plausible to me that priests of cults who were losing funding may have reacted like freelance experts and began to dip into the pool of Jesus follower becoming Bishops and clergy members in addition to their cult leadership (although Bagnall does not speak on this possibility).

<sup>152</sup> Frankfurter, *Christianizing Egypt: Syncretism and Local Worlds in Late Antiquity*, (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, December 2017): 257. Also, see Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

<sup>153</sup> Grenfell and Hunt’s oxyrhynchus findings uncovered magic amulets containing Christianized elements, most notably, figures on a cross, supplemented by a text of Matthew. This adds evidence that within the religious ecology of Egypt it becomes possible to imagine a saying from Thomas to appear on a magic amulet for healing or protection purposes. This amulet is archived at Muhlenberg College: Vol. VIII Oxy. 1077, dating: 550 Amulet: magic text, quotes Matthew 4:23–24. Thank you to Dr. William “Chip” Gruen for granting access to the Amulet amongst other documents for a course in Spring, 2016.

<sup>154</sup> Bagnall, *Early Christian Books in Egypt* (2009): 3-10. Also, see Frankfurter (2017).

### **3.42) The Egyptian Milieu of Nag Hammadi: Intertextuality**

In trying to operate methodological studies based on the syncretism and complexity proposed by Bagnall and Frankfurter, it seems that the best move forward is embracing intertextual approaches with a centering focus on the texts within the Nag Hammadi corpus.<sup>155</sup> I have not had the time to review all of the Nag Hammadi materials in depth to build an extensive web of discursive strands; however, I will quickly point out a few lines of future inquiry. Firstly, noticing and analyzing themes (repetitions and strands) within and across the Nag Hammadi codices is a necessary task.<sup>156</sup> I present five possible strand directions here. (1) Fire, positive or negative connotations and commentary on the universe, such as *Dia. Savior* (NHC III,5 107.39-48). (2) Mountains, as a place of revelation and/or the Devil/Evil, such as *Ap. Paul* (NHC V,2). (3) Robbers, as commentary on socio-economic-cultural situations and theology, such as *Exeg. Soul* (NHC II,6 127,29-31). (4) Contemplative/Heavenly Ascents, as telling cosmological stories in relation to anthropology, such as *Ap. James* (NHC I,2). (5) A Primordial Adam-Son-Diety, as commentary and soteriological possibilities, such as *Zostrianos* (NHC VIII,1). Comparing and contrasting the linguistic and thematic repetitions within the codices as a whole, and perhaps each codex separately, is scholars best opportunity to reveal the social, psychological, and cultural interests of the Egyptian Milieu.<sup>157</sup> Ultimately, these scholarly routes are questions about literary production and literary connections. Roig Lanzillotta has begun this process with a series of articles on anthropological schemes in the codices.<sup>158</sup> Pulling from the five forms of transtextuality of Gerard Genette (1977), Roig Lanzillotta informs audiences of the potent power of intertextuality. “The intertextual approach to the Nag Hammadi Corpus is especially interesting because the comparison of hypotext and hypertext can help us reconstruct the worldview of the latter with a view to understanding, firstly, the process by which old texts transform and recreate themselves, and thereby continue to create meaning for their readers and,

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<sup>155</sup> For more discussion on methodological approaches, see King, *What is Gnosticism* (2003): 239-248.

<sup>156</sup> For a discussion of repetitions and strands, see David Rossenwasser and Jill Stephen, *Writing Analytically and Readings*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, (Cengage Learning: 2014).

<sup>157</sup> Lundhaug and Jenott, *The Monastic Origins* (2015): 253.

<sup>158</sup> “Spirit, Soul, and Body in Nag Hammadi Literature: Distinguishing Anthropological Schemes in Valentinian, Sethian, Hermetic and Thomasine Texts,” *Gnosis: Journal of Gnostic Studies* 2 (2017): 15-39.

secondly, the shifting values in the minds of their readers.”<sup>159</sup> These fruitful methodologies can be applied to the five textual themes I have outlined above.<sup>160</sup>

Secondly, scholars could more extensively examine *Thomas* as a companion to the *Ap. James* (NHC I,2). James Robinson and William Arnal have briefly commented on this connection: “The responses in logion 50 are strongly paralleled in the (first) Apocalypse of James where they are used as passwords by James to defeat the archons (the "tollcollectors" who rob "the soul") on his ascent to heaven (see logia 32, 28-34, 20). In the Gospel of Thomas's lack of specification of the identity of "they" who are posing the questions, and in its preceding these instructions with a saying about "returning" to the Kingdom, one can see that this parallelism is no coincidence.”<sup>161</sup> I briefly add that Jesus' non-divider claim happens in logion 72, which is strangely the same number of heavens in *Ap. James*, and logion 12 tells readers to go to James. In my view, linking these studies with previous comparisons between *Thomas* and *Ap. John* (NHC II,1) by Valantasis (1997), Marjanen (2003), and Popkes (2007) will be productive for the excavation of deeper anthropological and cosmological schemes in all of these texts.

