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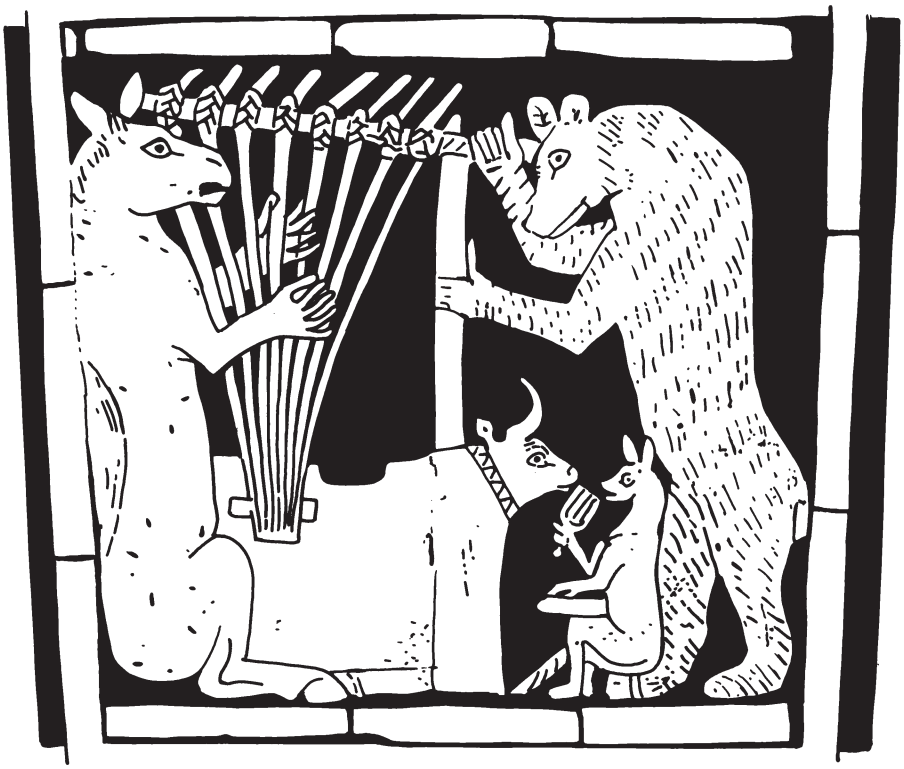
STRINGS AND THREADS

A Celebration of the Work of
Anne Draffkorn Kilmer



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"Wordplay" in the Song of Erra

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Introduction

The literary elites of the 1st millennium B.C.E. appear to have held the song of Erra in very high regard. According to Luigi Cagni, whose fundatmental studies of the song provide a starting point for any study, the text had few peers in antiquity.

> With respect to content, size, and state of preservation, the poem of Erra is the most noteworthy work of Mesopotamian literature in the Akkadian language, after *Atraḫasīs*, *Gilgameš*, *Enūma eliš*, and the *Descent of Ištar to the Nether World*. That the poem enjoyed a similar fame in the Ancient Near East is proven by the fact that it was diffused in unaltered editions, and with perhaps extraordinary rapidity, in the Mesopotamian cities of Nineveh (the library of Assurbanipal), Assur, Babylon, Ur, etc. and was known even in Sultantepe, near ancient Harrān. Not even *Gilgameš* had such circulations, as far as we know, in the 1st millennium B.C.E.[1]

Nevertheless, despite the importance of the song, the text has received surprisingly little scholarly attention after the initial publications by Cagni.[2] Aside from a few surveys and translations, its interesting literary features have been the focus of only a handful of works.[3] It is rather surprising that no comprehensive literary study of Erra has appeared. While I cannot give the topic exhaustive attention here, I offer instead a comprehensive treatment of one literary feature in the song of Erra—that of "wordplay."[4] I do so in honor of my dear friend and colleague, Anne Kilmer,

1. Cagni 1977: 4.

2. Cagni 1969; 1970; 1977. These works represented considerable advances from the earlier treatments of Ebeling 1925 and Gössmann 1956.

3. Surveys and translations: Labat et al. 1970: 114–37; Bottéro 1977–78: 107–64; Bottéro and Kramer 1989: 680–727; Dalley 1989; McCall 1990: 60–62; Müller 1994: 781–801; Foster 1995: 132–63; 2005: 880–911; 2007: 65–67. Literary features: Most notably Machinist 1983: 221–26; Bodi 1991. The latter work is a revised and expanded version of Bodi 1987. It also was built on previous article-length contributions on the subject by R. Frankena, J.-G. Heintz, M. Anbar, and B. Maarsingh, which are all cited in Bodi 1991: 14 and nn. 12–15. See also Bodi 1993: 1–23. There is, of course, also Hirsch 2002, but this book primarily treats the song's verbal system.

4. The term "wordplay" is highly problematic and can be applied to ancient Near Eastern texts only for its heuristic value (hence my quotation marks). There is little that is playful about punning in ancient Near Eastern texts, and it is debatable whether the "word" constitutes the most basic element of the device, especially in nonconsonantal writing systems. For a detailed discussion of the problem of terminology, see Noegel 2007b; Noegel and Szpakowska 2006: 193–212.

whose seminal works on the subject of "wordplay" in Akkadian texts and many thought-provoking conversations have long inspired my thoughts on the subject.[5]

ABOUT THE TEXT

The song was composed or redacted on five tablets by Kabti-ilāni-Marduk, a scholar known to us from the famous catalogue of texts and authors found in the library of Assurbanipal.[6] The date of the song is debated, but generally it is understood to have been composed sometime during the 9th to the 8th centuries B.C.E.[7] The text has been classified with some inconsistency as either "myth" or "epic," neither of which has gained a great deal of acceptance.[8] Others have pointed out that some of the text's features connect it more closely to "wisdom literature."[9] For the purpose of this contribution, which shall focus primarily on the text's acoustic qualities, I find it most helpful to refer to the tablets, as I have done already, by its *emic* designation as a "song" (*zamāru* in tablet V 49 and 59) or as an "incantation."[10]

Since Assyriologists are generally familiar with the song's contents, I am content to paraphrase them briefly as follows. The song details the destructive exploits of Erra, a warrior god of famine, who aims to annihilate humankind and disturb the cosmic order. After Marduk temporarily allows Erra to occupy his throne, Erra causes such massive destruction that it causes Marduk to lament and compels Ishum, Erra's own herald, to curb Erra's lust for violence. Convinced by Ishum's pleading, Erra returns to his own throne, and violence is averted. Also featured in the song are the Sibitti, seven evil demons who do Erra's bidding, and the god Anum, who is referenced ten times in the song in contexts that place him primarily in the background. Other deities also appear in the song, but they are mentioned parenthetically.[11] With regard to the song's overall meaning, B. Foster opines: "The denunciations of violence are so eloquent and lengthy that this poem can scarcely be read as anything but a condemnation of civil strife as a violation of the cosmic order."[12]

In a fascinating twist, the song closes by informing us that the text contains prophylactic powers and that its author received the entire text in a divine dream, which he rendered faithfully upon awakening. Thus, the incantation claims to be a divine revelation, which connects it to the tablets on which it is inscribed. The tablets do not merely talk *about* the revelation; they *are* the

5. See, for example, Kilmer 1982: 128–32; 1996: 127–39; 2000: 89–101; 2006: 209–19.

6. The text employs the words *kāṣir kammīšu*, which have been understood both as "author," for example, by Bodi 1991: 56 nn. 24–25, and as "compiler," for example, by Van der Toorn 2007: 41–42. On Kabti-ilāni-Marduk, see Lambert 1962: 59–77. On the historical reliability and questions of textual authority implicit in the attribution of the song of Erra to Kabti-ilāni-Marduk, see Van der Toorn 2007: 42–44. Bodi 1991 52–54 nn. 1–13 provides a useful bibliography on the history of publication regarding the various tablets and fragments of the Erra song.

7. See the survey of hypotheses in Bodi 1991: 54–56.

8. On the application of these terms to Erra see Cagni 1977: 5–14 and Bodi 1991: 59–62. On the term "epic" in Mesopotamian literature generally, see Noegel 2004: 233–45.

9. Cagni 1977: 13. See also the comments of Machinist 1981: 403.

10. Machinist (1983: 226) fittingly refers to the song of Erra as an "incantation." Several copies of the fifth tablet of the "song" in amuletic form have been found. Apparently, they were hung upside down to ward off famine. See King 1896: 52–62; Reiner 1960: 148–55. An image of one such amulet appears conveniently in McCall 1990: 61. I also note that Mesopotamian incantations often conclude by stating that they derive not from the human stylus, but from the mouths of gods. So, too, does this text make that claim (V 42–45).

11. For example, Adad, Dagan, Ea, and Enlil.

12. Foster 2007: 67.

revelation. Thus, the incantation serves as a *mise en abyme* for the physical tablets and participates in the self-referential nature of the text.[13] Since ancient Near Eastern incantations and dream texts often employ allusive language and punning, it thus seems wholly appropriate to study the song of Erra for evidence of "wordplay."[14]

Organization of Study

I divide my treatment of the topic of into the following sections: I. Alliteration and Assonance, II. Punning, III. Geminate Parallels and Clusters, IV. Allusive Imagery, V. Numerical Devices, and VI. Ambiguous Subjects. Afterward, I offer a few words in conclusion about these devices in the song of Erra. Before providing the evidence, some remarks about each category are in order.

Under *Alliteration and Assonance*, I collect cases in which the author repeats the same consonantal sounds (alliteration) or vowels (assonance) in proximity. Though we do not fully understand Akkadian vowel length or quality, a few passages nevertheless demonstrate rather obvious cases of assonance. Often times, alliteration and assonance lend a passage greater coherence and/or serve to link different words and concepts.

The section on *Punning* focuses on devices of meaning and sound—that is, cases where one word resounds another or can be read as another (polysemy). In some cases, this also involves polygraphy—that is, signs that permit the multiple readings of words. When punning involves the resounding of one word in another, it necessarily also constitutes alliteration. Nevertheless, since punning involves entire words and not just consonants, and since it also is a device that deals with meaning, I treat them here separately.

In the third section, I examine *Geminate Parallels and Clusters*, which I have described elsewhere as follows:

> My use of the word "geminate" is not restricted to the grammatical geminate forms, that is those forms derived from roots whose second and third radicals are identical, but includes any verb or noun derived from roots that contain any two identical root consonants, whether second and third, first and third, or even more rarely first and second. Since reduplicated and some quadraliteral forms also constitute gemination of this sort I include them as well. The device has as its primary characteristic the clustering of geminate forms in close proximity, often, but not strictly, in parallelism. I say "not strictly," because the main aim of the device appears to have been a general sense of ballast, and unlike word-pairs which are employed as parallels of sense or meaning, geminate clusters belong generally to the realm of sound devices, and serve to balance one stich's use of gemination with gemination in another.[15]

In the fourth section, on *Allusive Imagery*, I illustrate how Akkadian *literati* sometimes exploited the aspects or associations of various gods by employing lexemes that evoke or allude to their natures. For example, as I have discussed elsewhere, the author of Enūma Eliš often uses words that evoke water when referring to Tiamat and words that suggest fire when focused on

13. On the self-referential nature of some Akkadian texts, with special reference to Gilgamesh, see Foster 1991: 17–32; 1997: 63–78; Noegel 2007b: 73–74. The self-referential aspect of Akkadian texts should be examined in conjunction with a similar feature found in Mesopotamian art, which has been referred to as "circular referentiality" by Bahrani (2003) and "object self-portraits" by Cheng (2007: 437–47).

