



“WORDPLAY” IN ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN TEXTS

Scott B. Noegel

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“WORDPLAY” IN ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN TEXTS

ANCIENT NEAR EAST MONOGRAPHS

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by
Scott B. Noegel





Atlanta

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For my students: past, present, and future.

ישמע חכם ויוסף לקח ונבון תחבולות יקנה:
להבין משל ומליצה דברי חכמים וחידתם:
Prov 1:5–6

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Finally, I thank my wife Laurie Ramacci Noegel for her constant love and support. More than anyone, she knows my love for language.

ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Analecta Aegyptiaca
AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	Freedman, D. N., ed. <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
ADAIK	Abhandlungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Kairo
ADVGM	<i>Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt Graz: Mitteilungen</i>
AeLeo	<i>Aegyptiaca Leodiensia</i>
AfO	<i>Archiv für Orientforschung</i>
ÄgAbh	Ägyptologische Abhandlungen
AHw	von Soden, Wolfram. <i>Akkadisches Handwörterbuch</i> . Vols. 1–3. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1965–1981.
AIL	Ancient Israel and Its Literature
AIPHO	<i>Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientales et Slaves</i>
AJA	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
AJP	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
AKSP	Aporemata, Kritische Studien zur Philologiegeschichte
ÄL	<i>Ägypten und Levante</i>
AL	<i>Anthropological Linguistics</i>
ALK	Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation
AM	<i>Adeva-Mitteilungen</i>
AMD	Ancient Magic and Divination
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
ANEM	Ancient Near East Monographs
ANESS	Ancient Near Eastern Studies: Supplement Series
ANETS	Ancient Near Eastern Texts and Studies
AnOr	Analecta Orientalia
ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i>
AnS	Antiquités sémitiques
AnSt	<i>Anatolian Studies</i>
AO	<i>Acta Orientalia</i>
AOASH	<i>Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae</i>

AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AOS	American Oriental Series
AP	<i>Archiv für Papyrusforschung</i>
APAWPHK	Abhandlungen der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historisch Klasse
ARM	<i>Archives royales de Mari</i>
ARMT	<i>Archives royales de Mari, Texte</i>
ArOr	<i>Archiv Orientální</i>
AS	Assyriological Studies
ASEA	<i>Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte</i>
ASEAS	ASAE Supplément
ASJ	<i>Acta Sumerologica</i>
ASTI	<i>Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute</i>
ATANT	<i>Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments</i>
ATD	Das Alte Testament im Dialog
AuOr	<i>Aula Orientalis</i>
AUS	American University Studies
BA	Beiträge zur Altertumskunde
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BagM	<i>Baghdader Mitteilungen</i>
BAM	Die babylonisch-assyrische Medizin in Texten und Untersuchungen
BARev	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BASP	<i>Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists</i>
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BBVO	Berliner Beiträge zum Vorderen Orient
BCSMS	<i>Bulletin of the Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies</i>
BDB	Brown, Francis, et al., eds. <i>The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon</i> . Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1979.
BdE	<i>Bibliothèque d'étude</i>
BEATAJ	Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des antiken Judentums
BES	<i>Bulletin of the Egyptological Seminar</i>
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BI	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
BIFAO	<i>Le Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale</i>
BiOr	<i>Bibliotheca Orientalis</i>
BJRL	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library</i>
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies

BL	Bible and Literature
BM	<i>Beit Mikra</i>
BN	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
BPOA	Biblioteca del Próximo Oriente Antiguo
BRLAJ	Brill Reference Library of Ancient Judaism
BS	<i>Boghazköi-Studien</i>
BSac	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BSNESJ	<i>Bulletin of the Society for Near Eastern Studies in Japan</i>
BSOAS	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
BWL	Lambert, W. G. <i>Babylonian Wisdom Literature</i> . Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996.
BZ	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CAD	Reiner, E., et al., eds. <i>The Chicago Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956–2010.
CANE	Sasson, J. M., ed. <i>Civilizations of the Ancient Near East</i> . New York: Scribner’s, 1995.
CAT	Dietrich, M., Oswald Loretz, and Joaquín Sanmartín. <i>The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani, and Other Places</i> . Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1995.
CBOT	Coniectanea Biblica. Old Testament Series
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBR	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
CBS	Museum siglum of the University Museum in Philadelphia (Catalogue of the Babylonian Section)
CCdE	<i>Cahiers Caribéens d’Égyptologie</i>
CdE	<i>Chronique d’Égypte</i>
CH	Collectanea Hellenistica
CJ	<i>Classical Journal</i>
CL	<i>Cognitive Linguistics</i>
CM	Cuneiform Monographs
ColR	Colloquia Raurica
ConB	Coniectanea biblica
COS	Hallo, William W., and K. Lawson Younger Jr., eds. <i>The Context of Scripture: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World</i> . 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1997–2016.
CP	<i>Classical Philology</i>
CQ	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>
CR	<i>Classical Review</i>
CRAIBL	<i>Comptes rendus des séances de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres</i>

CT	<i>Cuneiform Texts from the Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum</i>
DAIAK	Deutsches Archäologisches Institut. Abteilung Kairo
DAWB	Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin
DDD	Becking, Bob, Karl van der Toorn, and Pieter W. van der Horst, eds. <i>Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible</i> . Leiden: Brill; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999.
DE	<i>Discussions in Egyptology</i>
DISO	Hoftijzer, J., and K. Jongeling. <i>Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions</i> . Vols. 1–2. Leiden: Brill, 1995.
DL	<i>DavarLogos</i>
DMA	Documenta Mundi-Aegyptiaca
DSD	<i>Dead Sea Discoveries</i>
DULAT	del Olmo Lete, G., and J. Sanmartín. <i>A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition</i> . Trans. Wilfred G. E. Watson. Leiden: Brill, 2004.
EAJT	<i>East Asia Journal of Theology</i>
EAL	Einführung in die altägyptische Literaturgeschichte
EC	<i>Les Études Classiques</i>
EI	<i>Eretz Israel</i>
EncJud	Berenbaum, Michael, and F. Skolnik, ed. <i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i> . 2nd ed. Detroit, MI: Thompson Gale, 2007.
EncIs	Hakeem-Uddee Qureshi, ed. <i>Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> . 2nd ed. 12 vols. Leiden: Brill, 2006.
EPHE	<i>École Pratique de Hautes Études</i>
ETL	<i>Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses</i>
ExpT	<i>Expository Times</i>
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
GCA	<i>Gratz College Annual</i>
GM	<i>Göttinger Miszellen</i>
GMS	Grazer Morgenländische Studien
GMTR	Guides to the Mesopotamian Textual Record
GTJ	<i>Grace Theological Journal</i>
HALOT	Baumgartner, Walter, and Ludwig Koehler, eds. <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Vols. 1–2. Leiden: Brill, 2001.
HANEM	History of the Ancient Near East. Monographs
HAR	<i>Hebrew Annual Review</i>
HdO	Handbuch der Orientalistik
HebAbst	<i>Hebrew Abstracts</i>
HOS	Handbook of Oriental Studies
HR	<i>History of Religions</i>

<i>HS</i>	<i>Hebrew Studies</i>
<i>HSCP</i>	<i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</i>
<i>HSep</i>	<i>Handbuch zur Septuaginta</i>
<i>HSS</i>	<i>Harvard Semitic Studies</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
<i>IBS</i>	<i>Irish Biblical Studies</i>
<i>ICC</i>	<i>International Critical Commentary</i>
<i>IDB</i>	<i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>
<i>IDBSup</i>	<i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement</i>
<i>IEJ</i>	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
<i>JA</i>	<i>Journal Asiatique</i>
<i>JAAR</i>	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
<i>JAIE</i>	<i>Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections</i>
<i>JAGNES</i>	<i>Journal of the Association of Graduates in Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JANEH</i>	<i>Journal of Ancient Near Eastern History</i>
<i>JANES</i>	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JARCE</i>	<i>Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt</i>
<i>Jastrow</i>	Jastrow, Marcus. <i>A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature</i> . New York: Pardes, 1950.
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JBQ</i>	<i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>
<i>JCS</i>	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
<i>JEA</i>	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JHS</i>	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
<i>JIAS</i>	<i>Journal of the Institute of Asian Studies</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JJSS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies: Supplement Series</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JNSL</i>	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
<i>JPOS</i>	<i>Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society</i>
<i>JQ</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>JSIS</i>	<i>Jewish Studies, an Internet Journal</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Periods</i>
<i>JSJSup</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism Supplement Series</i>

<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSOTSup</i>	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
<i>JSRC</i>	Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>JSSEA</i>	<i>Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities</i>
<i>JThC</i>	<i>Journal of Theology and the Church</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>KAI</i>	Donner, H., and W. Rollig. <i>Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften</i> . Vols. 1–3. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1966–1969.
<i>KAR</i>	<i>Keilschrifttexte aus Assur religiösen Inhalts</i>
<i>KB</i>	Koehler, L., and W. Baumgartner, eds. <i>Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti libros</i> . Leiden: Brill, 1958.
<i>KBo</i>	<i>Keilschrifttexte aus Boghazköi</i> . Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1916–1923; Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1954–.
<i>KUSATU</i>	<i>Kleine Untersuchungen zur Sprache des Alten Testaments und seiner Umwelt</i>
<i>LÄ</i>	Helck, W., E. Otto, and W. Westendorf, eds. <i>Lexikon der Ägyptologie</i> . Vols. 1–7. Wiesbaden, 1975–1992.
<i>LÄS</i>	Leipziger ägyptische Studien
<i>LASM</i>	<i>Lingua Aegyptiaca</i> . <i>Studia Monographica</i>
<i>LHBOTS</i>	The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
<i>LingAeg</i>	<i>Lingua Aegyptia</i>
<i>LKA</i>	Ebeling, L. <i>Literarische Keilschrifttexte aus Assur</i> . Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1953.
<i>LOT</i>	Library of Oriental Texts
<i>LSJ</i>	Liddell, Henry George, Robert Scott, and Henry Stuart Jones, eds. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> . 9th ed. with a supplement. Oxford: Clarendon, 1968.
<i>MÄS</i>	Münchner Ägyptologische Studien
<i>MC</i>	Mesopotamian Civilizations
<i>MCAAS</i>	Memoirs of the Connecticut Academy of Arts & Sciences
<i>MelS</i>	Melammu Symposium
<i>MIFAO</i>	<i>Mémoires publiés par les membres de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale (IFAO) du Cairo (Berlin/Cairo)</i>
<i>MoÄS</i>	Monographien zur ägyptische Sprache
<i>MPIW</i>	<i>Max-Planck Institut für Wissenschaftsgeschichte</i>
<i>MS</i>	Mnemosyne: Supplement
<i>MSL</i>	<i>Materialien zum sumerischen Lexikon</i>
<i>NABU</i>	<i>Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires</i>
<i>NEA</i>	<i>Near Eastern Archaeology</i> [formerly <i>Biblical Archeologist</i>]
<i>NT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>

NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OBC	Orientalia biblica et christiana
OBO	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
OC	Orientalia et Classica
OIP	Oriental Institute Publications
OIS	Oriental Institute Seminars
OLA	Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta
OLP	<i>Orientalia lovaniensia periodica</i>
OLZ	<i>Orientalistische Literaturzeitung</i>
OM	<i>Opera Minora</i>
OPOI	Orientalia: Papers of the Oriental Institute
OPSNKF	Occasional Publications of the Samuel Noah Kramer Fund
Or	<i>Orientalia</i>
ORA	Orientalische Religionen in der Antike
OrAnt	<i>Oriens antiquus</i>
Orient	<i>Orient: Journal of the Society for the Near Eastern Studies in Japan</i>
OrSu	<i>Orientalia Suecana</i>
OS	Oudtestamentische Studiën
OT	<i>Open Theology</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTP	Charlesworth, James H., ed. <i>Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i> . 2 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1983–1985.
OudMed	Oudheidkundige Mededelingen
PÄ	Problem der Ägyptologie
PALMA	Papers on Archaeology of the Leiden Museum of Antiquities
PAPS	<i>Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society</i>
PEGLMBS	<i>Proceedings of the Eastern Great Lakes and Midwest Biblical Societies</i>
PGM	Preisendanz, Karl, and Albert Henrichs, eds. <i>Papyri Graecae Magicae. Die Griechischen Zauberpapyri</i> . Vols. 1–2. 2nd ed. Stuttgart: Teubner, 1974.
PIASH	Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities
PIBRs	<i>Publications of the Israel Biblical Research Society</i>
PL	Papyrologica Leodiensia
PLLS	<i>Papers of the Liverpool Latin Seminar</i>
PMLA	<i>Journal of the Modern Language Association of America</i>
POS	Pretoria Oriental Series
PPISVLK	Pictura et Poesis. Interdisziplinäre Studien zum Verhältnis von Literatur und Kunst
PSBA	<i>Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology</i>

<i>R</i>	Rawlinson, H. C. <i>The Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia</i> . Vols. 1–5. London, 1861–1884.
<i>RA</i>	<i>Revue d’assyriologie et d’archéologie orientale</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
<i>RdE</i>	<i>Revue d’Égyptologie</i>
<i>RdEG</i>	<i>Revue des Études Grecques</i>
<i>RdQ</i>	<i>Revue de Qumran</i>
<i>RdSO</i>	<i>Rivista degli Studi Orientali</i>
<i>RDSR</i>	Ritual Dynamics and the Science of Ritual
<i>REG</i>	<i>Revue des études grecques</i>
<i>REJ</i>	<i>Revue des Études Juives</i>
<i>RINP</i>	Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period
<i>RIA</i>	Ebeling, Erich, et al., eds. <i>Reallexikon der Assyriologie</i> . Vols. 1–14. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1928–2016.
<i>RO</i>	<i>Revue de l’Organisation internationale pour l’étude des langues anciennes par ordinateur</i>
<i>RTP</i>	<i>Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie</i>
<i>SAA</i>	State Archives of Assyria
<i>SAAB</i>	<i>State Archives of Assyria Bulletin</i>
<i>SAACT</i>	State Archives of Assyria Cuneiform Texts
<i>SABMD</i>	Scholae Adriani de Buck Memoriae Dicatae
<i>SAK</i>	<i>Studien zur altägyptischen Kultur</i>
<i>SAMD</i>	Studies in Ancient Magic and Divination
<i>SANE</i>	Sources from the Ancient Near East
<i>SAOC</i>	Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization
<i>SAuK</i>	Seminar für Ägyptologie und Koptologie
<i>SB</i>	Subsidia Biblica
<i>SBE</i>	Studies in Bible and Exegesis
<i>SBLMS</i>	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
<i>SBTS</i>	Sources for Biblical and Theological Study
<i>ScrHier</i>	<i>Scripta Hierosolymitana</i>
<i>SEL</i>	<i>Studi epigrafici e linguistici sul Vicino Oriente antico</i>
<i>Sem</i>	<i>Semitica</i>
<i>SemeiaSt</i>	Semeia Studies
<i>SIFC</i>	<i>Studi italiani di filologia classica</i>
<i>SJ</i>	<i>Studia judaica</i>
<i>SJOT</i>	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
<i>SLTHS</i>	Siphut: Literature and Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures
<i>SOPFOS</i>	Studia Orientalia Published by the Finnish Oriental Society
<i>SSN</i>	Studia Semitica Neerlandica
<i>SSR</i>	Studien zur spätägyptischen Religion
<i>SSU</i>	Studia Semitica Upsaliensia

STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
STRT	Studia Theologica Rheno-Traiectina
<i>StTh</i>	<i>Studia theologica</i>
StudOr	Studia Orientalia
<i>TAPA</i>	<i>Transactions of the American Philological Association</i>
<i>TAPS</i>	<i>Transactions of the American Philosophical Society</i>
TAUOP	Tel Aviv University Occasional Publications
<i>TCL</i>	<i>Textes cunéiformes du Louvre</i>
TCS	Texts from Cuneiform Sources
TCSV	Trends in Classics: Supplementary Volumes
<i>TDOT</i>	Botterweck, G. Johannes, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, eds. <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Translated by John T. Willis et al. 15 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–2006.
<i>TIM</i>	Zaybari, Akram, and J. J. A. van Dijk, eds. <i>Texts in the Iraq Museum</i> . Baghdad, Directorate General of Antiquities, 1964–.
TOA	Testi del Oriente Antico
<i>TQ</i>	<i>Theologische Quartalschrift</i>
TR	Theology and Religion
<i>TrinJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
TS	Texts and Studies Third Series
TSAJ	Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism
<i>TSCPP</i>	<i>Transactions & Studies of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia</i>
UÄS	Untersuchungen zur ägyptischen Stilistik
UBL	Ugaritisch-biblische Literatur
<i>UF</i>	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
<i>UT</i>	Gordon, C. H.. <i>Ugaritic Textbook</i> , AnOr 38, Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965.
<i>VAB</i>	<i>Vorderasiatische Bibliothek</i>
VR	Visible Religion
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WAW	Writings from the Ancient World
<i>Wb</i>	Erman, A., and H. Grapow. <i>Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache</i> . Vols. 1–5. Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1926–1953.
<i>WdO</i>	<i>Welt des Orients</i>
WSEA	Wilbour Studies in Egyptology and Assyriology
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
WVDOG	Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft

YNER	Yale Near Eastern Researches
YOS	Yale Oriental Series, Babylonian Texts
ZA	<i>Zeitschrift für Assyriologie</i>
ZAH	<i>Zeitschrift für Althebräistik</i>
ZÄS	<i>Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZDMG	<i>Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>
ZPE	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>
ZSG	<i>Zeitschrift für Semitistik und verwandte Gebiete</i>

OTHER ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Ant. Rom.</i>	Dionysius of Halicarnassus, <i>Antiquitates Romanae</i>
b.	Talmud Bavli
BM	British Museum
CM	Cairo Museum
CT	Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum
<i>Div.</i>	Cicero, <i>De Divinatione</i>
Gen. Rab.	Genesis Rabbah
<i>Inst.</i>	Quintilian, <i>Institutio Oratoria</i>
<i>Inv.</i>	Hermogenes, <i>On Invention</i>
Frgs.	Fragments
l.	Line
LXX	Septuagint
m.	Mishnah
Mp	<i>Masora Parva</i>
MT	Masoretic Text. Based on K. Elliger and W. Rudolph, eds., <i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> . Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1983.
<i>Od.</i>	Homer, <i>Odyssey</i>
<i>Or.</i>	Cicero, <i>De Oratore</i>
P.	Papyrus
<i>Poet.</i>	Aristotle, <i>Poetics</i>
<i>Rhet.</i>	Aristotle, <i>Rhetorica</i>
PS	Proto-Semitic
RS	Ras Shamra
TT	Theban Tomb
y.	Talmud Yerushalmi

INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE

This book has three intersecting goals. First, it aims to provide the tools necessary for a comparative, in-depth study of “wordplay” in ancient Near Eastern texts. Second, it aspires to establish comprehensive taxonomies for the many kinds of devices that scholars have labeled as “wordplay” and for their proposed functions. Finally, it seeks to establish a consistent terminology that will offer students and scholars of ancient Near Eastern languages a useful template for documenting and understanding the devices they discover, and scholars of other disciplines access to the sophisticated devices of ancient Near Eastern writers. This, I hope, will lead to greater precision and interdisciplinary dialogue.

