# "SUFFERING AMBIGUITY IN *LUDLUL BĒL NĒMEQI*: ON ERUDITION, IDEOLOGY, AND THEOLOGY IN TABLET I"

Scott B. NOEGEL
University of Washington

*Abstract*

*In this study, I examine several cases of ambiguity in* Ludlul bēl nēmeqi *that force one to probe the nature and character of Marduk and the cause of human sin and suffering. When understood within the context of a profession that promoted secrecy and that hermeneutically exploited textual ambiguity to ascertain divine secrets, the cases of ambiguity demonstrate theological principles associated with the Marduk cult, including the incomprehensibility of his godhead and his subsumption of gods, demons, and the powers of sorcerers. The essay concludes by looking at the poem's ambiguities as representative of the divinatory institution's critical inquiry into the cult's syncretistic theology and the dilemmas it naturally poses concerning the ultimate cause of sin and suffering.*

*Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* is an abstruse text — deliberately so, one might argue. Its author was a highly learned ritual professional, and he took great pains to make sure that posterity knew it, often employing arcane words drawn from medicine, mythology, and the divinatory sciences.[1]) Wilfred Lambert describes the poem this way.

> The range of vocabulary is far wider than in most religious texts, and *hapax legomena* or meanings not otherwise attested occur frequently. The author has certainly not coined these rare words himself. He was steeped in the magic literature and seems to have culled from it all the obscure phrases and recondite words.[2])

With regard to the poet's artifice, Benjamin Foster describes it as the work of a master: "The author makes use of every poetic device in the Akkadian repertory. He is fond of wordplays... alliteration, rhyme, intricate parallelism, (and the) inclusion by opposites..."[3])

The poet's message, which ostensibly is about the cause of personal suffering, concludes that, because one cannot fully comprehend Marduk's will and reasoning, one must extol him. Thus, the poet's use of difficult language not only embodies his message about divine incomprehensibility, it becomes ironic in its light. Indeed, the long list of scholarly terms and learned literary devices only underscores the author's predicament that despite all of his acquired wisdom, he can only hunch his shoulders and praise the "Lord of Wisdom."

It is in this context that I would like to examine the poet's sophisticated language in Tablet I, with special attention to the opening hymn and the account of the angry king and his seven wicked courtiers. Specifically, I shall argue that the author has charged this section of his poem with a number of ambiguities that represent an ideological and theological engagement with the subject of divine knowledge.[4])

I divide my study into four sections. In the first, I contextualize my analysis by discussing how the divinatory profession hermeneutically exploited ambiguity to ascertain divine secrets and how secrecy was ideologically vital to that institution. In the second, I turn to the opening hymn in *Ludlul* and examine several cases of ambiguity that force one to probe the nature and character of Marduk and the cause of human sin and suffering.[5]) In the third, I present additional cases of ambiguity that demonstrate theological principles associated with the Marduk cult, including his subsumption of gods, demons, and the powers of sorcerers.[6]) I close the study with a few observations concerning the author and his learned use of ambiguity.

## 1. Ambiguity and Divine Secrets

We may see the author's use of ambiguity functioning much like his pseudonymity. Both served to conceal ideological and theological knowledge that was restricted for the inner circle. Indeed, as an *ummânu* "master" and/or *āšipu* "exorcist," the author of *Ludlul* worked hard to cultivate his authority as a handler of divine secrets.[7]) His profession held especially close the secret readings of learned texts that were obtained through paronomasia, *noṭariqon*, and the polyvalent values of cuneiform signs (both phonetic and

[1]) The text gives the sufferer's name as Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan, which scholars have long taken to be the text's author, a pseudonym, or a fictive character. Takayoshi Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers: Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi and the Babylonian Theodicy* (Orientalische Religionen in der Antike, 14; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 13-19, argues that he was a real person of high status, perhaps a governor, who commissioned an *ummânu* "master scholar" to compose the thanksgiving poem on his behalf.

[2]) W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 26. For a list of some of the arcane vocabulary items appearing in the text, see Amar Annus and Alan Lenzi, *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi: The Standard Babylonian Poem of the Righteous Sufferer* (State Archives of Assyria Cuneiform Texts, 7; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2010), xxvi-xxviii. For a more complete treatment of the broken fourth tablet, see Annus and Lenzi, "A Six-Column Babylonian Tablet of *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi* and the Reconstruction of Tablet IV," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 70 (2011): 181-205.

[3]) Benjamin R. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature*. Vols. 1-2 (3rd ed; Betheda, MD: CDL Press, 1993), 393. Annus and Lenzi, *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi*, xxx-xxxiv, offer additional examples of the learned devices at work in the poem.

[4]) On Mesopotamian literary texts as generally representative of the ideology and theology of the divinatory profession, see Scott B. Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers: The Allusive Language of Dreams in the Ancient Near East* (American Oriental Series, 89; New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 2007), 1-88. Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 230, suggests that *Ludlul* could have promoted the reliability of those ritual experts specifically connected to the Esagil in Babylon.

[5]) Notwithstanding the study by Jean Bottéro, "Le problème du Mal en Mésopotamie ancienne, Prologue à une étude du 'Juste Souffrant,'" *Recherches et Documents du Centre Thomas More* 15/7 (1977): 1-43, Annus and Lenzi, *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi*, xxiii, n41, rightly note: "Oddly, the issue of sin in *Ludlul* has not received much attention from interpreters."

[6]) Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 44-47, places the creation of the poem in the Kassite period, but the development of a universalist Marduk theology in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar I. If he is correct, then the ambiguities studied here reflect the theological development of this later period.

[7]) Alan Lenzi, *Secrecy and the Gods: Secret Knowledge in Ancient Mesopotamia and Biblical Israel* (State Archives of Assyria Studies, 19; Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2008); "Advertising Secrecy, Creating Power in Ancient Mesopotamia: How Scholars Used Secrecy in Scribal Education to Bolster and Perpetuate Their Social Prestige and Power," *Antiguo Oriente* 11 (2013): 13-42.

logographic).[8]) This hermeneutic belonged generally to what Babylonian scholars called the *amāt niṣirti* "hidden words" and *pirišti ša ilī* "secret of the gods."[9]) As one school text instructs:

> *tupšarrūtu bīt būni niṣirti* $^{d}$*Ammanki*
> *tadallipšimma niṣirtaša ukallamka*
>
> The scribal art is a house of goodness, the treasure/secret of Ammanki.
> Work ceaselessly with the scribal art, and it will reveal its treasure/secret to you.[10])

It was the task of the advanced pupil to study closely a text's signs and to apply the learned hermeneutic in order to obtain the divine secrets embedded in it, whether that text was written in the stars, a sheep's liver, or on a clay tablet.[11]) Like the discipline that employed it, the signs could hide in plain sight information that required and reified the role of those who could interpret them properly.

## 2. The Hymn to Marduk: On the Ambiguity of the Divine and Human Suffering

It is within this context of erudition, ideology, and theology that I turn first to the opening hymn, in which the poet exalts Marduk as a god of extreme contrasts.[12]) As he proclaims, Marduk is *ēziz mūši muppašir urri* "furious at night, relaxed at dawn" (I 2, 4). The line is more than a poetic description of capriciousness, for as Lambert observes, the Marduk cult held that "all other powers of the universe were but aspects of him."[13]) Thus, the author's frequent use of merisms to describe Marduk allows him to engrain a profound theological tenet on his audience: as a merism embodied, Marduk is all things. As Takayoshi Oshima remarks, the text is "an embodiment of Babylonian cult dogma in the second half of the second millennium BCE."[14])

Nevertheless, the merisms are not always as straightforward as one might expect, for many of them are ambiguous and impel one to contemplate the meaning of Marduk's actions. With regard to the aforementioned expression *muppašir urri*, William Moran observes that it:

> ...compels attention, and by leaving us to supply the object it also creates rich ambiguity. The indefiniteness allows us to think not only of Marduk's wrath but of the 'loosening' of other things as well — the sins that provoke wrath, the clutch of the demon, disease and pain, the tangle of troubled dreams. ...or does (it) depart even further from expectation and make *urru*... (the) object, the day cleared and the cloudless symbol of Marduk's mercy...?[15])

The ambiguity leaves us with questions and persuades us to concur with the author's assertion that Marduk's intentions cannot be comprehended, even by the other gods (I 30-32).

Moreover, the polyvalency of some merisms allows for interpretations that stress the darker side of Marduk's character. Thus, in the hymn we learn:

> 8. *musaḫḫir karassu kabattašu târat*
> His mood turns, his emotion pivots,
> 9. *ša nakbat qātīšu lā inaššû šamā'u*
> The force of whose hand, the heavens cannot hold,
> 10. *rittuš rabbât ukaššu mīta*
> Whose palm is gentle, it assists the dying.
> 11. $^{d}$AMAR.UTU (*Marduk*) *ša nakbat qātīšu lā inaššû šamā'u*
> Marduk, the force of whose hand, the heavens cannot hold,
> 12. *rabbâti rittašu ukaššu mīta*
> Gentle is his palm, it assists the dying.
> 13. *ša ina libbatīšu uptatta qabrātum*
> On account of whose wrath, graves are opened (I 9-13).

Here the poet's repetition and variation simultaneously laud and arraign Marduk's extreme qualities. Note first the ambiguous wording of I 8: *musaḫḫir karassu kabattašu târat* "His mood turns, his emotion pivots." One can read the line positively or negatively; it is impossible to know which direction Marduk's mood is said to swing. In addition, both *saḫāru* and *târu* have semantic parameters that permit the meanings "turn, return, repeat, and transform."[16]) Further, since Marduk is the subject of the previous line, it is possible to read him as the subject of *musaḫḫir* rather than his *karašu* "mood."[17]) This becomes meaningful when we recognize the paronomasia by which *karašu* (*karšu*) "mood" suggests *karašû* "catastrophe" and *kabattu* "passion" suggests *kabittu* "grievous matter."[18]) The allusions characterize Marduk as the one who brings catastrophe and his emotion as a grievous matter. Moreover, in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* both *karašû* and *kabittu* occur in reference to the great flood about which Ea warns Utnapištum.[19]) By drawing upon that learned

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[8]) Alasdair Livingstone, *Mystical and Mythological Explanatory Works of Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*. We find the same techniques employed in commentaries, which presumably were used in school settings. See Eckart Frahm, *Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries: Origins of Interpretation* (GMTR, 5; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2011), 70-85.

[9]) Beate Pongratz-Leisten, *Herrschaftswissen in Mesopotamien: Formen der Kommunikation zwischen Gott und König im 2. und 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1999), 289-293, 301-309; Barbara Böck, "An Esoteric Babylonian Commentary Revisited," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 120 (2000): 619; and Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 36-88.

[10]) A. W. Sjöberg, "In Praise of the Scribal Art," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 24 (1972): 126-127. Here the polyseme *niṣirtu* means both "treasure" and "secret." For other examples of polysemy and compositional structure in this text, see Victor A. Hurowitz, "Literary Observations on 'In Praise of the Scribal Art,'" *Journal of the Ancient Near East Society* 27 (2000): 49-56.

[11]) See Frahm, *Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries*. For an examination of such devices in Tablet IV, see Alan Lenzi, "Scribal Hermeneutics and the Twelve Gates of *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 135 (2015): 733-749. I thank Alan Lenzi for sharing an earlier draft of his article with me and for providing helpful feedback on earlier draft of this essay.

[12]) On the opposing features of Marduk, see Takayoshi Oshima, *Babylonian Prayers to Marduk* (Orientalische Religionen in der Antike, 7; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 48-58.

[13]) W. G. Lambert, "The Historical Development of the Mesopotamian Pantheon: A Study in Sophisticated Polytheism," H. Goedicke and J. J. M. Roberts, eds., *Unity and Diversity: Essays on the History, Literature, and Religion of the Ancient Near East* (Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 198.

[14]) Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 28.

[15]) William Moran, "Notes on the Hymn to Marduk in *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 103 (1983): 256.

[16]) *CAD* S 37, s.v. *saḫāru*; *CAD* T 250, s.v. *târu*.

[17]) The *Song of Erra* similarly employs ambiguous subjects. See Scott B. Noegel, "'Word Play' in the Song of Erra," in Wolfgang Heimpel and Gabriella Frantz-Szabó, eds., *Strings and Threads: A Celebration of the Work of Anne Draffkorn Kilmer* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 186-189.