Thirdly, scholars will find profitable pastures in examining bipartite and tripartite anthropological themes within *Thomas* and further examining them with other Nag Hammadi texts (intertextual). This is another task launched by Roig Lanzillotta in his series for *Gnosis*.<sup>162</sup> This thesis has focused its energy on bipartite possibilities, particularly following the pre-Socratic ideal of becoming like God; however, there are more nuanced distinctions to examine in *Thomas*. The incongruous usage of spirit and soul throughout the text hint at possible tripartite claims (GTh 29, 56, 80, 87, 112). Additional to unearthing possible Aristotelian or Platonic twists of thought, when considering Platonic influence, the particular type of Platonism (monism, dualism, ambiguous) must be assembled. I have followed my proclivity for ethical community to contend that *Thomas* suggests leading the good life requires not only a cultivation of the rational mind, but also the utilization of one's body to better the world. This claim, however, can and should be challenged in later writings to build a more complex view of the theologies within the text (and between the text and audiences). Lastly, these anthropological schemes may be

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<sup>159</sup> “*Gospel of Thomas Logion 7 Unravelling*,” (2013): 132. Also, see p. 117-18 where he writes that these changes can be analyzed as “due to radical and deep changes in the axiological framework.”

<sup>160</sup> For more on intertextual possibilities, see Appendix K.

<sup>161</sup> *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* [rev. ed.; ed. James M. Robinson; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988] 265-66) cited in Arnal, “The Rhetoric of Marginality,” (1995): 478, footnote 18.

<sup>162</sup> “Spirit, Soul and Body in Nag Hammadi Literature,” (2017): 15-39.

illuminated by comparing *Thomas* with Hermeticism and Jewish visionary, heavenly ascent motifs. DeConick has already begun this study noting that Hermeticism “appears frequently in Egyptian hagiographic literature, where it serves to distinguish ascetic heroes. In the *Life of Onnophius*, for example [...]”<sup>163</sup> Moldovan has examined the lack of consensus amongst scholars concerning possible connections between *Thomas* and *Corpus Hermeticum*.<sup>164</sup> Furthermore, Bagnall imagines a likely overlap between Jesus worshipers and Hermeticism, particularly within upper class circles.<sup>165</sup> Certainly, a holistic study is in order.

Unfortunately, for this study, I have not had the opportunity to delve into Lundhaug and Jenott’s latest work, *The Nag Hammadi Codices and Late Antique Egypt* (2018), but based on the table of contents they have begun to excavate some of the directions posed here.<sup>166</sup> However, I think it is imperative for scholars not to overdetermine a monastic setting for the Nag Hammadi texts, but also consider a wider Egyptian Milieu that consisted of voluntary associations, freelance experts, philosophical schools, and individual benefactors.<sup>167</sup>

### **Section 3.5) Concluding Remarks: Next Steps**

This chapter arranges a series of possible milieus to be attentive to a plurality of readings for *Thomas*. My goal here is to encourage future studies on *Thomas* to embrace interdisciplinary approaches and work with scholars across the aisle. By working with scholars outside our expertise group, future discussions of *Thomas* might blossom into the fluid world of discourses in [Late] antiquity, so many of which *Thomas* seems to be engaged with. By continuing the trend of crossing assumed identities and ideological boundaries, scholars will develop better, more comprehensive and dynamic interpretations of social practices throughout the Roman Empire,

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<sup>163</sup> Lundhaug and Jenott, *The Monastic Origins* (2015): 260. Also see April DeConick, *Seek to See Him* (1996) and *Recovering the Original* (2006), particularly p. 224-236.

<sup>164</sup> Moldovan notes how Patterson DeConick, Hendrick, Uro, Dunderberg, Copenhagen, and Quisbel have all come up with various connections between the texts with occasional overlaps; however, none of them builds upon each other, nor do they provide reasons for why they do not accept certain connections that previous scholars have outlined (p. 7). A comprehensive consensus with this line of comparison is still available for future scholars.