14. On the relationship between incantations, dream texts, and punning, see Noegel 2007b, Greaves 1994: 165–67, and recently Ford 2008: 585–95. On the poetics of incantations, see Veldhuis 1990: 27–44; 1991; 1998: 35–48.

15. Noegel 2005: 2.

Marduk.[16] This tradition continues in our song with regard to Erra and Ishum, whose very names mean "scorched earth" and "fire," respectively.[17]

The fifth section, on *Numerical Devices*, focuses on the sophisticated ways that the author of Erra exploits numerical values and associations. This section builds on a growing body of work on numerical punning found elsewhere in ancient Near Eastern texts.[18]

In the sixth and final discussion, on *Ambiguous Subjects*, I turn my attention to three cases in which the poet makes reference to a god without citing him by name. Each of these occurs at a critical juncture in the story, and each serves similarly to overlap the identities of the gods in question. As I argue, the reasons for this ambiguity are as much religious as they are literary.

I. Alliteration and Assonance

I 7

i-ta-mi a-na kakkē-šú lit-pa-ta i-mat mu-u-ti

He (Erra) says to his weapons "Smear yourselves with deadly venom!"

This line illustrates alliteration of the /m/ and /t/ phonemes. Note how the alliteration connects Erra's ritually performative pronouncement (*i-ta-mi*) with the deadly venom (*i-mat mu-u-ti*), and how the /t/ sound is further reinforced with the word *lit-pa-ta*.

I 23–24

la šá-na-an šu-un-na-ta i-lu-su-un i-lit-ta-šú-nu a-ḫat-ma

"Their nature is quite different, their origin is strange."

This brief reference to the Sibitti alliterates the /l/ (3×), /n/ (5×), and /š/ (3×) phonemes. Further, the sibilant /s/ in *i-lu-su-un* alliterates with /š/.

I 42–43

"And your heart is driven to cause annihilation, the dark-headed (people) to kill (*šu-mut-ti*), to slaughter (*šum-qu-tu*) the herds of Shakkan)."

I have reflected the chiasm in my translation in order to illustrate that the words *šu-mut-ti* and *šum-qu-tu* are immediately adjacent on the tablet, thus strengthening the alliteration of the sounds /š/ and /t/.

I 49

ki-i la a-lik ṣe-ri ni-ik-ka-la a-kal šin-niš

"Like those who do not stride into the battlefield, must we eat women's bread"?

16. Noegel 1995: 82–87. In *Enūma Eliš* VI 55–56, we are told: "When Marduk (^{d}AMAR.UTU) heard this, like the day (UD-*mu*) his features shone (*im-me-ru*) brightly. The statement constitutes a pun on Marduk's name, for the logogram UTU is also read as UD (= *ūmu*). *Enūma Eliš* VI 127 also refers to Marduk as *ma-ru* ^{d}UTU-*ši* 'son of the Sun', and Marduk later receives the name ^{d}MIN-^{d}*nam-ru* 'Light' (VI 155–56). For ancient commentaries that similarly link gods to elements, see Livingstone 1986: 74–76.

17. Roberts 1971: 13. Machinist states (1983: 223–24, but see also 224 n. 16): "The effect of all this is to emphasize the intertwined nature of their personalities—something apparent even from the etymologies of their names—or more precisely, it is to show the importance of Išum in defining the range of Erra's behavior."

18. On numerical devices and punning in ancient Near Eastern texts, see Hurowitz 1998: 44–46; 2008b: 104–20; Kilmer 2006; Noegel 2007c: 26–27.

The alliteration of /k/ and /l/ in this passage connects the words 'like' (*ki-i*), 'not' (*la*), 'stride' (*a-lik*), 'eat' (*ni-ik-ka-la*), and 'bread' (*a-kal*).

I 136

> "Lo! The government (*ši-piṭ*) of heaven and earth dissolved (*up-ta-ṭi-ru*). Springs became few (*im-ta-ṭi-ma*), the overflow receded. Again did I gaze (*a-tur a-mur-ma*). One could hardly sate oneself (*im-tar-ṣa*)."

The alliteration in this line occurs with repeated /t/ and /m/ phonemes. This is enhanced by assonance between the first two syllables of *im-ta-ṭi-ma* and *im-tar-ṣa* and the second two syllables of *up-ta-ṭi-ru* and *im-ta-ṭi-ma*. Note also how the phoneme /ṭ/ appears in the words *ši-piṭ* and *im-ta-ṭi-ma*, and how the /p/ an /ṭ/ sounds connect *ši-piṭ* and *up-ta-ṭi-ru*. A similar alliteration joins *ši-piṭ* and *up-ta-aṭ-ṭir* in I 133.

I 151

> *iṣ-ṣu el-lu eṭ-lu ṣi-i-ru*
> "That pure tree, the august youngster. . ."

This remarkably brief and rhythmic phrase contains alliteration of the /ṣ/ and /l/ phonemes, as well as assonance of the /i, e/, and /u/.

I 156

> *na-áš pa-áš šá-aš-ši*
> "Who carries the golden axe?"

This short phrase again offers a strong case of alliteration (of /š/) and assonance (of /a/).

I 170

> "I shall rise from my seat and the government (*ši-piṭ*) [of heaven and earth] will be dissolved (*up-ta-aṭ-ṭar*)."

This line repeats the alliteration of the phonemes /p/ and /ṭ/ as discussed above in I 136.

I 171–73

> [*mê*] *il-lu-nim-ma* [*i-maš-šá*]-ʾ*u* [*m*]*a-a-tu*
> [u_4-*m*]*u nam-ru a-na da-u*[*m-m*]*a-ti* [*i-ta-ar*]
> [*me-ḫ*]*u-ú i-te-eb-ba-a*[*m-m*]*a kakkabāniš šá-m*[*a-mi ikattam*]
> The waters will swell and devastate the country.
> The shining day will turn into deep darkness.
> The storm will rise and blot out the sky.

These three lines emphasize the /m/ sound (11×), perhaps to echo the sound and name of *mê* 'water'. Additional alliteration occurs between *da-um-mat-ti* and *ma-a-tu* and between *i-te-eb-ba-a*[*m m*]*a* and *kakkabāniš*.

I 181

> "Until you enter (*ter-ru-bu-ma*) that house, prince (*rubû*) Marduk, and Girra purifies (*ub-ba-bu-ma*) your garment, and you return to your place. . ."

Alliteration of the bilabials /b/ and /m/ and assonance of the /a/ and /u/ appears in *ter-ru-bu-ma*, *rubû*, and *ub-ba-bu-ma*.

I 186

"I shall brandish (*uš-za-za*) my fierce (*ez-zu-ti*) weapons over them."

This brief line illustrates alliteration of the /z/ and connects the brandishing of the weapons with their fierceness.

II C 8–10

He entered ([*i-ru*]*m-ma*) Emeslam, occupied (*ir-ta-mi*) his seat.
He ponders within himself (*ra-ma-nu-uš*) that work.
His heart rages (*ra-um-ma*), gives him no answer.

These three verses demonstrate alliteration of the /r/ and /m/ phonemes, which is reinforced by the assonance of the /a/ and /u/.

II C 13

"The day is nearing its end (*iq-ta-tu-ú*), the appointed time is done (*i-te-ti-iq*)."

The alliteration of the /q/ and /t/ in this verse places emphasis on the finality of the pronouncement by linking the 'end' (*iq-ta-tu-ú*) with the act of completion (*i-te-ti-iq*).

II C 14

I say "I shall quench (*ú-šam-qa-ta*) the rays of Shamash (^{d}*šamši*)."

This verse continues the alliteration of the /q/ and /t/ in the previous verse while also connecting the act of quenching to the sun god by way of the sound /šam/.

II C 31

"I shall not let Shakkan's herds nor the wild animals (*nam-maš-šá-a*) go (*ú-maš-šá-ra*) to. . ."

This line alliterates the /m/ and /š/. In fact, the words for "wild animals" and "go" repeat the sound sequence /maš-ša/ in quick succession.

II C 33

"A son will not care (*i-šá-al*) for his father's health (*šu-*[*ul*]*-mu*), (nor) a father for his son's."

Though not apparent in the English translation, the Akkadian text underscores the alliteration of the /l/ and /š/ in this verse by placing the words *i-šá-al* and *šu-*[*ul*]*-mu* side by side.

II C 35–43

"I shall get into (*ú-še-rab*) the abode (*šu-bat*) of the gods, there where the evil man has no access.
At the abode (*šu-bat*) of princes (*ru-bé-e*), I shall let the rogue (*is-ḫab-ba*) dwell (*ú-še-šá-ab*).
The beasts (*ú-ma-am*) [*nam-si-ka* . . .] I shall let in (*ú-še-er-rab*).
The city in which they appear (*in-nam-ma-ru*), I will deprive (*ú-za-am-ma*) of (everyone) who enters (*e-ri-ba*).
I shall send all the beasts (*ú-ma-am*) of the mountain down.
They will devastate the places where (*e-ma*) they set foot.
The beasts (*ú-ma-am*) of the steppe will not [. . .] I shall let run about in the squares of the city.
Omens I shall make bad (*ú-lam-man-ma*). The centers of worship I shall la waste (*ú-nam-me*).
Into the abode (*šu-bat*) of the gods [. . .] I shall make (the demon) Saghulḫaza enter (*ú-še-rab*)."

Two sets of extensive alliteration mark this pericope. The first set echoes the phonemes /r/, /b/, and /š/ in the words *ú-še-rab* (3×), *šu-bat* (3×), *ru-bé-e*, *is-ḫab-ba*, *ú-še-šá-ab*, and *e-ri-ba*. The second set employs the sounds /m/ and /n/ in the words *ú-ma-am* (2×), *nam-si-ka*,[19] *in-nam-ma-ru*, *ú-za-am-ma*, *ú-lam-man-ma*, and *ú-nam-me*.

II C 44

ekal š[*arri*] [. . .] *ú-šal-la-ka kar-mu-ta*

"I shall make a ruin of the king's palace."

The four words in this fragmentary verse offer a concatenation of the sounds /k/, /š/, /l/, and /r/.

III A 11–12

"I shall cause them to speak ill and they will forget their god (*at-ma-ši-na ú-lam-ma-na-ma i-maš-šá-a ìl-ši-in*).
(And) speak gross blasphemy (*šil-la-tu*) to the goddess."

The alliteration in these lines exploits the phonemes /l/, /m/, /n/, and /š/.

III A 24

"In vain will the sick man be craving (*ir-riš-ma*) after some roast meat (*ši-i-ri*) for his voluntary offering (*bi-bil lìb-bi-šú*)."

Two sets of alliteration characterize this verse. The first contains the /r/ and /š/, and the second /b/ and /l/. Note also that the words *ir-riš-ma* and *ši-i-ri* are virtually palindromes of each other (minus /ma/), as are also *bi-bil* and *lìb-bi-šu* (minus /š/).[20]

III D 5–7

tam-tam-ma dal-ḫa-ta šad-de-ma gam-ra-ta
nišī-ma re-da-ta bu-lam-ma re-ʾa-a-ta
é-šar-*ra-ma ḫa-nu-uk-ka* é-engur-*ra-ma qa-tuk-ka*
The oceans you convulse, the mountains you finish off.
Men you govern, the herds, you shepherd.
Esharrama is before your face, Engurrama is in your hands.