[18]) *CAD* K 214, s.v. *karašû*; *CAD* K 21, s.v. *kabittu*.

[19]) *Epic of Gilgamesh* IX 169: "and assigned my people to destruction (*karaší*)." It also occurs in XI 173. In IX 45, the dialogue exploits a similar paronomasia between *kabittu* "grievous matter" and *kibātu* "wheat" in Ea's secret words to Utnapishtim portending the *abūbu* "deluge." See already Frank, Carl, "Zu den Wortspielen *kukku* und *kibâti* in Gilg. Ep.

tradition,[20]) the author subsumes Ea's role into Marduk and offers a fitting follow-up to the previous line: *uzzuššu lā māḫar abūbu rūbšu* "His fury one cannot withstand, the deluge is his rage" (I 7).[21]) Moreover, in case one did not catch the allusions, shortly afterwards the poet employs *karašû*: "Then he (Marduk) raises the fallen from catastrophe (*karašê*)" (I 14); and *kabittu*: "Dangerous in a flash, his grievous (*kabitti*) punishment" (I 17).

Polysemy also obtains in the repeated verb *kâšu* (I 10, 12), which means "help, assist" or "delay."[22]) When understood as the former, the hymn describes Marduk's care for the dying, but when read as the latter, it casts him as a god who cruelly prolongs the death of the sufferer. The former finds support in Marduk's *rittuš rabbât* "whose palm is gentle," whereas the latter anticipates the mention of Marduk's wrath and open graves (I 13) and the sufferer's own protracted illness for which others prepare an open tomb (II 114).[23])

In addition, we can read the signs comprising the word *nak-bat* (I 9, 11) as *nag-bi* meaning "deep-spring."[24]) This calls to mind the title $^{d}$AMAR.UTU *ša nagbi* "Marduk of the deep-spring," further representative of his subsumption of Ea.[25]) The change in reading encourages us to translate I 9 as a rhetorical question: "From the deep-spring, do his (Marduk's) hands not hold up the heavens?"[26])

Another case of ambiguity is the two-fold use of *rabbâtu*, which means "gentle, calm" or "large, powerful, grievous, overbearing."[27]) One simultaneously hears that the very palm that is gentle can be overbearing, even for the heavens (I 9, 11). The ambiguity thus anticipates I 33: *ana kî kabtat* ŠU-*su* (*qāssu*) ŠÀ-*ba-šú* (*libbašu*) *rēmēni* "As grievous as is his hand, his heart is merciful." However, here too we have polysemy, because *kabtu* also means "venerable, honored" and *qātu* can mean "power, care, control."[28]) Thus, we may understand *ana kî kabtat qāssu* to mean "As venerable as is his power." In fact, it is not until *Ludlul* III 1 that the negative nuance of the phrase *kabtat qāssu* becomes clear: *kabtat* ŠU-*su* (*qāssu*) *ul ale'î našâša* "His hand was grievous, I could not bear it."[29])

Ambiguity in the service of erudition also appears in I 18-20.

18. *ikkarriṭma zamarma itâr ālittuš*
    He is caring and instantly becomes motherly.
19. *iddudma rīmašu uganna*
    He darts and dotes on his pitied one,
20. *kî araḫ būri ittanasḫara* EGIR-*šú* (*arkīšu*)
    And like a cow (to her) calf, keeps turning around behind him.

These lines offer a veritable cornucopia of allusions. We can derive the verb *ikkarriṭma* (written *ik-kar-riṭ-ma*) from *nakruṭu* meaning "show pity, mercy."[30]) Yet the sign *riṭ* also has the value *rit*, which permits a derivation from *karātu* "strike, cut off."[31]) In addition, *ālittuš* refers to a mother giving birth, but paronomastically one also hears in this word *littu* "offspring" and *littu* "cow."[32]) The verb *edēdu* means "act quickly" or "pointed" (hence my "darts") in reference to horns and impetuous action.[33]) Even *rīmu* is polyvalent. It can mean "womb, mercy, passion" or a "wild bull,"[34]) and it paronomastically suggests *râmu* "loved one."[35])

The possibilities for interpretation are manifold. An *ālittu* "woman giving birth" can suggest maternal tenderness, but also travail.[36]) Marduk either is caring towards his loved one or he becomes cut off from his protégé.[37]) He is either quick to act or pointed and impetuous. The additional paronomasia suggesting a cow and wild bull only perfects Marduk's transformation into a bovine. The combined polysemy and paronomasia force one to contemplate which of the characteristics defines him.

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XI," *ZA* 36 (1925): 218. Discussed and expanded in Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 67-70.

[20]) On *Ludlul* as a "montage" of textual and cultural traditions, see Beate Pongratz-Leisten, "From Ritual to Text to Intertext: A New Look on the Dreams in *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi*," in P. Alexander, *et al*., eds., *The Second Degree: Paratextual Literature in Ancient Near Eastern and Ancient Mediterranean Culture and Its Reflections in Medieval Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 139-157.

[21]) The *abūbu* "deluge" is also the twelfth weapon created by Marduk to defeat Tiamat in *Enūma eliš* IV 49.

[22]) *CAD* K 295, s.v. *kâšu* A, B. As "help" the verb is rare. Rainer Albertz, "*Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* eine Lehrdichtung zur Ausbreitung und Vertiefung der persönlichen Mardukfrömmigkeit," in *Geschichte und Theologie: Studien zur Exegese des Alten Testaments und zur Religionsgeschichte Israels* (Beiheft zu Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, 326; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 87, n14, considers both possibilities. Noted also by Alan Lenzi, "The Curious Case of Failed Revelation in *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi*: A New Suggestion for the Poem's Scholarly Purpose," in C. L. Crouch, *et al*., eds., *Mediating Between Heaven and Earth: Communication with the Divine in the Ancient Near East* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2012), 41, n15; and Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 176, though here too not as polysemy.

[23]) *Ludlul* II 114: *peti* KI.MAḪ (*kimāḫḫī*) *ersû šukānūa* "open is my tomb, my grave-ornaments prepared."

[24]) *CAD* N/1 108, s.v. *nagbu* A.

[25]) He is equated with $^{d}$LUGAL.A.KI.[A] = Lugalidda. CT 24, pl. 50, No. 47406, line 2. Marduk also is connected to the *nagbu* in *Ludlul* IV 86, though this portion of the tablet is broken. In *Enūma eliš* V 54, Marduk opens a *nagbu* in Tiamat's body. For other learned uses of *nagbu* for both "deep-spring" and "all, totality," see Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 27-28.

[26]) *CAD* N/1 89, s.v. *našû*, adopts a similar reading.

[27]) *CAD* R 6, s.v. *rabābu*; *CAD* R 15, s.v. *rabbu* A; *CAD* R 14, s.v. *rabâtu* (*rabbâtu*).

[28]) *CAD* K 24, s.v. *kabtu*; *CAD* Q 183, s.v. *qātu*.

[29]) Moran, "Notes on the Hymn to Marduk in *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi*," similarly sees the three lines as mutually referential. Also Albertz, "*Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* eine Lehrdichtung zur Ausbreitung und Vertiefung der persönlichen Mardukfrömmigkeit," 94. Note too that the idiom ŠU + godname can denote a type of illness or disease. The "hand of Marduk," could refer to illnesses related to the chest. See JoAnn Scurlock and Burton Andersen, *Diagnoses in Assyrian and Babylonian Medicine: Ancient Sources, Translations, and Modern Medical Analyses* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 459-460; and now Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 175.

[30]) With Annus and Lenzi, *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi*, 50, who treat it as an N-stem of *karāṭu*. See also A. George and F. al-Rawi, "Tablets from the Sippar Library. VII. Three Wisdom Texts," *Iraq* 60 (1998): 197. Supported now by Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 177. *CAD* N/1 195, s.v. *nakruṭu*. Note the paronomasia between *zamar* "instantly" in I 18 and *zumra* "body" in I 21.

[31]) *CAD* K 215, s.v. *karātu*.

[32]) *CAD* A/1 340, s.v. *ālidu*. *CAD* L 217-219, s.v. *littu* A, C.

[33]) *CAD* E 24, s.v. *edēdu*. Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 79, renders the verb "become pointed (i.e. become angry?)." He also suggests that the verb might refer "to Marduk's being the crescent of the waxing moon" since *arḫu* also can mean "cow" or "moon" (177).

[34]) *CAD* R 259, s.v. *rēmu*; *CAD* R 359, s.v. *rīmu* A.

[35]) Puns noted by Foster, *Before the Muses*, 395, n2; Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 179.

[36]) Cf. *Epic of Gilgamesh* XI 116: *išassi* $^{d}$*Ištar kīma ālitti* "Ishtar cried like a woman giving birth."

[37]) Perhaps cut off "umbilically" (from *karātu*)? The verb appears in reference to a dog giving birth in an omen without an apodosis in Alfred Boissier, *Documents assyriens relatifs auz présages* (Paris: Librarie Émile Bouillon, 1894), 105, r. 8: DIŠ SAL.UR *ina* É LÚ Ù.TU *ik-kar-it* (*šumma kalbatu ina bīt amēli ūlid ikkarit*) "If a bitch gives birth (to a puppy) in a man's house and is cut off..." Cf. Ezek 16:4: בְּיוֹם הִוָּלֶדֶת אֹתָךְ לֹא־כָרַת שָׁרֵךְ "On the day you (Jerusalem) were born, your navel-cord was not cut."

Theological ambiguity continues in I 22-24.

22. *pašḫū ṣindūšu uballaṭū namtara*
His bandages pac[i]fy, they revive (the one afflicted by) the Namtar-demon.
23. *iqabbi gillata ušraššu*
He speaks and assigns guilt.
24. *ina* $U_4$ (*ūmi*) *iširtīšu uptaṭṭarū e'ilti u annu*
On the day of his justice,[38]) liability and punishment are absolved.

Of immediate interest is the ambiguity inherent in I 22. While the use of bandages suggests the revival of someone inflicted by a Namtar-demon, the fact that we must supply the words "the one afflicted by," suggests, as Rainer Albertz avers, that the author implies Marduk's responsibility for his suffering, and by extension, man's sin.[39])

The subject of sin is then resumed in the next two lines. However, here too there is ambiguity. Of note is the cuneiform sign *raš* in *uš-raš-ši* (I 23), which also has the value *káš*. This allows us to derive the verb as a *šd*-stem causative form of *kâšu* "delay" (rather than from *rašû* "assign") and translate: "He speaks and delays guilt."[40]) The reading finds fulfillment in the next line: "On the day of his justice, sin and transgression are absolved" (I 24). With a single stroke the poet comments on Marduk's unpredictability in issuing a verdict or a stay.[41]) Again, he is a merism embodied. Annus and Lenzi's explanation of this passage is apposite: "even the sufferer's sin is explained by way of Marduk's inscrutable freedom to do as he pleases."[42])

Further, I 24 contains two words that one can understand in varying ways: *e'iltu* and *annu* (from *arnu*). On the one hand, since both occur after the assigning/delaying of guilt, we can read them both in a juridical sense, i.e., as "liability" and "crime/punlishment," respectively. However, both words also mean "sin," thus connecting the verdict or stay to a transgression against Marduk. By identifying his punishment with sin, the author echoes the conventional theology of his day that understands suffering as the result of sin,[43]) and foreshadows the sufferer's entrance through the eighth gate: *ina* KÁ NAM.TAG.GA DUḪ.A *e'iltī ippaṭir* "In the Gate of Namtaggaduḫa (lit. "Absolution of Sin") my transgression was dissolved" (IV 45).[44])

The contemplation concerning sin and punishment in I 22-24 subtly attributes the responsibility for human sin to Marduk. Note that, up until this point in the text, the sufferer has confessed to no wrongdoing. On the contrary, before describing the results of Marduk's anger, he proclaims: "I will teach the people their plea for favor is near. May his favorable concern carry off *their* sin" (I 39-40). His use of the third person pronoun only draws attention to the fact that he has admitted to no guilt of his own. In fact, one hears nothing of personal sin until much later, in a broken portion of Tablet III (58-60), following the nocturnal promise of recovery.[45]) As Annus and Lenzi remark, "It is surely significant that he mentions sin only *after* he received divine aid."[46])

Consider a similar case of ambiguity in I 27-28.