<sup>165</sup> Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (1993): 276.

<sup>166</sup> I hope that they address questions posed on 256 of *The Monastic Origins* (2015): “Why would the Pachomians, or any other Egyptian monks, have read such books as the Nag Hammadi Codices? How would these texts, which have usually been labeled ‘unorthodox’ and ‘gnostic,’ have appealed to monastic [or non-monastic] readers in late antique Egypt?”

<sup>167</sup> As Bagnall reminds us: “[...] a text or even a whole library of texts, does not make a sect or community.” *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (1993): 304.

and Egypt more specifically with the Nag Hammadi codices at the center of analysis. Diving into themes of freelance experts, absurdity, and postcolonial studies may be fruitful ways forward to grasp the complexities of the Nag Hammadi codices and *Thomas* in particular.

However, I must admit to my own inability to live up to the standards promoted in this chapter. Rather than linking discursive strands of fire in Nag Hammadi texts or the larger socio-cultural world of Egypt, I singled out the fragments of Heraclitus modelling a petri dish style of analysis I frown up in this chapter. Furthermore, despite my interest in (middle) Platonic, Neoplatonic, Jewish wisdom and apocalyptic literature, I worry I do not have the expertise to comment properly on the ways these writings may be converging within *Thomas*. I have shied away from this huge task, but I do hope to interrogate this direction interrogate in the future. Many of the directions I have proposed are theoretical models that seem very exciting, but are often much more difficult to implement than their authors imply. I encountered this gap when trying to directly apply Karen King's "Notes on Methodology" into my research on *Thomas*. I hope that by highlighting the minefield of methodological issues in this chapter that scholars can move forward with fewer difficulties.

## Reflections

Throughout this thesis writing and research process, I outlined countless theological possibilities within *Thomas*, discursive connections between *Thomas* and several texts from antiquity, and found fascinating links between studies interpreting the text. This thesis reflects just a few instances of thought. My aim was to continually forward a both/and approach. I worked to be attentive to both the details of *Thomas* in-itself and attend to social connections.

In the first chapter, I outlined anthropological and theological schemas by solely focusing on *Thomas*' repetitions. I located two opposing strands, Light-Living and Death-Darkness within *Thomas*. In order to grasp this disjuncture, I went to comical incongruity theory as a way of playing with the text. This resulted in a proposition that *Thomas* is a philosophical trickster that embraces multiplicity and rejects totalitarian theologies through laughter. This hypothesis opens up the text to a divergent theologies based on individual reader and community expressions, re-readings, and particular settings.

In the second chapter, I further excavated anthropological and theological themes in *Thomas* by utilizing intertextual approaches to link *Thomas* with the fragments of Heraclitus. The brilliant production of chiasmus by Heraclitus sheds new light on the "whole and not wholes, convergent divergent, consonant dissonant, from all things one and from one thing all" that appears in *Thomas*.<sup>168</sup> This mix of both the social atmosphere and the text itself helped me posit that *Thomas* has a theological strand of monism that promotes an ethical perspective of maximizing the rational capacities and bettering the (social) world. In *Thomas*, audiences can train to fuse with god - *homoiosis theo*. Through this chapter, I was able to explore some of the themes presented by Arnal in his book review of and interview with Skinner: explicit esoteric character, genre, and the wider intellectual context of the document in novel ways.

Then, in chapter three, I focused on possible social interpretive directions and milieus for future research on *Thomas* that I myself was not able to complete for this project. First, I highlighted the pigeonhole issue in our field through Skinner's three "major" questions and worked with Arnal's book review to pave new lines of inquiry. The goal being to convince researches to move away from origin stories. Then, I outlined various social distinctions that affect theology: rich/poor, urban/rural, and types of philosophical influences. In noting this

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<sup>168</sup> From footnote 88, see Miller, *Becoming God* (2011): 36.

complexity, the chapter aims to compel nuanced and overlapping theological possibilities in and around *Thomas* based on setting (time and place) and textual companions. The crux of the argument being there cannot be a single, *sui generis*, theology in *Thomas*. Certainly, with the deficiency of archeological evidence around the found *Thomas*' scholars are frustrated with where to move in terms of articulating these possible trajectories, because there are no real individuals or communities where we can assign the text. However, by being explicit about our backgrounds, proclivities, and methodological questions, I believe that scholars can write nuanced, humble conclusions/reflections upon their own engagements with *Thomas* that do not continue the contemporary battles over authenticating one particular theology.