The astute reader will notice that I have placed the term “wordplay” in quotation marks. It is my contention that the term is problematic for many reasons, which I discuss in chapter 1. Nevertheless, I find it heuristically useful in communicating to those outside the discipline what sorts of devices this book will examine, even if the devices differ in technique and their functions and social contexts appear alien.

Readers also will note that I have opted to use the word *texts*, in the title rather than *literature*. There are two reasons for this. First, one finds “wordplay” in texts of all kinds, including annals, letters, law codes, medical prescriptions, omen lists, and ritual descriptions. In fact, there appear to be no generic or chronological restrictions to the application of “wordplay” in the ancient Near East. A second reason is that the social background of textual production, which I discuss in the chapter 2, strongly suggests that many forms of “wordplay” have an illocutionary function. Thus “wordplay” is often as much a performative phenomenon as a literary one.

It is rather ironic that the presence of “wordplay” in ancient Near Eastern texts has been recognized for many years—in the case of the Hebrew Bible, for several centuries. Yet, large-scale publications on the phenomenon are rare. In addition, though we have benefitted from numerous articles on the subject, most have focused on select biblical passages rather than books. Moreover, until recently, most scholars were content merely to illustrate examples without

discussing their functions, generic environments, or literary and social contexts. Consequently, despite the long-standing recognition, it is fair to say that many aspects of “wordplay” in ancient Near Eastern texts remain largely unexplored.

Moreover, the disciplines represented in this study have long suffered from a vague, inconsistent, and, at times, even contradictory vocabulary that has done little to advance the study of the phenomena and all their permutations and effects. Consequently, many publications employ only the most basic terms for a number of devices that deserve individual attention. Thus, we find studies on alliteration that more accurately contain cases of homoeopropheron, homoioteleuton, parasonance, and the like, and publications on punning that ignore the visual register and do not distinguish devices of sound from those of meaning. It is my hope that this monograph will provide tools for advancing the comparative study of these phenomena with greater accuracy.

ORGANIZATION

I have organized the book’s contents to facilitate future research. In chapter 1, I discuss a number of difficulties that confront the contemporary study of “wordplay” in ancient texts such as the lack of a complete taxonomy and consistent vocabulary. After surveying some influential surveys on the subject with special attention to Biblical Hebrew, I offer a general description of the taxonomy I employ and I explain how it differs from previous proposals.

Chapter 2 addresses several methodological issues that confront the study of ancient “wordplay.” Here I begin by examining the issue of intentionality. I then treat the complicated topic of reception by asking for whom such devices were intended. This naturally leads to an examination of the social contexts of textual production. Afterwards, I discuss the importance that proximity and the role of memory play in making such devices effective. This chapter also considers the generative roles that different scripts play in the production and meaning of “wordplay,” and it outlines the importance of distinguishing lingual manipulation from grammaticality.

Chapter 3 provides a taxonomy for the many different functions that “wordplay” might serve based on proposals found in previous scholarship. I offer no theoretical framework for the taxonomy, as I am interested only in gathering what we currently know (or think we know) about the topic.¹ The chapter con-

1. The recent attempt by David M. Dalwood, “Solomon, God, and Sharon Walk into a Song: Dialoguing Polysemy in the Song of Songs,” *JHS* 17 (2017): 1–16, perhaps best embodies the opposite approach of using theory, in particular the ideas of Paul Ricoeur, to understand biblical polysemy. I do not feel we can apply theory to a topic for which we only have partial data. Moreover, as the following chapters will make clear, there is no one type of polysemy or paronomasia to which a single theory might apply. For useful

cludes with a brief discussion of the complexities that inform discussions of function.

In chapter 4, I offer a taxonomy for the many kinds of devices labeled “wordplay,” and I demonstrate each device, wherever possible, in Akkadian, Egyptian, Ugaritic, Hebrew, and Aramaic texts. Periodically, I cite epigraphic materials in other Semitic languages such as Moabite, Phoenician, and the language of Deir ‘Alla.² I offer even fewer examples from Sumerian texts due to

recent surveys on the variety of methods applied, see Chaim Cohen, “New Directions in Modern Biblical Hebrew Lexicography,” in *Birkat Shalom: Studies in the Bible, Ancient Near Eastern Literature, and Postbiblical Judaism Presented to Shalom M. Paul on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Chaim Cohen et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 441–73; Arthur Keefer, “Phonological Patterns in the Old Testament: A Century of Studies in Sound,” *CBR* 15 (2016): 41–64.

2. There has been an increasing appreciation among scholars for the literary sophistication of ancient inscriptions, especially in terms of style and structure. See, e.g., Jonas C. Greenfield, “Stylistic Aspects of the Sefire Treaty Inscriptions,” *AO* 29 (1965): 1–18; Greenfield, “Early Aramaic Poetry,” *JANES* 11 (1979): 45–51; Terence Collins, “The Kilamuwa Inscription: A Phoenician Poem,” *WdO* 6 (1971): 183–88; Hayim Tawil, “Some Literary Elements in the Opening Sections of the Hadad, Zākīr, and the Nērab II Inscriptions in the Light of East and West Semitic Royal Inscriptions,” *Or* 43 (1974): 40–65; Michael O’Connor, “The Rhetoric of the Kilamuwa Inscription,” *BASOR* 226 (1977): 15–29 (with some reservations on Collins’s study); Pierre Auffret, “Essai sur la structure littéraire de la stèle de Mésa,” *UF* 12 (1980): 109–24; William H. Shea, “The Carpentras Stele: A Funerary Poem,” *JAOS* 101 (1981): 215–17; Victor A. Hurowitz, “Literary Structures in Samsuiluna A,” *JCS* 36 (1984): 191–205; Hurowitz, “Some Literary Observations on the Šitti-Marduk Kudurru (BBSt. 6),” *ZA* 82 (1992): 39–59; Hurowitz, “ABL 1285 and the Hebrew Bible: Literary Topoi in Urad-Gula’s Letter of Petition to Assurbanipal,” *SAAB* 7 (1993): 9–17; Hurowitz, *Divine Service and Its Rewards: Ideology and Poetics in the Hinku Kudurru* (Beersheva, Israel: Ben-Gurion University Press, 1997); Hurowitz, “‘An Heir Created by Aššur’: Literary Observations on the Rassam Prism (A) of Ashurbanipal,” in *Politics as Literature: Essays on the Ancient Near East in Honor of Peter Machinist*, ed. David S. Vanderhooft and Abraham Winitzer (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 223–68; Yitzhak Avishur, *Phoenician Inscriptions and the Bible: Select Inscriptions and Studies in Stylistic and Literary Devices Common to the Phoenician Inscriptions and the Bible* (Tel Aviv: Archaeological Center Publication, 2000); Michael G. Hasel, “The Structure of the Final Hymnic-Poetic Unit on the Merneptah Stela,” *ZAW* 116 (2004): 75–81; Jan-Wim Wesselijs, “Language Play in the Old Testament and in Ancient North-West Semitic Inscriptions: Some Notes on the Kilamuwa Inscription,” in *The Old Testament in Its World: Papers Read at the Winter Meeting, January 2003, The Society for Old Testament Study and at the Joint Meeting, July 2003, The Society for Old Testament Study and Het Oudtestamentisch Werkgezelschap in Nederland en België*, ed. Robert P. Gordon and Johannes C. de Moor, *OS* 52 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 253–65; Aaron Schade, “A Text Linguistic Approach to the Syntax and Style of the Phoenician Inscription of Azatiwada,” *JSS* 50 (2005): 35–58; Schade, “The Syntax and Literary Structure of the Phoenician Inscription of Yehimilik,” *Maarav* 13 (2006): 119–22; Scott B. Noegel, “The Zakkur Inscription,” in *The Ancient*

our limited knowledge of Sumerian poetics. Jacob Klein and Yitschak Sefati explain:

A reliable analysis of Sumerian poetics, and especially the aspect of sound and word play, is hampered by the structure of cuneiform writing and our transliteration system, as well as by the fact that Sumerian literature was committed to writing by scribes whose mother tongue was Akkadian, and when Sumerian was no longer a spoken language.³

Despite our limitations, a number of important publications on Sumerian compositions have shown that scribes employed several of the devices examined here, so I would be remiss to leave them out.⁴ Nevertheless, for the most part, I

Near East: Historical Sources in Translation, ed. Mark W. Chavalas (London: Blackwell, 2006), 307–11; Gary A. Rendsburg, “Linguistic and Stylistic Notes to the Hazon Gabriel Inscription,” *DSD* 16 (2009): 107–16; Mario Liverani, “Literary-Political Motifs in the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions: Measuring Continuity versus Change,” in Vanderhooft and Winitzer, *Politics as Literature*, 269–84; Roland Enmarch, “Some Literary Aspects of the Kamose Inscriptions,” *JEA* 99 (2013): 253–63.

3. Jacob Klein and Yitschak Sefati, “Word Play in Sumerian Literature,” in *Puns and Pundits: Wordplay in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Literature*, ed. Scott B. Noegel (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2000), 25 n. 6.

4. See, for example, M. Civil, “The Anzu-Bird and Scribal Whimsies,” *JAOS* 92 (1972): 271; Bendt Alster, “An Aspect of ‘Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta,”” *RA* 67 (1973): 101–10; M. Civil, “Sumerian Riddles: A Corpus,” *AuOr* 5 (1987): 17–35; Bendt Alster, “Paradoxical Proverbs and Satire in Sumerian Literature,” *JCS* 27 (1975): 201–30; Jerrold S. Cooper, *The Return of Ninurta to Nippur: An-gim dim-ma*, *AnOr* 52 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1976); Cooper, “Puns and Prebends: The Tale of Enlil and Namzitara,” in *Strings and Threads: A Celebration of the Work of Anne Draffkorn Kilmer*, ed. Wolfgang Heimpel and Gabriella Frantz-Szabó (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011): 39–43; Adele Berlin, “Shared Rhetorical Features in Biblical and Sumerian Literature,” *JANES* 10 (1978): 35–42; Robert Seth Falkowitz, *The Sumerian Rhetoric Collections* (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1980); Thorkild Jacobsen, “Abstruse Sumerian,” in *Ah, Assyria: Studies in Assyrian History and Ancient Near Eastern Historiography Presented to Hayim Tadmor*, ed. Mordechai Cogan and Israel Eph'al, *ScrHier* 33 (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1991), 279–91; Jacob Klein, *The Royal Hymns of Shulgi, King of Ur: Man's Quest for Immortal Fame*, *TAPS* 71 (Philadelphia, PA: American Philosophical Society, 1981); Annette Zgoll, *Der Rechtsfall der En-hedu-Ana im Lied nin-me-sara*, *AOAT* 246 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1997); Klein and Sefati, “Word Play in Sumerian Literature,” 23–61; Graham Cunningham, “In the Company of *ni* ‘Self’ and ‘Fear(someness),” in *Analysing Literary Sumerian: Corpus-Based Approaches*, by Jarle Ebeling and Graham Cunningham (London: Equinox, 2007), 70–104; Bálint Tanos, “The Polysemy and Productivity of the Formative Element *nam* in Old Babylonian Literary Sumerian,” in Ebeling and Cunningham, *Analysing Literary Sumerian*, 250–72; Piotr Michalowski, “Where’s Al? Humor and Poetics in the Hymn to the Hoe,” in *Cuneiform Studies in Honor of David I. Owen on His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Alexandra Kleinerman and Jack M. Sasson (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 2010), 195–200.

have left Sumerian out of my final analysis.⁵ Hittite is beyond my ken and thus not represented, though I hasten to refer to Ahmet Ünal, who observes that “Hittite literature seems rather devoid of all kinds of sophisticated literary embellishments, eschewing, for instance, puns, puzzles, plays on words, riddles, any sort of poetry, verse, alliteration, paronomasia, and rhyme.”⁶

I have placed the chapter on taxonomy after the chapter on proposed functions, because it allows me to reconsider (and reorient) the proposed purposes for each of the devices by discussing the effect that each has on readers/listeners. Often, these effects offer insights that help to redefine what we mean by “function.”

I have based the taxonomy of devices again on existing scholarship in order to provide an up-to-date presentation of known examples, though in the interest of comparative study and greater exactitude I employ terms that are less culturally bound or disciplinarily idiosyncratic. I distinguish devices that involve meaning (polysemy) from those that involve sound (paronomasia) and note wherever possible when a device operates aurally and/or visually. As in chapter 3, my interest here is in surveying the devices that scholars already have discovered in order to develop a taxonomy from them, rather than offering examples to fit a preconceived theoretical model. This enables me to present a consensus of scholarship, even if some might dispute particulars. In several cases, I have adopted terms that are Greek in origin, because they accurately identify the devices and because they demonstrate that the devices are far more Eastern and ancient than their Greek usage might suggest (fig. 3). Throughout I have made no attempt to cite every scholar on every topic or every commentary for every passage, though I have labored to be as inclusive as possible in the bibliography. In many ways, I intend the book to serve as a reference work.

The fifth and concluding chapter synthesizes the preceding research. Here I discuss what the evidence tells us about patterns of preference and distribution, and the fundamental strategies that inform “wordplay” in ancient Near Eastern texts. I also propose a number of directions for future research.

TRANSLITERATION GUIDE

Since it would be impossible for those unfamiliar with the languages studied in this book to grasp many of its techniques without seeing them in transliteration,

5. On the difficulties confronting the study of Sumerian poetics, see Piotr Michalowski, “Ancient Poetics,” in *Mesopotamian Poetic Language: Sumerian and Akkadian*, ed. Marianna E. Vogelzang and Herman L. J. Vanstiphout, CM 6 (Groningen: Styx Publications, 1996), 141–53.

6. Ahmet Ünal, “Word Play in Hittite Literature,” in *Hittite Studies in Honor of Harry J. Hoffner Jr. on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Gary Beckman, Richard Beal, and Gregory McMahon (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 377.

I herewith provide a guide. For pedagogical reasons, I resist explaining the nature of the various writing systems until chapter 2.

In Egyptology and Assyriology/Sumerology, it is customary to publish in transliteration, unless it is the first time a text appears. In such cases, a hand-drawn copy and/or photograph of the text often accompanies the transliteration. In biblical studies, it is customary to cite the text in the original without a transliteration. However, since I intend to make this research accessible to those beyond biblical studies, I have provided both the original text and a transliteration for all Hebrew and Aramaic passages. When discussing Egyptian, I sometimes provide portions of the hieroglyphic text, because a particular device is difficult to appreciate without it, but I do so always with an accompanying transliteration.

Readers should be aware that our understanding of how some consonants were pronounced is an approximation based on comparative evidence and/or historical reconstruction—information that has emerged long after the transliteration systems were created. Consequently, in some cases there is something of a dissonance between the conventions used for teaching the sounds of a language and the way we believe phonemes actually were pronounced. I point this out periodically in the guide below. While this creates a potential for confusion, it is crucial for understanding the types of sound devices covered in the ensuing chapters. For those phonemes that are peculiar to English speakers, I have equipped the guide below with their equivalent representation in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).⁷ Of course, it is important to note that regardless of how one pronounces a consonant, we can assume that it had an alliterative effect when repeated in subsequent words.

SUMERIAN

Sumerian is a language isolate, which is to say, it has no known relatives. Moreover, the writing system was mnemonic, and so it was never intended to render pronunciation. The morphophonemics of Sumerian have been reconstructed from this imperfect mnemonic system in conjunction with lexical lists and Akkadian translations. Based on our current knowledge, we can say that the consonants represented in the script include: *b*, *b'*, *d*, *g*, *ġ*, *h*, *h'*, *k*, *k'*, *l*, *m*, *n*, *p*, *r*, *ř*, *s*, *š*, *t*, *t'*, *z*, though in standard transliteration practice, the post glottalized

7. Nevertheless, I have resisted employing the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) throughout the book for two reasons. First, each of the transliteration systems employed herein has a very long and intractable history in its discipline, and each continues to be the standard in publications. It only makes sense to retain these systems in order to make the research accessible to scholars within these disciplines. Second, whichever transliteration system I adopt inevitably will leave someone having to acquire it.

stops (*b*´, *k*´, *t*´) are rendered simply *b*, *k*, *t*. The consonant *ġ* has been tentatively labeled a velar nasal or palatal. It can be seen in Akkadian translations that treat the sound as /ng/, as in the English word “sing” [IPA ŋ], and it is primarily represented by the syllabograms ĜÁ, ÁĜ, and MI.⁸ The consonant *ḫ* is pronounced like /ch/ in the Scottish “loch” but with more force [IPA x]. There is a lack of agreement on the consonant *ṛ*. It perhaps represents a consonantal cluster /dr/. I have added it here for the sake of completion, but I have not reflected it in the transliterations. The consonant *š* is pronounced like /sh/ in “sheep” [IPA ʃ]. Some phonemes, like /h/, and the additionally proposed values /g^w/ and /g^b/, only can be inferred from the comparative evidence and certain linguistic environments. I have not marked these in order to make the script as accessible as possible. Sumerian also contained short and long vowels: *a*, *ā*, *e*, *ē*, *i*, *ī*, *u*, *ū*, and possibly *o*, *ō*, though vowel length is usually inferred and not represented in the script. I have disregarded vowel length in the transliterations to simplify the sign values. There are various scholarly traditions on how to transliterate Sumerian. I have opted to capitalize Sumerian signs to differentiate them from Akkadian, which I italicize and place in lower case. Though Sumerologists sometimes employ H for the sound /h/, I have used Ĥ to avoid confusion with the consonant *h* found in other languages in this book.⁹

The two primary dialects of Sumerian are known as EME.ĜIR, the standard dialect, and EME.SAL, a much debated, perhaps literary dialect usually reserved for the direct speech of women and goddesses and the ritual activities of the so-called *gala*-priests.¹⁰ I shall refer to them periodically.