27. *mušmanṭi* [*riḫiṣ*]*ti* $^{d}$IM (*Adad*) *miḫiṣti* $^{d}$*Erra*
Who abates the [cru]shing of Adad,[47]) the wound of Erra,
28. *musallim* DINGIR (*ila*) *u* $^{d}$15 (*ištāra*) *šabbasūti*
Who pacifies a furious god and goddess.

There is much hidden in this learned passage. Not only do *riḫiṣtu* and *miḫiṣtu* rhyme, but the latter term also designates cuneiform signs and writing.[48]) Thus, the phrase *miḫiṣti* $^{d}$*Erra* naturally evokes the "writing of (the name) Erra," i.e., *èr-ra*. Indeed, a close look reveals that the logographic meaning of the sign RA in Erra's name denotes both *riḫiṣtu* "crushing" and *miḫiṣtu* "wound."[49])

Moreover, the entire passage is ambiguous.[50]) Does the author's use of *mušmanṭi* convey the notion that Marduk will lessen the impact of Adad and Erra's destruction?[51]) Or does it suggest that he will make it pale in comparison to his own wrath? Similarly, does *musallim* signify that Marduk will reconcile the anger of the god and goddess? Or will he be on favorable terms with them?[52]) Again, the ambiguity cautions us not to assume firm knowledge of Marduk's character.

The rhetorical queries in I 35-36 are also ambiguous.

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[38]) Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 180-181, suggests reading "day of offering" (to Marduk).

[39]) Albertz, "*Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* eine Lehrdichtung zur Ausbreitung und Vertiefung der persönlichen Mardukfrömmigkeit," 103, "ja vielleicht sogar der Meinung ist, daß Marduk selber Sünde auf einen Menschen bringen kann." Note that the sufferer sees an exorcist in his dream who was sent by Marduk and states that he brought a bandage (*ṣimda*) for Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan (III 44-45). The passage recalls the author's ambiguous statement concerning the bandage in I 22.

[40]) *CAD* K 295, s.v. *kâšu*, shows no attestation of a *šd*-stem, but such refinement is not beyond the abilities of our poet who twice employs this form elsewhere (I 27, 56). A. Albertz, "*Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* eine Lehrdichtung zur Ausbreitung und Vertiefung der persönlichen Mardukfrömmigkeit," 88, n19, notes the alternative reading, but rejects it.

[41]) The author also registers Marduk's ambivalence in assigning or releasing sin by his iconic use of the wax tablet in the dream episode (III 42), which recorded the sufferer's sins and could be just as easily shelved or erased. See Pongratz-Leisten, "From Ritual to Text to Intertext," 152-153. Oshima, *Babylonian Prayers to Marduk*, 55, suggests that the tablet symbolized a prayer or incantation of Asarluḫḫi.

[42]) Annus and Lenzi, *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi*, xxiii.

[43]) Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 12, sees this sin as the sufferer's neglect of cultic obligations to Marduk and his temple.

[44]) On the learned use of polyvalent signs here and in the names of the other gates, see Lenzi, "Scribal Hermeneutics and the Twelve Gates of *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*."

[45]) This in contradistinction to the prayer to Marduk published by W. G. Lambert, "Three Literary Prayers of the Babylonians," *Archiv für Orientforschung* 19 (1959-1960): 55-60, which contains several first person reflections on, and confessions of personal sin, e.g., 58, line 139: *ma'dūma annūya aḫṭaṭi kalāma* "Many are my transgressions, I have committed every sin." On the relationship between prayers to Marduk and *Ludlul*, see Oshima, *Babylonian Prayers to Marduk*, 48-56; *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 26-28.

[46]) Annus and Lenzi, *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi*, xxiii. Italics are original.

[47]) Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 184-185, provides evidence for understanding the *riḫiṣtu* of Adad as a flood.

[48]) *CAD* M/2 54, s.v. *miḫiṣtu*.

[49]) *CAD* M/2 54, s.v. *miḫiṣtu*; *CAD* R 334, s.v. *riḫiṣtu*. A similar use of the RA sign appears in the *Song of Erra* I 112, in which Erra declares: "Among the herds, I am striker (*māḫiṣāku*), on the mountains, the ram" (also IV 92). See Noegel, "'Word Play' in the Song of Erra," 174, 179. It also is possible that the broken signs reconstructed as [*ri-ḫi-iṣ*]-*ti* read [RA]-*ti*, as speculated by *CAD* R 335, s.v. *riḫiṣtu*.

[50]) Observe also the odd orthography of *muš-man-ṭi* in I 27, which the author wrote with the *man* sign rather than *maṭ*. One would expect *muš-maṭ-ṭi*, as the participle derives from *maṭû*. *CAD* M/1 429, s.v. *maṭû*. Could it be that author employed the *man* sign, because, when read logographically (i.e., as MAN), it communicates the number "twenty," i.e., the number used to write the name Šamaš? It thus would constitute a learned correlate to "fifteen" (i.e., *ištāru*) in the next line and bring the total number of deities referenced in the couplet to six, including Marduk. On Marduk as an embodiment of Šamaš, see below.

[51]) Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 184, proposes that we emend *muš-man-ṭi* to *muš-mid-ṭi* and render it "the one who multiplies."

[52]) *CAD* S 89, s.v. *salāmu*.

35. *ša lā* ŠÀ-*bišu* (*libbišu*) *mannu miḫiṣtašu lišapšiḫ*
Without his desire, who could pacify his strike?
36. *ela kabtatišu aiû lišālil* ŠU-*su* (*qāssu*)
Apart from his emotion, who could restrain his hand?

Notable is the expression *miḫiṣtašu lišapšiḫ*, which means "pacify his strike" or "heal his wound."[53]) The former implies that no one can withstand Marduk's power, whereas the latter cynically suggests that one must await Marduk's decision to heal wounds that he himself has inflicted. As Oshima observes, "These lines imply that Marduk is ultimately responsible for people's adversities as well as for their salvation."[54]) In I 36, the words *lišālil qāssu* are also ambiguous. If we treat the verb as a causative form of *alālu* "hang," it translates "restrain his hand."[55]) However, there is another verb *alālu* that means "hail, acclaim, boast."[56]) In fact, the *š*-stem form of this verb appears twice in reference to hailing Marduk in *Enūma eliš* (V 81, VII 46). I already have discussed *qātu* "hand" as also meaning "power, care, control." This allows us to render the question: "Apart from his emotion, who would hail his power?," intimating that it is only the threat of Marduk's violence that compels one to honor him. This informs the sufferer's statement in the next line: *lušāpi uggassu ša kīma nūni ākulu rušumtu* "Let me praise his fury, I, who like a fish, gulped silt" (I 37).[57])

The sufferer's double-edged praise continues in I 40-42.

40. *ḫissassu* $SIG_5$ (*damiq*)-*tu*[*m*] *arnāšina litbal*
May his favorable grace carry off their sin.
41. *ištu* $U_4$ (*ūm*)-*mi bēli īninanni*
From the day the lord punished me,[58])
42. *u qarrādu* $^{d}$AMAR.UTU (*Marduk*) *isbusu* [K]I (*itti*)-*ia*
And the hero Marduk was wroth with me.

Polysemous here is the verb *enēnu*. In addition to meaning "punish," it means "grant favor, be favorable."[59]) This permits us to render I 42: "from the day the lord found favor with me." This reading is suggested by $SIG_5$-*tu*[*m*] (= *damiqtum*) in the previous line, and by I 38-39 just prior, which also uses *enēnu* "grant favor" to refer to the fortunes Marduk can confer: "He quickly bestowed favor (*īnunamma*)." Yet, as "punish," the line points ahead to Marduk's anger in the next line and the results that it brings in I 43-44. It thus forms a Janus Parallelism.[60]) Once again the polysemy communicates Marduk's unpredictability and incomprehensibility; to wit, even a master diviner cannot fully know what Marduk intends, whether for weal or woe.

From a literary perspective, the author's ambiguity enacts for the reader the sufferer's experience failing to find a clear sign through divinatory means. As he bemoans:

51. *dalḫā têrētūa nuppuḫū uddakam*
Convoluted are my extispicies, ambiguous daily.[61])
52. *ittī* LÚ.ḪAL (*bārî*) *u šā'ili alaktī ul parsat*
My sign, the extispicer and diviner could not parse.[62])

Like the reader who encounters frightening descriptions of Marduk hidden in the cuneiform signs used to praise him, so too does the sufferer discover terror in the only signs he is able to obtain (I 49, 54-55). As he complains: *iššaknanimma idāt piritti* "Omens of terror were established for me" (I 49); an experience in which an expected *pirišti* "secret" became an unexpected *piritti* "terror."[63])

## 3. Ambiguity and the Subsumption of Gods, Demons, and the Power of Sorcerers

In a number of passages, the author employs polysemy to bolster the theological claim implicit in the merisms that Marduk is the embodiment of all things. Babylonian religion generally held a fluid conception of divine incarnation, as Benjamin Sommer explains: "...in Mesopotamian religions, divine bodies differ from nondivine ones in that a deity's presence was not limited to a single body; it could emerge simultaneously in several objects."[64]) Nevertheless, in the Marduk cult this theology reached new heights. Indeed, the story of Marduk's creation in *Enūma eliš* folds the gods Anu, Ea, and Enlil into Marduk's being (IV 4; VII 101, 136, 142-144).[65])

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[53]) *CAD* M/2 54, s.v. *miḫiṣtu*; *CAD* P 227, s.v. *pašāḫu*.

[54]) Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 186.

[55]) *CAD* A/1 329 s.v. *alālu* A. Hence "stay his hand" in Annus and Lenzi, *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi*, 32. The *š*-stem is unattested for this verb, unless we count *Ludlul* I 36 as the only case.

[56]) *CAD* A/1 331, s.v. *alālu* B.

[57]) Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 186, does not understand the fish as a simile and renders "who ate mud instead of fish."

[58]) With Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 188, I have not rendered the noun with a first person suffix, i.e., *bēlī* "my lord" (though see his remarks on 44). I also concur with Lenzi, "The Curious Case of Failed Revelation in *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi*," 43, n18, who notes: "...the best readings of I 41 cohere with the idea that Marduk is not recognized explicitly as the sufferer's lord until the announcement of the sufferer's imminent, Marduk-initiated deliverance."

[59]) It also means "pray." See *CAD* E 162-164, s.v. *enēnu* A, B, C.

[60]) Janus Parallelism is a device found in many ancient Near Eastern literary texts in which a polyseme faces back to a previous line in one of its meanings, and forward to a following line in its other meaning. Note that *arnu* means "sin," but also "punishment." So the line reflects back to I 40 as well. On this device in Akkadian, see Scott B. Noegel, "A Janus Parallelism in the Gilgamesh Flood Story," *Acta Sumerologica* 13 (1991): 419-421; "An Asymmetrical Janus Parallelism in the Gilgamesh Flood Story," *Acta Sumerologica* 16 (1994): 10-12; "Janus Parallelism Clusters in Akkadian Literature," *Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires* 71 (1995): 33-34; "Another Janus Parallelism in the Atra-ḫasis Epic," *Acta Sumerologica* 17 (1995): 342-344.

[61]) The word *nuppuḫu* means "swollen, bloated" in reference to disease or "light fires." *CAD* N/2 342, s.v. *nuppuḫu*; *CAD* N/1 268, s.v. *napāḫu*. However, in reference to extispicy omens it means "ambiguous," i.e., "swollen with *nipḫu*-signs." A *nipḫu*-sign is an abnormal feature on the exta that functions like a "joker sign" to change the meaning of an omen to its opposite. See Heeßel, "The Hermeneutics of Mesopotamian Extispicy," 25-26. *CAD* N/2 242, s.v. *nipḫu*. See Oshima, *Babylonian Prayers to Marduk*, 192, suggests the word here refers to an omen of evil import.

[62]) A *šā'ilu* is not necessarily a dream interpreter, hence my translation "diviner." In *Ludlul* II 7, the *šā'ilu* is connected to libanomancy. On the interdisciplinarity of Mesopotamian divinatory professionals, see Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 32-34. Oshima, *Babylonian Prayers to Marduk*, 192-193, reads *itti* as a preposition ("by means of") rather than a noun ("sign").

[63]) Discerned by Annus and Lenzi, *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi*, 44, n21.

[64]) Benjamin D. Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 19.