The section on freelance experts espousing “universal” communities and ideas is one way of coming to terms with the traveling of *Thomas* and the particular difficulties in interpreting a direct “origin” of the text. This move towards reception history and transmission seems more honest and fruitful. Additionally, focusing concretely on the Egyptian Milieu seems to house the most intriguing possibilities for future research. The Nag Hammadi texts can help scholars re-evaluate the philosophical and “religious” milieu of the first few centuries C.E. where there has been a previous lack of texts. Part of this task is embracing various types of intertextuality (transtextuality) to excavate anthropological, cosmological, and soteriological schemes in the codices. Additionally, as scholars navigate the Nag Hammadi texts in more depth outward connections to the Egyptian milieu such as Jewish mysticism and wisdom along with Hermeticism will become clearer. Lastly, as I noted in footnotes 61 and 148, the complex socio-political dynamics of the city of Alexandria (and the writings of Clement) pose acute concerns regarding *Thomas* and the practices of freelance experts.

The first is the last, so I will end where I began: with myself. This project has tried and tested my research skills and interpretive imagination. Rather than plugging into usual considerations on *Thomas*, I attempted to think outside normal, white boxes of canonical influence and origin. I pushed myself to be reflective about why specific interpretations resonated with me, and I crossed scholarly boundaries. This thesis initially began with the aim of writing a symposium: interweaving various commentaries of secondary scholars (allowing them to speak together and around each other) as a vast web of ideological networks within GTh. Swimming through the sea of literature, I became increasingly concerned with the categorical impulses of scholars. I am wary of my tendency for polemic writing, so I stirred away from

direct critiques of scholarship as much as possible in favor of positivistic writing to share ideas. Quilting interpretations together also proved difficult, so I abandoned that project and turned to milieus instead. This satisfied my interests in history and historiography, and created the third chapter. I envision a future where readings of *Thomas* are always-already splicing heterogeneous influences. These analytical rehearsals will aid scholars in reflecting upon and considering the interwoven discursive threads in their own worlds.

In my opinion, the world's we inhabit are saturated with an assemblage of violent apparatuses, undergirded and sustained by antiblackness. White, western scholars have been operating within a colonial, patriarchal culture that has exacted racialized categories onto material bodies and affected ways of being in the world. Furthermore, this knowledge has been hidden and obscured by those same academies. It is our ethical imperative as people within the academy to break out of isolated-hierarchical categories, disciplines, contours of public/private, and coercive rhetorical strategies.

It is 2018. (Neo)-Fascism is on the rise across the borders that gently housed my white body as I wrote this thesis. Most humans have not encountered the same compassion and luxuries as I have when traveling to the U.S. and Europe. As silly as it may seem at first, the ways we as scholars ask questions and manufacture categories often reflects and affects the ways our governments and politicians make demands and manufacture borders. Christian/Jew, Secular/Religious, Philosophical/Hermetic, Male/Female, White/Black. These inherently fluid identities have been combatively consolidated and naturalized. My scholarly both/and posture is just one way I live my life to battle totalitarianism in the body; another, is incongruous laughter. I believe there are strands within *Thomas* that also embrace incongruity to teach us how to perceive and contest with these evils. This is certainly true for the trickster philosopher Heraclitus. The fragments and *Thomas*' enigmatic aphorisms train our perceptions to embrace the incongruous joys of vibrant life and passionately go to war against tyranny. Now is the time for those of us who claim to value "critical thinking" to use the tools at our disposal in order to ask, reflect, and act upon how, why, and for what purposes do we read, write, and breathe?

Thank you for joining this hermeneutical journey with me.



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## Appendices

Each appendix in this series operates as a lengthy supplement to particular issues raised in the thesis. In these, I will address questions of translation, authority, the demiurge, and additional pieces to section 1.4, incongruous play in *Thomas*. I hope that these side journeys will inspire future studies and illuminate the breadth and depth of the research and analytical thinking that went into this project. Appendices A and B touch upon two crucial, ambiguous phrases found in the first two logion of *Thomas* that could have substantial effects on interpretive possibilities. Appendix C brings to light some key questions about the Demiurgical Myth, which was dismissed by consensus from several scholars. Appendices D-H point towards various incongruities and interpretive possibilities that there was not space in the thesis to explore. Thus, these paths are not completely cleared or completed. Appendix I details authoritative issues that explicitly differentiate Heraclitus' writings from *Thomas*. Appendix J outlines April DeConick's prominent work in the field and how we can all slip into overdetermination. Appendix K offers an interpretation of *Thomas* logia to emphasize the helpful nature of the intertextual approach.