AKKADIAN

Akkadian is an East Semitic language that is represented mainly by two major dialects, Babylonian and Assyrian, though there also were many peripheral dialects. The language possesses the following consonants: ʾ, *b*, *d*, *g*, *ḫ*, *k*, *l*, *m*, *n*, *p*, *q*, *r*, *s*, *š*, *t*, *t*´, *w*, *y*, and *z*. All of these occur in English except four: *ḫ*, *š*, *š*´, and *t*´. The *ḫ* and *š* are pronounced like their Sumerian counterparts; thus again, *ḫ* is like /ch/ in the Scottish “loch” [IPA x] but with more force, and *š* is like /sh/ in “sheep” [IPA ʃ]. The ancient sounds of the *š*, *t*´, and the third emphatic (*q*) are unknown, so scholars have adopted the convention of pronouncing them like *ts*, *t*´, and *k*, respectively. John Huehnergard offers possibilities based on modern cognate languages:

8. The latter being the EME.SAL dialectal equivalent.

9. For those seeking deeper information on the Sumerian language, see Dietz Otto Edzard, *Sumerian Grammar*, HOS 1, The Near and Middle East 71 (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

10. EME.SAL means “thin” or “high-pitched” language.

The sounds corresponding to *q*, *ṣ*, *ṭ* in the modern Semitic languages of Ethiopia and South Arabia are glottalized, that is, pronounced like *k*, *s*, and *t* with accompanying glottal closure and sharp ejection of air (*q* = [kʰ]; *ṣ* = [sʰ]; *ṭ* = [tʰ]). In Arabic the phonemes corresponding to the Akkadian emphatics are pronounced as follows: *q* is articulated farther back than *k* (at the uvula); *ṣ* and *ṭ* resemble *s* and *t*, respectively, but with a simultaneous constricting of the throat (pharyngealization).¹¹

Since Akkadian employs a syllabic script, vowels are represented. The vowels are /a/, /e/, /i/, and /u/, and they can be short or long. I leave short vowels unmarked and record long vowels with a macron.

EGYPTIAN

The consonants in the Egyptian language include: ʒ, ʔ, j, ʕ, w, b, p, f, m, n, r, h, ḥ, ḫ, ḥ, s, š, k, q, g, t, ṭ, d, and ḏ.¹² Many appear in English except: ʒ, ʔ, j, ʕ, ḥ, ḫ, ṭ, ḏ. The dissonance between the conventional and actual pronunciation of consonants discussed above is especially noticeable in ancient Egyptian, a language that also underwent change over its more than three thousand year history.¹³ The conventional way of teaching the consonant ʒ is to treat it as an a-vowel, but it once sounded like /r/ or perhaps /l/. It lost its consonantal value around 1500 BCE. Meanwhile, the sign rendered *r* and usually pronounced as /r/ represented two different phonemes in early Egyptian: /r/ and /l/. When teaching the consonants ʔ and j, we typically pronounce the former like /y/ in “yes” and the latter, like /ee/ in “sleep.” However, the former was a voiceless glottal plosive that sounded like the last sound in uh-oh, while the latter may have been similar to /i/. If the double reed leaf sign (𐀀) is used, it probably sounded like /y(a)/. The consonant ʕ too, we usually pronounce as an a-vowel, but it was a laryngeal fricative that was pronounced by emitting an *ah*-sound from very deep in the throat, as if gargling [IPA ʕ]. It is identical to the consonant ʕ found in Ugaritic, Hebrew, and Aramaic. The ḥ is pronounced like the voiced /ch/ in German “Ich,” and it too appears in Ugaritic, Hebrew, and Aramaic as ḥ [IPA h]. The Egyptian ḫ [IPA x] is a much harder version of ḥ and is equivalent to the same sound in

11. John Huehnergard, *A Grammar of Akkadian*, HSS 45 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1997), 2.

12. I have opted to transliterate the sound /q/ as *q* rather than *k* in order to aid comparative study with the other languages that contain this phoneme.

13. For those seeking a more comprehensive linguistic approach to the Egyptian language, more information on the phonological changes that occurred over time, and an in-depth discussion of the different conventions for pronunciation that have emerged in Egyptology, see Carsten Peust, *An Introduction to the Phonology of a Dead Language*, MoAS 2 (Göttingen: Peust & Gutschmidt Verlag, 1999).

Akkadian and Ugaritic. The value of *ḥ* is less certain, but it appears to have been a lateral form of *h*, in some cases closer to the sound /ʃ/, thus [IPA ɕ]. The consonant *š* is again like /sh/ in “sheep,” and is found in each of the languages in this book. The conventional way of teaching the Egyptian *ṯ* is to pronounce it like /ch/ in “chowder.” However, it sometimes renders Semitic /z/ and voiced /th/, so it probably was more of an /s/ sound. The consonant transliterated as *ḏ* is conventionally taught as the /j/ sound in “journey” [IPA ʝ], but since it renders Semitic /z/ and all dental/sibilant emphatics, it was closer to /ts/. The consonants rendered as /k/, /g/, and /q/ are more complex than they might appear. In Old Egyptian, the three graphemes represent three distinct phonemes: /k/ renders an aspirate /k^h/ or a phoneme that later develops into an aspirate, /q/ and /g/ represent two non-aspirate phonemes the distinction between which is impossible to know. The phoneme /q/ was likely labialized, as was /g/, which was an allophone. In the Middle and New Kingdoms the consonants became even more complex. Carsten Peust explains:

So in total we have 5 or 6 phonemes: /k^h/, /k₁/, /k₁^w/, /k₂/, /k₂^w/ (or k₂^w), and /q/. They are rendered by only three different graphemes (or by four if we consider the marginal grapheme 𓂏). Labialization is largely ignored in writing, and there is no sign to unambiguously indicate /q/.¹⁴

Indeed, the pronunciation of other consonants also changed over time. In particular, in Late Egyptian, we find the depalatalization of *ṯ* to /t/ and *ḏ* to /d/, though the latter change is not necessarily represented in the writing. The consonants *t* and *r* also were often not pronounced in a variety of linguistic environments (e.g., in final position), but remained in writing.¹⁵ Note too that the signs 𓂏 and 𓂐 (both rendered with *s*) were once separate sounds (i.e., /s/ and /ts/), but the two became allographs from the Middle Kingdom on, when they perhaps approximated the English /s/.¹⁶

Egyptian records no vowels, so Egyptologists reconstruct them mostly on the basis of Coptic. Since Coptic was written so much later than the texts covered in this book, we cannot know whether vowel change has occurred, so I have left assonance out of the study.

There are various methods of transliterating grammatical relationships in Egyptian texts. I have opted to employ a dot to mark the verbal past tense and an equal sign (=) for affixed verbal and nominal pronouns. I also mark feminine singular nouns, masculine and feminine plural nouns, duals, and some other

14. Peust, *Introduction to the Phonology of a Dead Language*, 114.

15. See Peust, *Introduction to the Phonology of a Dead Language*, 151–54.

16. On the various proposals of how these consonants were pronounced, see Peust, *Introduction to the Phonology of a Dead Language*, 126.

distinct elements of the language with a period. Thus, *hm.t* “wife,” *ts.w* “phrases,” *ntr.wt* “goddesses,” and *t3.wj* “the Two Lands.”

UGARITIC

The consonantal inventory for the Ugaritic language includes: *a, i, u, b, g, d, ḡ, h, w, z, ḥ, ḫ, ṭ, ṣ, y, k, l, m, n, s, š, ʿ, ḡ, p, ṣ, q, r, š, t, and ṭ*. Do not be confused by *a, i, u*; Ugaritic does not record vowels. Instead, these are variations of the same *aleph* glottal plosive followed (or in some cases preceded, according to some) by an *a, i, or u* vowel. The sound of the consonant is identical to Hebrew and Aramaic ʾ (not to be confused with ʿ in each of them, which faces the other way). Because Ugaritic does not render vowels, we cannot delineate cases of assonance. As for the other consonants not found in English, I add: *ḡ, ḥ, ḫ, ṭ, ṣ, s, š, ʿ, ḡ, š, and ṭ*. The consonants *ḥ, ḫ, ʿ, and š* are pronounced the same way as they are found in the languages discussed thus far. The problems that exist in ascertaining the true values of the emphatics *ṭ, ṣ, q*, in Akkadian are also realized in Ugaritic. Consequently, scholars regularly pronounce them as *t, ts, and k*, respectively. Thus, the only new consonants to introduce include: *ḡ, ṣ, s, š, ḡ, and ṭ*. In Ugaritic, *ḡ* is a voiced sound that is pronounced like /th/ in “there” [IPA ð] and sometimes also can represent /d/. The *ṣ* is pronounced like /th/ in “thought” but with the jaw open [IPA ðʰ]. The sign *s* is not like *s* in English, but a heavy /ss/, as in “hiss,” but articulated again with the jaw open [IPA ts]. The *š* is identical to our *s* (as in “sun”), but readers might be unfamiliar with this transliteration. The *ḡ* is a richer, more guttural reflection of the consonant ʿ, and is produced as if saying the initial *g* in “gargle,” while gargling [IPA ɣ]. The *ṭ* is pronounced /th/, as in “thank” [IPA θ].¹⁷

HEBREW AND ARAMAIC

Hebrew and Aramaic consonants are identical: ʾ, *b, g, d, h, w, z, ḥ, ṭ, y, k, l, m, n, s, ʿ, p, ṣ, q, r, š, š, and t*. All of these have been discussed already in conjunction with Ugaritic, except for ʾ. The phoneme ʾ is identical to the Ugaritic variants *a, i, and u*. It is a glottal plosive that one must distinguish from ʿ, which faces the opposite way. In Hebrew and Aramaic, the consonants *b, g, d, k, p, and t* also can be aspirated. Thus, when recorded, I have rendered their aspirated forms as

17. For a deeper treatment of the Ugaritic language, consult John Huehnergard, *Ugaritic Vocabulary in Syllabic Transcription*, HSS 32 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1987); Daniel Sivan, *A Grammar of the Ugaritic Language*, HOS 1, The Near and Middle East 28 (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

b, *g*, *d*, *k*, *p*, and *t*.¹⁸ In inscriptions and other texts in which aspiration is not recorded, I transliterate as if not aspirated. Note that while I transliterate every *π* as *h* and every *ϣ* as *ʿ*, evidence suggests that both consonants mask two potential phonemic values. The *π* can represent *h* or *ħ* [IPA *h* or *x*], and the *ϣ* can represent *ʿ* or *g* [IPA *ʕ* or *ɣ*]. In fact, the two sets of sounds, which are the same as those found in Ugaritic, were still articulated distinctly as late as 200 BCE, after which *ħ* merged with *h*, and *g* merged with *ʿ*.¹⁹ I raise this issue periodically throughout when the underlying phonemic values matter to a word's pronunciation and interpretation. As with Akkadian and Ugaritic, the ancient sounds of the consonants *t*, *s*, and *q* are unknown, so here too we adopt the convention of pronouncing them as *t*, *ts*, and *k*.

The reader should take care to note the difference between Hebrew and Aramaic *q*, the Egyptian *q*, and the Ugaritic *q*, each of which differs. As I noted above, the Hebrew and Aramaic *t* similarly differs from the same transliteration signs found in Egyptian and Ugaritic.

Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic possess a notation system for recording vowels, which consists of a number of diacritical marks (Hebrew נִקּוּד *niqqūḏ* “pointing”), though it was added to the biblical text at a much later date (see chapter 2). Periodically, I refer to this system as the vocalized text or the pointed text. Hebraists will be able to understand which vowels correspond to which transliterations, and so I will not provide this correspondence here. For those unfamiliar with Hebrew and Aramaic, suffice it to note that I transliterate the vowels as follows: short (*a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, *u*), partial (*ə*, *ā*, *ē*, *ō*), and long (*ā*, *ē*, *ī*, *ō*, *ū*).²⁰ For those Hebrew and Aramaic texts that appear in inscriptions or elsewhere without vowels, I simply transliterate the consonants. I do the same for other Northwest Semitic scripts that do not record vowels.

For the few terms cited from medieval and modern Hebrew, I have followed the common convention to leave the Hebrew unpointed and to transliterate it without attention to vowel length, for example, זיווג מלים *ziwwug millim* “word pairs.”

The chart below should help readers to distinguish the sounds of the consonants that one could potentially confuse when moving from language to language.

18. The fricativization of these letters occurred sometime around 400 BCE, possibly under Aramaic influence. See Gary A. Rendsburg, “Phonology: Biblical Hebrew,” in *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*, ed. Geoffrey Khan (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 3:104–5.

19. See Rendsburg, “Phonology: Biblical Hebrew,” 104–5.

20. A note to Hebraists: I have elected to use *h* to transliterate cases of *matres lectionis* in final *he* forms and cases in which the consonant *h* is pronounced (with a *mappiq*), because I did not want the visual impression of the consonant marking a *matres lectionis* to be lost to readers unfamiliar with the script. Those wanting to see which of these cases an *h* represents in the transliteration can consult the adjoining Hebrew.

Fig. 1. Consonants in Each Language with Descriptions and IPA Alphabet

Consonant	Sumerian	Akkadian	Egyptian	Ugaritic	Hebrew	Aramaic
ʒ			l or r			
ʾ <i>aleph</i> — glottal plosive				<i>a, i, u</i> represent the consonant <i>aleph</i> plus the vowel <i>a, i</i> or <i>u</i> —as in the second syllable of uh-oh	as in the second syllable of uh-oh	as in the second syllable of uh-oh
ʿ <i>ayin</i> — laryngeal fricative			<i>ah</i> -sound, but from very deep in the throat as if gargling [IPA ʕ]	<i>ah</i> -sound, but from very deep in the throat as if gargling [IPA ʕ]	<i>ah</i> -sound, but from very deep in the throat as if gargling [IPA ʕ]	<i>ah</i> -sound, but from very deep in the throat as if gargling [IPA ʕ]
<i>b</i>					aspirated <i>b</i> [IPA b ^h]	aspirated <i>b</i> [IPA b ^h]
<i>d</i>			<i>ts</i> as in tse-tse fly [IPA s ^ʃ]	<i>th</i> as in there [IPA ð]	aspirated <i>d</i> [IPA d ^h]	aspirated <i>d</i> [IPA d ^h]
<i>g</i>	<i>ng</i> as in sing [IPA ŋ]					
<i>g</i>				<i>g</i> as in gargle, while gargling (a more guttural form of <i>ayin</i>) [IPA ɣ]		

Consonant	Sumerian	Akkadian	Egyptian	Ugaritic	Hebrew	Aramaic
<i>g̃</i>					aspirated <i>g</i> [IPA g ^h]	aspirated <i>g</i> [IPA g ^h]
<i>h</i>			voiced <i>ch</i> in German Ich [IPA ħ]	voiced <i>ch</i> in German Ich [IPA ħ]	voiced <i>ch</i> in German Ich [IPA ħ]	voiced <i>ch</i> in German Ich [IPA ħ]
<i>ḥ</i>	<i>ch</i> as in loch [IPA x]	<i>ch</i> as in loch [IPA x]	<i>ch</i> as in loch [IPA x]	<i>ch</i> as in loch [IPA x]		
<i>h̥</i>			uncertain-perhaps a lateral <i>h</i> , closer to <i>ʃ</i>			
<i>ʔ</i>			like the last sound in uh-oh			
<i>j</i>			like <i>ee</i> in weep [IPA ɪ] or (if double reed sign) <i>y(a)</i>			
<i>ḳ</i>					aspirated <i>k</i> [IPA k ^h]	aspirated <i>k</i> [IPA k ^h]
<i>p̣</i>					aspirated <i>p</i> [IPA p ^h]	aspirated <i>p</i> [IPA p ^h]
<i>q</i>		<i>k</i> with a glottal closure and sharp ejection of air [IPA kʰ] or <i>q</i> articulated farther back than <i>k</i> (at the uvula)		<i>k</i> with a glottal closure and sharp ejection of air [IPA kʰ] or <i>q</i> articulated farther back than <i>k</i> (at the uvula)	<i>k</i> with a glottal closure and sharp ejection of air [IPA kʰ] or <i>q</i> articulated farther back than <i>k</i> (at the uvula)	<i>k</i> with a glottal closure and sharp ejection of air [IPA kʰ] or <i>q</i> articulated farther back than <i>k</i> (at the uvula)
<i>s</i>				heavy <i>ss</i> , as in hiss, with the jaw open	heavy <i>ss</i> , as in hiss, with the jaw open	heavy <i>ss</i> , as in hiss, with the jaw open

Consonant	Sumerian	Akkadian	Egyptian	Ugaritic	Hebrew	Aramaic
<i>š</i>		<i>ts</i> as in tse-tse fly perhaps glottalized [IPA sʔ] or pharyn- gealized [IPA sʕ]		<i>ts</i> as in tse-tse fly perhaps glottalized [IPA sʔ] or pharyn- gealized [IPA sʕ]	<i>ts</i> as in tse-tse fly perhaps glottalized [IPA sʔ] or pharyn- gealized [IPA sʕ]	<i>ts</i> as in tse-tse fly perhaps glottalized [IPA sʔ] or pharyn- gealized [IPA sʕ]
<i>ṣ</i>	<i>sh</i> as in sheep [IPA ʃ]	<i>sh</i> as in sheep [IPA ʃ]	<i>sh</i> as in sheep [IPA ʃ]	<i>sh</i> as in sheep [IPA ʃ]	<i>sh</i> as in sheep [IPA ʃ]	<i>sh</i> as in sheep [IPA ʃ]
<i>ś</i>				<i>s</i> as in sun [IPA s]	<i>s</i> as in sun [IPA s]	<i>s</i> as in sun [IPA s]
<i>t</i>			type of <i>s</i> sound renders Semitic /z/ and voiced /th/	<i>th</i> as in thank [IPA θ]	aspirated <i>t</i> [IPA θʰ]	aspirated <i>t</i> [IPA θʰ]
<i>t</i>		<i>t</i> with root of tongue retracted [IPA tʰ]		<i>t</i> with root of tongue retracted [IPA tʰ]		
<i>ẕ</i>				<i>th</i> as in thought, but with the jaw open [IPA ðʰ]		

THE PROBLEMS WITH PUNS

1.1. PREVIOUS TAXONOMIES AND VOCABULARY

One of the largest challenges confronting researchers on the topic of ancient Near Eastern “wordplay” is the inconsistent terminology used to describe its many devices. The terms “wordplay,” “pun,” and “paronomasia” appear with the greatest frequency in scholarly publications, and sometimes are used interchangeably, while elsewhere they appear to be distinct. When distinguished, scholars typically use “wordplay” and pun in a general way, whereas they usually restrict paronomasia to sound devices that have an alliterative effect, though here too there is inconsistency. I, too, readily admit to having employed the terms “wordplay,” pun, alliteration, and the like, more loosely in my earlier works. As I noted in the introduction, they can serve a heuristic purpose by making the subject more accessible to those beyond our discipline. However, I now have come to believe that such terms can no longer be used without qualification. With this work I hope to lend the discussion of these devices a greater precision and move the field forward.