[65]) Earlier syncretism had folded the gods Asaluḫi and Tutu into Marduk as well. A similar device obtains in the *Song of Erra*, in which Marduk, Erra, and Ishum are brought seemlessly into a single frame that blurs their identities. The device serves to make Erra and Ishum appear as manifestations of Marduk. See Noegel, "'Word Play' in the Song of Erra," 162-193. On other deities as manifestations of Marduk, see the one god list fragment of the AN = *Anu šá amēli* type that focuses solely on the god Marduk, discussed by Lambert, "The Historical Development of the Mesopotamian Pantheon," 191-200. The text appears in CT 24, pl. 50, No. 47406. It does not appear in Richard L. Litke, *A Reconstruction of the Assyro-Babylonian God Lists, AN:* $^{d}$*A-NU-UM and AN: ANU ŠÁ AMĒLI* (Texts from the Babylonian Collection, 3; New Haven, CT: Yale Babylonian Collection, 1998). Additional syncretism with Marduk appears in some incantations to Marduk. See Oshima, *Babylonian Prayers to Marduk*, 388-394.

I already have touched on this above with regard to the association of Marduk with the deluge and other terms connected to Ea. We encounter it again when the poet describes the fifth of seven courtiers who plotted evil against him: *ḫaššu pî ḫa-še-e šubalkut* (I 63). The word *šubalkut* means to "make someone change their opinion, mood, or allegiance" when it occurs in conjunction with *pû* "mouth."[66]) So it appears that the fifth adversary is changing someone's opinion, but whose?

At the heart of the difficulty is the lexeme *ḫa-še-e*, which undoubtedly was selected as a paronomastic complement for *ḫaššu* "fifth."[67]) Annus and Lenzi note the existence of a variant text that reads *ḫa-an-še-e* and render it "fifty," translating the verse: "*And* the fifth overturned the opinion of fifty."[68]) Oshima similarly renders "The fifth incited fifty people..."[69]) This provides an apt description of the damage that one person's accusations can do in a community. However, as I have noted elsewhere, the presence of odd orthography or peculiar grammar often serves to signal the presence of polysemy — for diviners, an abnormal "sign" constituted a meaningful "signifier.'[70]) Niek Velhuis similarly maintains: "Ungrammaticality, or deviant grammar, is often a mark in that it draws attention to something special, as readers of modern poetry well know."[71])

I submit that the author employed the odd orthography and chose the hyperbolic number not only to create alliteration, but to underscore the ultimate source of his suffering, namely Marduk, who possessed fifty names, one of which was "Fifty."[72]) As the end of *Enūma eliš* informs us: *ina zikri ḫanšā ilāni rabûti ḫanšā šumēšu imbû* "The great gods called the fifty names, they pronounced his name 'Fifty'" (VII 143-144).[73]) As a master of Akkadian exegetical and literary lore, the author was well acquainted with the tradition of Marduk's fifty names as found in *Enūma eliš*,[74]) a text that also expounds on their meanings via polysemy, paronomasia, and *noṭariqon*.[75]) *Enūma eliš* also connects Marduk to the numeral fifty aetiologically in the description of his birth: *pulḫātu ḫa-mat-si-na elišu kamra* "a frightening aura covered him entirely" (I 104).[76]) Here too odd orthography and a polyvalent cuneiform sign (i.e., *mat*) allow the word *ḫa-mat-si-na* "entirely," to bear two other wholly different meanings, both suitable to Marduk.[77]) The first is *ḫa-maṭ-si-na* "burn, be aflame," a term often connected with the *pulḫātu* "frightening aura."[78]) The change of *maṭ* for *mat* lets us translate: "A fiery frightening aura covered him." The second, which reads *mat* as *šat*, is *ḫa-šat-si-na* "fifty" (from *ḫanšā*).[79]) This renders the line: "Fifty frightening auras covered him."[80]) Given such traditions and the erudition of the author, I aver that we understand *Ludlul* I 64 also to mean: "The fifth altered the opinion of 'Fifty' (i.e.,

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[66]) *CAD* N 1, 17-19, s.v. *nabalkutu*.

[67]) The peculiar form also suggests *ḫašû* "change," which is precisely the context here. In fact, when *ḫašû* occurs with *pî* "mouth," it means to alter someone's speech. In fact, this is attested in a medical text that reads: *šumma* KA-*šú* KÚR.KÙR-*ir ....iḫašu* "If his speech is changed..." *CAD* Ḫ 145, s.v. *ḫašû* D. Given the author's knowledge of medical terminology, this additional allusion is not beyond the scope of possibility. See Annus and Lenzi, *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi*, xxvii.

[68]) Annus and Lenzi, *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi*, 17, 32. Italics original. George and al-Rawi, "Tablets from the Sippar Library," 199, call it a "pun." However, if they understand the word to mean "fifty," which appears to be the case, then we cannot regard it as a pun, since "fifth" and "fifty" are etymologically related. However, elsewhere in the list of the courtiers' threats, the author exploits paronomasia on numbers. See, e.g., I 62: *errub* É-*uššu* 4-*ú itammi* "'I will takeover (lit. enter) his household,' the fourth said." Here *erēbu* "enter" alliterates with *rebû* "fourth." Noted by Foster, *Before the Muses*, 396, n2. The paronomasia on the "fourth" only draws attention to the potential for additional allusions concerning the "fifth" in the next line.

[69]) Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 212.

[70]) Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 19-24. For the role that polyvalent cuneiform signs play as signifiers in Mesopotamian texts, see also Laurie E. Pearce, "Secret, Sacred and Secular: Mesopotamian Intertextuality," *Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies Journal* 1/1 (2006): 11-21; Nicla de Zorzi, "The Omen Series *Šumma Izbu*: Internal Structure and Hermeneutic Strategies," *KASKAL*: *Rivista di storia, ambienti e culture del Vicino Oriente Antico* 8 (2011): 67-71. On abnormality as a signifier in extispicy, see Nils P. Heeßel, "The Hermeneutics of Mesopotamian Extispicy: Theory vs. Practice," in *Mediating Between Heaven and Earth*, 16-35.

[71]) Niek Velhuis, "The Fly, the Worm, and the Chain," *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 24 (1993): 46; "The Heart Grass and Related Matters," *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 21 (1990): 27-44.

[72]) See already Franz M. Th. Böhl, "Die fünfzig Namen des Marduk," *Archiv für Orientforschung* 11 (1936): 191-218. Now W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths* (Mesopotamian Civilizations, 16; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 147-168.

[73]) Note that Marduk references Enlil in the fiftieth line of the *Song of Erra* (IV 50), a fitting place for such a quote, since both Marduk and Enlil bear the name "Fifty." See Noegel, "'Word Play' in the Song of Erra," 186. For the text, see L. Cagni, *The Poem of Erra* (Sources from the Ancient Near East, 1.3; Malibu: Undena Publications, 1977), 52.

[74]) The poet exploits one of Marduk's fifty names from the onset: *ludlul bēl nemēqi* DINGIR (*ilu*) *muš*[*tālum*] *ēziz mūši muppašir urri* "Let me praise the Lord of Wisdom, the con[cerned] god, furious at night, relaxed at dawn" (I 1-2). The couplet's use of both *muštālum* and *ēziz* recalls his name *Meršakušu* in *Enūma eliš* VI 137: $^{d}$MER.ŠÀ.KÚŠ.Ù *ēziz u muštāl sabus* "*Meršakušu* is furious and concerned, angry and relenting." Here the sign MER has the logographic value *agāgu* "be angry," a synonym for *ēziz* "furious." The sign ŠÀ is read as *libbu* "heart," and the signs KÚŠ.Ù as *anāḫu* "consider, worry," thus combining to mean "consider matters of the heart." As such, they are the equivalent of the Akkadian *muštālu* "concerned." See also *Ludlul* I 29: *bēlum mimma* ŠÀ-*bi* (*libbi*) DINGIR.MEŠ (*ilāni*) *ibarri* "The Lord, he sees everything in the heart of the gods." The line references Marduk's name ŠÀ.ZU "He who sees the heart" (*Enūma eliš* VII 35). Espied by Moran, "Notes on the Hymn to Marduk in *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi*," 259. See also IV 71: *mannumma iqbi amar* $^{d}$UTU-*iššu* "Who would have said he would see the sun (again)?" As noted by Victor A. Hurowitz, "As His Name Is, So is He: Word Play in Akkadian Texts," in S. E. Fassberg and A. Maman, eds., *Jubilee Volume for Avi Hurvitz* (Language Studies, 11-2; Jerusalem Hebrew University, 2008), 76-77 (Hebrew), the word "see" *amar* juxtaposed with $^{d}$UTU "sun" comprise the name of Marduk ($^{d}$AMAR.UTU). Note here again the defective orthography of *amar* for *ammar*.

[75]) See similarly the commentary on the text studied by J. Bottéro, "Les noms de Marduk, l'écriture et la 'logique' en Mésopotamie ancienne," Maria de Jong Ellis, ed., *Essays on the Ancient Near East in Memory of Jacob Joel Finkelstein* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1977; = Memoirs of the Connecticut Academy of Arts & Sciences, 19 [1977]), 5-28, who also discusses *Enūma eliš*. See also Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths*, 147-168.

[76]) *CAD* Ḫ 68, s.v. *ḫammatu* B.

[77]) The polysemes at work here are discussed in greater depth in Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 24-26.

[78]) *CAD* Ḫ 64, s.v. *ḫamāṭu* B. Additional support occurs in *Utukkū-Lemnūtu* 11, excerpt 4, line 1: [KI.MIN] *ša namrīr litbušu malû pulḫāti* "[ditto] (Asarluḫḫi = Marduk) who is clothed with brightness, full of fearfulness." See Markham J. Geller, *Evil Demons: Canonical Utukkū-Lemnūtu Incantations* (State Archives of Assyria Cuneiform Texts, 5; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2007), 155, 234 (throughout I cite Geller, though, in some cases, I have altered his translations slightly. I also dispense with the Sumerian). Marduk's association with fire and light probably explains the theme of darkness and light in *Ludlul*, noted by Foster, *Before the Muses*, 393-394.

[79]) *CAD* Ḫ 81, s.v. *ḫanšā*.

[80]) This reading is adopted by Andrea Seri, "The Fifty Names of Marduk in *Enūma eliš*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 126 (2006): 511, who does not observe the polysemy.

Marduk).” As such, the line offers the sufferer’s aetiology for his predicament.

When understood as a subtle reference to Marduk, the passage takes on an added seriousness, for in Mesopotamia, altering a god’s behavior towards another person required performative charms and rituals that properly belong to the realm of sorcery, a craft with which our author certainly was familiar.[81]) As Tzvi Abusch observes, witchcraft “may affect the personal god and goddess and cause this deity to distance itself from its human protégé or to grow angry with him.”[82]) Major gods too, like Marduk, could be swayed by incantations to remove someone’s personal gods.[83])

Seeing the actions of the fifth courtier as a veiled accusation of sorcery explains the symptoms of the poet’s suffering, which he frames as Marduk’s displeasure: “He frowns: the divine guardian ($^{d}$LAMMA) and protective-spirit ($^{d}$ALAD) withdraw” (I 15). Indeed, from the moment Marduk became angry with him, his god (DINGIR.MU) and goddess ($^{d}$*ištārtī*) left him, as did his protective-spirit ($^{d}$ALAD) and divine guardian (*lamassīma*) (I 41-46).