In addition to offering textbook examples of alliteration, especially of the phonemes /m/ and /t/, these verses also illustrate remarkable assonance. Note how every word ends in /a/, with every other word (starting with the first) in the entire passage ending in /ma/, every other word (starting with the second) in the first two lines ending in /ata/, and every other word in the final line ending with /ukka/. The passage is in essence a rhyme. In addition, this verse illustrates a skillful use of idioms involving body parts, in this case of "face" and "hands," a device known elsewhere in ancient Semitic literature.[21]

III D 12

"Enlil gives you his favor. Without you, is there hostility (*ul-la-nu-uk-ka-ma nu-kúr-tu*)?"

19. It is unclear what is meant by the word *nam-si-ka*, for which another recension has a variant *na-si-ka*, perhaps meaning 'sheik, tribal leader'.

20. A similar pun between 'crave' (*erēšu*) and 'meat' (*šīru*) appears in *The Poor Man of Nippur*. See Noegel 1996a: 177–78.

21. See Noegel 2011.

This line equates Erra, who is addressed here, with enmity by alliterating the /n/ and /k/, thus echoing the sounds for the words 'without you' (*ul-la-nu-uk-ka-ma*) in the word 'hostility' (*nu-kúr-tu*).

IV 6–7

> "The sons of Babylon, who like reeds in a reed thicket, had no overseer, all of them (*nap-ḫar-šú-nu*) thronged (*ip-taḫ-ru*) around you.
> He who knows nothing of weapons, his sword (*pa-tar-šú*) is unsheathed."

The poet here alliterates the sounds /ḫ/, /p/, /r/, and /t/. Each of the words highlighted in this verse contains three of the four phonemes, and one of them (*ip-taḫ-ru*) contains all four.

IV 23–24

> "The heart of the governor (*šak-ka-nak-ki*), the avenger of Babylon, was kindled with fury.
> As if they were to loot (*šá-la-li*) the loot of the enemy (*šal-lat na-ki-ri*), he gives orders to his army."

The phonemes /k/, /l/, and /š/ here provide the alliteration between the words *šak-ka-nak-ki*, *šá-la-li*, and *šal-lat na-ki-ri*.

IV 29

> "Neither suckling (*e-niq ši-zib*) nor child, spare (*te-ez-zi-ba*) nobody!"

The alliteration of the sounds /b/, /z/, and /š/ in this verse allow the word *ši-zib* 'milk' to anticipates the sounds in the word *te-ez-zi-ba* 'spare'.

IV 40–42

> "Ah, Babylon (*Bābili*), whose top I had made as luxuriant as a palm tree, but the wind has dried (*ub-bi-lu-šú*)!
> Ah, Babylon (*Bābili*) that I had replenished with seed like a pinecone, but whose fullness (*la-lu-šú*) I could not sate myself (*lā áš-bu-ú*).
> Ah, Babylon (*Bābili*) that I had tended like a thriving orchard, but whose fruit (*inib-šú*) I could not taste (*lā a-ku-la*)."

The alliteration of the /b/ and /l/ in the words *la-lu-šú*, *lā áš-bu-u*, *inib-šu*, and *lā a-ku-la* reinforces the same sounds in the thrice-mentioned name Babylon.

IV 49

> "In the expanse of the broad sea—water for a hundred double hours (*bēru*)—may they propel (*li-bi-ku*) the boat of the fisherman (*bā'iri*) with the pole (*pa-ri-su*)!"

This verse contains alliteration of the bilabials /b/ and /p/, which appear in each of the four highlighted words, three of which also are followed by /r/.

IV 58–59

> "Who, to delight Ishtar's heart, give themselves to forbidden actions (*i-tak-ka-lu a-*[*sak-ka*]).
> An arrogant, pitiless governor (*šakkanakku*) you placed (*taš-k*[*un*]) over them."

The poet has taken advantage of the /k/ and /š/ sounds in the word *šakkanakku* already (see IV 23–24). Here again we see a similar alliteration that exploits the proximity to *i-tak-ka-lu* and *taš-k*[*un*], and also the /k/ and sibilant /s/ in *a-*[*sak-ka*].

IV 68

> "Like foam (*ḫu-bu-uš*) on the surface of the water, you silenced their noise (*ḫu-bur-ši-na*)."

The alliteration of the /b/, /ḫ/, and /š/ and the assonance of the /u/ in the words *ḫu-bu-uš* and *ḫu-bur-ši-na* is obvious and serves to connect the "noise" with the "foam" to which it is likened.[22]

IV 78–80

"Him (*šá*) whom the enemy has not plundered, the thief (*šar-ra-qu*) will kill.
Him (*šá*) whom the thief (*šar-ra-qu*) has not killed, the king's weapon will hit (*kakki šarri i-kaš-šad-su*).
Him (*šá*) whom the king's weapon has not hit (*kakki šarri lā ik-tal-du*), the prince will strike down."

Here we find alliteration of the phonemes /k/, /q/, /r/, and /š/ in the repeated relative pronoun *ša* (3×) and the words *šar-ra-qu* (2×), *kakki* (2×), *šarri* (2×), and *kašādu* (2×).

IV 97–100

"The son I shall deliver unto death and his father will need to bury him (*i-qa-ab-bir-šu*).
After that I shall deliver his father unto death and he will have no burier (*qé-bi-ra*).
He who built (*i-pu-šú*) a house and exclaimed (*i-qab-bi*) '(This is) my dwelling.
I built it (*e-te-pu-uš-ma*) myself, I shall rest (*a-pa-áš-šá-ḫa*) in it (*qer-bu-uš-šu*).' "

The alliteration of the /b/, /r/, and /q/ in the *i-qa-ab-bir-šu*, *qé-bi-ra*, and *qer-bu-uš-šu* is enhanced by the /b/ and /q/ in *i-qab-bi* as well as the bilabial /p/ in *i-pu-šu*, *e-te-pu-uš-ma*, and *a-pa-áš-šá-ḫa*. The latter words also alliterate the /š/, which also appears in *i-qa-ab-bir-šu* and *qer-bu-uš-šu*.

IV 108

"The *enu*-priest who hastened (*mu-šaḫ-miṭ*) to bring the offerings to the gods, you killed (*tuš-ta-mit*)."

The phonemes /m/, /š/, and /ṭ/ in the word *mu-šaḫ-miṭ* are especially resonant, because this line is one of eight in succession that concludes with the word *tuš-ta-mit* (IV 104–11).

IV 118

"I want to wrench the mooring-pole, so that the ship (*eleppu*) drifts away (*lit-te-eq-lep-pa-a*)."

Alliteration of the /l/ and /p/ in *eleppa* and *lit-te-eq-lep-pa-a* is abetted by assonance of the /a/ and /e/.

IV 120–22

"I want to root out (*lu-uš-ḫu-uṭ-ma*) the mast (*tim-ma*), I want to tear out (*lu-us-su-ḫa*) its rigging.
I want breasts (*tu-la-a*) to dry up (*lu-šá-bil-ma*) so that babies will not survive (*ul i-bal-luṭ*).
I want to silt up (*lu-uḫ-ṭim-ma*) springs so that the little canals will no longer carry (*ul ub-ba-la*) the water of abundance."

This passage demonstrates a sustained alliteration of the phonemes /b/, /ḫ/, /l/, /m/, /š/ and /ṭ/. Note, for example, how the sounds /ḫ/, /l/, /m/, and /ṭ/ connect *lu-uš-ḫu-uṭ-ma* and *lu-uḫ-ṭim-ma*. The /m/ and /ṭ/ further reverberate as /m/ and /t/ in the word *tim-ma*. The /ḫ/, /l/, and sibilant /s/ in the word *lu-us-su-ḫa* also provide linguistic refrain for the /ḫ,/ /l/, and sibilant /š/ in *lu-uš-ḫu-uṭ-ma* in the same line. In the Akkadian, the word *lu-us-su-ḫa* follows immediately after *lu-uš-ḫu-uṭ-ma*. Similarly, alliteration obtains in the words *tu-la-a*, *lu-šá-bil-ma*, *ul i-bal-luṭ*, and *ul ub-ba-la*, each of

22. On the ironic use of "noise" in this song, see Machinist 1983: 224.

which contains /l/ and two of which contain /b/. The alliteration is enhanced also by way of assonance, especially of /u/.

IV 123–25

"I want to make the Irkalla quake (*lu-un-niš-ma*). May the heavens (*šá-ma-mi*) roll too!
As for (*šá*) Shulpae, I want to annihilate (*lu-šam-qit-ma*) its brilliance (*šá-ru-ru-šu*). I want to do away with (*lu-šam-sik*) the stars in the heavens (*šá-ma-mi*).
As for (*šá*) the tree, I want to cut its roots (*šu-ru-us-su*) so that it sprouts cannot shoot (*i-šam-mu-ḫa*)."

The highlighted words above illustrate alliteration of the sounds /m/ and /š/. Note also that *šá-ma-mi* (2×), *lu-šam-qit-ma*, *lu-šam-sik*, and *i-šam-mu-ḫa* each contains the sound *šam*. The word *lu-un-niš-ma* comes close with the sound /šma/. The alliteration of the /r/ and /š/, as well as the assonance of the /u/ in *šá-ru-ru-šu* and *šu-ru-us-su* also is striking.

IV 135–36

"A house the (other) house, the man the (other) man, the brother (*aḫu*), the (other) brother (*aḫa*) must not spare! May they slay each other (*a-ḫa-miš*).
And afterwards (*ar-ka*), may the Akkadian (*ak-ka-du-ú*) rise. May he annihilate them all and rule them all."

Alliteration in this passage is based on the phonemes /ḫ/ and /k/. The former ties the words *aḫu*, *aḫa*, and *a-ḫa-miš*. The latter binds *ar-ka* and *ak-ka-du-u*. I also note that this passage is the final and climactic part of an extended terrace pattern in IV 135–35.[23] The extended terrace construction is also known in Ugaritic texts and in the Hebrew Bible.[24]

V 5–6

"Pay attention, all of you. To my words, listen (*lim-da*).
Certainly (*mìn-de-e-ma*) at the time of the former sin I plotted evil (*lemuttim*)."

The words *lim-da*, *mìn-de-e-ma*, and *lemuttim* are connected by way of alliteration of the phonemes /l/ and /m/. Repetition of the dentals /d/ and /t/ strengthens the alliteration.

V 7–8

"My heart was burning (*a-gu-ug-ma*) with wrath and I laid low the people.
Like a hireling (*a-gir*) I removed the leading ram from the flock."

The repetition of the sound /g/ in *a-gu-ug-ma* and *a-gir* is made prominent by the assonance of the /a/ vowel that precedes both words.

V 14–15

"Where would your provider (*za-nin-ku-nu*) be? Your *enu*-priest (*e-nu-ku-nu*)! Where (*a-a-in-na*)?
Where be your food offering (*nin-da-bi-ku-nu*)? You would no longer smell incense (*qut-rin-na*)."

23. The extended terrace is noted by Watson (1986: 212). Given the performative nature of this text, perhaps we should see the terrace pattern acting like a chain in incantations. On this feature, see Veldhuis 1993: 41–64.

24. See, for example, Hos 2:23–24, Joel 1:3–4, Isa 24:18. Noted and discussed by Watson (1986: 211–13).

These queries contain a plethora of /n/ sounds, specifically in the words *za-nin*, *e-nu*, *a-a-in-na*, *nin-da-bi*, and *qut-rin-na*. Note also that both line end in *-na*. Adding to the alliteration is the pronominal suffix *kūnu*, which connects *za-nin-ku-nu*, *e-nu-ku-nu*, and *nin-da-bi-ku-nu*.