Another challenge to researchers has been a lack of a comprehensive and consistent taxonomy for all the devices labeled as puns or “word-plays.” To be sure, there have been small-scale attempts, but the points of departure for defining the varied phenomena have been very different and inconsistent.¹ Let me

1. See the fitting remark of Werner Diem, “‘Paronomasie’: Eine Begriffs-verwirrung,” *ZDMG* 157 (2007): 346: “Was den mehr literwissenschaftlichen Paronomasiebegriff betrifft, so hat er, insbesondere in der englischsprachigen Hebraistik, eine derartige begriffliche Erweiterung und Umformung erfahren und ist inzwischen, wie sich insbesondere an der ausgefeilten Subkategorisierung in Sassons zeigt, so stark differenziert worden, daß der Terminus ‘paronomasia’ nachgerade entbehrlich geworden ist; an seiner Stelle ließe sich ohne irgendeine Beeinträchtigung der bereits sehr übliche Terminus ‘wordplay,’ also ‘wortspiel,’ verwenden, freilich ebenfalls unter starker Erweiterung dieses Begriffs.” Diem offers a fine survey of many, but not all, of the approaches to the topic examined here.

demonstrate by turning to six of the most cited case studies from within the discipline of biblical studies. My focus on this discipline is due to the fact that, though we possess several fine studies on “wordplay” in some of the other Near Eastern languages, they mostly tend to survey a variety of devices under the problematic rubrics discussed above. None has attempted to establish greater precision or to offer a complete taxonomy of types and functions.

I begin with the now classic study by Immanuel Casanowicz authored in 1893 entitled “Paronomasia in the Old Testament.”² Casanowicz first outlines some methodological considerations for the study of paronomasia by establishing which consonants he felt alliterate. His groupings include:

aleph (‘) and *‘ayin* (‘)
‘ayin (‘) and *ḡayin* (ḡ)
bet (b) and *pe* (p)
bet (b) and *mem* (m)
dalet (d) and *ṭet* (ṭ)
het (h) and *kaph* (k)
het (h) and *ḥet* (ḥ)
ṭet (ṭ) and *taw* (t)
mem (m) and *pe* (p)
qof (q) and *gimmel* (g)
qof (q) and *kaph* (k)
lamed (l) and *reš* (r)

He excludes from consideration alliteration and assonance created by grammatical necessity or verbatim repetition. Thus, cognate accusative and infinitive ab-

2. Immanuel M. Casanowicz, “Paronomasia in the Old Testament,” *JBL* 12 (1893): 105–67. The article derives from work found in Casanowicz, *Paronomasia in the Old Testament* (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1892). Three earlier works deserve notice here, though often neglected in surveys on the topic. The first is Samuel Waldburg, *Methods of (Hermeneutical) Transformations* [Hebrew] (Lemberg: Menkes, 1870). Waldburg examined a number of devices for their exegetical use, like homoeopropheron, homoioteleuton, parasonance, anagrammatic paronomasia, and also *gemaṭria* and *noṭariqon* (see chapter 4 for definitions), but all under the rabbinic expression לשון נופל על לשון *lašon noṭel ‘al lašon* (lit.) “language/tongue falling upon language/tongue.” He even attempted to provide a taxonomy based on which words’ root consonants were transposed, yet because it was authored in Hebrew, it never received wide attention. Nevertheless, it offers a representative collection of several of the devices considered here in biblical and later rabbinic texts. The second two publications, by Julius Ley, *Alliterierende Poesien der Hebräer* (Leipzig, 1865); Ley, “Über die Alliteration im Hebräischen,” *ZDMG* 20 (1866): 180–83, mostly aim to differentiate alliteration in biblical Hebrew from that in Old Germanic texts.

solute constructions, as well as the repetition of the same root with a different vocalization (also called metaphony, polyptoton, polyprosopon) do not qualify.

Casanowicz then briefly discusses and demonstrates cases of alliteration, assonance, rhyme, and epanastrophe.³ Afterwards, he moves to the category “Play upon Words,” which he subdivides into various types, and “Plays upon Proper Names.” He discusses diction as it relates to paronomasia and the use of *hapax legomena* in creating it. An appendix on paronomasia in postbiblical literature and an index of examples surveyed conclude the work.

For Casanowicz, paronomasia represents a number of devices that involve the manipulation of sounds, and “wordplay” is one of these devices. Alliteration and assonance are the aural effects of paronomasia and not themselves types of paronomasia. A close look at the section on “Play upon Words” reveals that he includes examples of other devices classified differently by later scholars. Moreover, Casanowicz understood paronomasia as an elevated element of style.

Paronomasia in the Old Testament is, like all other embellishments of speech, an element of higher style, that is, of the poetical and prophetic diction. In the historical books, except in the poetical passages embodied in them and the plays on the etymology of proper names, cases in which it occurs are few and far between. It is everywhere merely a casual, not an organic, element of diction. Hebrew poetical style hardly differs from the rhetorical; both have in common all the peculiarities which distinguish them from the lower style.⁴

Casanowicz’s method and categories were largely adopted by scholars,⁵ though they contextualized them by employing more familiar contemporary nomenclature.⁶

3. Casanowicz spells rhyme as “rime.”

4. Casanowicz, “Paronomasia in the Old Testament,” 120.

5. See, e.g., Antoine-Jean Baumgartner, “L’humour dans l’Ancien Testament,” *RTP* 29 (1896): 497–535; Johann Döllner, *Rhythmus, Metrik und Strophik in der biblisch-hebräischen Poesie* (Paderborn: Druck & Verlag von Ferdinand Schöningh, 1899); Eduard König, *Stilistik, Rhetorik, Poetik in Bezug auf die Biblische Literatur* (Leipzig: Dieterich’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung Theodor Weicher, 1900); Hermann Reckendorff, *Über Paronomasie in den semitischen Sprachen: Ein Beitrag zur allgemeinen Sprachwissenschaft* (Giessen: Töpelmann, 1909); Franz M. T. Bohl, “Wortspiele im Alten Testament,” *JPOS* 6 (1926): 196–212; Bohl, “Wortspiele im Alten Testament,” *OM* (1953): 11–25; Ignác Gábor, *Der hebräische Urrhythmus*, BZAW 52 (Giessen: Töpelmann, 1929); David Yellin, “Polysemy in the Bible” [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 5 (1933): 1–17; Ignác Gábor, “Paronomasia in the Bible” [Hebrew], *Leshonenu* 5 (1933): 274–94; Gábor, “On Biblical Rhetoric” [Hebrew], in vol. 2 of *Selected Writings* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sepher, 1939), 1–149; Asher Weiser, “Wordplay in the Book of Proverbs” [Hebrew], *PIBRS* 7 (1959): 140–47; Weiser, “Wordplay in the Book of Isaiah” [Hebrew], *BM* 20 (1964): 25–

Compare Casanowicz's approach with Janus Glück's 1970 article on "Paronomasia in Biblical Literature."⁷ Noting the lack of a comprehensive taxonomy, Glück attempts to provide one. His classification offers six types: equivocal pun, metaphonic pun, parasonantic pun, farraginous pun, associative pun, and assonantic pun.⁸ Additionally, some of the categories he provides group together quite different devices. Under the metaphonic group, Glück includes the repetition of the same root with a different vocalization, a category excluded from Casanowicz's definition. Glück's treatment of parasonancy is broad enough to include "the replacement of a word in the sentence by a new and unexpected one."⁹ Also unlike Casanowicz, his category assonantic treats assonance as a type of paronomasia, rather than as the aural effect of paronomasia.¹⁰ However, in keeping with Casanowicz, Glück regards paronomasia as a flourish of high style.

In contrast with modern rhetorical concepts and with classical usage generally, the biblical paronomasia is no pun but an integral part of the elevated diction of the Bible.... Biblical paronomasia seems to be an inseparable part of the word-magic, the subtle eloquence of the Bible.¹¹

Quite a different approach was taken by Jack Sasson in his 1976 entry on "Word Play in the O.T." for the *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. He begins

32; Robert Gordis, "Rhetorical Usages in the Sacred Writings" [Hebrew], in *Articles in Bible Research Presented to Dr. Moshe Seidel on the Occasion of His Seventy-Fifth Birthday*, ed. A. Eliner et al. (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1962), 253–67; Yair Zakovitch, *Duplicated Midrashic Name Derivations* [Hebrew] (Master's thesis, Hebrew University, 1972); Zakovitch, "The Status of the Synonymous Word and the Synonymous Name in the Creation of Midrashic Name Derivations" [Hebrew], *Shenathon* 2 (1977): 106–7; Meir Paran, "Double Meanings in the Bible" [Hebrew], *Beersheva* 1 (1973): 151–61; Raphael Weiss, "Derivation of Names in the Book of Chronicles" [Hebrew], in *Biblical Essays: The Bible in Qumran, the Samaritan Pentateuch* (Jerusalem: Rubenstein, 1976), 90–91; Weiss, "Paronomasia in the Bible" [Hebrew], in *Biblical Essays*, 162–89.

6. The terms encountered most frequently in aforecited publications include: *Wortspiele* (German), *jeux de mots* (French), and the Hebrew expressions משחקי לשון *mišḥaḳe lašon* "plays of language," משמעות כפל *keḥel mašma'ut* "polysemy," משנה הוראה *mišneh hora'ah* "ambiguity," זוג הצליל *ziwwug haššalil* "homonymic pairs," כפל משמעות *keḥel mašma'ut* "double entendre," and צמוד שלם *šimmud šalem* "antanaclasis."

7. J. J. Glück, "Paronomasia in Biblical Literature," *Semitics* 1 (1970): 50–78.

8. Chapter 3 provides definitions of these terms.

9. Glück, "Paronomasia in Biblical Literature," 66.

10. See also J. J. Glück, "Assonance in Ancient Hebrew Poetry: Sound Patterns as a Literary Device," in *De Fructu Oris Sui: Essays in Honour of Adrianus van Selms*, ed. Ian H. Eybers, PRS 9 (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 26–45.

11. Glück, "Paronomasia in Biblical Literature," 78.

by discussing how paronomasia was used “by ancient Greek commentators when referring to rhetoric devices designed to engage an audience.”¹² He then subdivides the topic into visual wordplay, oral wordplay, and extended wordplay. Into the first group, he places *gematria* (i.e., isopsephy), *notariqon*, acrostics, atbash, anastrophe, and epanastrophe. The second group includes equivocal, metaphonic, parasonancy, farrago, assonance, onomatopoeia, and antanaclasis.¹³ The third section provides examples of Israelite writers employing these devices across extended pericopes.

The reader will immediately note the shift from paronomasia to “wordplay” as the umbrella term of choice. Sasson’s taxonomic division between visual and aural devices provides a new and useful point of departure. Nevertheless, as I hope to make clear below, many visual devices also operate aurally and most aural devices simultaneously operate visually. Sasson’s taxonomy does not distinguish forms from functions, and it deviates in small, but significant ways from the earlier approaches of Casanowicz and Glück. Thus, for Sasson, parasonancy “involves the use of verbal or nominal roots which differ in one of their three consonants,”¹⁴ a more restrictive definition than offered by Glück.¹⁵ Moreover, in the same section, he includes examples in which two words share all three consonants, but in a different order. The example he provides (Job 3:15) constitutes an anagram and, thus, also must be considered a visual device.

Sasson primarily sees “wordplay” as literary tool employed for serious and lighthearted purposes alike.

The use of paronomasia promoted a certain aura of ambiguity, which was intended to excite curiosity and to invite a search for meanings that were not readily apparent. It is not surprising, therefore, that divine revelations were couched in paronomastic forms. There were also times when Hebrew wordplays expressed a spirit of playfulness.¹⁶

Another influential treatment on the subject is that of Wilfred G. E. Watson. In his now classic guide to biblical Hebrew poetry, Watson devotes an entire chapter to the topic of sound in Hebrew poetry, which he divides into the fol-

12. Jack M. Sasson, “Word Play in the O.T.,” in *IDB Supplement* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), 968.

13. See chapter 3 for definitions. The approaches of Glück and Sasson were adopted with minor variations by Russell T. Cherry III, *Paronomasia and Proper Names in the Old Testament: Rhetorical Function and Literary Effect* (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1988).

14. Sasson, “Word Play in the O.T.,” 969.

15. However, only two of the words that appear in the verse he cites (i.e., Isa 5:7) share two of the three radicals.

16. Sasson, “Word Play in the O.T.,” 968.

lowing sections: assonance, alliteration, rhyme, onomatopoeia, and “word-play.”¹⁷ Watson further divides the category “wordplay” into three types based on whether the words involved derive from the same or different roots. Under those that derive from identical roots (his first type), he includes: turn (root repetition), rootplay (verbal roots used as the basis for alliterative transposition), and polysemantic pun (words that have multiple meanings in a single context). He labels his second type of “wordplay” “punning repetition” and applies it to true homonyms (words of *apparent* different derivation that appear identical). His third type, paronomasia, juxtaposes words of similar sound, but different meanings (near-homonyms).

Watson finds that “wordplay” can function to amuse and sustain interest, assist composition, lend authenticity (demonstrate mastery), link a poem or its parts, denote reversal, show that appearances can be deceptive, or equate two things. He further opines that it can instruct, assist memory, and even distract mourners when found in laments.

Like Sasson, Watson employs the term “wordplay” as his overarching designation of choice, but he also uses pun synonymously. However, some of the types that Watson offers differ in important ways from those of the aforementioned scholars. Watson’s inclusion of “turn or root repetition” is identical to Glück’s metaphonic group, which Casanowicz rejected as outside the parameters of paronomasia. Watson’s rootplay category combines anagrams and alliteration. His use of “polysemantic pun” is equivalent to polysemy and what Watson calls “punning repetition” is what Sasson labels “antanaclasis.” The term paronomasia is here a subcategory of “wordplay,” just the opposite of the approach taken by Casanowicz. Though Watson understands the function of “wordplay” primarily in literary terms, he also considers the possibility of social, mnemonic, and didactic purposes.

Another approach to the subject is that of Edward Greenstein’s 1992 entry, “Wordplay, Hebrew,” written for the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Greenstein begins by defining “wordplay” as “use in close proximity of words that display similarity of sound with dissimilarity of meaning.”¹⁸ His method applies Casanowicz’s definition of paronomasia to “wordplay” and adopts his method of excluding repetition that is verbatim or required by grammatical necessity. Greenstein’s approach usefully departs from previous attempts by distinguishing form from function. In addition, his subcategories also differ. Thus, under forms he includes “complete and incomplete sound repetition,” “explicit and implicit wordplay,” and “types of wordplay.” A perusal of the first subgroup shows that it includes, *inter alia*, antanaclasis, polysemy, farrago, and metathesis. His inclu-

17. Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques*, JSOTSup 26 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), 222–50.

18. Edward L. Greenstein, “Wordplay, Hebrew,” *ABD* 6:968.

sion of examples in which “inflection of a verb-stem alters sense”¹⁹ are what Glück and Sasson refer to as “metaphony” and what Casanowicz excludes.

In the section on “Types of Wordplay,” Greenstein suggests that there are multiple ways of classifying “wordplay.”

We may classify forms of biblical wordplay in a variety of ways.... One may distinguish between play on proper names and on common nouns..., or between explicit and implicit derivations.... One may taxonomize according to the sound patterns involved.... Alternatively, one may differentiate between polysemy in the strict sense and paronomasia, in which slightly dissimilar sounds or words are entailed. Such a distinction is not hard and fast for a pun may work in either way.²⁰

Greenstein divides his discussion of function into two categories: “general” and “proper names.” The former includes euphony, “to highlight an idea or association,” the leading word, allusion, irony, and satire. The second category proper names encompasses etymology, “essence,” and “fate or destiny.” In a final section, he briefly offers examples of bilingual wordplay, a category undiscovered when the previous studies appeared.

Finally, I note the important article by Nathan Klaus, which appeared at roughly the same time as Greenstein’s contribution.²¹ Since Klaus wrote his study in Hebrew, it unfortunately has not enjoyed the circulation and influence of the other works examined here. Nevertheless, Klaus taxonomizes biblical Hebrew “word play” into thirty-four different types. While some of his taxa reflect the influence of previous works on the subject (e.g., transposition of consonants, onomatopoeia, and polysemy), others appear as rubrics for a variety of types.²² Still others constitute cases of root, particle, and word repetition, various kinds of alliterative devices, poetic chains, ring structures, inclusio, and devices that derive from grammatical necessity—categories all rejected by Casanowicz and others, including myself. His title and taxonomy employ the partial calque מִשְׁחָקֵי לָשׁוֹן *mišḥaḳe lašon* “plays of language.”

19. Greenstein, “Wordplay, Hebrew,” 969.

20. Greenstein, “Wordplay, Hebrew,” 970. He has recently taken up the topic again in “Verbal Art and Literary Sensibilities in Ancient Near Eastern Context,” in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Ancient Israel*, ed. Susan Niditch (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 457–75.