The sufferer also later complains that when he looks behind him he sees only *ridâti ippīru* “persecution (and) conflict” (II 11). Not only are the verb *redû* and noun *ippīru* both used elsewhere in reference to demons,[84]) as a number of *namburbû* rituals, medical charms, and a great deal of comparative evidence demonstrate, the act of looking behind oneself is a widespread topos for incurring a demonic attack.[85]) Indeed, already from the start of the poem (I 13), the sufferer stated that Marduk’s wrath opened *qabrātum*, a term that can refer to graves or the place where demons dwell.[86]) Moreover, as the sufferer later laments: *alû zumrī ītediq ṣubāti* “An *alû*-demon has donned my body like a cloak” (II 71).[87]) Thus, the suffering experienced by the author in *Ludlul* represents the theological development, recognized by Abusch, in which the Marduk cult also subsumed the powers of human sorcerers into the “anger of god.”[88])

This brings me to the next line: *šeššu u sebû ireddû šēduššu* “The sixth and seventh (courtiers) *ireddû* his protective-spirit” (I 64). First, I note that the verb *redû* can mean “follow” or “persecute.”[89]) Observe also that the seizing of a *šēdu* “protective-spirit,”[90]) whether done physically or through incantations, renders the poet vulnerable to illness by demonic attack. Thus, the combined actions of the fifth, sixth, and seventh courtiers are far more serious than the previous four in that they unleash the demonic world upon the sufferer,[91]) and, of course, this is exactly how the story

[81]) The wisdom reflected in Marduk’s title *bēl nēmeqi* “Lord of Wisdom” in I 1 also could be understood as divine knowledge that saves one from witchcraft. Cf. Marduk’s title *šar nēmeqi* “King of Wisdom” in an anti-witchcraft prayer noted by Tzvi Abusch and Daniel Schwemer, *Corpus of Mesopotamian Anti-Witchcraft Rituals* (Studies in Ancient Magic and Divination, 8/1; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 323, line 41’.

[82]) Tzvi Abusch, *Ancient Mesopotamian Witchcraft: Toward a History and Understanding of Babylonian Witchcraft Beliefs and Literature* (Ancient Magic and Divination, 5; Brill: Styx, 2002), 30.

[83]) In Mesopotamia, the boundaries between prayer and magic are blurry at best and efforts to distinguish them often reflect modern Western preconceptions. One need only look at the prayers to Marduk published by Oshima, *Babylonian Prayers to Marduk*, to see that ritual professionals performed incantations on behalf of others in an effort to persuade Marduk both to help their clients and do ill to their enemies. As Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 188, also observes, other deities besides Marduk, such as Ištar, could remove one’s protective gods.

[84]) *CAD* R 226, s.v. *redû*; *CAD* I/J 164, s.v. *ippiru.*

[85]) For example, one *namburbû* instructs the patient that after purification *ana arkīka lā tappallas* “do not look behind you” (cited in *CAD* P 52, 55, s.v. *palāsu*). Witches in Mesopotamia similarly are said to walk behind people as they cast their spells. See Jeremy Black and Anthony Green, *Gods, Demons, and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1992), 127. The exorcist in the series *Utukkū-Lemnūtu* II 22, adjures the evil demons that they *ana arkīya â illikūni* “not walk behind me.” See Geller, *Evil Demons*, 101, 197. The topos may be operative in the reference to Lot’s wife, who looked back, despite being warned (Gen 19:17, 19:26). See also *Odyssey* V.348-350, X.526-530. The tradition appears to have enjoyed some longevity in Mesopotamia as is clear in the travel account of R. C. Thompson, *Semitic Magic: Its Origins and Development* (London: Luzac & Company, 1908), 172: “A similar idea was current in Mosul, my servant Mejid telling me that if a man desired a charm, he was to take a dead hoopoe bird with a piece of inscribed paper tied to it, to a cemetery, and lay it near a grave at night. He must then read some book, while the demons gather round, without turning to look around. If he should look round, the demons will have the power to attack him.”

[86]) See S. Lundström, “*Kimaḫḫu* und *Qabru*,”*Altorientalische Forschungen* 27 (2000): 6-20.

[87]) Cf. *Utukkū-Lemnūtu* III 32: *alû lemnu ša kīma ṣubāta* [*ikattamu*] “an evil *alû*-demon envelopes (someone) like a cloak.” See similarly the following two apodoses of dream omens that refer to demonic possession as an attachment to the body: *šēd lumnim ina zumrīšu rakis* “An evil demon is attached to his body” and LÚ *šû* $^{d}$KAL *u šēdu ina zumrīšu rakis* “The *lamassu* and *šēdu* are attached to the body of this man.” See Franz Köcher, A. L. Oppenheim, and H. G. Güterbock, “The Old-Babylonian Omen Text VAT 7525,” *Archiv für Orientalforschung* 18 (1957-1958): 69. See also: *ina têšu lissuḫ ina zumrīka* “(May Asaluḫḫi) tear (named demons and diseases) from your body with his incantation” (K.6335:17’); *CAD* T 441, s.v. *tû*. Note that *lissuḫ* here can refer to “tearing off” (as of clothing), not just “tearing out” (*CAD* N/2 1, s.v. *nasāḫu*), suggesting, along with the aforecited comparisons to a garment, that some forms of demonic possession were viewed as an external attachment to the body rather than an inhabitation of the person. On the other hand, ghosts were believed to be capable of entering the ear of a person: *šumma ina bīt amēli eṭemmu ana* GEŠTU (*uzni*) *bēl bīti īrub* “If in a man’s house a ghost enters the ear of the house’s owner...” CT 38, pl. 26, line 32. *CAD* U 363, s.v. *uznu*.

[88]) Abusch, *Ancient Mesopotamian Witchcraft*, 14.

[89]) Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 83, translates “the sixth and seventh followed his (the fifth man’s) *devil* (lit. *šēdu*-spirit).”

[90]) The line is difficult, in part, because of the adverbial *-um* in *šēduššu*, which would suggest the noun is an indirect object (i.e., as if *šēdu* followed *ina*). Yet, this makes little sense, even if we take the verb *redû* to mean “lead, pursue.” Moreover, I know of only two other instances in which *šēdu* follows *ina*, both in Neo-Assyrian texts in reference to large orthostat figures, but both appear to mean “with the help of the prospective spirit,” which cannot help us here. See Simo Parpola, “The Murderer of Sennacherib,” in B. Alster, ed., *Death in Mesopotamia, XXVIe Rencontre assyriologique internationale* (Mesopotamia, 8 Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1980), 171-182, especially 175; *Letters from Assyrian Scholars to the Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal* (AOAT, 5; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1970 = Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 220, No. 276, Obv. 9-10. Hence, *CAD* Š/2 257, s.v. *šēdu*, labels *Ludlul* I 64 “obscure” and renders simply as “the sixth and the seventh...” I read *šēduššu* as the direct object, but I see here, some poetic license on behalf of the author, for the form allowed him to repeat the sounds /u/ and /š/, and thus, complete the line’s assonance and alliteration. This would be another case of ungrammaticality in the service of poetry. In an earlier treatment of this text, W. Lambert and O. R. Gurney, “The Sultantepe Tablets III. The Poem of the Righteous Sufferer,”*Anatolian Studies* 4 (1954): 71, similarly rendered the line: “The sixth and seventh will make off with his protective angel.” See similarly, Bottéro, “Le problème du Mal en Mésopotamie ancienne,” 12: “Chassons son esprit-protecteur!” W. von Soden, “Der leidende Gerechte,” in *Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments: Weisheitstexte* 3/1 (1990), 118, n64, admits that his translation, concerning *šēduššu* here and in l. 97, “...ist ein Versuch; das Wort ist wohl mit *šēdu* ‘Schutzgeist’ nicht identisch.”

[91]) Note that the previous four adversaries *say* something, but the final three *do* something. The first courtier’s words are not introduced with a verb of speech, but are rendered as such by most translators, because I 57-58 make reference to their malicious words and rumors. The words of the second courtier are introduced with *qabû* “speak.” The third courtier follows by reference to the second (i.e., *ša kīma šalši*), and the fourth courtier’s words appear with *amû* “speak.”

plays out. Indeed, the suffering that the author endures reads like a list of symptoms found in the following ritual text for counteracting witchcraft.

> If a man is constantly frightened and worries day and night; losses are suffered regularly by him and his profit is cut off; people speak defamation about him, his interlocutor does not speak affirmatively, a finger of derision is stretched out after him; where he stands he is not well received; his dreams are confused, in his dreams he keeps seeing dead people; heartbreak is laid upon him; the wrath of god and goddess is upon him, god and goddess are angry with him; his case is not cleared up by diviner or dream interpreter; witchcraft has been practiced upon him; he has been cursed before god and goddess.[92])

Another way that the author reflects on the theology of divine embodiment and its dilemma of causation is by employing polysemes that identify the demons that beset him as manifestations of Marduk. We find this already in the characterization of Marduk in I 5: *ša kīma* $U_4$ (*ūm*)*-mi meḫê namû uggassu* "Whose fury is like a violent lionstorm-demon of the steppe."[93]) In I 41, we also hear: *ištu* $U_4$ (*ūm*)*-mi bēli īninanni* "From the day that the lord punished me," a verse that we also may read: "As soon as the lionstorm-demon Bel punished me."[94]) Abetting the identification of Marduk with a lionstorm-demon is the sign $U_4$, which in addition to meaning *ūmu* " lionstorm-demon," and *ūmu* "day,"[95]) also signifies UTU, the second component in Marduk's name ([d]AMAR.UTU, i.e., the "bull-calf of Utu [= Šamaš]").[96]) As a manifestation of all divine beings, Marduk is both apart from, and a part of, the demonic world. This view is encapsulated well in the incantations series *Utukkū-Lemnūtu*, in which Marduk declares:

> [*anāku* [d]*asarlu*]*ḫḫi nāsiḫ murṣi mu'abbit gallê ma* [...]
> [[d]*asarluḫḫi*] $u_4$*-mu ezzu muttak*[*kipu*] *lā māḫiru anāku*
>
> "[I am Asalu]ḫḫi who eradicates disease and destroys *gallû*-demons... [...]
> I am [Asaluḫḫi], a fierce lionstorm-demon who but[ts] the one who cannot oppose (me)."[97])

Thus, Marduk is both himself *and* an *ūmu ezzu* "fierce lionstorm-demon."[98]) As the poet of *Ludlul* puts it: *šûma utukka* [*r*]*a'ība ušarši ina têšu ušd*[*ap*]*paru šuruppû u ḫurbāšu* "He transmits the shuddering shaitan, (and) by means of his spell deforces rigors and shivers" (I 25-26),[99]) the first stich of which, we also may translate: "He (Marduk) himself is an *utukku*-demon, he transmits..."[100]) The identification of Marduk with the demons illustrates Marduk's power as an embodiment of all divine entities,[101]) but it also blurs the causative connection between them, thus underscoring Marduk's role as the ultimate source of the author's suffering.

Yet our theologian does not stop here. He also identifies his human tormentors with demons. Summarizing the evil deeds of the seven courtiers, he vents: *ikṣurūnimma rikis sebet illassun* [$U_4$]*-miš lā pādû utukkiš mašlū u ištēn šīršunuma pâ itteddi* "The band of seven bound their bunch, lacking lenity like a [lionstorm-demon], resembling an *uttuku*-demon, but one in their flesh, each cast a spell" (I 65-67). No single translation can do justice to the allusive quality of this line, because several of its lexemes are rich with incantatory connotation. The verb *kaṣāru* means "bind a (magic) knot," or "group together," but also "plot evil."[102]) The term *riksu* is a "contingent of people," but it also occurs in conjunction with magic spells and incantations as the evil

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[92]) Cited in Abusch, *Ancient Mesopotamian Witchcraft*, 42. Cf. the link between bad dreams and witchcraft in the Hittite world. See Alice Mouton, "Les 'mauvais rêves' en Anatolie Hittite: mise en contexte," in Jean-Marie Husser and Alice Mouton, eds., *Le cauchemar dans les sociétés antiques. Actes des journées d'étude de l'UMR 7044* (*15-16 Novembre 2007, Strasbourg*) (Paris: De Boccard, 2010), 41-186.

[93]) *CAD* U/W 153, s.v. *ūmu*. According to *Enūma eliš* I 143, an *ūmu* "lionstorm-demon" is one of the demons created by Tiamat for her battle against Marduk. This also was the name of Marduk's chariot (V 50). On the history and meaning of this demonic entity as a personified Day and manifestation of divine will, see Frans A. M. Wiggermann, *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits*: *The Ritual Texts* (Groningen: Styx Publications, 1992), 169-172, who describes it as "lion-demon" akin to *utukkū lemnūtu* "evil demons." Hence my "lionstorm-demon." I add that the mention of the steppe in I 5 is apt as demons are widely associated with wastelands. See, e.g., *litbâ lištappidu namê* "Let (the demon) leave and run around on the steppe." In *CAD* N/1 251, s.v. *namû* A. See similarly *Utukkū-Lemnūtu* VI 136': *utukku lemnu ana ṣerīka alû lemnu ana ṣerīka* "Evil *utukku*-demon to your steppe! Evil *alû*-demon to your steppe!" In Geller, *Evil Demons*, 218.