V 22

He (Erra) entered (*i-ru-um-ma*) Emeslam (*é-mes-lam*) and occupied (*ir-ta-me*) his seat.

This line exploits the sounds /m/ and /r/ and links the acts of Erra's entering and taking his throne with his temple.

V 26–27

"May short (*ku-ru-u*) and tall (*ar-ki*) alike (*ki-ma*) tread its road!
May the weak (*a-ku-ú*) Akkadian (*Akkadû*) throw down the mighty Sutean!"

The song here alliterates the /k/ sound five times in this brief passage.

V 30–31

"You shall take (*šal-lat-su-nu*) massive booty (*tu-ša-la-la*) from them (and put it) in Shuanna.
You shall restore (*tu-šal-lam*) the gods of the country, who were angry, to their abodes."

Alliteration appears in these verses by way of the sounds /l/, /š/, and /t/, which resound in *šal-lat-su-nu*, *tu-ša-la-la*, and *tu-šal-lam*. The sound /š/ also appears in Shuanna.

V 37–39

"May the Tigris and Euphrates carry (*li-šá-bi-la*) the water of abundance.
As to the provider of the Esagila and of Babylon (*Bābili*), may the governors of every city, all of them bring (*li-bi-lu*) him (tribute).
For years without number (*lā ni-bi*), may the praise of great lord (*bēlī rabi*) Nergal (and) of the warrior Ishum (last)."

The poet has resounded the name of Babylon already (see IV 40–42). Here again we find the phonemes /b/ and /l/ echoed in *li-šá-bi-la*, *li-bi-lu*, *lā ni-bi*, and *bēlī rabi*.

II. Punning

I 2–3

Ḫendursanga (*ḫendur-sag-gá*), the first born of Enlil. . .[ ]
Holder of the holy scepter (*na-áš ḫaṭ-ṭi*), herdsman of the dark-headed (SAG) people, shepherd to [human beings].

Regardless to whom the epithet Ḫendursanga belongs,[25] its literal meaning as 'lofty scepter' (PA = ḫendur = GIDRU = *ḫaṭṭu*) is given an etymological pun in the next line by calling the god the *na-áš ḫaṭ-ṭi* 'holder of the holy scepter'. The line also permits a pun between the phonetic sign *sag* in the name *ḫendur-sag-ga* and the logogram SAG (= *qaqqadu* 'head') in "dark-headed people."

I 4

Ishum, zealous slaughterer (*ṭá-bi-ḫu na-aʾ-du*), whose hands are fit to wield fierce weapons.

25. On the ambiguous identity of this god, see Cagni 1977: 27 n. 1.

As Cagni and others have observed, this verse gives the god Ishum the epithet 'zealous slaughterer' (*ṭābiḫu na'ādu*), which punfully provides an etymological gloss of the Sumerian I (= *na'ādu* 'worship') and ŠUM (= *ṭabāḫu* 'slaughter'). [26]

I 21

> O Engidudu, lord who goes about the night (*bēlu mut-tal-lik mu-ši*), who always is a guide to the prince[s] (*mut-tar-ru-u ru-bé-e*).

In this line, the poet again provides a punning etymology of a name, specifically for Engidudu (^{d}en-gi$_6$-du-du), which is glossed as 'lord who goes about the night' (*bēlu mut-tal-lik mu-ši*)." [27] With regard to this line R. Labat comments: "Nouvelle épithète d'Ishoum et nouveaux jeux sur les significations possibles de la graphie du nom." [28] S. Tinney has espied another erudite pun suggested by the signs *gi*$_6$ and *du-du* in the name ^{d}en-gi$_6$-du-du. In particular, he has shown how gi$_6$ evokes gi$_7$ (= *ru-be-e* 'prince[s]') by homophony, and how *du-du* suggests DU.DU (= *mu-ut-tar-ru-ú* 'guides'). [29] As Tinney points out, the use of the word *ru-bé-e* 'prince[s]' is ambiguous as to whether it is singular or plural, and thus naturally evokes prince Marduk: "When one remembers that Marduk himself is practically always referred to in Erra as *rubû Marduk* it becomes clear that this epithet is a key point in the intertwining of the roles and characters of Išum, Erra and Marduk. . . ." [30]

To these observations I add that a visual pun obtains between the sign gi$_6$ in ^{d}en-gi$_6$-du-du and the goddess ^{d}ma-mi mentioned in the previous line, for gi$_6$ and mi are identical signs (GI$_6$ = *mūšu* 'night').

I 26

> *ul ir-ru a-na šá-a-šú*
> "They dare not go near it."

This line describes the fear that humans feel toward Erra by saying "they dare not go near it (Erra's breath = fire). [31] The verb *ir-ru* here offers a pun on the name Erra (^{d}*èr-ra*).

I 28–29

> Anum (^{d}*a-nu-um*), king of the gods, fecundated (*ir-ḫe-e-ma*) Earth.
> She bore seven gods (*sibit ilāni*) to him, and he named them Sibitti.

The signs used to spell Anum permit several anticipatory puns. The logogram A suggests *aplu* 'heir' and the the sign UM can suggest *ummu* 'mother', each of which anticipates Earth conceiving and giving birth to the Sibitti.

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26. Cagni remarks (1977: 27 n. 4): "The author of Erra enjoys these etymological games. . . ." According to Labat (1970: 117 n. 1), "le poète joue sur les multiples possibilités étymologiques que paraît suggérer le nom d'Ishoum, ou plus précisément, la graphie de son nom: *I-Shoum*." Bodi states (1991: 59 n. 36): "The use of some recondite etymologies implying the knowledge of Sumerian (for example, IŠUM *ṭābiḫu na'ādu*) indicates that the poet addressed himself to a highly educated public fully conversant with the possibilities of wordplays based on Sumerian cuneiform signs." Bodi cites Wilcke 1977: 198.

27. As observed also by Cagni 1977: 27 n. 8.

28. Labat 1970: 117 n. 3.

29. Tinney 1989.

30. Tinney 1989: 4.

31. As suggested by Cagni 1977: 27 n. 9.

Another etymological pun, this time on the divine name Sibitti appears in I 29, where we are told that the union between Erra and the Earth produced 'seven gods' (*sibit ilāni*); hence the name the Sibitti ("the Seven").[32]

I 33

To the second he said 'burn like a fire, blaze like a flame' (*kīma* ^{d}*Girri ku-bu-um-ma ḫu-muṭ kīma nab-li*).

Following the birth of the seven Sibitti, Anu commands the second of them to 'burn like a fire, blaze like a flame' (*kīma* ^{d}*Girri ku-bu-um-ma ḫu-muṭ kīma nab-li*). The fiery command connects the Sibitti to Erra, to whom Anu will later give the Sibitti (I 40), by way of the etymology of Erra's name, that is 'to scorch, char' (*ḥ-ṛ-r*).[33] For additional allusions to Erra's fiery nature, see below pp. 184–185 under Allusive Imagery.

I 42–43

"And your heart is driven to make (*šá-kan*) annihilation, to kill the dark-headed (people), to slaughter the herds of Shakkan (GÍR = ^{d}*Šákkan*).

I have discussed the alliteration in these lines above. Here, I point out an example of punning between the word for 'make, establish' (*šá-kan*) and the divine name ^{d}*Šákkan*. There may be an additional pun in the name ^{d}*Šákkan* since the reading GÍR also can refer to Nergal (the god with whom Erra is identified).[34]

I 45–46

They are furious (*ez-zu-ma*). Their weapons are upraised (*te-bu-ú*).
They say to Erra: "Arise! To work (*te-bi i-zi-iz-ma*)!"

Here obtains a pun between the words 'furious' (*ez-zu-ma*) and 'work' (*i-zi-iz-ma*). As P. Machinist has observed, an additional pun occurs here between the word 'upraised' (*te-bu-ú*) 'arise' (*te-bi*) in battle.[35] Though these words derive from the same Semitic root, their different usages in reference to weapons and people demands we see this as a case of antanaclasis.

I 47

"Why are you staying (*tu-šib*) in town like a miserable old man (*ši-i-bi*)"?

The poet here exploits the similarity in sound between the word 'staying' (*tu-šib*) and 'old man' (*ši-i-bi*).

I 52

"Though he be a prince, he who remains (*a-šib*) in the city will not be satisfied (*i-šeb-bi*) with food."

The poet continues the punning begun in I 47 by this time connecting the roots *wašābu* 'stay, dwell' and *šebû* 'be satisfied, full'.

I 59

"A palace (*ekal*) on a foundation terrace is not comparable to a shelter."

32. Cagni 1977: 27 n. 11.
33. Roberts 1971: 13.
34. For ^{d}GÍR as Nergal, see Leichty 1970: 78.
35. Machinist 1983: 224.

The appearance of the word 'palace' (*ekal*) here puns upon a litany of previous references to 'going out' (*alāku*, 44, 51, 54, 56), 'eating' (*akālu*, 49), and 'bread' (*akal*, 49, 52, 57).

I 70

"May billowy (*gal-la-ti*) seas hear it. . ."

The use here of the word 'billowy' (*gal-la-ti*), recalls in a punning way the use of 'demons' (*gal-lu-ú*) just mentioned in I 67.

I 74–75

"May the herds tremble (*li-ru-ur-ma*) and return to clay.
May the gods, your fathers, see (*li-mu-ru-ma*) and praise your valor."

The pun between the words 'tremble' (*li-ru-ur-ma*) and 'see' (*li-mu-ru-ma*) provides the poet with an opportunity to connect the differing reactions of mortals and gods to Erra's might.

I 86

"Because of his flocks, the shepherd cannot rest by day (*ur-ra*) or night, but entreats you (Erra)."

The Sibitti's address to Erra here puns on Erra's name by way of the word 'day' (*ur-ra*).

I 94–95

He (Erra) then opened his mouth and said to Ishum (^{d}*i-šum*):
"Why, having heard (*še-ma-ta-ma*), do you sit speechless?"

By reminding Ishum that he has heard (*še-ma-ta-ma*) the Sibitti's cry for battle, Erra's linguistically indicts Ishum for his lack of immediate reaction by punning on his name.

I 100

Ishum (^{d}*i-šum*), on hearing (*še-mi-šú*) such a thing. . .

The puns on Ishum's name in I 94–95 are reinforced in I 100.[36]

I 112

"Among the herds, I am the striker (*ma-ḫi-ṣa-ku*), on the mountains, the ram."

Erra (*èr-ra*) here offers an erudite etymological pun on his own name. Note how the second sign in his name, that is RA, is also a logogram for the verb *maḫāṣu* 'strike, defeat', with which Erra identifies. Thus, "striker" is literally part of Erra's name.

I 115

ki-i šá-a-ri a-za-qu

"Like the wind I blow."

Erra's claim punfully recalls his previous statement in line 110 "In the country I am king (*šar-ra-ku*). Among the gods, I am the furious one (*ez-za-ku*)."

36. This is the way the verse appears in manuscripts K 8751 and S. U. 52/166. The variant manuscript VAT 9162 makes the pun even clearer by placing the two words immediately adjacent, as in "Ishum heard (*iš-ma-e-ma* ^{d}*i-šum*) that speech of his. . ." For manuscript information, see Cagni 1977: 50–57.

I 124–25

The warrior then turned his face (*pa-ni-šú*) toward Shuanna (*šu-an-na*), the city of the king of the gods.
Entered Esagila (é-sag-íla), the palace of heaven and earth, and stood in his presence (literally before his face [*pa-nu-uš-šú*]).