21. N. Klaus, “Plays of Language in the Bible” [Hebrew], *BM* 129 (1991–1992): 170–81.

22. For example, Klaus’s first category, “similar words in close proximity,” includes examples that one might classify more specifically as cases of homoeopropheron, homoioteleuton, polyptoton, and superlative expressions like שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים *šir haš-šīrīm* “the Song of Songs,” which are required by grammar.

The problems of taxonomy and terminology illustrated by these seminal case studies only multiply when one considers that they represent a mere cross-section of approaches found in the study of Hebrew, Aramaic, Ugaritic, Akkadian, and Egyptian literature. Moreover, the same terminology has changed in usage over time.²³ Sasson’s aforementioned statement with regard to the use of the term paronomasia among ancient Greek rhetors rightly captures its function in that cultural milieu, but it does not convey its original usage. In earliest parlance, paronomasia referred to the repetition of the first one or two consonants of a word (typically the word’s first syllable) in another word.²⁴ A synonym for this device, and one that I prefer in this volume is homoeopropheron.

However, scholars of the Hebrew Bible have long understood paronomasia more loosely and they have applied it to the repetition of same or similar consonants regardless of where they appear in words or whether the words are etymologically related. This follows the approach of the early rabbis, who referred to the device with the curious idiom לשון נופל על לשון *lašon nōpēl ‘al lašon*. The expression resists a smooth translation into English and literally means “language/tongue falling upon language/tongue” (see Gen. Rab. 18:6, 31:8).²⁵ Similarly, the term alliteration, as used by grammarians and literary theorists of the last several centuries, was restricted to the repetition of the initial consonants of words.²⁶ Today scholars apply the term alliteration as broadly as “wordplay.” As a result, it has become too vague to be useful. In fact, as I show in chapter 4, the term alliteration only obscures the presence of several distinct devices.

Even from this cursory chronological survey one can make the following observations. First, despite the best intentions and deep erudition of all the aforementioned scholars, a gradual shift in terminology has occurred from the

23. One finds an inconsistency in spelling with regard to “wordplay,” “word play,” and “word-play.” The *Oxford English Dictionary* prefers “word-play,” but it is by far the least frequently attested of the forms.

24. Already by the first century CE, Quintilian was using the term paronomasia loosely and equating it with *adnominatio*. See Quintilian, *Inst.* 9.3.66.

25. The expression refers mostly to paronomasia. See chapter 2 for additional terms used by the medieval commentators. I wonder if the expression relates to that of נפל בלשון *npl b-lšwn* “slip of the tongue” in Ben Sira (e.g., 25:8). On the latter, see Bradley C. Gregory, “Slips of the Tongue in the Speech Ethics of Ben Sira,” *Bib* 93 (2012): 321–39.

26. Giovanni Pontano coined the term alliteration (from Italian *alliteratio*) in 1519 to describe the repetition of a word’s initial consonants. He used this term as a further specification of the term *adnominatio* (Latin *adnominatio*), which was used for ascribing to a proper name its literal or homophonic meaning. Thus, pedantically speaking, alliteration is synonymous with homoeopropheron. On *adnominatio*, see Quintilian, *Inst.*, 9.3.66. Hence Glück, “Assonance in Ancient Hebrew Poetry,” 70–71: “Alliteration is repetition of the same or cognate sounds at the beginning of words—as the term is generally understood by literary dictionaries.”

technical to the broad, with “wordplay” replacing paronomasia as the most general designation. Whether the works of biblical scholars on “wordplay” reflect the influence of rabbinic usage or the study of Western literature generally,²⁷ they have increasingly preferred flexibility over precision. Second, the survey reveals an increasing confusion between types and functions and a growing recognition that existing vocabulary and taxonomies are insufficient, or at least difficult to disentangle. Finally, it illustrates that there has been a rather consistent tendency to treat the many devices found in the Hebrew Bible primarily as elements of literary style and rhetorical flare.²⁸

This last observation is one worth reconsidering. In a number of publications and conference papers I have drawn attention to the problematic nature of the term “wordplay.”²⁹ Indeed, in recent years it has become increasingly obvious that there is little that is “playful” about most of the devices considered here. Second, the term “wordplay” implies that the *word* is the basic operative unit of

27. See, e.g., the term “*midrashic* name derivation” coined by Zakovitch, *Duplicated Midrashic Name Derivations* (in Hebrew), and his other publications; and popularized in the English speaking academic world by Moshe Garsiel, *Biblical Names: A Literary Study of Midrashic Name Derivations and Puns* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1991); Garsiel, “Puns upon Names as a Literary Device in 1 Kings 1–2,” *Bib* 72 (1991): 379–86; Garsiel, “Homiletic Name Derivations as a Literary Device in the Gideon Narrative: Judges VI–VIII,” *VT* 43 (1993): 302–17; Garsiel, “Puns upon Proper Names and Place Names in the Book of Samuel” [Hebrew], in *Moshe Goshen-Gottstein—in Memoriam*, vol. 3 of *Studies in Bible and Exegesis*, ed. Moshe Bar-Asher et al. (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1993), 105–19; Garsiel, “Wordplays, Puns and Puns upon Names as a Literary Rhetorical Device in the Book of Samuel” [Hebrew], *BM* 42 (1998): 1–14; Garsiel, “Name Midrashim on People and Places as a Literary Device in the Book of Judges” [Hebrew], *BM* 53 (2008): 8–9*, 59–82; Garsiel and Robert Řehák, “Puns on Names as a Poetic Device in the Book of Judges,” in *Ben Porat Yosef: Studies in the Bible and Its World: Essays in Honor of Joseph Fleishman*, ed. Michael Avioz, Omer Minka, and Yael Shemesh, AOAT 458 (Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 2019), 271–87. See also H. Barazin and Y. Zakovitch, “Name-Derivations and Word-Plays on Names in the Book of Chronicles” [Hebrew], *BM* 13 (1968): 145–47; I. H. Eybers, “The Use of Proper Names as a Stylistic Device,” *Semitics* 2 (1971–1972): 280–81; Amos Frisch, “Midrashic Name Derivations of Solomon’s Name in the Book of Kings,” *BM* 44 (2000): 84–96; Isaac B. Gottlieb, “*Mashal le-Melekh*: The Search for Solomon,” *HS* 51 (2010): 107–27; Ekaterina E. Kozlova, “What Is in a Name? Rahab, the Canaanite, and the Rhetoric of Liberation in the Hebrew Bible,” *OT* 6 (2020): 573–86.

28. A welcome exception is Stefan Schorch, “Between Science and Magic: The Function and Roots of Paronomasia in the Prophetic Books of the Hebrew Bible,” in Noegel, *Puns and Pundits*, 205–22.

29. See most notably, Scott B. Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers: The Allusive Language of Dreams in the Ancient Near East*, AOS 89 (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 2007).

such devices. Yet, one could argue that consonants and syllables are the more meaningful components in Ugaritic, Hebrew, and Aramaic and that the individual sign is the most important constituent when examining Akkadian devices. In fact, Akkadian does not even possess a term for word as a distinct linguistic unit; the term usually so rendered, *amātu* (like Sumerian INIM), means “speech, utterance, news, report, text” and the like.³⁰ In Egyptian, too, one could argue that the sign is the most significant component in the production of “wordplay,” though some Egyptologists, like Friedrich Junge, have argued that we should consider the colon as the basic unit—there being some flexibility between the Egyptian terms *mdw.t* “word” or “colon” and *ʿs* “phrase” or “verse.”³¹ As I shall show, these distinctions are not merely semantic quibbling but are critical for understanding how the ancients understood their many tools for manipulating language. This is especially important for the comparative study of the phenomena, which I undertake here. Ancient Israel’s debt to the scribal cultures of Mesopotamia and Egypt has long been recognized, and the comparative study of the respective literatures has yielded numerous insights. However, few studies have offered a comparative analysis of these cultures’ literary craft.³² Nevertheless, if we are to appreciate the true influence of Israel’s neighbors on its scribal culture,

30. CAD A/2, s.v. “*amatu* A.” The term *amātu/awātu* may be etymologically connected to the word “liver” (i.e., *amūtum*), as first suggested by Jean Nougayrol, “Note sur la place des ‘présages historiques’ dans l’extispicine babylonienne,” *Annuaire EPHE* (1944–1945): 14 n. 54. Cited also in Ulla Jeyes, *Old Babylonian Extispicy: Omen Texts in the British Museum* (Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut te Istanbul, 1989), 17, 46. Note the related remark of Herman L. J. Vanstiphout, “*Mihiltum*, or the Image of Cuneiform Writing,” in *The Image in Writing*, ed. Hans G. Kippenberg, Van Den Bosch, L. Leertouwer, and Hazel A. Witte, VR 6 (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 160: “It may not be too bold to suggest that one of the reasons why the liver was by far the most frequently used organ in extispicy was a similarity they perceived between the liver and a clay tablet, perhaps guided in this matter by shape and texture.”

31. Friedrich Junge, “Zur Sprachwissenschaft der Ägypter,” in *Studien zu Sprache und Religion Ägyptens zu Ehren von Wolfhart Westendorf überreicht von seinen Freunden und Schülern*, ed. Friedrich Junge, vol. 1, SAuK 1 (Göttingen: Friedrich Junge, 1984), 491–506; Antonio Loprieno, “Puns and Word Play in Ancient Egyptian,” in Noegel, *Puns and Pundits*, 6–7. “Wordplay” has been used to demonstrate phonetic correspondence between the consonants *ʾ* and *h* in Egyptian. See Stefan Bojowald, “Der ägyptische Lautwandel zwischen *ʾ* und *h*,” *JAOS* 136 (2016): 831–34.

32. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, is an important exception, as he discusses parallels with Akkadian, Ugaritic, and other Northwest Semitic languages. However, he does not cover Egyptian.

we must establish a neutral vocabulary and complete taxonomy of proposed devices and functions.³³

1.2. TERMS AND TAXONOMY IN THIS BOOK

I concur with Greenstein that there are multiple ways to taxonomize the phenomena under consideration here. However, as the previous survey demonstrates, each of the proposed taxonomies has strengths and weaknesses. Herein I attempt to build upon the former by providing greater precision when distinguishing one device from another and by giving greater attention to the devices' nonliterary functions. In short, I aim for greater exactitude and comprehensiveness. With Greenstein I distinguish sharply between forms and functions, though I shall offer a more specific and complete taxonomy for both based on our current state of scholarship. I recognize that several devices can be employed simultaneously and that each can have multiple functions. With Sasson, I distinguish those "wordplays" that operate only on a visual register from those that operate aurally, though I acknowledge that some visual types work aurally and most aural types also operate visually. Since aural and visual registers can overlap, I differ from Sasson by treating this distinction as a register, rather than a taxon.

Herein I divide "wordplay" into two broad types: polysemy and paronomasia.³⁴ I employ the term *polysemy* for devices that involve multiple *meanings* in a *single context*, and I use the term *paronomasia* for *sound* devices that function *across* word divisions and involve a *dissimilarity in meaning*.³⁵ Thus, many (but not all) cases of polysemy operate on a purely visual register, whereas all cases

33. It has been nearly three decades since the surveys by Greenstein and Klaus, and in that time, scholars have discovered many new devices and have made significant advancements. I integrated some of them into the taxonomy that I offered in the entries "Paronomasia," in Khan, *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*, 3:24–29; and "Polysemy," in Khan, *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*, 3:178–86. However, I wrote these articles specifically for Biblical Hebrew, and so some of the terms I employed were specific to the discipline, and thus not as neutral as those offered here.

34. The publication of Hans Ausloos and Valérie Kabergs, "Paronomasia or Wordplay? A Babel-Like Confusion; Towards a Definition of Hebrew Wordplay," *Bib* 93 (2012): 1–20, is something of a curiosity. It offers a refutation of the taxonomy I employ in this book nine years before it has appeared. Not surprisingly, their characterization of the taxonomy is wholly inaccurate.

35. The term *πολύσημος*, whence "polysemy," is first attested in Democritus, *Frag.* 26 (sixth–fifth century BCE). We find *παρωνομασία* "paronomasia" first used by Cicero, *Or.* 2.63.256 (first century BCE); Rutilius Lupus, *Fig. Sent.* 1.3 (first century BCE–first century CE).

of paronomasia operate both aurally and visually (in consonantal systems but not always in pictographic ones). Where I differ from previous treatments is that I treat alliteration *not as a tool or type* of paronomasia but as the *sonic effect* of some devices.³⁶ In essence, it is an generic term that masks a number of distinct devices.³⁷ I adopt Casanowicz’s approach that excludes from discussion cognate accusative and normative infinitive absolute constructions, as well as the repetition of the same root with a different vocalization (i.e., metaphony, polyptoton, polyprosopon).³⁸ I reserve a discussion of the many subtypes of polysemy and paronomasia for chapter 4.

36. The study of assonance in ancient Near Eastern texts is, with few exceptions, nonexistent. While a few Assyriologists and biblicists periodically have noted the presence of assonance, especially when discussing cases of paronomasia, the great majority of examples are produced by way of repeated grammatical forms. As I exclude from this study cases of paronomasia produced by grammatical necessity, I must do the same for cases of assonance. For a useful early attempt, see J. P. van der Westhuizen, “Assonance in Biblical and Babylonian Hymns of Praise,” *Semitics* 7 (1980): 81–101. In addition, the lack of vowels in Egyptian script makes the study of assonance in that language difficult. One must resort to using Coptic, which represents a much later form of the language. Ugaritic too does not record vowels, but scholars frequently reconstruct them based on a knowledge of comparative Semitic. In sum, we cannot say more about assonance in Near Eastern texts, even those written in scripts that document vowels, other than to note its presence in some passages.

37. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 225–29, treats alliteration as a separate device. So too does Baruch Margalit, “Alliteration in Ugaritic Poetry: Its Role in Composition and Analysis,” *UF* 11 (1979): 537–57; Margalit, “Alliteration in Ugaritic Poetry: Its Role in Composition and Analysis (Part II),” *JNSL* 8 (1980): 57–80, who further distinguishes alliteration that is essential to the text (“constitutive”) from alliteration that is not (“ornamental”). See similarly O. S. Rankin, “Alliteration in Hebrew Poetry,” *JTS* 31 (1930): 285–91; David F. Pennant, “Alliteration in Some Texts of Genesis,” *Bib* 68 (1987): 390–92; Gary A. Rendsburg, “Alliteration in the Exodus Narrative,” in Cohen et al. *Birkat Shalom*, 83–100; Rendsburg, “Alliteration,” in Khan, *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*, 1:86–87; Rendsburg, “Alliteration in the Book of Genesis,” in *Doubling and Duplicating in the Book of Genesis*, ed. Elizabeth R. Hayes and Karolien Vermeulen (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016), 79–95. Despite the important contributions of these studies, I submit that we can classify each of their cases of alliteration with greater precision.

38. Thus, I exclude herein the topics covered by the following studies P. Trost, “Der paronomastische-potenzierende Genitiv Pluralis,” *ZSG* 10 (1935): 326–28; G. Schäfer, “König der Könige”—“Lied der Lieder”: *Studien zum paronomastischen* (Heidelberg: Abhandlungen der Hiedelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1974); Mats Eskhult, “Hebrew Infinitival Paronomasia,” *OrSu* 49 (2000): 27–32.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

2.1. INTENTIONALITY

When interpreting the devices of ancient texts, we must be aware of the possibility that we are engaged in an eisegetical, rather than exegetical, process. We must try to create, wherever possible, emic categories based on the literary and cultural frameworks provided by the cultures we study, in addition to the etic frames of reference derived from our own literary and cultural horizons. On the other hand, we also must caution ourselves not to give short shrift to the ancients, lest their lingual and literary sophistication be lost on us.

Yet, establishing an emic taxonomy for ancient devices is a difficult task. The ancients have left us little in the way of terminology. Akkadian hermeneutical texts appear to understand “wordplay” as belonging to the *niširtū u pirištū ša ilī* “the hidden things and secrets of the gods,”¹ but nowhere do they provide us with specific nomenclature for its diverse devices.² Ludwig Morenz has shown that the Egyptian phrase *šd r sp sn* “to read in two ways” was employed for texts that could communicate different things phonetically and visually.³ A bilingual Egyptian-Greek inscription discovered at Kanopis also informs us that the Egyptian word *tj.t* “hieroglyphic sign, image” can mean signs that cryptographically conceal a message.⁴ Yet, such terms represent hermeneutic strategies rather than the craft of composition.

The Hebrew Bible provides no native terms for its many literary devices other than מָשָׁל *māšāl* “parable,” מְלִיצָה *məliṣāh* “figure, enigma,” and הִדְאָה *hīdāh* “rid-dle, ambiguous saying,” each of which the author of Proverbs presents as a key to

1. Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 36–45.

2. See Eckart Frahm, *Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries: Origins of Interpretation*, GMTR 5 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2011), 70–77.

3. Ludwig D. Morenz, *Sinn und Spiel der Zeichen: Visuelle Poesie im Alten Ägypten*, PPISVLK 21 (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2008), 65–66.

4. Morenz, *Sinn und Spiel der Zeichen*, 66.

unlocking the book's hidden wisdom (Prov 1:6).⁵ Nevertheless, a few expressions have been proposed as references to polysemy and paronomasia, most of them from the dialogues in Job, a text filled with such devices.⁶ They include Eliphaz's reference to Job's לשון ערומים *lašōn ʿarūmīm* "crafty language" (Job 15:5); Elihu's use of the root חלק *h-l-q* "smooth, slippery" in reference to language (Job 32:17);⁷ and his accusation about Job: יפצה פיהו בגלל ידעת מלין יכבר *yipṣeh pīhū bi-blī daʿat millīn yakbār* "his mouth chirps without knowledge, he multiplies words" (Job 35:16). Glück proposed that Isaiah's expression ובלשון שפה *bə-la ʾāgē šāpāh ū-b-lāšōn ʾahereṭ* "with a stammering lip and in a foreign (lit. 'another') tongue" (Isa 28:11) refers to paronomasia.⁸ Since diviners used polysemy and paronomasia to interpret dreams, the following verbs are also relevant: חלט *ḥalṭ* "snatching" meaning (1 Kgs 20:33), גנב *gānab* "stealing" words, and לקח *lāqah* "taking, learning" language (Jer 23:30–31, Prov 1:5, Job 4:12).⁹ It also may be that the oft-heard prophetic command to "listen" (e.g., Num 12:6, Amos 3:1, Hos 4:1) signals the importance of paying attention to the speech's devices in addition to its content.