### Appendix A) Translation questions of “the Living Jesus”

The two discursive strands of Living-Light and Death-Darkness have a crucial ambiguity with their relationship to the “the Living Jesus.” The consensus on this translation by contemporary scholars posits “the Living Jesus” to be an active participant in the world, still, through his words. That these words come alive in the textual form. However, the Coptic phrase translated to “Living” in English by Lambdin, Patterson, Meyer, Robinson, and Layton is a relative clause that *could* mean either ‘who lives’ or ‘who lived.’ Now, try to imagine a *Gospel according to Thomas* version in which “Living” is always “Lived.” The discursive constellations of my study are immediately throw into chaos, and a new order emerges. Now, there is Jesus who has died; he is still important in his physical death. No longer is my initial premise of ‘Living’ important. This changed translation of the relative clause is extra-ordinary and unlikely, but its linguistic possibility might be more telling than most scholars would be willing to admit. I would like to thank Dr. Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta's Coptic grammar course, and the classes led by his assistant, Arjan Sterken, which allowed me to participate in enriching discussions about *Thomas*' grammatical ambiguities. Both insightful translations discussed here came up during the course by curious undergraduates.



### **Appendix B) Playing with the Audience: Seeking or Stumbling?**

In these readings of ambiguity and incongruity, it seems the primary (and perhaps only) fundamental objective of *Thomas* is to subvert audience expectation. Yet, the opening three sayings have a highly esoteric quality that shapes any reader's attention. The first saying encourages readers to find an interpretation. The second saying (repeated in saying 111.3) introduces the foundational element of 'seeking.' At first glance, I took seeking to mean active practices by readers to find the proper view of the text. Yet, the Coptic word usually translated as 'Seeking' is passive verb that literally translates to "whoever falls upon it." The common scholarly assumption for Logion 2 is a theme of sapiential and/or mystical knowledge, and therefore encourages active participation with the divine; however, the term is grammatically unclear. Coptic readers face another translation conundrum. The Jesus figure often speaks of toil as an important element, which I have interpreted as a form of ethical progress, but what if the text is speaking of epiphanies or revelations as passively 'falling into' knowledge. Even without the linguistic ambiguity, the theme of accidentally falling into knowledge rather than obtaining it through practiced skill appears in logia 76, 97, and 109. In saying 76, a merchant *randomly* finds a pearl among his goods and (wisely) chooses to keep it. In saying 97, a woman's basket handle *inadvertently* breaks and she finds an empty jar (symbolizing the Kingdom). In saying 109, a man *randomly* finds a treasure in his fields when ploughing. None of these characters has any intent in finding the Kingdom. It is purely by chance that they find themselves intoxicated by their truth. This textual ambiguity may be purposefully directing readers to encounter and accept both the active and passive interpretation. One example of this in the ancient world is the Platonic rational training (seeking) to receive revelation (falling upon) as demonstrated in Plato's *Phaedo*. From a puzzle solving perspective, this translation and textual incongruity forces readers to investigate further their own beliefs regarding seeking, finding, mystical, and revelation. From a comedic perspective, readers can take delight in these continual twists from rhetorical toil to revelation. In doing so, they are (ironically) both rhetorically toiling and having revelations about the text and their own lives.

### **Appendix C) Briefly Revisiting the Demiurgical Myth**

During the process of my explorations with *Thomas*, I toyed with various proposed definitions of "demiurgical myth" and "Gnostic" as categories for the text. Most prominently, at