I have drawn attention to the subtle use of idioms employing body parts above (see III D 5–7). The device appears again in conjunction with two puns here. Note how the two-fold mention of the "face" puns upon the 'hand' (ŠU = *qātu*) in *šu-an-na* and the 'head' (SAG = *rēšu*) in é-sag-íla.[37]

I 133

"I (Marduk) rose from my seat and the government (*ši-piṭ*) of heaven and earth dissolved (*up-ta-aṭ-ṭir*)."

I have discussed the alliteration in this verse above. Of note here is the polysemous word *šipṭu*, which means 'governance' and 'destruction'. P. Machinist comments:

> Lastly, there is the '*šipṭu* (= "governing order") of heaven and earth,' which, as we have observed, dissolves if Marduk leaves his seat (I 132, 170). So when Erra promises, in taking Marduk's place, that he will keep this *šipṭu* strong (I 182), we are treated to the patent irony that Erra does indeed maintain *šipṭu* – but the *šipṭu* of 'destruction', as is made explicit later (IV 76–77; V 53, 58).[38]

I 137–42

"The offspring (*šik-na-at*) of the living diminished, and I did not restore them."
Until, like a farmer, I seized (*aṣ-ba-tu*) their seed in my hand (*qa-ti-ia*)."
I built myself a house, wherein I settled.
(As for) my attire, which had been overrun by the deluge (*a-bu-bu*) and its appearance (*ši-kin-šá*) was dimmed.
I ordered Girra to restore the sheen of my features and to purify (*ub-bu-ub*) my garments (*ṣu-ba-ti-ia*).
When he had completed (*ú-qat-tu-ú*) the work for me, having made my attire splendid again. . ."

The complexity of the passage's puns requires that I discuss several lines together. See, for example, how puns connect the words *ṣu-ba-ti-ia* 'my garments' (I 141) and *aṣ-ba-tu* 'I seized' (I 138), *šik-na-at* 'offspring' (I 137) and *ši-kin-šá* 'its appearance' (I 140), as well as *qa-ti-ia* 'my hand' (I 138) and *ú-qat-tu-ú* 'completed' (I 142). In addition, the pun between 'deluge' (*a-bu-bu*) and 'purify' (*ub-bu-ub*) is reinforced in I 144 when kingship is restored to Marduk and his countenance once again expresses haughtiness (*tub-bu-ú-ma*), thanks to the men who survived the deluge (*a-bu-bi* [I 145]).

I 150–52

"Where is the *mēsu*-tree, the flesh (*šir*) of the gods, the ornament of the king (*šàr*) of the universe?
That pure tree, that august youngster (*eṭ-lu*) suited to supremacy.
Whose foundation reaches as deep down (*i-šid-su ik-šu-du*) as the bottom of the underworld. . ."

37. See Noegel 2011.
38. Machinist 1983: 224–25.

In addition to the obvious pun between *šir* 'flesh' and *šàr* 'king', the passage also contains an erudite code. As Cagni remarks: "Here we have another etymology and equation game, a play on words dear to Kabti-ilāni-Marduk, between Sumerian MES and the corresponding Akkadian *mēsu*."[39] Indeed, the sign MES is a logogram for the word *eṭlu* 'youngster'. However, what Cagni does not note is that the sign MES appears again in the very next line in the words 'its foundation' (*i-šid-su*), but there it is read phonetically as *šid*. Note also the pun between *i-šid-su* 'its foundation' and *ik-šu-du* 'reaches down'. Moreover, the MES sign is suggestive of ^{d}MES, which stands for Marduk, who is speaking these lines to Erra.

I 155

> "Where is Ninildu (^{d}nin-IGI.NAGAR.BU), the great woodcarver (nagar-GAL) of my godhead?"

Continuing his penchant for etymological and visual punning, the author employs the logograms IGI.NAGAR.BU (= íldu), thus providing a visual pun on NAGAR (= *nagāru*) 'woodcarver'.

I 158

> "Where is Gushkinbanda (^{d}guškin-bàn-da), the maker (*ba-an*) of god (*ili*) and man, whose hands are [pure (*el-la*)]?"

The poet here offers several learned puns on the name of the *apkallu* Gushkinbanda. The first obtains by way of the word *ba-an* 'maker', which puns on the sound of bàn in ^{d}guškin-bàn-da. Second, the reference to Gushkinbanda as a maker of gods (*ba-an ili*) is reinforced visually by the logogram AN (= *ilu*), which appears as the determinative for Gushkinbanda and as the phonetic sign *an* in the word *ba-an* 'maker'. Third, the sign bàn in ^{d}guškin-bàn-da is a logogram for DUMU (= *mār*) 'son, descendant', which anticipates the reference to him as a creator of man (*amēli*). Finally, I point out that if the reconstruction of 'pure' (*el-la*) is correct, then this also constitutes a punning reference to the composite sign guškin, the first sign of which KÙ is the logogram for *elēlu* 'be pure'.

I 159

> "Where is Ninagal (^{d}nin-á-gal), who carries the upper millstone and the lower one?"

Though the overall meaning of this line is a bit unclear,[40] the reference to the *apkallu* Ninagal as someone who is able to carry something as heavy as a millstone, suggests that it registers her great strength.[41] If this is the case, then the reference perhaps offers an exegetical and learned pun on the signs á-gal in her name, for if the scribe has in mind the logograms Á.GÁL (a pun on á-gal) the signs may be read as *lē'û* 'strength'.

I 160

> "Who chews hard copper (*e-ra-a*) like leather, who forges tools?"

The word *e-ra-a* 'copper' is an obvious pun on the name of the god Erra. Moreover, the word *erû* also can mean 'grindstone', thus connecting it with the previous line. The reference to precious

39. Cagni 1977: 35 n. 45. Dalley (1989: 314 n. 22) also notes that the same pun appears in the late 3rd-millennium poem *Shulgi King of Abundance*, and cites Klein 1981: 11.

40. In agreement with Labat 1970: 122 n. 6, who notes that this line is ambiguous.

41. The account of the woman of Thebez in Judg 9:52–53 (see 2 Sam 11:21) might be analogous.

stones and a crown in the line that follows permits us to see this line as the centerpiece in a Janus Parallelism.[42]

I 162

> "Where are the seven *apkallū* (NUN.ME) of the Apsu (ZU.AB), pure (*eb-bu-te*) *purādū* (carps) who like Ea (^{d}*é-a*) their lord, are exalted of wisdom, perfect, appointed to the cleansing (*mu-ub-bi-bu*) of my body?"

The author again offers etymological puns by referring to the *apkallū* as pure and wise *purādū*-fish, thus connecting them to the signs NUN (suggesting *nūnu* 'fish'), ME (*mê* 'water' and IŠIB = *ellu* 'pure'), ZU (= *mūdû* 'one who knows'), and AB (*tâmtu* 'sea'). The poet also has chosen to spell Ea phonetically rather than use one of the many possible logograms so as to permit readers to see ^{d}*é-a* as suggestive of the logograms É (= *bītu* 'abode, house, temple') and A (= *mû* 'water'), an appropriate place for the *apkallū*.

I 188

> "In the house you are to enter (*ter-ru-bu*), prince (*rubû*) Marduk."

This verse anticipates Marduk's title *rubû* 'prince' with the words *ter-ru-bu* 'you are to enter'.

II B 18

> "Where the god does not go (*i-ir-ru*), they draw near."

Here again we find a pun upon the name Erra in the word *i-ir-ru* 'go'. The pun is especially potent since Ea has just mentioned Erra in the previous line, and since Ea is well known for his punning speech.[43]

II B 19

> "He (Marduk) endowed (*i-din-šú-nu-ti-ma*) those *ummānu* with a vast heart and [made firm] their foundations (*iš-di-šú-nu*)."

Here we find a pun between the words *i-din-šú-nu-ti-ma* 'endowed' and *iš-di-šú-nu* 'their foundations'.

II B 22

> The warrior Erra (^{d}*èr-ra*), night and day (*ur-ra*) stands before it without intermission.

The word *ur-ra* 'day' constitutes a pun on the name Erra, with which it is in close proximity. The poet has exploited the same pun in I 86 above.

II C 8

> He entered ([*i-ru*]*m-ma*) Emeslam (é-mes-lam), occupied (*ir-ta-mi*) his seat.

In this line the words [*i-ru*]*m-ma* 'he entered' pun upon Erra's name. In the previous line Ishum had referred to the god by epithet only (as *apil* ^{d}*enlil ṣi-i-ru* 'Enlil's most exalted son'), thus anticipating the punning reference to his name. The use of the sound /ir/ in *ir-ta-mi* immediately afterwards bolsters the pun.

42. Janus Parallelism is now a well-attested feature of ancient Semitic poetry. See Noegel 1996b and 2007b: 27 n. 94 for publications on the topic since 1996.

43. For Ea as a punster, see Noegel 2007b: 28.

There is an additional pun here involving the sign mes in é mes-lam. As we have seen in I 150–51, this sign was exploited for its value as a logogram. Here it is again suggestive of ^{d}MES, that is Marduk, and serves to remind us that Erra has taken Marduk's seat (I 180–82; II 1).

II C 35

"I shall get into the house of the gods where the evil man has no access (*iʾ-a-ru*)."

The tablet continues its puns on the name Erra by again employing the word *iʾ-a-ru* 'access, enter'.

III A 7–8

"I shall cut off the life (*napšat-su*) of the man who acts as intercessor.
The evil man, who cuts throats (*na-piš-ti*), him I shall put in the highest places."

The use of *napaštu* for both 'life' and 'throat' constitutes a fine example of antanaclasis.

III C 9–10

"He swore: he shall not drink the water (*mê*) of the river.
He fears their blood (*dāmē-šú-nu*) and he does not want to enter the Ekur."

The poet here connects the river's water with blood by punfully connecting *mê* with (*dāmē*, thus reinforcing what Ishum says about Erra in III C 5: "You slashed their veins and made the river flow (bloodstained)."

III D 4–6

"You dominate the whole (*gam-ma-ra-ta*) earth. You lord it over the country.
The oceans you convulse, the mountains you finish off (*gam-ra-ta*).
Men you govern (*re-da-ta*), the herds, you shepherd (*re-ʾa-a-ta*)."

Underscoring the completeness with which Erra annihilates is a pun between *gam-ma-ra-ta* 'whole' and *gam-ra-ta* 'you finish off'. The pun between *re-da-ta* 'govern' and *re-ʾa-a-ta* 'shepherd' also constitutes a rare rhyme (see above under Alliteration and Assonance).

IV 2

"You have undone the bond of Dimkurkurra (Dim-kur-kur-ra), the city of the king of the gods, the bond of (all) countries (*ri-kis mātāti*)."

As observed by Cagni, the poet here again demonstrates his interest in etymological punning by offering a literal Akkadian translation of the Sumerian name Dimkurkurra in *ri-kis mātāti* 'the bond of (all) countries'. [44]

IV 42

"Ah, Babylon that I had tended (*az-qu-pu-šú-ma*) like a thriving orchard, but whose fruit I could not taste."

I discussed the alliteration in this passage above. Here I note a case of antanaclasis, specifically with the verb *zaqāpu* 'tend, plant' in the form *az-qu-pu-šú-ma* 'I had tended'. Only ten verses prior the poet used the same root in reference to bearing swords (IV 32 *za-qip pat-ru* 'the sword is drawn' and IV 33 *kak-ke-šú-nu ta-za-qáp* 'you made them bear weapons'). The same root appears again in V 9 where it is used in reference to pruning an orchard, though clearly as a metaphor for unrestrained violence.