As emic as these references appear, they offer no taxonomic distinctions. Even the terminology employed by the early rabbis and medieval sages is unhelpful as it fossilizes very different cultural attitudes toward text and lingual dexterity in very different times and contexts.¹⁰ Nevertheless, though we lack native

5. The three also appear together in Hab 2:6, apparently in reference to taunting, though the LXX reads *πρόβλημα εἰς διήγησιν* "obscure speech." See too Ps 49:5, 78:2 (in Sir 47:17 *מליצה* *mālīṣāh* "figure" is parallel with שיר *šir* "song"). The basic meaning of the root משל *m-š-l* means "resemble" (*HALOT*, s.v. "משל"). The term מליצה *mālīṣāh* derives from לץ *l-y-ṣ*, meaning "allusive expression, figurative language" and possibly relating to "interpretation" (*HALOT*, s.v. "מליצה"; *DISO*, s.v. "lyṣ"). The term חידה *ḥīdāh* perhaps means something "locked" (*HALOT*, s.v. "חידה"), though Moshe Held, "Marginal Notes to the Biblical Lexicon," in *Biblical and Related Studies Presented to Samuel Iwry*, ed. Ann Kort and Scott Morschauer (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1985), 93–103, suggested the Akkadian cognate *ḥittu* "utterance." See *CAD* H, s.v. "*ḥittu* C." Other native terms for literary forms not relevant here include: שיר *šir* "song," מִשָּׁא *māšā* "oracle," and קינה *qīnāh* "lament-form."

6. See Scott B. Noegel, *Janus Parallelism in the Book of Job*, JSOTSup 223 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 21–25.

7. Observed by John Briggs Curtis, "Word Play in the Speeches of Elihu (Job 32–37)," *PEGLMBS* 12 (1992): 23–30.

8. Glück, "Paronomasia in Biblical Literature," 52. Nevertheless, most see the passage as a derisive reference to foreignness.

9. On the ambiguity of oneiric experiences and the use of polysemy and paronomasia to interpret dreams, see Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 183–89.

10. As mentioned in chapter 1, the early rabbis referred to the device as לשון נופל על לשון *lašōn nōpēl ʿal lašōn* "language falling upon language." The medieval exegetes also

terminologies and classifications, we should not infer that such terms and taxonomies did not exist. We do not possess native terms for parallelism, word pairs, and chiasmus, perhaps the most commonly shared features of ancient Near Eastern poetry, but few would deny their existence.¹¹ A comparison with “wordplay” studies in Renaissance literature is enlightening. Experts in that field face similar problems of vocabulary and recovery, even though they work in languages much closer to our own in kind and time, and despite having a much larger textual corpus.¹² The unfortunate fact is that the bards of the ancient Near East did not leave us with the terms for their craft, largely because they transmitted it orally and regarded it insider information.

Though we lack an emic classification, we still can ascertain whether a device represents ancient craft or modern imaginings. Three criteria aid this endeavor. First among them is whether a particular device appears with frequency. If we find multiple examples of a particular type of polysemy or paronomasia, then it is reasonable to understand it as a convention. A second criterion is whether a particular device displays a consistency in type and usage. Of course, we must remain somewhat flexible and acknowledge that some devices might be restricted to particular contexts and genres, which might diminish our ability to locate numerous examples; but if they exhibit consistency in frequency and form, it stands

employed the expressions דרך צחות *derek šahut* “way of eloquence” or צחות הלשון *šahut hal-lašon* “eloquence of the language.” Those familiar with Islamic learning sometimes employ the Arabic term تَجْنِيس *tajnīs*, but this can refer to many types of paronomasia as well as *figura etymologica*. See W. Heinrichs, “*Tajnīs*,” *EncIs* 10:67–70. On the problematic nature of applying Arabic terms to Western literary devices, see Hany Rashwan, “Arabic Jinās Is Not Pun, Wortspiel, Calembour, or Paronomasia: A Post-Eurocentric Approach to the Conceptual Untranslatability of Literary Terms in Arabic and Ancient Egyptian Cultures,” *Rhetorica* 38 (2020): 335–70; Rashwan, *Comparing the Incomparable in Post-Eurocentric Poetics: Arabic Jinās in Ancient Egyptian Literature* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, forthcoming).

11. The term *chiasmus* first appears in Hermogenes, *Inv.* 4.3 (second–third century CE) to refer to the reversed arrangement of clauses in a sentence. Saadia Gaon applies the expression تقديم وتاخير *taqdīm wa-ta’ḥīr* for chiasmus. On the latter, see Richard C. Steiner, “*Muqdam u-Me’uḥar* and *Muqaddam wa-Mu’ahḥar*: On the History of Some Hebrew and Arabic Terms for *Hysteron Proteron* and *Anastrophe*,” *JNES* 66 (2007): 43. Abraham ibn Ezra and David Qimḥi sometimes refer to cases of parallelism as טעם כפול *ta’am kaḥpūl* “double sense.” On chiasmus, see also Elie Assis, “Chiasmus in Biblical Narrative: A Rhetoric of Characterization,” *Prooftexts* 22 (2003): 273–304.

12. See the remark of Sophie Read, “Puns: Serious Wordplay,” in *Renaissance Figures of Speech*, ed. Sylvia Adamson, Gavin Alexander, Katrin Ettenhuber (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 82: “There is, to begin with, no very exact correspondence between the nomenclature of the rhetoricians and the slang terms—‘quibble’, ‘clench’, ‘catch’, and above all ‘pun’ itself—that coexisted with and then supplanted it.”

to reason that they were deliberate and learned devices. A third supporting criterion is whether a device appears in more than one ancient Near Eastern language. If it does, we again may postulate that it was acquired in scribal academies or other learned settings, or perhaps in the case of some of the Israelite prophets, in discipleship circles. All of the devices examined in this book meet these criteria, and thus, I contend that all of them were used intentionally.

2.2. TEXT RECEPTION

Studies on “wordplay” in ancient Near Eastern texts have focused primarily on cataloging examples. Consequently, they seldom discuss the issue of reception. Put simply, they do not address for whom such devices were intended. Nevertheless, depending on the function they attribute to the device, they imply one. If a device operates aurally and is understood to be aesthetic or rhetorical in function, the assumption is that the audience is public and perhaps large.¹³ However, if it is understood as a display of erudition or act of concealment, the audience is assumed to be much smaller, usually scribal elites, or in some cases, the gods. Nevertheless, the situation was likely far more complex.

In Mesopotamia, we know that scribal masters in the Neo-Assyrian period viewed themselves as integral links in a chain of transmission going back to the gods, and in some circles, traced their genealogy back to Enmeduranki, the antediluvian king of Sippar. Elsewhere, we are told that they transmitted knowledge from the mouth of Ea, the patron god of scribes, whose recorded speeches abound in “wordplay.”¹⁴ Master scribes were an interdisciplinary lot in Mesopotamia who wielded enormous social and cosmological power, especially if they excelled in the divinatory arts.¹⁵ While recitation and oral tradition played important roles for Mesopotamian literate elites, it was the act of writing that was central to their identity.¹⁶

13. Representative is the remark of Cherry, *Paronomasia and Proper Names in the Old Testament*, 115–16: “It is altogether likely that much of the Old Testament text was written chiefly for oral presentation. As a result, throughout much of its history the Hebrew Bible has had audiences rather than readers.”

14. See Samuel Noah Kramer and John Maier, *Myths of Enki, the Crafty God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 145; Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 27–28; H. A. Hoffner, “Enki’s Command to Atrahasis,” in *Kramer Anniversary Volume*, ed. B. L. Eichler et al., AOAT 25 (Kevelaer: Verlag Butzon and Bercker; Neukirchener Verlag: Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1976), 241–45; Keith Dickson, “Enki and the Embodied World,” *JAOS* 125 (2005): 499–515.

15. Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 50–55; John Z. Wee, “Pan-Astronomical Hermeneutics and the Arts of the Lamentation Priest,” *ZAW* 107 (2017): 236–60.

16. One can know something of the conception of writing by the words used for “sign.” See the interesting observation of Frahm, *Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries*, 70

Egyptians referred to the hieroglyphic script as *mdw ntr* “the words of the gods” and the scribal art was to them a devotional occupation without equal. They describe Thoth, the divine inventor of writing, as *mnḥ ḥkꜣ* “excellent of magic” and *nb md.w ntr* “Lord of hieroglyphs.”¹⁷ Artistic remains depict Thoth writing the hieroglyphic feather sign representing *maat* (*mꜣ.t*), a word that stands for the cosmic force of equilibrium by which kings keep their thrones and justice prevails. The link between writing and *maat* underscores the importance that scribes placed on their craft for maintaining the cosmic order.¹⁸ Contributing to the perceived power of writing was the nature of the script, for each hieroglyphic sign could convey information far beyond its phonetic value, as Jan Assmann explains:

Die Hieroglyphenschrift enthält daher eine Fülle von Zeichen, die keinen Lautwert haben, sondern nur semantische Informationen vermitteln. Während die durch die Alphabetschrift vermittelten Informationen ziemlich vollständig im lauten Lesen hörbar werden, enthält die Hieroglyphenschrift zahlreiche Informationen, die sich nur dem lesenden Auge erschließen.¹⁹

Moreover, according to the Memphite Theology, the created universe was the creator god’s idea, put into the form of hieroglyphic writing.²⁰ Even when expert

n. 338: “Note that gù-sum, the logogram used to write *miḥiṣtu* ‘cuneiform sign,’ means ‘sound-giver’ in Sumerian; it expresses the idea of a close connection between graphemics and phonemics. In contrast, the Akkadian *miḥiṣtu*, derived from *maḥāṣu* ‘to beat, to drive in,’ refers to the material realization of the signs.”

17. Robert K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, SAOC 54 (Chicago, IL: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1993), 35. Cf. the famous stela of Irtisen, overseer of artisans during the reign of Mentuhotep II, who describes the process of writing as an act of *ḥkꜣ* “magic.” See Winfried Barta, *Das Selbstzeugnis eines altägyptischen Künstlers (Stele Louvre C 14)*, MÄS 22 (Berlin: Verlag Bruno Hessling, 1970).

18. See Chloé Ragazzoli, *Scribes: Les artisans du texte en Égypte ancienne (1550–1000 BCE)* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2019), 379–82, 551–52.

19. Jan Assmann, “Etymographie: Zeichen im Jenseits der Sprache,” in *Hieroglyphen: Stationen einer anderen abendländischen Grammatologie*, ed. Alideda Assmann and Jan Assmann, ALK 8 (München: Fink, 2003), 52. See also Assmann, “Creation through Hieroglyphs: The Cosmic Grammatology of Ancient Egypt,” in *The Poetics of Grammar and the Metaphysics of Sound and Sign*, ed. Sergio la Porta and David Shulman, JSRC 6 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 17–34.

20. James P. Allen, “From the ‘Memphite Theology,’” *COS* 1:22 nn. 5, 11. See the observation of Assmann, “Etymographie,” 56: “Die Hieroglyphen sind die Urbilder der Dinge, die die Gesamtheit der Wirklichkeit ausmachen. Indem Ptah die Urbilder der Dinge konzipierte, erfand er zugleich mit ihnen auch die Schrift, die Thoth nur aufzuzeichnen braucht, so wie er als Zunge die Gedanken des Herzen nur aussprechen muß. Ein Onomastikon, das heißt eine nach Sachgruppen geordnete Wortliste ist daher

poets are asked to speak eloquently, they often first commit their thoughts to writing. In the Prophecy of Neferti (P.St. Petersburg 1116B, l. 13), when the pharaoh instructs Neferti to speak *mdw.t nfr.t ts.w stp.w* “a nice speech (and) choice phrases,” Neferti immediately commits his thoughts to writing. Given the cosmological import of writing, it is easy to understand why Egyptian master scribes were considered powerful people whose knowledge of the divine was inherent to their craft.²¹ Indeed, throughout the ancient Near East, devices of sound and meaning constitute applications of divine knowledge and the experts who employed them embodied that wisdom.²²

We know less about audience and the production of texts in ancient Israel, but given the Israelites’ shared sense of the ontology of words and their performative dimension, we may understand master Israelite scribes as operating among priestly and/or mantic circles.²³ This would fit with what we know from the archaeological record, which is making us increasingly aware of the role that ritual professionals had in controlling a variety of textual materials, including literary, magical, and lexical texts.²⁴

überschreiben als Auflistung ‘aller Dinge, die Ptah geschaffen und Thoth niedergeschrieben hat.’”

21. On this point, see Scott B. Noegel, “‘Sign, Sign, Everywhere a Sign’: Script, Power, and Interpretation in the Ancient Near East,” in *Divination and Interpretation of Signs in the Ancient World*, ed. Amar Annus, OIS 6 (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2010), 143–62.

22. On the relationship between literary devices, the literati, and conceptions of wisdom, see Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 27–35, 177–82.

23. Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 176–82; Noegel, “‘Sign, Sign, Everywhere a Sign.’”

24. This is confirmed, in part, by the archaeological record, which shows that ritual professionals controlled a variety of textual materials, including literary, magical, and lexical texts (e.g., at Ugarit, Emar, and Sultantepe). See, e.g., W. G. Lambert, “The Sultantepe Tablets,” *RA* 3 (1959): 121–24; Jacques-Claude Courtois, “La maison du prêtre aux modèles de poumon et de foies d’Ugarit,” *Ugaritica* 6 (1969): 91–119; Dominique Charpin, “Les archives du devin Asqudum dans la résidence du ‘Chantier A,’” *MARI* 4 (1985): 453–62; Daniel Arnaud, *Textes sumériens et accadiens*, vol. 6.3 of *Emar: Recherches au pays d’Astarte* (Paris: ADPF, 1985–1987); Antoine Cavigneaux, “A Scholar’s Library in Meturan? With an Edition of the Tablet H 72 (Textes de Tell Haddad VII),” in *Mesopotamian Magic: Textual, Historical, and Interpretive Perspectives*, ed. Tzvi Abusch and Karel van der Toorn, *SAMD* 1 (Groningen: Styx, 1998), 251–73. See especially his comment that “this library, with its diversity, bringing together popular and utilitary texts with higher literature, shows very concretely how Mesopotamian ‘holism’ coexisted with the intellectual production of the ‘hegemonic’, ‘theistic’ ideology” (257–58). See also Olof Pedersén, *Archives and Libraries in the City of Assur: A Survey of the Material from German Excavations*, part 2, *SSU* 8 (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 1986); Alasdair Livingstone, “Babylonian Mathematics in the Context of Babylonian Thought,” in *Intellectual Life in the Ancient Near East: Papers Presented at*

In sum, we may characterize the social context for the production of texts in the ancient Near East generally as elite and interdisciplinary, and one in which knowledge of divination and other ritual practices was transmitted by the same individuals who steeped themselves in the learned readings of their sacred and mythological texts. However, in some cases, we know that texts were transmitted or performed beyond the elite group, which suggests that some of its devices could have reached larger audiences.²⁵

Therefore, I propose that it is most useful to understand the reception of ancient Near Eastern “wordplay” as a continuum that works on two intersecting axes. The poles of the first axis are marked by a general and public audience, on the one hand, and an elite and private one, on the other. The second axis represents the abilities and erudition of any one individual to grasp the complexities of the writing system, from the illiterate to the master. It is important to acknowledge that both axes operate simultaneously and that people naturally possess different levels of textual perception depending on their backgrounds. There is no reason to assume that master bards expected or intended every learned device to be caught by their pupils, much less a public audience, any more than scholars of Shakespeare expect their students to catch all that is imbedded in his plays without further study.

2.3. PROXIMITY

A common assumption in scholarship on paronomasia is that the lexemes involved must be in close proximity to be effective.²⁶ Certainly this would appear

the 43rd Rencontre assyriologique internationale, Prague, July 1–5, 1996, ed. Jiri Prosecky (Prague: Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Oriental Institute, 1998), 215–19; Gregorio del Olmo Lete, “(Bn) *’agp̄r* / (Binu) *Agaptari*’s House: A Functional Analysis of an Ugaritic ‘Archive’ (PH Room 10),” *JAOS* 137 (2017): 483–503.

25. Though note the remark by Christopher J. Eyre, “Is Egyptian Historical Literature ‘Historical’ or ‘Literary’?,” in *Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms*, ed. Antonio Loprieno, PÄ 10 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 433, concerning the relationship between historical and literary texts: “Such cross-reference and cross-fertilization between genres is an important indication that their audience was the same, and although the occasion for performance is different, their patrons and authors are likely to be the same: historical text and classical *belles lettres*, but both belong to a single context of the literary and performance ‘arts.’”

26. Often such a view is grounded in the study of memory and retention in contemporary Western cultures, where memorization and retention are not practiced as widely. Notwithstanding the study of Ziony Zevit, “Cognitive Theory and the Memorability of Biblical Poetry,” in *Let Your Colleagues Praise You: Studies in Memory of Stanley Gevirtz*, part 2, ed. Robert J. Ratner et al. (Rolling Hills Estates, CA: Western Academic Press, 1993), 199–212.

to be true of some devices that depend upon an immediate recognition of similarity in sound, such as onomatopoeia. Nevertheless, some devices can operate over extensive bodies of text. This should compel us to rethink our assumptions concerning proximity. If the way we understand the function of a device affects how we envision its audience, so also does our understanding of the audience for a device shape our understanding of proximity as a compositional factor. If we imagine a text being recited orally, we are likely to hold that paronomasia must occur in close proximity to be effective. Nevertheless, in cultures that place emphasis on the memorization of performed texts, writing also plays a role in preservation,²⁷ and there are individuals who can learn by heart lengthy texts upon hearing them and recite them even after many years. Such is the case with modern-day Somali and Ethiopian poets who not only memorize vast amounts of poetry but retain it accurately over many years.²⁸ Moreover, there is a great deal of evidence that memorization by rote was standard practice in the ancient world.²⁹

David Carr has argued that Near Eastern literary texts generally served as *aide-mémoire* for the performance of their contents and the enculturation of their young, elite readers.³⁰ If he is correct, and I believe him to be, we must ask how the literati handled the presence of polysemy during recitation. What occurred, for example, in a learning environment when bards recited Enuma Elish 7, fully cognizant of the numerous esoteric and polysemous readings of Marduk’s names, many of which communicate solely on a visual register? The sheer impossibility of transmitting polysemous meanings during recitation, without endless pauses and explanations, strongly suggests the existence of an accompanying oral tradition; an educational context in which master tradents passed on the learned readings to their pupils. In this context, the presence of polysemes would have offered teaching/learning moments of pause, reflection, and interpretation, and as

27. Deut 31:19 commands that Moses’s song (Deut 32), which scholars generally feel to be representative of early Hebrew poetry, be committed to writing so that the Israelites may teach it to their descendants.