[94]) For *ištu* as "as soon as," see *CAD* I/J 284, s.v. *ištu*.

[95]) On the numinous nature of "Day," see Alasdair Livingstone, "The Magic of Time," in Tzvi Abusch and Karel van der Toorn, eds., *Mesopotamian Magic: Textual, Historical, and Interpretative Perspectives* (Ancient Magic and Divination, 1; Brill: Styx, 1999), 131-137; Frans A. M. Wiggermann, "Some Demons of Time and Their Functions in Mesopotamian Iconography," in B. Groneberg and H. Spieckermann, eds., *Die Welt der Götterbilder* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 102-116.

[96]) *CAD* U/W 138, s.v. *ūmu*. Though the phonetic complement *-mi* shows that UTU cannot be read as Šamaš, the advanced pupil would be aware of the sign's other values. In fact, the same sign occurs ninety-eight times in *Ludlul*, though only thirteen of them can be read as UD and twenty-three of them as UTU. The list of cuneiform signs in *Ludlul* and their numerous values produced by Annus and Lenzi, *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi*, 61-68, is in itself an illustration of the learnedness behind the text. It reveals that only 98 of the text's 232 signs (42%) were used with a single value. Moreover, many of the signs in *Ludlul* have more than two values, e.g., UTU, which appears with no less than thirteen values. Thus, the astute reader of *Ludlul* must be prepared to encounter the full polysemous range of cuneiform sign values.

[97]) The text was formerly known as *Marduk's Address to the Demons*, and published in W. G. Lambert, "An Address of Marduk to the Demons," *Archiv für Orientforschung* 17 (1954-1956): 313, 317. Restored partially also in *CAD* N/1 158, s.v. *nakāpu* A. The text was later identified as Tablets 10 and 11 of *Utukkū-Lemnūtu*. Elsewhere, W. G. Lambert, "Marduk's Address to the Demons," in T. Abusch and K. van der Toorn, *Mesopotamian Magic. Textual, Historical, and Interpretative Perspectives* (Ancient Magic and Divination, 1; Groningen: Styx, 1999), 291-296, argues that it was an independent composition. In Geller, *Evil Demons*, 156, 234, the first line that I have translated above appears in Tablet 10, excerpt five, line 13, but that is the last line of the excerpt. The second line does not appear in Geller. However, a similar line appears in reference to the *Sibittu* in *Utukkū-Lemnūtu* XVI 1: UD.MEŠ (*ūmū*) *muttakpūtu* DINGIR.MEŠ (*ilānu*) *lemnūtu šunu* "They are butting lionstorm-demons, evil gods."

[98]) *Maqlû* I 117: UD-*ka ezzu likšussunūti* "may your fierce lionstorm-demon catch them." In *Enūma eliš* II 151 we read of Marduk: $U_5$ UG.GAL.GAL.LA = *rākib* $u_4$*-mu rabbûtu* "he rides the great lionstorm-demons" (cf. IV 50). Some incantations against witchcraft also employ *ūmu ezzu* in the sense of "fiery light" to refer to Šamaš. See Abusch, *Ancient Mesopotamian Witchcraft*, 74, 126.

[99]) Note that the causative use of the verb *rašû* has a medical nuance: "cause to develop symptoms of a disease." Hence, my translation "transmit." However, the verb also means "itch." See *CAD* R 193, 207, s.v. *rašû* A, B. Given the medical knowledge of the author, perhaps we should translate the line: "He is the one who makes one itch with the demon shivers."

[100]) Thus, with *CAD* U/W 340, s.v. *utukku*.

[101]) Cf. *Enūma eliš* VI 149: *ša kīma šumešuma lamassi* DINGIR (*ili*) *u māti* "According to his name, (Marduk is) a protective-spirit of god and land."

[102]) *CAD* K 260, s.v. *kaṣāru*. Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 212, notes the literal translation "they bound the knot of the gang of seven..."

"binding" of demons and witches.[103]) While *illatu* can mean a group of people, it also is used of "covens."[104]) The expression *lā pādû* "lacking lenity" is particularly fitting as it appears in *Utukkū-Lemnūtu* VI 24 to describe an *utukku*-demon.[105]) The phrase also suggests *lā pâdu* "unfettered, unbound," which, of course, demons should never be.[106]) Moreover, according to *Enūma eliš* V 50, 52, *lā pādû* is the name of one of four monsters that Marduk harnesses to his lionstorm-chariot (i.e., *ūmu*) in his ride against Tiamat. Thus, this creature does Marduk's bidding. Finally, I note that the phrase *pâ itteddi* can suggest "cast a rumor" or "cast a spell."[107])

The pericope identifying the seven courtiers as demons, with its long chain of lexemes derived from magical praxis, naturally conjures, as Wolfram von Soden espied,[108]) the tradition of the *Sibittu*, the "seven" evil demons who bring disease and incite lawlessness.[109]) According to *Utukkū-Lemnūtu* XV 36-44, havoc wrought by the *Sibittu* causes the gods, including Marduk, to flee to the highest heaven and withdraw their protection from earth. In XVI 2, 102, the *Sibittu* also are described as *lā pādû* "lacking lenity." Indeed, the author of *Ludlul* embues his descriptions of the courtiers with so much exorcist and witchcraft terminology that the courtiers effectively become indistiguishable from demons, and his sufferering at their hands, increasingly becomes a demonic attack. Thus, summarizing their deeds, he says: *muttallu pīya apatiš īteš'ū* "Rein-like they seized my noble speech" (I 70).[110]) This is a difficult and allusive remark and my translation can be only approximate.[111]) The verb *ešē'u* is known only from this passage and from a lexical list that equates it with the verb *ṣabātu* "seize, take hold."[112]) Interestingly, the idiom *ṣabātu* + *pû* "mouth" has three primary applications, each of which is appropriate here. First it describes the effects of a stroke.[113]) This offers a perfect parallel to the sufferer's symptom in the next line: *šaptāya ša ittaṣbarā ḫašikkiš ēme* "My lips that gabbled, I became mute-like" (I 71). The second, and related use of the idiom, is to depict attacks by ghosts, demons, and evil gods.[114]) Third, the idiom appears in incantations for counteracting witchcraft, e.g., *kaššāptu aṣbat pâki aṣbat lišānki* "I seized your mouth, sorceress, I seized your tongue" (*Maqlû* III 92).[115]) In the *Utukkū-Lemnūtu* incantations III 50-52, we hear a demon's actions similarly described: *upīšū lemnūtu ša pâ ukassū kišpī lemnū ša lišānu uṣabbatū bennu ilu* (DINGIR) *lemnu* "evil praxes that fetter the mouth, evil sorceries that seize the tongue, epilepsy, the evil god."[116]) Thus, the author of *Ludlul* has integrated the language of exorcism and sorcery so that it is the wicked courtiers who now seize his innocent mouth like a demon or as one might seize the tongue of a witch.[117]) Moreover, whereas normally Marduk would assist the exorcist in ridding the threat of the *Sibittu*, here the wicked seven appear to be working in consort with him.[118])

By this point in the story, the identification of the courtiers with demons is so thorough that the author no longer characterizes them as human.[119]) Illustrating this well is the

[103]) In *Utukkū-Lemnūtu* III 98, the exorcist calls for the breaking of a demonic *riksu* "bond." *CAD* R 348-349, s.v. *riksu*.

[104]) Cf. *lispuḫ* ILLAT-*kunu mār* $^{d}$*Ea mašmaššu* "May Ea's son, the exorcist, scatter your (witches') band (*Maqlû* III 165).

[105]) Geller, *Evil Demons*, 128, 214, 178, 182, 251, 254. Note that in XVI 1, the *Sibittu* also are referred to as UD.MEŠ (= *ūmū*) "lionstorm-demons."

[106]) *CAD* P 8, s.v. *pâdu* A.

[107]) Annus and Lenzi, *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi*, 32, translate the phrase "each had a mouth." To my knowledge, the idiom *nadû* "cast" + *pû* "mouth" does not occur. Nevertheless, *pû* can be a synonym for *šiptu* "spell." See, e.g., *Maqlû* V 9: *šipātki â iqriba pûki/amâtūki* (KA.MEŠ-*ki*) *â ikšudā'inni* "may your (the witch's) spells not draw near to me, may your pronouncements not reach me." Moreover, the verb *nadû* appears with many other forms of speech in addition to "spells" (*šiptu* or *tû*): e.g., utter a "cry, scream" (*ikkillu*), sing a "lamentation" (*inḫu*), give a "shout" (*yarūrūtu*), swear an "oath" (*māmītu*), utter a "sound, cry, complaint" (*rigmu*), spread a "rumor" (*tukku*), and make a "false accusation" (*tuššu*). See *CAD* N/1 94-96, s.v. *nadû*. One also wonders if the usage here suggests the idiom *nadû* "cast" + *pû* "chaff," which appears in incantations to counteract witchcraft. See Abusch, *Ancient Mesopotamian Witchcraft*, 194. On *pû* meaning "chaff," see *CAD* P 471, s.v. *pû* B.

[108]) Note the remark of von Soden, "Der leidende Gerechte," 118, n65: "In Z. 65-68 werden die 7 Feinde des Dulders ähnlich beschrieben wie in sumerischen Beschwörungen die 'bösen Sieben,' eine viel genannte Gruppe von Dämonen." For learned polysemy involving the *Sibittu* elsewhere, see Noegel, "'Word Play' in the Song of Erra," 164, 172-173, 186. Further encouraging the connection between the courtiers and the *Sibittu* is their association with fire in *Ludlul* I 68: [*i*]*nnadrūnimma nanḫuzzu išātiš* "They (the seven courtiers) became [in]flamed against me, ablaze like fire." Cf. Anu's command to the second *Sibittu* in the *Song of Erra* I 33: *kīma* $^{d}$*Girri kubumma ḫumuṭ kīma nabli* "scorch like a fire, and blaze like a flame." Note also the paronomasia that connects the *nanḫuzzu* "ablaze" to the *nanzāzū* "courtiers" (I 57). Daniel Bodi, *The Book of Ezekiel and Poem of Erra* (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis, 104; Academic Press Freiburg: Universistätsverlag, 1991), 106-110, has found similar allusions to *Sibittu* traditions in the account of the seven celestial executioners in Ezekiel 9.

[109]) Others include the *utukku*, *alû*, *eṭemmu*, *gallû*, and *ilu* (the seventh is unnamed). See *Utukkū-Lemnūtu* VI 40-45. See Geller, *Evil Demons*, 129, 215. With the exception of the *rābiṣu,* each of these entities appears in *Ludlul*, though the word *eṭemmu* is used of the sufferer himself (i.e., *eṭemmūtu* "ghostly" IV 30). On the *Sibittu*, see Charles-F. Jean, "$^{d}$*VII-bi*," *Revue d'assyriologie* 21 (1924): 93-104.

[110]) Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 83, translates: "They muzzled my noble mouth as with a bridle."

[111]) Adding to the difficulty of the passage is that one would expect the adjective *muttallu* "noble" to follow *pīya* "my mouth" and agree in case. See *CAD* M/2 306, s.v. *muttallu*. I suggest that the mangled grammar and misinterpretable speech, both here and in I 71, constitute an anacolouthon, i.e., a deliberate attempt to mimic the effects of stammering brought on by speech paralysis/sorcery. Compare similarly the sufferer's later reflection: *lišānu ša innibṭa šutābulu* [*l*]*ā i*[*le'u*] "Tongue that was paralyzed, c[ould] [n]ot move about" (III 94). On the use of anacoloutha in other Near Eastern texts, see Gary A. Rendsburg, "Confused Language as a Deliberate Literary Device in Biblical Hebrew Narrative," *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 2 (1998-1999): 1-20; "Literary Devices in the Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 120 (2000): 22-23.

[112]) *Malku* = *šarru* IV 236; *CAD* E 364, s.v. *ešē'u*; Ivan Hruša, *Die akkadische Synonymenliste malku = šarru: Ein Textedition mit Übersetzung und Kommentar* (Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 2010), 106-107, 249.

[113]) *CAD* Ṣ 7, s.v. *ṣabātu*.