the SBL meeting in 2017, I attempted to humor the prevailing demiurgical myth category as proposed by Michael Williams [1996]. Williams claims that *Thomas* does not fall into the framework he proposes: “I use the term ‘demiurgical myth’ to mean simply a myth in which a distinction is made between the highest God or ultimate principle and the entity or entities to whom are ascribed the initiative and responsibility for the fashioning of the material cosmos.”<sup>169</sup> I find William’s portrait of the category helpful and he shows that it appears in various traditions and texts. I hypothesized “Light” and “Death” were antagonistic discourses that battled throughout the *Thomas*, particularly focusing on the strand of Death-Darkness to be an implicit Demiurge. Identifying two further strands of (1) violent rhetoric in logia 10, 16, 35, 40, 57, 68, 69, 71, 76, 98 and; (2) protective rhetoric in logia 21, 25, 32, 48, 103 compelled a reading of the need to “root out” a demiurgical being and protect oneself from the anonymous enemy that might rob one (of a soul?). The lack of an explicit demiurgical figure or a massive cosmological battle diminishes the chances audiences in antiquity would have qualified the text into larger demiurgical discourses. However, I do not think we as scholars should rule out the (perhaps small) possibility that an audience with an orientation towards demiurgical myths in antiquity might have also seen some of these connections, particularly in a reading group with explicit demiurgical texts such as the *Apocryphon of John* and *Hypostasis of the Archons*.

#### **Appendix D) Logion 11: The Heaven’s Will Pass Away**

**GTh 11.1)** “Jesus says: ‘This heaven will pass away and the (heaven) above it will pass away.’”

Perhaps the first (below) heaven that Jesus speaks of is the present cosmology of the world... but what of this second Heaven? Why just two and why do they both pass away? Does passing away symbolize a total end or a slight change? In my proclivity for the unity-as-multiplicity strand, I see this claim of two heavens passing (one above and one below) to represent the continual change in the universe. Each cosmological organization (heaven) will happen eventually.

#### **Appendix E) Horses, Bows, Sheep, and Fish**

The one, solitary sheep that strays from the flock is found by the toiling shepherd. In my view, there are four intriguing pieces to the 107th logion: (A) 99 sheep, (B) a toiling shepherd,

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<sup>169</sup> Michael A. Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism*, (1996): 265.

(C) a single, large sheep, and (D) a Kingdom, presumably, of God. There are double representations here. This shepherd picks the one sheep does so because they have toiled. They have worked hard or begun to cultivate how to notice. On the register of unity, the shepherd – signifying the reader – has been able to notice the importance of “One.” However, there is a particular qualification of this sheep that caught my interest. This single sheep, much like the fish of saying 8, is “large.” These single ones were chosen specifically based on this trait of largeness, not picked randomly. They are distinguished from the “small” fish, while the flock is not given any defining adjective. These small fish are let go alive and these fish, along with the 99 sheep, are all part of the story of the Kingdom. That is to say, these small fish and 99 sheep are also still valued. The small fish are thrown back because they have more training, growing to do. The large sheep and large fish are interpreted here as being prime or ready. The toiling shepherd symbolizes an ability to notice properly, but also the sheep has been growing, or loosely put, toiling.

The kingdom could mean the story as a whole, which would leave out the 99 sheep and small fish from the kingdom. Such a reading would certainly make a reader who feels they have mastered or trained well with these sayings that they are part of a secret in-group. Neophyte readers might take hope in such a saying: that as they grow with time they too will become both the large sheep and the intelligent shepherd.<sup>170</sup>

### **Appendix F) Fasting and Praying**

What of the bridal chamber in saying 104? In this moment, responding to an unknown group of people, Jesus wonders if he has to fast and pray. He states that only sinning would cause him to fast/pray. Sinning in this case is analogized with a bride leaving the bridal chambers -- making the one into two. Fasting and praying is for those who have sinned -- made the two into one. Jesus may not be mocking fasting and praying as practices, but rather states that he himself, in this exact moment of the logion, does not require such rituals. However, I propose that this narrative could be a hermeneutic key for readers to respond to the question posed by Jesus in saying 11, “On the day when you were one you became two. But when you become two, what will you do?” The reader responses: Fast and pray!<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Perhaps, as a novice in academia, I am inclined to gravitate towards such a positivistic reading from the 99(%).

<sup>171</sup> Now, I have encountered the issue of direct practice. This is merely speculation, and there has not been nearly enough evidence to prove this case.

At this juncture, there are two other readings I would also like to entertain. Fasting and praying always appear together, and do so twice more in the text: sayings 6 and 14. It seems with these two practices appearing three times together, there is a slight chance *Thomas* is responding to a particular community that strongly values both of these activities. In saying 6, it is Jesus' disciples who inquire about fasting and praying (along with alms and dieting), and he swerves the question by announcing an imperative not to lie or do what one hates. The reader does not receive a direct answer... until saying 14, when, without the prompting of a question, Jesus explicitly condemns fasting as "bring[ing] forth sin" and claims that the act of praying causes self-condemnation. Recall that in saying 104, Jesus does not reiterate the 14th saying, but asks a rhetorical question if he has sinned or been overcome. A reciprocal question to the 14th saying might look like "(104.2) Jesus said: 'Does it look like I want to sin or become overcome today?'" What I take away from this exercise is that *Thomas* has a more complex figuring of ritual activities than simply dismissing fasting and prayer all together.