44. Cagni 1977: 49 n. 114.

IV 55–56

"They rose up (in) Eanna, the cultic actors and singers (*i-sin-*[*ni*]).
In order to strike people with religious awe, whose manhood Ishtar turned into womanhood (*sin*[*nišūti*])."

The pun between *i-sin-ni* 'singers' and *sin*[*nišūti*] 'womanhood' draws attention to Ishtar's power to invert gender, which is the subject of these lines.

IV 59

"A pitiless (*lā ba-bil pa-ni*) governor you placed over them."

The alliteration in this passage has been discussed above. Here I point to the words *lā ba-bil pa-ni* 'pitiless' (literally 'forebear the face'), which evoke the name Babylon. The pun serves to connect the behavior of the governor of Uruk with that of the governor of Babylon, which this passage evokes. Cagni observes: "The behavior of the governor of Uruk has some analogy with that of the governor of Babylon (IV 23 ff.), but it is presented as arrogant and as hostile to the cults of Ištar (lines 59–60), so much so as to cause the vendetta of the goddess against the city (lines 61–62)."[45]

IV 76

"He who has not died in the struggle will die in the destruction (*šiṗ-ṭi*).
He who has not died in the destruction (*šiṗ-ṭi*), the enemy will plunder."

The polysemy of the word *šipṭu* 'destruction' and 'government' has been discussed above. Here again the word evokes both meanings, this time as a link in a long literary chain of consecutive acts of destruction (IV 76–86). This device is another example of an "extended terrace."

IV 92

"Its people (are) the herds, their god (is) the striker (*ma-ḫi-ṣu*)."

Ishum's reference to Erra as 'the striker' offers a subtle pun on one of the signs that comprise the name of Erra, for the sign *ra* read as the logogram RA can mean *maḫāṣu* 'strike, beat'. We have seen this subtle visual pun in I 112.

IV 120–22

"I want to root out (*lu-uš-ḫu-uṭ-ma*) the mast, I want to tear out its rigging."

I examined this passage above for its extensive alliteration. Polysemy also obtains in the word *lu-uš-ḫu-uṭ-ma*, which can mean 'I will root out, remove' or 'I will become angry'.[46] Since the context of the passage details acts of Erra's anger, the polysemy is particularly apt.

IV 124

"As for Shulpea, I want to annihilate its brilliance (*šá-ru-ru-šu*). I want to do away with the stars in the heavens."

The extensive alliteration in this passage has been discussed above. Here I point out that the poet has employed the words *šá-ru-ru-šu* 'his brilliance, rays' as an etymological pun on the name of the astral deity Shulpaea (^{d}šul-pa-è-a), whose Sumerian name is rendered into Akkadian as *eṭlu šūpû* 'youth who appears brilliant' (Jupiter).

45. Cagni 1977: 53 n. 134. He does not note the pun.
46. From homophonous roots. See *CAD* Š 92–95 s.v. *šaḫāṭu* B and *CAD* Š 95 s.v. *šaḫāṭu* C.

V 18–19

"That is all very well, but now be appeased! We stand before you (*ma-ḫar-ka*).
One the day of your wrath, where is he who can withstand you (*ma-ḫir-ka*)?"

Ishum's punning words to Erra contrast the gods' obedience and presence before him (*ma-ḫar*) with the inability of anyone to withstand (*ma-ḫir*) Erra's ire.

V 20–21

Like a bright shining day, his (Erra's) features broadened (*uḫ-tam-bi-ṣu*).

The poet cleverly uses the polysemous verb *ḫabāṣu* here since it can mean 'broaden, dilate (with joy)' and 'smite down, pulverize', thus bringing into relief Erra's thirst for violence.

V 33–35

The mountains, their abundance, and the sea too, you shall bring forth its yield (*bi-lat-su*).
(From) the fields (*qer-bé-e-ti*), which were laid waste, you shall bring forth produce (*bil-tu*).
May the governors of all the cities draw their massive tribute (*bi-lat-su-nu*) into (*qé-reb*) Shuanna.

These three lines offer two cases of antanaclasis. The first is the root *qerbu*, which the poet uses for 'fields'(*qer-bé-e-ti*) and the 'interior' (*qé-reb*) of the temple. The second case is the use of *biltu* for 'yield, produce' from the sea and field, as well as for 'tribute'.

V 42–45

Kabti-ilāni-Marduk, the son of Dabibi, (is) the composer of this tablet.
He (a god) revealed it to him during the night (in a dream), and in the morning, when he recited (*id-bu-bu*) it, he did not omit (*ul iḫ-ṭi*) a single line.
Nor a single line (*šu-ma*) did he add (*ú-rad-di*) to it.
Erra (^{d}*èr-ra*) heard it (*iš-me-šu-ma*) and approved it.

The end of the tablet offers us the name of its author. It also puns upon this name by employing a device that scholars have dubbed a "subtle colophon."[47] Of course, some exemplars of this text contain different colophons, but this one claims to be the first and has become part of the text itself.

Note how V 43 follows the mention of the name ^{m}*kab-ti-ilani-*^{d}*mar-duk mār da-bi-bi* by employing the pun *id-bu-bu* 'he recited'. This will be the first of several puns on this eponym.

This passage puns in other ways as well. Two words in V 43 make the line ambiguous. The first is *šumu*, which can mean a "single line of text" or more generally "name, reputation." Since the text has placed a great deal of emphasis on gods' names (for example, I 121 and near the end of the song in V 51, V 56, V 61 [the final word!]), the poet also may be telling us that he did not omit any important names from the text.

The second ambiguous phrase in V 43 is *ul iḫ-ṭi*, which usually is translated 'he did not omit'. The verb *ḫaṭû* is polysemous and can refer to 'omission' but also to 'bad dreams'. Thus, the line can refer to the dream itself, by informing us that it was a favorable one, that is a good omen. This then would reinforce the reading of V 47 as "All the gods, together, extolled its omen (*it-ti-šú*)," rather than ". . .with him (*it-ti-šú*)."

47. See Garsiel 1990: 1–8; Hunger 1990: 33–36. More recently, see Hurowitz 2008a: 69–88 (in Hebrew).

The passage contains two additional puns. The first is the verb for 'add' (*ú-rad-di*), which puns upon the name Erra. The second is *iš-me-šu-ma* 'he heard it', which puns upon *šu-ma*.

V 51–52

"May the king (*šarru*) who extols (*ú-šar-bu-ú*) my name rule the world.
May the prince (*rubû*) who proclaims (*i-dab-bu-bu*) the praise of my valor have no rival."

Erra emphasizes here the importance of royalty extolling his name by drawing a punning connection between the 'king' (*šarru*) and 'extol' (*ú-šar-bu-ú*). Note also that the causative stem of the verb *rabû* anticipates *rubû* 'prince'. The poet's use of the root *dabābu* here constitutes a case of antanaclasis with V 43, where it was used for 'recite a text' and also resounds the scribe's own name. In this way, the text subtly extols the scribe along with Erra.

V 53

"The singer who chants it will not die in the destruction (*ina šip-ṭi*)."

We have seen several instances where the polyseme *šipṭu* is used to convey 'destruction' and 'government'. Here I suggest there is another level of punning. The same signs that read *šip-ṭi* 'destruction' also can be read *šip-ti*$_4$ 'incantation'. Thus, the line also may be interpreted: "The singer who chants it will not die by means of the incantation." In fact, we are soon told that this text serves as a talisman to ward off evil (V 57–58).

V 54–57

"To the king (*šarri*) and prince shall his word be welcome.
The scribe (*ṭupšarru*) who commits it to memory shall escape the enemy country (and) shall be honored (*i-kab-bit*) in his own country.
In the sanctuary (*a-šìr-ti*) of the sages where (*a-šar*) they constantly mention my name, I will grant them wisdom.
To the house in which (*a-šar*) this tablet is placed—however furious Erra may be, however murderous the Sibitti may be. . ."

This passage continues punning on *šarru* 'king' in the words *ṭupšarru* 'scribe', *a-šìr-ti* 'sanctuary', and the relative pronoun *a-šar* (two times). These puns reinforce the previously discussed passage in which the poet subtly connects the king's praise of Erra with himself. Moreover, note how the poet's use of the verb *kabātu* 'honor' in reference to future scribes who receive honor for memorizing the text also recalls Kabti-ilāni-Marduk, who claims to have memorized the dream song.[48]

V 58

"The sword of destruction (*šip-ṭi*) will not come near (*i-ṭe-ḫi-šu-ma*): salvation (*šá-lim-tu*) shall alight on it!"

Yet another punful allusion obtains in this line. We have just seen how the signs read as destruction (*šip-ṭi*) also can be read as 'incantation'. This time, the poet exploits the nuance of the verb *ṭeḫû* 'draw near, approach', which is also used of plagues and diseases. This is especially powerful

48. It is likely that our author was one of the sages. See Cagni 1977: 61 n. 170.

as it allows us to read *šip-ṭi* as *šibṭu* 'plague, epidemic'.[49] The word for salvation (*šá-lim-tu*) also may be understood as 'good health'. In this way, the tablet promises also to ward off disease. Thus, we also may interpret the line: "The sword of the plague (*šib-ṭi*) will not approach (*i-ṭe-ḫi-šu-ma*): good health (*šá-lim-tu*) shall alight on it!"

V 59–60

"May this song last forever (*ma-ti-ma*)! May it endure for eternity!
May all the countries (*ma-ta-a-ti*) hear it and celebrate my valor."

The pun between *ma-ti-ma* 'forever' and *ma-ta-a-ti* 'countries' underscores the temporal and geographic totality evoked in this passage.

III. GEMINATE PARALLELS AND CLUSTERS

I 43–46

"To kill (*šu-mut-ti*) the dark-headed (*qaqqadi*) (people and) and to slaughter (*šum-qu-tu*) Shakkan's herds,
Let them be your fierce weapons (*kakkū*), let them march (*lil-li-ku*) beside you!"
They are furious. Their weapons (*kakkū*) are upraised.
They say to Erra: "Arise! To work! (*i-zi-iz-ma*)"

I have discussed this passage above for its alliteration, but I note here that it also illustrates the device known as geminate clustering. Each of the words highlighted above geminates a consonant (*qaqqadi*, *kakkū*, *lillik*, *izizma*). A pseudo-gemination also occurs in I 43 which places the words 'kill' and 'slaughter' side by side (not apparent in English), thus geminating the sound /šum/.

I 132

"Long ago (*ul-tu ul-lu*) I got angry (*a-gu-gu-ma*). I rose from my seat and contrived the deluge (*a-bu-bu*)."

The gemination clusters obtains here with the sounds /ul-ul/, /gu-gu/, and /bu-bu/, each in quick succession.

I 140–41

(As for) my attire, which had been overrun by the deluge (*a-bu-bu*) and its appearance was dimmed.
I ordered Girra to restore the sheen of my features and to purify (*ub-bu-ub*) my garments.

The alliteration in this passage is reinforced by a geminate parallel between the words *a-bu-bu* 'deluge' and *ub-bu-ub* 'purify'.

I 162–63

"Where are the seven *apkallū* of the Apsu, who like Ea their lord, are exalted of wisdom, perfect (*šuk-lu-lu*), appointed ([*m*]*u-ub-bi-bu*) to the cleansing of my body?"
The warrior Erra heard him and paced forward ([*iz*]*-zi-iz*).

49. On the relationship between Erra and disease, see Cagni 1977: 15–16. It is perhaps worth noting that "fire" also can refer to "fever" brought on by sickness. See Lambert 1970: 39–45.

This passage contains three lexemes that form a geminate cluster: *šuk-lu-lu*, [*m*]*u-ub-bi-bu*, and [*iz*]-*zi-iz*.