28. See B. W. Andrzejewski and I. M. Lewis, *Somali Poetry: An Introduction* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), 45. On memory as it relates to paronomasia and variation in Hebrew poetry, see Scott B. Noegel and Gary A. Rendsburg, *Solomon’s Vineyard: Literary and Linguistic Studies in the Song of Songs*, AIL 1 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 109–11.

29. See Paul Delnero, “Memorization and the Transmission of Sumerian Literary Compositions,” *JNES* 71 (2012): 189–208. On the practice of reading texts aloud, see A. K. Gray, “Murmuring in Mesopotamia,” in *Wisdom, Gods, and Literature: Studies in Assyriology in Honour of W. G. Lambert*, ed. Andrew R. George and Irving L. Finkel (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 301–8.

30. David Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

items of special focus, they even might have abetted a text's memorization.³¹ Therefore, while we may see the learned interpretations contributing to an apprentice's enculturation, the engagement with forms of polysemy had to have taken place prior to performance.³² The recitation of a text thus already constituted an authoritative interpretation of its ambiguities (see chapter 5).³³

One also should remember that many of the texts studied here were chanted, sung, and/or set to music, which may have helped listeners to remember them, and we should keep in mind that an audience that reads or hears a text recited many times is likely to catch more of its subtleties than a first-time reader/listener. The fact that most of the texts examined in this book were recorded in multiple copies demonstrates that they enjoyed repeated use.

Finally, I note that most forms of polysemy and paronomasia operate on a visual register as well, and thus, they could be appreciated by a reader as much as a listener. Thus, proximity probably was less of a factor in the effectiveness of some forms of "wordplay" than others, depending on their functions, the audience, and the frequency with which a text was consulted.

2.4. SCRIPTS, WRITING SYSTEMS, AND SCRIBAL POTENTIAL

Since polysemy and paronomasia are conveyed in written texts, it is important that we consider more fully the natures of the various writing systems examined here. As will become clear, the potential for achieving polysemy and paronomasia depends entirely on the interrelationship between the script and the writing system in which it appears.

2.4.1. SUMERIAN

The Sumerian writing system is the oldest in human history, appearing first around 3100 BCE. It began as a pictographic and logographic script used for administrative purposes, but developed over two millennia into a series of generalized logographic, and less so logosyllabic cuneiform signs. The script was never intended to be an exact, phonetic representation of the living tongue, but rather only a mnemonic system. Consequently, some aspects of the spoken language were not expressed in writing. For example, in the earlier stages of the

31. For a similar observation concerning Ugaritic, see Jack M. Sasson, "Literary Criticism, Folklore Scholarship, and Ugaritic Literature," in *Ugarit in Retrospect: Fifty Years of Ugarit and Ugaritic*, ed. Gordon D. Young (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1981), 93.

32. Thus, while in the main I concur with Carr's findings, the existence of polysemous devices in Near Eastern literary texts generally reveals that written texts had to have possessed more than a mnemonic function.

33. See Scott B. Noegel, "Kirtu's Allusive Dream," *AuOr* 32 (2014): 299–316.

script, a scribe could employ the sign AK meaning “do, make, act, perform” without any indication of conjugation: no person, mode, or tense. This is because the language and topic were known to the scribe, who could infer these things from context. However, scribes gradually wrote down more of the spoken language when Sumerian began to die. Indeed, much of what we know of Sumerian derives from later lexical lists and bilingual texts that offer Akkadian equivalents, written at a time when Sumerian had long ceased to be a living language.

I refrain from explaining the complexities of the language here (e.g., its split ergativity and classification of nouns by animacy, etc.), since I am primarily interested in providing readers with a sense of the writing system. Suffice it to say that as a primarily logographic system, its signs can convey nominal and verbal concepts or phonetic sounds. The signs are primarily consonant-vowel (e.g., BA, BE, BU) or vowel-consonant (e.g., AB, EB, UB). More rare are consonant-vowel-consonant signs, as scribes preferred to render such sequences with consonant-vowel and vowel-consonant signs, for example, PA.AG rather than PAG. Logosyllabic signs can have many different functions depending on where they appear. They can reproduce phonetic elements, vocalic sequences, and mark prefixes or cases.

The Sumerian script also masks a number of features that would be otherwise invisible to nonspecialists such as the change of final /m/ to /n/ at word boundaries and the use of consonant-vowel signs to represent a vowel as well as the last consonant after a previous grapheme. Many final consonants also are omitted in the writing. In addition, the script contains determinatives that serve to classify words. In earlier times they appear to have been read aloud, but later they were not.

Because there were so many similar-sounding words, some logograms possessed the same phonetic values as others, and so, as a matter of convention, scholars distinguish them with accents and numbers. Thus, ŠA, ŠÁ, ŠÀ, ŠA₄, represent four different cuneiform signs that have the same phonetic value. The first is unmarked, the second takes an acute accent, the third a grave accent, and the rest from four and above take subscripted numerals. Scholars apply this transcription system consistently to all similar cases, thus for BA, BÁ, BÀ, BA₄, AH, ÁH, ÀH, AH₄, and so on.

2.4.2. AKKADIAN

Akkadian is a syllabic system that employs hundreds of cuneiform signs, most of them with multiple phonetic, syllabic, and logographic values. So, for example, there are different signs for *ba*, *bi*, *bu*, *ab*, *ib*, *ub*, and likewise for the other consonants. The system was adopted from Sumerian and adapted by Akkadian speakers to transcribe their own language, which we classify as East Semitic. Thus, scholars transliterate different Akkadian signs that share the same

pronunciation by way of the same accent and number system, that is, *ša*, *šá*, *šà*, *ša₄*, et cetera.

Some signs are used merely to classify words and are known as determinatives. They are read but not spoken. Akkadian also integrates many Sumerograms, but they are read as their Akkadian equivalents. Thus, when Akkadian scribes encountered the Sumerian sign *DIĜIR* meaning “god,” they read it as *ilu*, the Akkadian word for “god.” When the *DIĜIR* sign was used as a determinative, scribes simply noted its presence while reading and did not say *ilu* aloud. An example of this in transcription would be ^d*Marduk*, in which the superscript *d* represents the determinative *DIĜIR* = *ilu*. When not used as a determinative, the same sign could be read as the phonetic syllables *an*, *èl*, *le₄*, *sa₈*, *ána*, or *šubul*, depending on the type of text in which it appeared and its date and provenance. Most cuneiform signs possess multiple and simultaneous phonetic, syllabic, and logographic values. In addition, the signs do not distinguish voiced, voiceless, and emphatic consonants. Consequently, a sign representing a syllable that contains a dental, sibilant, or velar could represent three different phonemes. A sign containing a labial could represent two. The following chart illustrates this.

	Voiceless	Voiced	Emphatic
Dentals	<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>t̰</i>
Sibilant	<i>s</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>š</i>
Velars	<i>k</i>	<i>g</i>	<i>q</i>
Labials	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	

So for example, a sign that has the value *ib* also could represent *ip*, *eg* could be read *ek* or *eq*, *it* could be *id* or *iṭ*, and so forth. In this book, I typically transliterate Akkadian texts in accordance with Assyriological practice in order to make the syllabic structure of the writing system obvious to the reader (e.g., *šeṛ-lib-bu* “fox”). When the writing system is less important to my point or when I want to emphasize how a word or phrase was pronounced, I normalize it (e.g., *šēlibu* “fox”).

The polyvalency of the cuneiform system allows for multiple readings in a single context. Note, for example, the narrator’s gruesome description of Marduk’s handling of Tiamat’s corpse in *Enuma Elish* 4.138–40:

138. *mi-iš-lu-uš-ša iš-ku-nam-ma šá-ma-mi uš-šal-lil*
Half of her he set up and made as a cover, (like) heaven.
139. *iš-du-ud maš-ka ma-aš-ša-ra ú-šá-aš-bit*
He stretched out the skin and assigned watchmen,
140. *me-e-ša la šu-ša-a šu-nu-ti um-ta- i-ir*
And ordered them not to let her escape.

Of note here is the word written *maš-ka* “skin, hide,” the signs of which one also can read as *pár-ka* “dividing line.”³⁴ As “skin,” the reading follows Tiamat’s dismembered body and the cover, which is made of her skin. As “dividing line,” it establishes the boundary that follows, which watchmen are to protect. In essence, the “skin” is literally a “dividing line.” This form of polysemy operates strictly on a visual level (see 4.1.5).

Even when texts are written syllabically, the signs used to communicate one thing can evoke something altogether different by way of their logographic values. Thus, in the Tale of the Poor Man from Nippur we read: *ana i-riš šīra* (UZU) *ù šikāra* (KAŠ) *rēšti* (SAĜ) *lummunu zīmūšu* “due to his craving for meat and the best beer, his face was disfigured” (l. 8). Of note is the Sumerogram SAĜ, which we normally translate in Akkadian as *rēšu* “head.” Its use here as an adjective for beer requires that we render it *rēšti* “the best,” as in “head of the class.” However, the reader already has encountered the sign SAĜ read phonetically as *riš* in *i-riš* “craving.” Moreover, the Sumerogram UZU is read as *šīru* “meat,” which paronomastically and anagrammatically reflects *irīš(u)* “craving.” Thus, in multiple ways the reader sees and hears the word “head” before ending the line appropriately with *zīmūšu* “his face.” In this way, Akkadian can communicate aurally on one register and visually on another.³⁵ In addition, all Akkadian signs were originally pictographic, even though they became more abstract in appearance over time. Thus, the sign SAĜ looks more like a head in Sumerian than it does in later Akkadian traditions that adopted and abstracted it. Nevertheless, Assyrian and Babylonian literati were well aware of the pictographic associations of their signs.

2.4.3. EGYPTIAN

The Egyptian writing system is similarly complex and contains hundreds of signs. It seamlessly integrates alphabetic signs with bi- and triconsonantal signs, as well as logograms, many of which permit multiple options for reading. Like Akkadian, Egyptian employs determinatives to classify words, and they too are read, but not spoken. Egyptian authors can exhibit great cleverness in their use of determinatives and communicate information visually that is not evident while reading orally.³⁶ See, for example, the following dream omen: *ḥr m3 i'ḥ wbn=f; nfr ḥtp*

34. For the rendering “dividing line,” see CAD M/1, s.v. “maššaru.” The dual reading is noted by Benjamin R. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature* (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 1993), 377, 402.

35. On the complexity and abilities of the cuneiform writing system, see Alex de Voogt and Irving Finkel, eds., *The Idea of Writing: Play and Complexity* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

36. See already Hermann Grapow, *Sprachliche und schriftliche Formung ägyptischer Texte*, UÄS 7 (Glückstadt: Augustin, 1936), 17–20. See now more recently, Ludwig D. Morenz, “Visuelle Poesie und Sonnen-Mysterium: Von bild-textlicher Kohärenz und

n=f in *ntr=f* “seeing the moon when it rises; good, (it means) being clement to him by his god” (P.Chester Beatty III.r.5.22). Of note is the determinative of the falcon god Horus *ꜥ*, which occurs after the word *whn* “rises” in the protasis. This is not the usual determinative for this word (which is *ꜥ*). Its presence here provides the interpreter with a reason for interpreting the omen as the sign of a *ntr* “god.”³⁷

In the Egyptian Tale of Setna I, the author adds a phallus determinative (ⲙ) next to four words that normally would not require one in order to lend those lines (i.e., 3:6, 5:9, 5:19, 5:22) an erotic nuance and to underscore the presence of sexual euphemisms (see 4.1.2).³⁸

Consider also the Poetical Stela of Thutmosis III (CM 34010), in which we hear the following boast: *tꜣtꜣ=k ꜥwn.tjw stj r-mn-m šꜣ.t m ꜥmm.t=k* “you trample the Nubian tribesmen; as far as Shat is in your grasp” (l. 22). Here the place name *šꜣ.t* is written with a bird-claw hieroglyph (ⲥ), thus evoking the image of pharaoh as Horus, and anticipating the word *ꜥmm.t* “grasp,” which is written with a human fist determinative (ⲙ).³⁹ This is reminiscent of the famous Narmer palette on which Horus possesses both a bird claw and a human hand.

Another way to create polysemy is to employ signs as acronyms, that is, reading the first consonant or sign of successive words (see 4.1.11). See, for example, a Ptolemaic reading that stacks the signs: *p.t* “heavens,” *hh* “heaven’s pillars,” and *tꜣ* “land,” as *ⲙⲉⲩ*. The signs visually depict a personification of the pillars of heaven kneeling on the earth and supporting the sky with his hands. Yet they also are read acronymically as *p + t + h = pth* “(the god) Ptah.”⁴⁰ Throughout its long history, hieroglyphic Egyptian remained pictographic. Consequently, even its cursive form, hieratic, retained its pictographic associations.

Hieroglyphic Egyptian is extraordinary for its ability to communicate different messages aurally and visually. Returning to the Poetical Stela of Thutmosis III (CM 34010), we find the god Amun claiming that he showed the king miracles on the battlefield: *wr.w ꜥꜣs.wt nb.(w)t dmd.(w) m ꜥꜣf=k* “the princes of all foreign

offener Intertextualität auf dem Schutzamulett des Butehamon,” *DE* 56 (2003): 57–65; Hany Rashwan, “Ancient Egyptian Image-Writing: Between the Unspoken and Visual Poetics,” *JARCE* 55 (2019): 137–60.

37. Scott B. Noegel and Kasia Szpakowska, “‘Word Play’ in the Ramesseid Dream Manual,” *SÄK* 35 (2007): 205.

38. See Pieter Willem Pestman, “Jeux de déterminatifs en Démotique,” *RdE* 25 (1973): 27–28; Steve Vinson, “Ten Notes on the First Tale of Setne Khaemwas,” in *Honi soit qui mal y pense: Studien zum pharaonischen, griechen-römischen und spätantiken Ägypten zu Ehren von Heinz-Josef Thissen*, ed. Hermann Knuf, Christian Leitz, and Daniel von Recklinghausen, OLA 194 (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 459–60, and n. 57; Jacqueline E. Jay, *Orality and Literacy in the Demotic Tales* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 103.

39. Found in Eyre, “Is Egyptian Historical Literature ‘Historical’ or ‘Literary’?,” 421.

40. Morenz, *Sinn und Spiel der Zeichen*, 47.

lands I gathered into your grasp” (l. 4). Pictorially this line conveys the added sense of trapping birds with one’s hand, for *wr.w* “princes” is written    and *dmd* “gathered” is written . ⁴¹ In addition, following the word *hf* “grasp” is the determinative of the clenched fist . ⁴² The scribe also achieves a nice symmetry by writing *h3s.wt* “foreign lands” as   .

In the Tale of Sinuhe (P.Berlin 3022), we similarly see how Egyptian can operate simultaneously on different aural and visual registers. In line 110, Sinuhe claims that a warrior of Retenu provoked him in *im3=i* “my tent.” This is followed immediately by *pr.j pw nn sn.nw=f* “a champion was this one without a peer.” The visual imprinting is striking: *im3=i* “tent” is written as  with  resting below it, and *pr.j* “champion” as  , with the house sign (*pr*) resting above the mouth sign  (*r*). The juxtaposition not only uses the sign  as a determinative and then immediately afterwards phonetically, it brings the images of “tent,” “men,” and the “mouthing off” of the champion into greater relief.

In the Prophecy of Neferti (P.St. Petersburg 1116 B), Neferti predicts: *itn hbs.w nn psd=f m3 rh.jt* “the sun-disk is covered, it does not shine for people to see” (ll. 24–25). Usually *psd* “shine” takes the sun-sign determinative . But it is nowhere present here in order to make a visual point and deprive the sun-disk of its rays. Similarly, in line 26 he predicts: *itrw swi n.w km.t* “the waters of Egypt are empty.” Here *swi* “empty” appears without its usual solar-disk determinative , thus, again removing any sunshine from the text.

2.4.4. UGARITIC

Ugaritic employs a cuneiform script, but unlike Akkadian, the writing system is not syllabic. Instead, the system uses a consonantal alphabet (in cuneiform script). Its Semitic consonantal inventory includes thirty signs, some of which preserve phonemes that merged and/or were written with the same consonantal sign in later Hebrew and Aramaic. The consonantal system lends itself well to paronomastic devices, but it provides fewer opportunities for polyvalency since each sign possesses a single value.⁴³ The signs themselves are not polysemous, and so polysemy must be created via homonyms. So, for example, in the Baal myth we read:

41. For a similar use of bird signs, see Barbara A. Richter, *The Theology of Hathor of Dendera: Aural and Visual Scribal Techniques in the Per-Wer Sanctuary*, WSEA 4 (Atlanta, GA: Lockwood, 2016), 442.

42. See similarly the abundant images of rams and crocodiles for similar effect at Esna. Christian Leitz, “Die beiden kryptographischen Inschriften aus Esna mit den Widdern und Krokodilen,” *SÄK* 29 (2001): 251–76.