#### **Appendix G) The Well**

74) He said: "Lord, there are many around the well, but nothing is in the <well>."

Many around an empty well could mean that they are getting from a poor source: they are not being watered (cultivated) properly. In a different way, we could imagine this to mean many people are ready for Jesus' message of emptiness, but they are in want of something from that well when they in fact need only the nothing.<sup>172</sup>

#### **Appendix H) Intricate Incongruities: Mild Yokes and Other Odd Phrases**

90 (1) Jesus says: "Come to me, for my yoke is gentle and my lordship is mild. (2) And you will find rest for yourselves.

Considering the singular or double references of particular words and phrases in *Thomas* may help scholars consider the historical, discursive atmosphere of the 1st-4th centuries. Put differently, I wonder if words like yoke, gentle, and lordship are utilized by the text as discursive plays to include readership with reference to particular contemporaneous terms (purposefully connecting outside of itself). Maybe these moments subvert typical statements in which these terms can be found, which would make the reader laugh. I am not currently up to this task. These

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<sup>172</sup> Of course, depending on how one interprets the notion of emptiness in the text.

odd terms and phrases that pop up in the text, especially the latter half, seem to me like purposeful incongruities. The audience is not expecting to see the term ‘lordship’ after the first 60 sayings and then it appears twice (75 and 90) and the notion of ‘yoke’ ‘mild’ and ‘gentle’ do not appear elsewhere.

### **Appendix I Issues of Authority between *Thomas* and Heraclitus**

Quite different than Heraclitus, Jesus presents himself as having mastered knowledge and is able to transmit it as well. Heraclitus does not see himself as a master, nor does not wish to transmit knowledge. The only truth he knows is that everything is in flux. He offers only impassioned riddles to help readers cultivate their perceptions. As previously mentioned, the *Gospel of Thomas* does not reference a singular conception of the Word as an authority. Instead, in the first saying, the authority is openly attributed to “the hidden words that the living Jesus spoke.” Throughout the text Jesus proclaims the power of God and the Kingdom. Yet he is still the direct speaker and authority. Furthermore, Thomas may have written them down and he is given some authoritative recognition in the 13th saying when Jesus speaks three (hidden) special words to him, but it is clear that Jesus is in command and has mastery of the topic. Going even further, in sayings 38, 59, and 92(2), Jesus by pressuring the disciples to seek whilst he is with them (and implying there is a time in which he will no longer be there), hints he is the only one with knowledge. Juxtapose this powerful authority of Jesus with the importance of “interpretation” (GTh 1) of these sayings. This, in theory, requires active participation by the reader. Or it may be an appeal to another (master) in the community. The focus on “know thyself” lends itself as active participation. Once again, readers face an incongruity, this time it surround the authority (inside or outside of themselves?). This is directly contrary to Heraclitus’ rhetorical tactic of diminishing any one figure and giving the power of *logos* to all. Heraclitus actively tells readers that they can understand and that this capacity will express itself by developing throughout the course of life. Unlike GTh’s hidden language about an interpretive key that must be found, Heraclitus shows readers that a movement of “unity-in-opposites” will come in the following text. So as mysterious as Heraclitus tends to be, he is not constantly secretive. There is an endless seeking. GTh presents Jesus as the central authority figure (particularly the notion of the hidden words), the minimal implications being that GTh wishes to persuade those within the discursive Jesus community. Heraclitus is speaking more generally to people, while GTh sticks itself in a particular milieu. Future studies must investigate, so what

that Jesus is the authority of *the Gospel of Thomas*? Why choose this particular figure to characterize the bringer of knowledge/Light? Why not Mani or Simon Magus?<sup>173</sup>