III C 40–42

"You are acquainted with the decision of the Igigi (ᵈ*ì-gí-gí*) and with the counsel of the Anunnaki (ᵈ*a-nun-na-ki*).
To the Dark-headed (*qaqqadi*) people you give orders, you grant wisdom.
Why then are you (*at-ta*) prattling (*ta-ta-me*) like an ignorant man?"

The geminate cluster here joins the Igigi and Anunnaki, also found elsewhere in parallelism, with *qaqqadi* and *ta-ta-me*. The latter geminates are enhanced by the word 'you' *at-ta*, which in the Akkadian comes immediately after *ta-ta-me*.

IV 11–12

"The cripple (*ḫaš-ḫa-šú*) overtakes the swift-footed man, the weak man overwhelms the strong one.
Against their governor (*šak-ka-nak-ki*), the provider of their centers of worship, they utter grossly insolent words."

A geminate parallelism appears here in the words *ḫaš-ḫa-šu* 'cripple' and *šak-ka-nak-ki* 'governor'.

IV 117

"I want to destroy the *gigunû* (*gi-gu-na-šá*) of the sanctuary (and) the wall's battlement (*ki-lil-šú*), and the sustenance of the city I want to turn to nothing (*lu-ḫal-li-qa*)."

This geminate cluster is formed by bringing into close proximity the words *gigunû* and *ki-lil-šu*. Reinforcing the geminated /l/ sound in the latter word is the repeated /l/ in *lu-ḫal-li-qa*.

IV 124

"I want to annihilate the brilliance (*šá-ru-ru-šu*) of Shulpae. I want to do away with the stars (*kakkabāni*) in the sky."

The pun on the name Shulpea has been explained above. Note here that the poet has imbedded a geminate parallel as well, specifically with the words for 'brilliance' (*šarūru*) and 'stars' (*kakkabāni*).

IV 143

Mount Ḫeḫe (ḪI.ḪI) he razed to the ground (*qaq-qar-šu*).

A geminate cluster appears in this single line in Ḫeḫe and *qaq-qar-šu*.

IV 150

He cursed (*i-ru-ur-ma*) the herds and turned them into clay (*ṭi-iṭ-ṭi*).

Another one-line geminate cluster appears here with *i-ru-ur-ma* and *ṭi-iṭ-ṭi*.

V 6–7

"Certainly at the time of the former sin I plotted (*aḫ-su-sa*) evil.
My heart was burning (*a-gu-ug-ma*) with wrath and I laid low the people."

The passage's alliteration has been discussed above. Here I draw attention to the geminate parallelism formed by the words *aḫ-su-sa* and *a-gu-ug-ma*.

V 33–35

The mountains, their abundance, and the sea too, you shall bring forth (*tu-šá-áš-šá-a*) its yield.
(From) the fields, which were laid waste, you shall bring forth (*tu-šá-áš-šá-a*) produce.
May the governors (*šak-ka-nak-ku*) of all the cities draw (*liš-du-du*) their massive tribute into Shuanna.

As I have shown above, the poet has skillfully employed puns in this passage. However, he also has formed a geminate cluster by twice using the causative form of the root *našû* 'lift', which geminates the /š/, and by following them with the words *šak-ka-nak-ku* and *liš-du-du*.

V 57

To the house in which this tablet is placed—however furious (*li-gug-ma*) Erra may be, however murderous (*liš-gi-šú*) the Sibitti may be. . ."

This brief line contains two geminated forms: *li-gug-ma* and *liš-gi-šú*.

IV. ALLUSIVE IMAGERY

In this section, I dispense with rendering the entire passage and simply make reference to the allusions that connect Erra and those associated with him to fire.

I 5

In this verse the poet describes Erra as making "his sharp spears flash (*šub-ruq*)." 'Flashing' is suggestive of fire and light.[50]

I 10

Erra speaks to his herald Ishum by saying: "You are 'Torch' (*di-ḫa-ru-um-ma*), on your light (*nu-úr-ka*) men focus." Such references to fire and light are fitting of a god whose name is "Fire."

I 22

In this passage Erra is said to lead all young men and women to good health and make them 'shine like daylight' (*it-ta-nar-ru-u ú-nam-ma-ru kīma* u_4*-mi*). In essence he makes them shine like himself (see the puns between Erra and *urru* 'daylight' in I 86 and II B 22, above, pp. 174, 177).

1 33

When naming the second of the Sibitti demons, Anum says: "Burn like a fire, blaze like a flame (*kīma* ^{d}*girri ku-bu-um-ma ḫu-muṭ kīma* [*n*]*abli*)." These are fitting characteristics for a demon whom Anum gives to Erra as a personal weapon.

I 113

After the Sibitti provoke Erra to battle, the god turns to Ishum and boasts: "In the reed thicket I am the fire (^{d}*girra-ku*)."

I 116

The author continues his allusions to heat and light when Erra likens himself to the sun in I 116: "Like the sun (^{d}*Šamši*), I survey the entire orbit of the world."

I 128

In this passage Erra asks Marduk: "(What happened to) the crown of your lordship, which made Ehalanki as bright (*ú-nam-ma-ri*) as Etemenaki? Its surface is shrouded over (*kàt-mu*)!"

50. *CAD* B 103–5, s.v. *barāqu*.

Since Erra's motive is to take Marduk's place, his words bring into contrast the two gods in such a way as to suggest that if Marduk's lordship were truly strong, he would shine like Erra. The verbs *namāru* (> *nawāru*) and *katāmu* both can refer respectively to the 'shining' and 'darkening' of light.

I 172

"The shining day ([u_4-*m*]*u nam-ru*) will turn into deep darkness."

Marduk suggests that his departure from the throne will cause chaos. The words remind us of what Erra had said of Marduk in the passage discussed above.

II C 28

In this verse, Erra likens himself to Girru, the god of fire by claiming: "I shall devastate reed and rush thickets and like fire (^{d}*girri*) I shall burn them."

II C 46

". . .like fire (*gir-ra-niš*), the enemy country."

The passage is broken, but Erra's likening to fire is clear.

III C 68

This line to is broken, but clearly refers to Erra's sword as *šub-ruq* "flashing."

IV 141–143

In this passage we are told that the warrior (Erra) and the Sibitti reached Mount Ḫeḫe (ḪI.ḪI) and razed it to the ground. It is fitting that this mountain is attacked in the song, for the signs that comprise its name ḪI.ḪI also can be read as a logogram for *barāqu* 'flash, lighten, shine'.

IV 149

He devastated reed and rush thickets and burned (them) like fire (^{d}*girri*).

It is unclear whether the warrior undertaking the destruction here is Erra or Ishum,[51] but either way the connection to fire makes perfect sense.

V 20–21

Erra heard him (Ishum) and his face shone (*im-me-ra*).
Like a bright shining day (u_4-*me na-par-de-e*), his features broadened.

Here, again, Erra's actions associate him with fire and light.

V. Numerical Devices

III C 63–64

"One was placed and you [ ] seven.
Seven of them you killed and would not spare a single one (*e-da*)."

Though the first of these lines is broken, the beginning and end of the verse are extant and it is possible to see that line 63 begins with the number "one" and ends with "seven," and that line 64 begins with the number "seven" and ends with the word *ēdu* (> *wēdu*) 'single one', thus creating a chiasm of numbers and words at the start and end of the verse.

51. Cagni 1977: 57 n. 154 discusses the ambiguity. On the purpose of the ambiguity, see below, pp. 186–189.

IV 50

> "As to Sippar the primeval city, through which the lord of (all the) countries did not let the deluge pass because she was the darling of his eyes."

Marduk's words here refer to the chief god Enlil, though he remains unnamed. Since Enlil's name can be written ^{d}50, it is fitting that he appears here in line 50 of the tablet. Our distinguished honoree has discovered similar numerical devices involving Enlil in other texts.[52] Here I add that there is great propriety in having Marduk speak these words, since *Enūma Eliš* tells us that Marduk had fifty names, one of which was *ḫamšā* 'Fifty' (*Enūma Eliš* VI 121).

IV 75

> "I shall stir up the seven (*sibit*) old wind(s) on this one (*ištēt*) country."

The numerical play on the numbers 7 and 1 is obvious and recalls III C 63–64, discussed above.

V 12

> "Where (*a-šar*) one (*iš-te-en*) is raging, another (*šá-nu-ú*) cannot advise him."

This brief line contains the word for 'one' (*iš-te-en*) and the word for 'two', the latter in the sense of 'other, another'. In this context, the use of the relative pronoun (*a-šar*) evokes the number 'ten' (*ešer*).

V 28

> "May one (*ištēn*) drive away seven (*sibitti*), as if they were sheep."

In the Akkadian, the seven follows immediately upon the one. One wonders also if there is an additional allusion to the Sibitti here.

VI. AMBIGUOUS SUBJECTS

B. Foster has observed that the song of Erra shows "signs of literary experimentation."[53] Though he refers primarily to the text's use of first and second person dialogues, innovation is noticeable also in the author's clever use of ambiguity to mask the identities of gods at key moments in the story. I offer three examples.

The first appears in Tablet Four, where the author leaves it unclear whether Erra or Ishum marched off to devastate the Suteans on Mount Ḫeḫe. The relevant passage, IV 141–43, reads:

> The warrior (*qurādu*) reached Mount Ḫeḫe.
> He raised his hand and leveled the ground.
> Mount Ḫeḫe he razed to the ground.

Since Erra is called *qurādu* 'warrior' throughout the song, we are apt to think it is he who initiates the campaign. However, since just previously Erra has said: "Go, Ishum, the matter of which you

52. See Kilmer 2006: 210 n. 3, who cites Hurowitz 1998: 44–46.
53. Foster 2007: 66.

spoke, do as you please" (IV 140), we are inclined to see Ishum as leading the charge. As Cagni astutely remarks: "It is not possible to decide whether the hero (*qurādu*) is Erra or Išum."[54]

The ambiguity, I assert, is deliberate. By leaving us to ponder whether Erra or Ishum is the subject, the author allows both gods to share the same linguistic space, thus blending their identities. P. Machinist's comment on the song's patterns of rest and violence applies equally well to the ambiguity of our warrior in this passage: "The effect of all this is to emphasize the intertwined nature of their personalities—something apparent even in the etymologies of their names—or more precisely, it is to show the importance of Išum in defining the range of Erra's behavior."[55]

In addition to blending their identities, a subject to which I shall return later, the device has a literary effect in that it allows us to bring the two gods into comparison and contrast. At this juncture in the story we already have learned of Erra's wanton destruction and have witnessed Ishum's intervention and call for Erra's compassion. We already know that Ishum is a kind and peaceful god (I 3, I 21). The distinction between the two divine personalities is so stark that choosing one or the other as leading the battle against Mount Ḫeḫe necessarily impacts how we interpret that event.