[114]) *CAD* Ṣ 21, s.v. *ṣabātu*. Compare the following medical omen found in Scurlock and Andersen, *Diagnoses in Assyrian and Babylonian Medicine*, 297: DIŠ KI.MIN-*ma* GÌR-*šú šá* 15 *i-maš-šar* KA-*šú ṣu-dur mi-šit-ti* MAŠKIM GÌD-*ma* GAM "If (it is the first day he is sick) and he drags his left foot (and) his mouth twitches (*ṣadāru*), stroke of a *rabīṣu*; (if) it is prolonged, he will die."

[115]) Transliterations of *Maqlû* throughout are those of of Tzvi Abusch, *The Witchcraft Series Maqlû* (Writings from the Ancient Word, 37; Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2015).

[116]) Geller, *Evil Demons*, 102, 198.

[117]) Cf. 6 (*šeššet*) *riksūšina* 7 (*sebet*) *piṭrū'a* "Six are their spells, but seven are my solutions" (*Maqlû* IV 118-119).

[118]) See *Utukkū-Lemnūtu* XV 59: *ša lemnūti sebittišunu mala ana panīka iširū ûrtašunu liddinka* "May he (Marduk) give you a formula for (exorcizing) the evil of the Seven of them, those that head straight at you."

[119]) The literary transmutation of the courtiers into demons is reminiscent of the transformation in *Utukkū-Lemnūtu*, noted by Geller, *Evil Demons*, xvi, in which the demonic bureaucrats (i.e., sheriff-demon, bailiff-demon), become the *Sibittu* in the second half of the series, and thus, become cosmic entities likened to storms. Moreover, as Geller (xviii) also observes, the series' ring structure makes the turning point Tablet 9, which describes the failure of the household gods to protect the victim, and

author's clever use of the word *a-pa-tíš* in I 70. As written, we must read it *apātiš* "like humans."[120]) The author was familiar with this term as we know from the sufferer's later query: *êkâma ilmadā alakti ilī apāti* "where have humans understood the way of a god?" (II 38).[121]) Yet, interpreters generally have understood it as a defective orthography for *appatiš* "like a rein," based on the context of "seizing."[122]) However, since "seizing the mouth" signifies a demonic attack, we may understand *a-pa-tíš* as a learned case of polysemy that recalls the earlier identification of the courtiers with the *Sibittu* (I 66-67). In essence, they have become so demonic that their actions only can be compared to those of humans: "Like humans they seized my noble speech" (I 70); a usage that also anticipates the sufferer's description of the otherworldy dream figure as *nīšiš* "like a mortal" (III 32).

The author's portrayal of the courtiers' actions as demonic is so successful that one is compelled to reflect on whether the irate king, whom the courtiers serve,[123]) also might be understood as a veiled reference to the angry god, Marduk.[124]) The passage in *Ludlul* I concerning the king reads:

> 55. LUGAL UZU DINGIR.MEŠ $^{d}$UTU *ša* UN.MEŠ-*šu*
> The king, flesh of the gods, the sun of his people.
> 56. ŠÀ-*buš* (*libbuš*) *ikkaṣirma paṭāri ušlemmin*
> His mind was bound, it became (too) malicious to unbind.[125])

While the epithet UZU DINGIR.DINGIR (*šīr ilāni*) "flesh of the gods" indeed was used to express the divine nature of some human kings, it can mean "divine kin" as well.[126]) We also know from *Enūma eliš* I 102 that Marduk is: *mār* $^{d}$UTU-*ši* $^{d}$UTU-*ši šá* DINGIR.DINGIR (*mār šamši šamši ša ilānī*) "Son of the Sun (Šamaš), Sun (Šamaš) of the gods" (cf. VI 127).[127]) One Babylonian AN = *Anum* list even identifies Šamaš ($^{d}$UTU) as "Marduk of Justice."[128]) In addition, note that the author has used the Sumerogram UN.MEŠ rather than a syllabic spelling.[129]) While commentators generally have read UN.MEŠ as *nīšū* "people," the UN sign also bears the value KALAM meaning *mātātu* "lands," which in this context recalls Marduk's epithet *unammaru mātāti* "he who illumines the lands."[130]) Thus, the syncretistic traditions and polyvalent signs encourage us to think of the king also as an allusion to Marduk: "The king, divine kin, the Sun (Šamaš) of his lands" (I 55).[131]) Indeed, one encounters the merging of Šamaš into Marduk again in the sufferer's pondering thoughts at the very end of Tablet I:

> 119 *tušama ina urri iššira dameqtum*
> Perhaps in a day goodness will be put in order.
> 120. *arḫu innammaru inammera* $^{d}$UTU-*ši* (*šamši*)
> (Perhaps when) the new moon is observed, the sun will shine.

Here the words *inammera* $^{d}$UTU-*ši* (*šamši*) "the sun will shine," again recall the frequent association of Marduk as he who *munammir* "illumines" lands and "lightens" people's troubles.[132]) The sufferer subtly calls for the moment when "Marduk of Justice" (i.e., Šamaš), will heed his prayer. The sufferer's statement that it is night and his mention of a new moon also evoke Marduk's subsumption of the moon god Sin in his title $^{d}$*Marduk munammir mūši* "Marduk who illumines the night."[133]) Moreover, it is on the propitious last

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"which can be seen as a transition between incantations describing the individual as victim or society as a victim." In *Ludlul* I 75-101, after the courtiers are likened to the *Sibittu*, the text describes a number of societal woes beyond the sufferer's ostracization and ill-treatment at the hands of those beneath his class, including the silting of canals and the driving out of the work force. Compare, the sufferer's lament in 102: *kīma āli* (URU) *nakiri ušqamim āliya* (URU.MU) "like a foreign city, my city fell silent," with *Utukkū-Lemnūtu* XIII 19-20, which describes the *Sibittu* after they destroyed the crops and land, drove away the inhabitants, and flattened the city and its settlements: *ina ṭūdāt šaqummiš ušbū šapliš ittanaprara šunu ina sūqātu qūlu inamdū šunu* "on the trails silently they sit, below (in the underworld) they are dispersed, in the streets they impose quiet."

[120]) *CAD* A/2 162, s.v. *apâtu*.

[121]) It also occurs in *Enūma eliš* VII 18 in reference to one of Marduk's fifty names: *â imaši ina apâti* "May he not be forgotten to humankind."

[122]) *CAD* A/2 181, s.v. *appatu* A.

[123]) The conception of demons and other entities as attendants is well attested. See, e.g., GIDIM.SIG$_5$.GA DINGIR INIM.MA.MU SAG.AN.NA GUB.BU.DÈ = *šēdu damqa ilu mūtamû nazaza maḫrīya* "the good *šēdu*-spirit, the eloquent god, who is an attendant before me (Anu)." See S. Langdon, "A Bilingual Tablet from Erech," *Revue d'assyriologie* 12 (1915): 45, 83. *CAD* N/1 261, s.v. *nanzazu*.

[124]) LUGAL *ša ilī* = *šarru ša ilī* "king of the gods," in CT 37, pl. 1, col. i, line 2, and other royal inscriptions. See also *Enūma eliš* IV 28, where all the other gods proclaim: $^{d}$*Mardukma* LUGAL (*šarru*) "Marduk is king."

[125]) In I 56, note that the lexemes *kaṣāru* "bound, tie," *paṭāru* "unbind, untie, release," and *lemēnu* "evil" all abound in exorcism texts, and thus, they are entirely applicable to the divine exorcist, Marduk. *CAD* K 257, s.v. *kaṣāru*; *CAD* P 286, s.v. *paṭāru*; *CAD* L 116, s.v. *lemēnu*. Michael P. Streck, "Review of Annus and Lenzi, *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi*," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 163 (2013): 219, suggests reading *paṭāruš lemnun* as "too angry for its undoing."

[126]) The author uses *šīru* for "family" in I 92. *CAD* Š/3 117-118, s.v. *šīru*.

[127]) Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 373-374, discusses the expression and its use for gods other than Šamaš, but he understands the king in I 55 as a human.

[128]) Lambert, "The Historical Development of the Mesopotamian Pantheon," 197. The text appears in CT 24, pl. 50, No. 47406, line 9. The same equation occurs in the commentary to *Utukkū-Lemnūtu*. See Lambert, "An Address of Marduk to the Demons," 313. It is unclear whether demons were included in the An = *Anum* list, because lines are missing. On the other hand, they might never have been listed, for as *Utukkū-Lemnūtu* 13:8 informs us: *ina mināt šamê u erṣeti ul immannû* "In the census of heaven and earth they (the demons) are not counted." Observed by Frans A. M. Wiggermann, "The Mesopotamian Pandemonium: A Provisional Census," *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni* 77 (2011): 307, n12. See Geller, *Evil Demons*, 166, 242.

[129]) In fact, *Ludlul* I 55 attracts special attention in that it is the only verse in the extant text written almost entirely in Sumerograms. When read in Akkadian it also is rich in alliteration: *šarru šīr ilāni šamši ša nišīšu*.

[130]) See Lambert, "An Address of Marduk to the Demons," 313: *anāku* $^{d}$*Asarluḫḫi ša šarūrûšu unammaru mātāti* "I am Asaluḫḫi whose radiance illumines the lands."

[131]) The sufferer's description of a devouring lion in IV 13-14 also might be a euphemistic reference to demonic attack: *ina pî girri ākiliya iddi napsama* $^{d}$AMAR.UTU (*Marduk)* "Upon the mouth of the lion devouring me, Marduk placed a feed bag." Compare the mention of the *ūmu* "lionstorm-demon," in Wiggermann, *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits*, 171: U$_4$ KA.BA MU.LU ŠU.TI.A (= *ūmu pētû pî lēqû amēla*) "Lion-demon that holds the man in his mouth." *Maqlû* III 156, also tells of a demon *ša kīma* UR.MAḪ (*nēši*) *iṣbatu amēlu* "which like a lion, has seized a man." The *napsama* in *Ludlul* IV 14 cannot be rendered "muzzle," as it is used only of horses. See already James Barr, "Ugaritic and Hebrew *šbm*?," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 18 (1973): 17-39. The point here is Marduk's domestication of the wild beast. Recall the *ūmū*-lionstorm-demons that Marduk harnesses and yokes in *Enūma eliš* V 50-52.

[132]) Marduk is *munammir erṣeti rapaštu pētû edlēti* "the one who illumines the wide land, he opens what is locked" (LKA 139:16 and 140:6). Elsewhere, Marduk *nummiršu* [*ešâtišu*] "lightens (a man's) troubles." See Lambert, "Three Literary Prayers of the Babylonians," 59. Note the creative paronomasia in *Ludlul* I 120 between the verbs *amāru* "see" and *namāru* "illumine."

[133]) Identified with $^{d}$EN.ZU (*Sin*) in CT 24, pl. 50, BM 47406, line 8. In the *Song of Erra* IIa 4, we also find: $^{d}$*šamši iṭṭulšuma šarūrīšu ušamqit* "Šamaš saw him (Marduk) and made his (own) radiance fall." See also

day of the month, just before the new moon, when one counteracted the effects of sorcery,[134]) and thus, it is a felicitous day to hope for Marduk's "enlightement."

Thus, the poet makes polysemous use of the king and his attendants. On the one hand, we can understand them on purely human terms as signalling the start of the sufferer's social ostracization, which spreads from the angry king and his nefarious courtiers into the community at large by way of slander and villainous gossip. On the other hand, we may understand them as allusions to Marduk and the demons in his charge, since the fall of one's reputation in the community also can be the result of demonic attack. See, for example, the definition of slander offered in the exorcist series *Utukkū-Lemnūtu* XV 146-152:

> 146. It was named for evil, its name was reckoned for evil,
> 147. human language named it for evil, its name was created for evil,
> 148. (it is) the evil slander (*egirrû lemnu*)[135]) that men call out
> 149. (against) whom the the evil *utukku*-demon seized, whom the evil *alû*-demon seized.
> 150. (When) Namtar and *asakku*-demon bind, (when) the *utukku*-demon binds,
> 151. the creatures of the land they seize as one (*ištēniš ṣabtū*).
> 152. From house to house, it (i.e., slander) burns (like) a fire.