### **Appendix J** DeConick and Issues with Origin Stories

One example of these issues is the writing of leading *Thomas* researcher April DeConick. Her first major monograph *Seek to See Him* (1996) explored *Thomas* through a lens of Jewish mysticism. DeConick wrestled with and identified a discursive strand that reveals a distinctly possible community wherein practitioners aimed at merging with an all-encompassing Deity of Light through complex meditative, mystical, and visionary ascent. In her next *Thomas* commentary, *Recovering the Original Gospel of Thomas* (2006), DeConick sought to end all debates about *Thomas* by utilizing social memory theories to imagine a Thomasine community that shifted theological views from changing social circumstances. DeConick details a fascinating list of accruing layers from 30-50 C.E. until the final sayings were added around 120 C.E. This hypothesis works out contradictions and kinks in the text and provides answers to all of Skinner's key questions: independence from the synoptic gospels, origins in Palestine with a movement to Syria, a changing theology from apocalyptic to mystical, language changes from western to eastern Aramaic, and the dating depends upon accruing layers from 30-120 C.E.. DeConick's hypothesis encompasses all 114 of the sayings by way of communal value changes. DeConick is certain she has stumbled upon the "interpretation of these sayings." In 2016, DeConick confidently writes "The Syrian Christians who wrote the Gospel of Thomas..." and of "Thomasine mysticism" as if these were clear-cut, objective truths about the text.<sup>174</sup> She does not cite her own work, nor does she point to disagreements in the field. It is as though an archeological finding from Syria unearthed a community practicing mysticism centering the *Gospel of Thomas*. She transformed her hypothesis from its liquid form (in flux, uncertain) into a solid, stable, and identifiable community without question.

I point to DeConick not because she is the only scholar who overdetermines claims about *Thomas*, but because of my appreciation for her insights into Jewish affinities within the text.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Further questions on the matter of Jesus' strange authoritative stance in the text; see, Arnal, "How the Gospel of Thomas Works," (2016): 278.

<sup>174</sup> April DeConick, Chapter 7, "Early Christian Mysticism," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Western Mysticism and Esotericism*, Ed. Glenn Alexander Magee, (Cambridge University Press, 2016): 75.

<sup>175</sup> In this way, I am influenced by James Baldwin's harsh criticisms of Richard Wright that stem from his love and appreciate for Wright; however, I do hope to be less harsh.

In pointing out her ‘failure’ to sit with uncertainty, I aim to open up a conversation about the nature of our theoretical questions and subsequent linguistic formations of our conclusions. While it is important to be confident in our claims, we should not overdetermine them.

## **Appendix K Thomas the Discursive Borrower and Lender**

### **Saying 109**

(1) Jesus says: “The kingdom is like a man who has a hidden treasure in his field, [of which] he knows nothing. (2) And [when] he died, he left it to his [son]. The son did not know (about it either). He took over that field (and) sold [it]. (3) And the one who had bought it came, and while he was ploughing [he found] the treasure. He began to lend money at interest to whom he wished.”

The compiler of GTh is seems to have been a person with the ability to work through many traditions; he transforms them and shares outwards. The literal fields in the saying, to me, symbolize the various discursive fields of knowledge in (late) antiquity. In each field, there is treasure to find that was once hidden-- understood by digging within the ground. *Thomas* is ploughing many fields in order to create this repertoire of sayings. There have been several generations of field owners, which may be referring to the several generations of different interpretations of Greek philosophical traditions such as Platonisms, various Judaic groups, and/or different local cults and deities (“pagans”). In a similar fashion to the man who randomly takes over the field, the various discourses that went into (re)making and sustaining *Thomas* are random, strange encounters with discursive traditions. Some may have known in depth the writings of Aristotle and Paul; others may have only been reading Epicurus and engaging in mystery cult activities; whilst others might have been monks with dozens of documents, some known and some unknown to us moderns. GTh (and the jumbled treasures within), I argue, made valuable usage of the field(s) it was born into. Ploughing through texts both discursive and non-discursive in the surrounding atmosphere, GTh began to lend (back) money -- wisdom -- to the community. This time there is “interest.” The wisdom looks slightly different from the money initially given to the bank. The reader has to put a bit more time and effort into the sayings -- they have to be a bit more interested.<sup>176</sup> They are invested, which is to say they are partaking in

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<sup>176</sup> To be fair to my reading of “both/and,” I must take into account how #95 undermines this reading (and logia #109 more generally). In logia #95 Jesus implores readers to “money, do not lend (it) out at interest.” Instead, it should be given out without any expectation of receiving it back. There are not “interested” investors here, but rather gifts. Perhaps, (still), we have a wandering document handed out, at random, to the people.

the treasure that is the Kingdom. It is my contention that these ideas of lending and borrowing have an ethical component and encourage readers to improve themselves, their community, and their reading activities. This reading forwards the intertextual approach.