It must be remembered, too, that the campaign against Mount Ḫeḫe is the most meaningful in the entire song for it represents an attack against the Suteans—the Babylonians' archenemies. If we see Erra as leading the battle, then the passage portrays him as excessive, unrelenting, and battle-blind despite Ishum's pleas. After needlessly destroying most of the world, Erra only now turns his attention to the only battle of relevance for Babylonia. However, if we understand Ishum as marching against Mount Ḫeḫe, then he alone receives credit with the only purposeful battle in the song.[56]

The next two examples in which the poet uses ambiguity to mask the identity of gods are related and occur at the start and end of the song, thus forming an *inclusio*. The first appears in I 1: "O king of all inhabited lands, creator of the world." The epithets here compel us to wonder whether they invoke Marduk, Erra, or Ishum. Some see the line as referring to Marduk, because the epithet appears for him elsewhere.[57] Others see the line as referring to Erra, because the next line invokes Ḫendursanga, another name for Erra's herald, Ishum.[58] Still others have seen the mention of Ḫendursanga as evidence that the epithets invoke Ishum.[59] I assert that the ambiguity again is deliberate and that it accomplishes two things. First, as with Erra and Ishum above, it allows Marduk, Erra, and Ishum to share the same space, thus overlapping their identities and bringing the gods into contrast. Second, it provides a linguistic clue from the onset of the song that the roles and destinies of Marduk, Erra, and Ishum will interconnect.

The final and related example of this device appears at the end of the story where the poet tells us that a god revealed the entire song in a dream to Kabti-ilāni-Marduk, without giving us

54. Cagni 1977: 57 n. 154.

55. Machinist 1983: 223–24.

56. The situation is reminiscent of 2 Sam 12:26–29, in which David's military commander Joab states that he will lay claim to the city of Rabbah and put his name upon it if David does not come to the siege.

57. For example, Foster 1995: 133. Moreover, neither Ishum nor Erra is associated elsewhere with kingship and creation of the world.

58. For example, Dalley 1989: 313 n. 1, and Cagni, who also provides an outline of the debate (1977: 27 n. 1).

59. Machinist (1983: 222–23), suggests the subject is Ishum because he is invoked in line 4. Müller (1995: 349–60), shows also how the interpretation of the opening lines was not uniform already in antiquity. Butler (1998: 34) is non-comittal "he (Erra/Ishum caused him to see (the text). . . ."

the god's name. The wording of the divine revelation is careful so as to avoid an explicit subject: *ina šat mu-ši ú-šab-ri-šu-ma* "during the night, he revealed to him" (V 43). While some scholars have argued that Erra revealed the dream, because he approved it, or Ishum revealed it because he is a god of the night, Marduk is a better candidate. Unlike Erra, Marduk is attested elsewhere as a sender of dreams.[60] He also is invoked in other dream incantations.[61] In addition, it is Marduk who is most closely associated with the creation of incantations that put angry gods to rest, and these are the very claims that the author makes for the divine song (V 55–58).[62]

Moreover, we are nowhere told that Erra receives praise as the song's author. Instead, we are told only that Erra and the gods praised the song:

> Erra heard and approved it.
> It pleased Ishum, his herald.
> All the gods, together, extolled with him (*it-ti-šú*) (V 45–47).

The pronoun *šu* "it" in V 47 leaves little doubt that it can refer only to that which Erra approved. Even if we read the word with Foster as *ittu* "sign or omen," and thus as a reference to the text's prophylactic powers, the word "its" (*šu*) must refer to the text.[63] Regardless of how one reads the word *ittu*, all the praise that Erra receives in V 49–61 issues from his own mouth and in any event does not credit him for the incantation. This is significant for the interpretation of the song, for by praising the song rather than Erra, and by having Erra join the other gods in praise, the author implies that Erra is not the source of the ultimate revelation. Implicit in this is that the revelation must have come from a higher deity that Erra, in this case Marduk.

Another clue suggesting that Marduk is the source of the dream text appears at the end of the song where we are told: "Kabti-ilāni-Marduk, the son of Dabibi, (is) the composer of this tablet" (V 42). Throughout the entire song the poet has drawn attention to the importance of recognizing the meanings of names.[64] Consequently, one is compelled to translate his name when he provides it, and in doing so realize that "Marduk is the most honored of the gods."[65] Regardless of whether we accept such clues as evidence to the identity of the dream source, it is clear that the author has made it difficult to determine whether Marduk or Erra is the ultimate author.

Thus, as we must from the start of the song, so must we also at its end bring Marduk and Erra into a single frame. Here again, the device allows us to compare and contrast the two gods.

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60. Erra: Cagni 1977: 61 n. 169. Ishum: Bottéro and Kramer 1989: 706; Bodi 1991: 57 n. 26, recognizes the ambiguity in this passage, but he does not consider whether it might be deliberate. Marduk: See *Lūdlul* III 39–47; Lambert 1960: 50–51; Butler 1998: 16–18 and 155. Marduk also can send his dream messenger Anzagar (ibid. p. 84).

61. Butler 1998: 57–59, 131–32, 135–37, 238–39.

62. In *Enūma Eliš* VII 9–14 Marduk (as ^{d}TU.TU) is credited with the power of putting angry gods to rest by means of an incantation: "TU.TU is he, who effects their restoration. Let him purify their shrines that they may have ease (*pa-áš-ḫu*). Let him devise an incantation (ÉN = *šiptu*) so that the gods may be at rest (*li-nu-ḫu*). Should they rise in anger (*ag-giš*), let them turn back. Truly, he is supreme in the assembly of the gods. No one among the gods is his equal." The ancient commentary on *Enūma Eliš* connects the incantation to his name by noting that reading TU as if it were TU_6 = *šip-tum*.

63. Foster (1995: 162), translates "his sign." Even this reading implies that the song is an omen for Erra.

64. The importance on names is seen also in that the very last word of the song is *šumi* "my name." See also Ishum's description of Erra's overindulgence as a sin against Marduk: "It is you, warrior Erra, (who) did not fear prince Marduk's name" (IV 1)!

65. Whether Kabti-ilāni-Marduk is a "pen name" serving a literary and theological agenda or a real name exploited for its meaning cannot be determined.

By the end of the song the portrait of Erra is apparent. He is ruthless, attacks with abandon, and indiscriminately engages in battles of cosmic importance. Conversely, Marduk remains restrained and supreme, as B. Foster observes: "Marduk, as chief Babylonian deity, plays a major role in the poem. He is portrayed as remote and all-wise; he knows Erra's plans even before Erra arrives at his temple. He speaks in a sonorous, scholarly diction. There is never any doubt that he is king."[66]

Thus, just as the author has allowed us to reflect on the differences between Erra and Ishum in the battle against Mount Ḫeḫe, the ambiguous reference to the divine author of our text allows us to contemplate the possibilities. Is Erra or Marduk or some other god the source of the divine incantation? Given the significance that ancient Mesopotamians placed on knowing the identity of the god who brings a dream and the importance that a god's identity must have upon the revelation's veracity and power, this is rather vital information for the author to leave ambiguous.[67] Nevertheless, as with the battle at Mount Ḫeḫe, the author has made the god's identity here nearly impossible to decide. We are left to ask why. I believe the solution to this conundrum lies in the sophisticated religious system of the Babylonian literati.

Conclusion

In an important contribution to the study of Babylonian religion, W. G. Lambert drew attention to a god list of the type AN = *Anum* that focuses solely on the god Marduk.[68] Among the gods appearing in that list and identified as various manifestations of Marduk, is the following: "Nergal is Marduk of Battle." In the song of Erra, Nergal's name occurs twice, each time as another name for Erra (III C 31 and V 39). In addition, Mami, who is normally the spouse of Nergal, is said to be Erra's wife (I 20). According to Cagni, these references denote that Erra "assumes in himself and surpasses, or at least expresses in a new way, all the characteristics of Nergal."[69] Thus, if Erra and Nergal's identities have fused, we must consider Erra also as a manifestation of Marduk.

Reflecting on the song in this way allows us to see the ambiguous references to gods as reflecting a sophisticated form of polytheism or perhaps monism.[70] Indeed, when viewed through this lens, a number of other intriguing aspects of the song receive fuller explanation. For example, it explains why Erra and Ishum share a number of epithets.[71] It informs the account of Erra's

66. Foster 1995: 132. This in contrast to the ways others have understood Marduk in the song. For example, Jacobsen (1976: 227) described Erra as aiming "to fast-talk Marduk—depicted as an old fuddy-duddy—into leaving him in charge of the universe while Marduk went off to have his crown jewels cleaned. . . ." According to Black and Green (1992: 129), "Marduk is presented, perhaps with humorous intent, in a very uncharacteristic form as a bumbling and old incompetent whose insignia need repairing and cleaning."

67. See Oppenheim 1956.

68. *CT* 24 50 (BM 47406) obverse. See Lambert 1975: 197.

69. Cagni 1977: 45 n. 100.

70. Lambert (1975: 198) sees the list as evidence of monotheism, but does not consider monism as an alternative model. The religious framework that informs this text and others from this period, is often simplistically referred to as syncretistic, but is in reality far more complex. It is clear from a number Neo-Assyrian ritual and expository texts that Marduk also was equated with Ninurta, who himself could be described as a composite of other gods: "(Ninurta) your teeth are Sibitti, who fells evil ones. The area of your cheeks, lord, is the apperance of the stars of [. . .] Your ears are Ea and Damkina, the sages of wisdom. [. . .] Your head is Adad who [. . .] heaven and underworld like an artisan. Your forehead is Shala, the beloved spouse who makes rejoice [. . .] Your neck is Marduk, judge of heaven and earth, the flood [. . .]." Erra also was associated with Ninurta. See Livingstone 1986: 101 and 154. On the difficulties of labeling and comparing polytheisms in the ancient Near East, see Noegel 2007a: 21–37, especially 35–37.

71. See Machinist 1983: 223.

occupation of Marduk's throne (II A–II C 8). Erra sits on the throne justifiably, even if temporarily, as a manifestation of Marduk in battle.[72] Reading the text as reflecting the sophisticated polytheism of its author also explains why the song connects Erra and Ishum to Marduk by way of fire imagery. The actions of Erra in the song also share a thematic affinity with those of Marduk in *Lūdlul*, as P. Machinist has espied: "Indeed, just as Marduk turns the social world of the individual suffered upside-down in Tablets I-II (in *Lūdlul*), only to right it in III and especially IV, so Erra does the same to the whole of Babylonia in Tablets II–IV and then V (in the poem of Erra).[73]

In the song of Erra, Erra and Ishum essentially are woven into the larger fabric of divinity of which Marduk is the grand design. When seen from this perspective, the song is as much about Marduk as it is about Erra and Ishum.

The many literary devices examined above confirm the observation of J. Bottéro who referred to the song as a work of "erudition vertigineuse."[74] The author has seamlessly integrated alliteration, assonance, punning, geminate parallels and clusters, allusive imagery, numerical devices, and deliberate ambiguity into a powerful and gripping story that balances patterns of rest and violence and portrays a sophisticated polytheistic system in which Marduk rests at the top.[75] Most of the devices employed by the poet represent a technical repertoire long familiar to the scribal elites of Mesopotamia.[76] Others, like ambiguous references to divinities, represent a more innovative approach that reflects the constructions of identities, relationships, and hierarchies with which the poet contemplated the divine world.

72. Is it possible that the notion of Erra as Marduk's weapon informs the ritual use of the *ēru*-wood weapon in dream rituals involving Marduk? See Butler 1998: 213. In this light one wonders whether there may be similar import in Erra's words: "Like the storm (^{d}*Adad*) I thunder. Like the sun (^{d}*Šamši*), I survey the entire orbit of the world" (I 115–16).

73. Machinist 1981: 403.

74. Bottéro 1977–78: 161.

75. Machinist 1983.

76. For example, the poet's puns on the meanings of names follows in the tradition of *Enūma Eliš*, which places great importance on knowing the meanings of divine names, especially that of Marduk (VI 121–VII 144). See Böhl 1936: 191–218; Bottéro 1977: 5–28; Noegel 2007b: 24–26; Andrea Seri 2006: 507–19. On punning on Akkadian names generally, see Hurowitz 2008a.

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