Indeed, as Abusch and Schwemer observe:

> The ultimate source of the patient's unjustified suffering is, of course, the sorcery of the warlock and witch; among other charges levelled against them, they are accused of having driven off the patient's protective deities and of having slandered him before the divine and human authorities, thereby causing his dismissal and rejection.[136])

With the identity of the courtiers as the *Sibittu* now complete by Tablet II, the sufferer describes his otherworldy symptoms in a way that again recalls *Utukkū-Lemnūtu*.[137]) Seemingly from every side, he is beset by a *murṣu munnišu* "debilitating disease" (II 50), *meḫû* "storm" (II 40), *imḫullu* "evil-wind" (II 40), a *di'u*-disease from the underworld (II 52), a *šūlu lemnu* "evil ghost" from the Apsû (II 53), an *utukku*-demon from Ekur (II 54), and a *lamaštu*-demon from the mountain (II 55).

The author no doubt listed seven torments to mirror the seven demonic courtiers. In fact, his description of their unified attack not only appears in nearly the same lines as Tablet I, it adopts language that recalls their schemes. Compare his description of the demons: "They joined (*innendūma*) their group (*puḫuršunu*), they approached me as one (1-*niš* = *ištēniš*)" (II 58), with his account of the courtiers: They "were plotting (*uštanaddanū*) malicious speech against me. They grouped (*paḫrūma*) themselves..." (I 57-58). They were "one (*ištēn*) in their flesh" (I 67).

The author's sophisticated rhetorical scheme becomes clear only in increments. By blurring the distinction between Marduk and demons, he makes Marduk a holistic embodiment of all divine beings, but also the true culprit of demonic attacks.[138]) By blurring the distinction between demons and his human conspirators, he adds the final link to a chain of causation that infers Marduk's responsibility for human sin.[139]) In effect, he has made Marduk and the demons, and the king and his courtiers, "one flesh."[140])

## 4. Conclusion

The clever integration of textual and cultural traditions drawn from exorcism, sorcery, and other ritual and

W. G. Lambert, "New Fragments of Babylonian Epics," *Archiv für Orientforschung* 27 (1980): 79.

[134]) See *CAD* B 299, s.v. *bubbulu*.

[135]) Geller, *Evil Demons*, 278, notes the variant KA = *pû* "mouth" for *egirrû*. Cf. *Ludlul* I 53: *ana pî sūqi lemun* INIM.GAR-*ú-a* (*egirrûya*) "According to the word/utterance of the street, evil was my reputation/omen." The author of *Ludlul* exploits the dual meaning of *egirrû* here, which either means "reputation (based on what people say of a person)" or a "chance oracular utterance." See *CAD* E 43, s.v. *egirrû*.

[136]) Abusch and Schwemer, *Corpus of Mesopotamian Anti-Witchcraft Rituals*, 7.

[137]) Each of the seven illnesses appears in *Utukkū-Lemnūtu* in connection with demons. Occurrences of *murṣu* "disease," the *utukku*-demon, and the *lamaštu*-demon are too ubiquitous to list here. The series renders $U_{18}$.LU as *meḫû* as "storm" in III 2, 4, XVI 11, 62, but as *alû*-demon in VII 4, 23, XII 28, XV 23. Note also the equation *meḫû* = $U_4$.GAL *ugallu* in AN.TA.GÁL = *šaqû* (*MSL* 17) N, ii, 10'. With regard to *imḫullu*, the *Sibittu* are described in V 77-78 as: *ūmū* ($U_4$-*mu*) *ša lemnūti* (ḪUL-*ti*) *imḫullu amerūti šunu ūmū* ($U_4$-*mu*) *ša lemnūti* (ḪUL-*ti*) *imḫullu alik maḫri šunu* "they are seen to be lionstorm-demons, which are evil, an evil-wind, they are lionstorm-demons, which are evil, an evil-wind goes in front." The *di'u*-disease also appears frequently (II 68-69, III 142, VI 55-56, 63, VII 4, 23, 145, XV 88, 163, 204, 225-226, 229). The commentary of *Ludlul* glosses the rare term *šūlum* as *eṭemmu* "ghost." The GIDIM.ḪUL = *eṭemmu lemnu* "evil ghost" also occurs frequently in *Utukkū-Lemnūtu* (III 33, VI 42, 79, 109, 138, VII 21, 28, 53, 129, 142, 153, IX 80, X 9, 25, 53, XVI 153). In general, see Geller, *Evil Demons*. On the relationship of demons to diseases, see Wiggermann, "The Mesopotamian Pandemonium," 310-311.

[138]) See similarly the poet's lament: *ana aḫî aḫī itūra ana lemni u gallê itūra ibrī* "my brother turned into an enemy, my friend turned into an evil-entity and *gallê*-demon" (I 84-85). Note the transformation embodied in the paronomasia between *aḫî* "enemy" and *aḫī* "my brother."

[139]) A prayer to Marduk published by Lambert, "Three Literary Prayers of the Babylonians," 63 (see also *CAD* A/2 88, s.v. *amû*), lists a number of individuals who slander the supplicant (e.g., *muštakṣib šaplâti mūtamû nullâtu* "One who is brimful of secret thoughts, who speaks slander"), and it explicitly refers to their actions as a sin (i.e., *gillatu ublāni* "they have committed a sin"). Compare the courtier's *taslītu* "libel" and *nullâtu* "slander" in *Ludlul* in I 57-58, and the sufferer's words in I 94-95: *mūtamû ṭapiltīya šakin ana rêši dābib nullâtīya* DINGIR (*ilu*) *rēṣušu* "One who speaks of my calumny is appointed to the head. One conspiring slander, god aids." Moreover, *nullâtu* can serve as a parallel for *kišpu* "sorcery." See H. C. Rawlinson, *The Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia*. Vol. 4 (London: R. E. Bowler, 1875), pl. 17, rev. 20: *ša kišpī īpušuni ikpuduni nullâti* "those who practiced sorcery, who have plotted slander against me." See also the use of *dabābu* "conspirer" in a charm over effigies to be destroyed: NU.MEŠ (*ṣalmū*) *bēl dabābiya u bēlet dabābiya* "images of lord conspirator and lady conspirator..." (*Maqlû* I 84). Thus, we may regard the evil talk and plotting of the courtiers as sinful acts. On slander as associated with witchcraft, see O. R. Gurney, "A Tablet of Incantations against Slander," *Iraq* 22 (1960): 221-227; Abusch and Schwemer, *Corpus of Mesopotamian Anti-Witchcraft Rituals*, 6-7.

[140]) In this light, it is worth considering the sufferer's comment after he was healed (IV 31-32): *lū mannu* $^{d}$AMAR.UTU (*Marduk*) *īzibbanni ana šīr asakki ammaniššu* "Was it not Marduk who spared me? I was turned into the flesh of an *asakku*." Here too there is ambiguity. What is meant by the "flesh of an *asakku*"? Does it stand for the body of an *asakku*-demon? This would anticipate well his self-identification with a walking *šalamtu* "corpse" in the next line (IV 33). It also would signal something of an inner transformation, a confession that he too had transgressed, and therefore, rightfully had shared a "unity of flesh" with the demonic world. Or does *asakku* here mean "set apart for gods and kings, a taboo," by which the "flesh of an *asakku*" makes him something forbidden to human contact? (*CAD* A/2 325-326, s.v. *asakku* A, B. Note the idiom *akālu* "eat" + *asakku* = "infringe on a taboo," *CAD* A/1 255, s.v. *akālu*). Further, the verb *ezēbu* means "spare" or "forsake, abandon" (*CAD* E 422-423, s.v. *ezēbu*). As "spare," the line depicts Marduk as a merciful god, which follows nicely IV 29, in which the sufferer expresses his appreciation that Marduk did not allow him to descend to the netherworld. As "forsake," it portrays him as a negligent god, like evil demons "who spare nothing" (i.e., *ša mimma šumšu lā izzibu*, *Utukkū-Lemnūtu* VII 29).

illocutionary practices, demonstrates why *Ludlul* was viewed as a paradigm of scholarship already in antiquity. As Pongratz-Leisten observes: "Profound knowledge of traditional compositional techniques enables the author to conjure up textual as well as ritual settings and interweave them into a complex new reality."[141])

Assisting in the creation of this new literary reality are a number of learned cases of ambiguity, which the poet employs with three primary aims. First, he uses it to display his erudition, and thus, also his divinatory power and ritual authority. The text's learned use of signs represents the intellectual and hermeneutical expertise of his profession, and thus, it is institutionally reaffirming. In this sense, we may see the ambiguity as having an ideological function. Second, some of the polysemes serve to demonstrate that Marduk is a god whose being and actions cannot be fully comprehended. These polysemes show him to comprise all divine beings, including demonic entities, and the powers of sorcerers.[142]) This use of ambiguity is best understood as serving a theological function, one again, in step with the doctrinal innovations of the Marduk cult. Thus, with Oshima, one might say that the text was studied "in order to contemplate Marduk's godhead."[143]) Finally, some cases of ambiguity demonstrate that violence lurks in Marduk's virtues, and thus, they bring into relief the conventional justification for Marduk's impenetrable actions and absolute power.[144]) Others represent the author's critical inquiry into the cult's syncretistic theology and the dilemmas it naturally poses concerning the ultimate cause of human sin and suffering. If such thinking indeed was troubling to conventional theology, then we may see the ambiguity as allowing the author to escape potential censure.[145])

However, the author of *Ludlul* was simply too learned a figure to have been an independent thinker peripheral to Babylonian institutions of higher learning. Thus, I aver that we understand his erudite use of ambiguity as representing the sort of genuine theological discussion and contemplation taking place among scholars and between masters and their pupils. With Oshima we may see its portrait of Marduk as "an amalgam of personal belief and the official dogma."[146]) Indeed, I would assert that the foci of critical thinking veiled by the author's ambiguities are the very pearls of wisdom that the masters so carefully guarded, precisely because they tested generally held beliefs.[147]) For this reason, the author ensconced his more scrutinous meditations in the *amāt niṣirti* "hidden words" and *pirišti ša ilī* "the secret of the gods."[148])

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[141]) Pongratz-Leisten, "From Ritual to Text to Intertext," 156, made her comment in reference to the episode of the gates in the final tablet of *Ludlul*, but I find it applicable here as well.

[142]) Albertz, "*Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* eine Lehrdichtung zur Ausbreitung und Vertiefung der persönlichen Mardukfrömmigkeit," 92, makes a similar observation: "Alle übrigen Ursachen, von denen die babylonische Religion ja vielfache kennt, seien es widerstreitende Götter, Dämonen oder Zauber und Verwünschungen, sind seinem Zorn gegenüber sekundär. Marduk selbst ist es letztlich, der mit seinen Schlägen Leid, Krankheit und Tod zufügt (Z. 13.21.34f.); er ist es sogar wenn ich die schwierigen Zeilen 17 und 25 richtig verstehe — , der eine Lösung seiner Strafe durch Ritualexperten verhindert (vgl. I,49.51f.; II,6-9.82.108-111)."

[143]) Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 33.

[144]) For other cases of ambiguity that criticize authority, see Scott B. Noegel, "Word Play in the Tale of the Poor Man of Nippur," *Acta Sumerologica* 19 (1996): 169-186.

[145]) On the poem as a challenge to institutional theology, see Lenzi, "The Curious Case of Failed Revelation in *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi*," 59, 63; Pongratz-Leisten, "From Ritual to Text to Intertext," 147, 150. Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 231, argues that the text might have intended to assert the supremacy of the Esagil priesthood over other cult centers and of Marduk over other gods. In his view, the poem affirms contemporary Marduk theology: "the acknowledgment of man's incapability to understand the divine plan and to recognize the specific sins of which he was guilty constitutes the ultimate proclamation of faith in the gods and the justice of their judgment" (69).

[146]) Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 14.

[147]) The author's strategy of bringing the reader ever closer to divine mysteries mirrors the plot development discovered by Pongratz-Leisten, "From Ritual to Text to Intertext," 156. As she observes, the sufferer at first is far removed from Marduk, but after his incubation, he gets closer, until in the end he obtains special access to Marduk: "The sufferer's approach to the deity in the temple which takes him out of the human realm into a world which is not accessible to most ordinary people, consequently, forms the climax of the whole composition."

[148]) Cf. *Babylonian Theodicy* XXIV 256-257: *libbi ili kīma qereb šamê nesīma lē'ûssu šupšuqatma nišē lā lamdā* "The mind of god, like the midst of the heavens, is remote. Knowledge of it is difficult, the masses cannot learn it."