43. Ugaritology has advanced significantly in “wordplay” research since the remark, now nearly forty years old, by Sasson, “Literary Criticism, Folklore Scholarship, and Ugaritic Literature,” 93: “It must be admitted, however, that Ugaritic scholarship has not reached

yštn aṛt l bmt 'r
 He sets Asherah on the back of an ass,
l ysmsmt bmt phl
 On the beautiful back of a donkey.
qdš yuḥdm šb 'r
 Qadish seizes. He *šb 'r*.
amrr k kbbk l pnm
 Even Amrar like a star before him,
aṛ bilt 'nt
 Marches the maiden Anat.
 (CAT 1.4.iv.14–18)

The text exploits the homonyms *b 'r* I “shine (like a star)” and *b 'r* II “leave.”⁴⁴ We may translate *šb 'r* as “he shines (like a star)” or “he causes to leave.”⁴⁵ The mention of a star just afterwards suggests the former, but the inherent movement of the caravan suggests the latter.

2.4.5. HEBREW AND ARAMAIC

Both Hebrew and Aramaic are written with an alphabet of twenty-two consonants, though not in a cuneiform script. Thus, like Ugaritic, ancient inscriptions and the earliest versions of the Hebrew Bible recorded no vowels. During the early Middle Ages, a rabbinic scribal group known as the Masoretes invented and added a vocalization system to the text. The system fossilized a particular tradition of recitation that sometimes obscured the polyvalency of the consonantal text,

the stage in which paronomastic evidence is clearly recognized.” However, see M. Dahood, “Some Ambiguous Texts in Isaiah: (30,15; 52,2; 33,2; 40,5; 45,1),” *CBQ* 20 (1958): 41–49; Wilfred G. Watson, “An Example of a Multiple Wordplay in Ugaritic,” *UF* 12 (1980): 443–44; Watson, “Ugaritic Poetry,” in *Handbook of Ugaritic Studies*, ed. W. G. E. Watson and N. Wyatt, HdO 39 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 165–92; Watson, “Puns Ugaritic Newly Surveyed,” in Noegel, *Puns and Pundits*, 124; Scott B. Noegel, “A Janus Parallelism in the Baal and ‘Anat Story,” *JNSL* 21 (1995): 91–94; Noegel, “Geminate Ballast and Clustering: An Unrecognized Literary Feature in Ancient Semitic Poetry,” *JHS* 5 (2004): 1–18; Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*; Noegel, “Kirtu’s Allusive Dream”; E. Shirley Natan-Yulzary, “The Transgression and Punishment of the Goddess ‘Anat in the ‘Aqht Story: A Literary Perspective,” *UF* 41 (2009–2010): 581–99; Jonathan Yogev and Shamir Yona, “A Poetic Letter: The Ugaritic Tablet RS 16.265,” *SEL* 31 (2014): 49–56; Yogev and Yona, “Opening Alliteration in Biblical and Ugaritic Poetry,” *ZAW* 127 (2015): 108–13.

44. The basic meaning of the verb *b 'r* is “burn, ignite,” unless put in the causative form as it is here. See *DULAT* s.v. “*b 'r*.”

45. Noegel, “A Janus Parallelism in the Baal and ‘Anat Story,” 91–94.

because it imposed upon the text a single authoritative interpretation.⁴⁶ The Masoretes also proposed a number of corrections and alternative readings by placing them in the margins of the biblical text. These readings are known as the קָרָי *qarē* “(what is) read,” as opposed to the כְּתִיב *kəṭīḇ* “(what is) written.” Herein, I have placed these readings in brackets [].

Unlike Ugaritic, some signs in the Hebrew and Aramaic alphabets were used for multiple phonemes that we know were pronounced distinctly. Thus, as I noted in the Introduction, the letter ה may represent the sounds /h/ or /ḥ/ and the letter ע may reflect /ʾ/ or /g/, depending on the etymology of the word. In addition, the same letter ש is used for the phonemes /š/ and /ś/, and also can represent PS /t/. Once the phoneme /t/ had merged with /š/ (and no longer existed as an independent phoneme), the letter ש was used for both /š/ and /ś/. In Aramaic, the phoneme /t/ became /t/ and was represented by ת. The Masoretes later distinguished the sounds /š/ and /ś/ by dotting their tops as שׁ and שׂ, respectively.

Epigraphic evidence shows that the Israelite alphabet was borrowed from Phoenician and was pictographic in origin. The pictographic associations gave rise to the names of the consonants. Thus, for example, the letter *bet* derives from the word “house,” and was shaped like a tent, and the letter *yod* derives from the word “hand” and resembled one. As with Akkadian and Egyptian texts, there is evidence that Israelites were aware of these associations and exploited them in some contexts (see 4.1.12).

Though Hebrew and Aramaic offer the same potential for creating paronomasia that one finds in the other languages, Hebrew and Aramaic polysemy is restricted to the word, phrase, and sentence levels, because, like Ugaritic, their individual consonantal signs do not permit multiple readings, as do Akkadian and hieroglyphic signs. Thus, there are three primary ways that Israelite authors could achieve polysemy—by exploiting homonyms, homographs, or single words with broad semantic ranges. I shall demonstrate each method with examples from the Hebrew Bible. Job’s lament demonstrates polysemy by way of homonyms (9:30–31).

אִם־הִתְרַחֲצִיתִי בְמוֹ [בְּמִי־] שֶׁלֹּג וְהִזְכֹּתִי בְּבֶר כְּפִי:
אֲזַ בְּשַׁחַת תִּטְבְּלֵנִי

46. See Noegel, *Janus Parallelism in the Book of Job*; Choon Leong Seow, “Orthography, Textual Criticism, and the Poetry of Job,” *JBL* 130 (2011): 63–85. On further challenges that such devices pose for textual critics, see Viktor Golinets, “Considerations on Questions Philology Cannot Solve While Reconstructing the Text of the Hebrew Bible,” in *Philology and Textual Criticism: Proceedings of the Second International Colloquium of the Dominique Barthélemy Institute held at Fribourg on 10–11 October, 2013*, ed. Innocent Himbaza and Jan Joosten (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 45–69.

'im hiṭrāḥaṣtī ḥəmə [ḥə-mē] šāleḡ wa-ḥāzikkōlī bə-ḥōr kappāy
'āz baš-šaḥaṭ tiṭḥəlēnī

Even if I should wash my hands with snow water,
and clean my hands בִּבְר bə-ḥōr,
You still would dip me in the pit.

In this passage the phrase בִּבְר bə-ḥōr can mean “with lye” or “in a pit.” Though the readings derive from different roots, the former from בִּר b-r-r “purify,” and the latter from בִּאֵר b-’-r “pit,” the nouns are indistinguishable in sound. Of course, the primary meaning of בִּבְר bə-ḥōr is “with lye,” since it makes little sense for Job to wash his hands in a pit. Nevertheless, the mention of a synonym for pit (שְׁחַת šaḥaṭ) just afterwards makes one recontextualize the meaning of בִּבְר bə-ḥōr.⁴⁷

Job 26:12–13 illustrates polysemy by means of homographs; words that look alike but whose pronunciations differ.⁴⁸ This form of polysemy obtains strictly on a visual level.

בְּכֹחוֹ רָגַע הַיָּם וּבְתוֹבְנָתוֹ [וּבְתִבְנָתוֹ] מַחֲץ רָהַב
בְּרוּחוֹ שָׁמַיִם שִׁפְרָה חִלְלָה יָדוֹ נָחַשׁ בְּרִיחַ

bə-kōḥō rāḡa‘ hay-yām ū-bi-tūbnāṭō [ū-bi-tbūnāṭō] māḥaṣ rāḥab
bə-rūḥō šāmayīm šiprāḥ ḥōlālāḥ yāḏō nāḥāš bārīaḥ

By his power, he רָגַע rāḡa‘ the sea, and by his skill he smashed Rahab.
By his wind the heavens were calmed, his hand pierced the Fleeing Serpent.

The verb רָגַע rāḡa‘ in this passage usually is rendered “quieted,” “stilled,” or the like, if derived from the PS root r-g-ḡ. However, we also may derive it from the PS root r-g-’ and translate it “disturbed.” Both readings are possible, though they would have been distinguished in speech.⁴⁹ Thus, this polyseme operates only on a visual register. Nevertheless, as a construction of opposites, it constitutes a merism, expressing a totality of actions.

To demonstrate the third way of creating polysemy, which exploits the semantic range of a single word, I turn to Pharaoh’s command to Moses in Exod 5:18:

47. There might be other additional layers of meaning here. The expression בִּר כָּפִי ḥōr kappāy also means “purity of my hands” (cf. Job 22:30, 2 Sam 22:21 [with יָד yāḏ “hand”]), and the consonants of שְׁחַת šaḥaṭ “pit” also connote “destruction” (e.g., Gen 6:17) and “misdeed” (e.g., Deut 32:5), though the word “pit” derives from a separate root (i.e., שׁוּח ṣ-w-ḥ). I thank one of the publisher’s anonymous reviewers for this observation.

48. John H. Hospers, “Polysemy and Homophony,” *ZAH* 6 (1993): 114–23.

49. See also Joshua Blau, *On Polyphony in Biblical Hebrew*, *PIASH* 6/2 (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1982).

וְעַתָּה לָכוּ עֲבָדוּ *wə-‘attāh lākū ‘ibdū* “now get to your work!” Umberto Cassuto observed that the verb in this passage עֲבָדוּ *‘ibdū* can mean “work, labor” or “worship, serve.”⁵⁰ In the former sense, the statement fits Pharaoh’s command that the taskmasters increase the workload of the Israelites. However, as “worship,” it prefigures Pharaoh’s release of the Israelites to worship Yahweh at Mount Sinai.

2.5. GRAMMATICALITY

An important point frequently unaddressed in publications on “wordplay” is that polysemy and paronomasia need not accord with our conception of what constitutes “correct” grammar to be effective.⁵¹ Grammatically speaking, Shakespeare’s use of the word “grave” in Mercutio’s asseveration, “ask for me tomorrow, and you shall find me a grave man” can only mean “solemn.”⁵² However, its use as a synonym for “dead” is not lost on the audience who knows that Mercutio has just been stabbed.

In Mesopotamian literature, one finds many examples of ungrammaticality in the service of polysemy and paronomasia. Stephen Lieberman points to *Enuma Elish* (7.95–96), in which one of Marduk’s fifty names is written as LU-GAL.DUR.MAḤ, but interpreted as *markas* “center, bond,” a translation that reads his name as it if contains the cuneiform sign DŪR rather than DUR, even though that sign is not used.⁵³ Eckart Frahm remarks that such examples

demonstrate to what extent the Babylonian commentators’ idea of how etymology was supposed to work differs from the more rigorous approach of the modern linguist. Mesopotamian scholars thought a fairly superficial similarity, which did not have to be based on universally applicable rules, was sufficient to link different words.... The reward for this apparent lack of rigor was that it opened up for the ancient scholars multiple avenues to achieve meaningful associations.⁵⁴

Egyptian texts too abound in nonnormative orthography, cryptographic practices, and ungrammatical usage. In his treatment of “wordplay” in the Middle Kingdom autobiographical eulogy of Intef-son-of-Min, Antonio Loprieno explains:

50. Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Skokie, IL: Varda, 1967), 71.

51. See, e.g., Meir Malul, “A Possible Case of Janus Parallelism,” *ASJ* 17 (1995): 341–42; John F. Sawyer, “Root-Meanings in Hebrew,” *JSS* 12 (1967): 37–50.

52. Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Act 3, Scene 1.

53. Stephen J. Lieberman, “A Mesopotamian Background for the So-called Aggadic ‘Measures’ of Biblical Hermeneutics?,” *HUCA* 58 (1987): 182.

54. Frahm, *Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries*, 71.

The title “leader who opened the secret” is rendered here by means of a graphic pun in which the three words “leader,” “opener,” and “secret” are indicated by two juxtaposed human heads, the first crowned with bovine horns (the sign for the phonetic reading *wp*), the other with a fish (*bz*). Since both the sign <bovine horns> and the sign <fish> are placed on a sign <human head>, which is phonetically *tp*, they also (crypto)graphically convey the value *hrj-tp*, lit. “Which is on the head,” whose primary meaning is “leader.” The entire group, therefore, is to be read *hrj-tp wp bz* “leader who opened the secret,” with a grapho-phonetic dialogue between <head>, <horns>, and <fish> on the one hand, *hrj-tp*, *wp*, and *bz*, on the other.⁵⁵

Genesis 2:23 informs us that the first man named the creature that Yahweh created from his rib an אִשָּׁה *iššāh* “woman,” because “she was taken from a man (אִישׁ *iš*),” though the two terms are etymologically unrelated.⁵⁶ Similarly, the name נֹחַ *nōah* “Noah” derives from a root that means “rest” (i.e., נָח *n-w-h*), yet the narrator tells us that his father named him saying יִנְחָמֵנוּ *yanaḥmēnū* “he will comfort us” (Gen 5:29). Thus, his father “inaccurately” etymologizes his name by connecting it to the root נָחַם *n-h-m* “comfort.” One more biblical example: Leah names her son רְאוּבֵן *rə’ūbēn* “Reuben,” explaining that “surely Yahweh looked [רָאָה *rā’āh*] at my affliction [בְּעָנִי *be-’ōnyī*],” though the word “affliction” can in no way explain or relate to the word בֶּן *bēn* “son,” which is implicit in the birth, but never explicitly related to the name (Gen 29:32). Moreover, even if Leah had claimed that God had “seen” that she bore a “son,” it would not provide a true etymology for the name Reuben, which likely means “lion.”⁵⁷ James Barr’s observation with regard to such “folk etymologies” is instructive.

To us, indeed, it is clear that some of the etymologies do not fit... But this is being too logical; the etymologies did not depend on having the same ‘root’, as we should call it. The phenomenon of popular etymology cannot be strictly separated from a whole series of other stylistic devices, such as assonance or paronomasia.⁵⁸

55. Loprieno, “Puns and Word Play in Ancient Egyptian,” 5.

56. In fact, the words אִישׁ *iš* “man” (PS *’yš*), אִשָּׁה *iššāh* “woman” (PS *’ly*), אֲנָשִׁים *’anāšīm* “men” (sing. form אִנּוֹשׁ *’enōš*, PS *’nš*), and נָשִׁים *nāšīm* “women” (PS *nšy*) are all etymologically unrelated; the four comprising a heteroclitic paradigm.

57. See *BDB*, s.v. “רְאוּבֵן”; *HALOT*, s.v. “רְאוּבֵן.”

58. James Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1987), 47–48. The terms *folk etymology* and *popular etymology* remain in circulation, though I find them problematic. See, e.g., John F. A. Sawyer, “The Place of Folk-Linguistics in Biblical Interpretation,” in *Proceedings of the Fifth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, ed. Pinchas Peli (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1969), 109–13; Leonid Kogan, “Popular Etymology in the Semitic Languages,” in *Studia Semitica*, ed. Leonid Kogan, OPOI 3 (Moscow: Russian State University for the Humanities, 2003), 120–40.

Choon Leong Seow has shown that the numerous cases of defective spelling in the pre-Masoretic text of Job permitted many more double readings than usually recognized:

the conservative orthography proves in many instances to serve a poetic function. This orthography allows homographic wordplays in addition to the numerous homophonic ones that scholars have long noticed. Poetry in Job, it seems, is written not only for the ear. It is written as well for the eye. It is “visual poetry.”⁵⁹

Naphtali Meshel similarly has drawn attention to some biblical proverbs that rely on ungrammaticality to give readers pause for contemplating multiple readings.⁶⁰ One of his examples is Prov 19:18: יִסֵּר בֶּן־ךָ בַּיּוֹם וְאֶל־הַמָּוֶת וְאֶל־תִּשְׁאָה יָסֵר בֶּן־ךָ yassēr binkā kī yēš tiqwāh wə-’el hāmītō ’al tiššā’ napšekā. As the verse stands, one can interpret it in two different ways: (1) “chastise your son since there is (still) hope, but do not strive to kill him,” or (2) “do not seek to have your son killed, chastise him while there is (still) hope,” renderings supported by a parallel in the Proverbs of Ahiqar (C1 1:177).⁶¹ However, the pre-Masoretic text would have read הַמָּוֶת hāmītō as הַמִּיתוֹ, thus also permitting the vocalization הַמִּיָּתוֹ hemyātō “his pleading/whining,” and the interpretation: “beat your son while there is (still) hope, and pay no heed to his whining.” Meshel thus concludes that Israelite poets often were “forced to resort to rare or awkward grammatical constructions in order to retain the desired duality.”⁶²

Such attestations—and the phenomenon is widespread in ancient Near Eastern texts—should caution us not to impose our contemporary sense of what constitutes “proper” orthography and grammar. Quite the contrary, as Niek Veldhuis keenly asserts: “Ungrammaticality, or deviant grammar, is often a mark in that it draws attention to something special, as readers of modern poetry well know.”⁶³

59. Seow, “Orthography, Textual Criticism, and the Poetry of Job,” 83–84.

60. Naphtali Meshel, “Whose Job Is This? Dramatic Irony and *Double Entendre* in the Book of Job,” in *Aesthetics, Ethics, Hermeneutics*, ed. Leora Batnitzky and Ilana Pardes, (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 51–52. Meshel refers to cases of “double-edged wording” as a subcategory of *double entendres*. I would classify them simply as cases of polysemy or amphiboly that have ironic or theological functions. In some cases, when touching on theologically subversive themes, we also may consider them as *double entendres*, but not all serve in this way.

61. The numbering system for the Proverbs of Ahiqar throughout is that of Bezalel Porten and Ada Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt*, vol. 3 (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1993).

62. Meshel, “Whose Job Is This?,” 53.

63. Niek C. Veldhuis, “The Fly, the Worm, and the Chain,” *OLP* 24 (1993): 46. I argue the same in Noegel, *Janus Parallelism in the Book of Job*, 146–47. See also Veldhuis’s article, “The Poetry of Magic,” in Abusch and van der Toorn, *Mesopotamian Magic*, 35–48.

FUNCTION

When one compares studies on “wordplay” in the Hebrew Bible with those that focus on Akkadian and Egyptian texts, one finds that the disciplines contextualize its function in very different ways. We have seen above that scholars of the Hebrew Bible tend to treat “wordplay” as having primarily literary or rhetorical functions.¹ The situation is quite different in Assyriology and Egyptology, where

1. Representative examples include E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1898; repr. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1968); E. A. Russell, *Paronomasia and Kindred Phenomena in the New Testament* (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1920); A. First, “Duplication in Our Language” [Hebrew], *Leshonenu* 16 (1948–1949): 196–208; Asher Weiser, “Letter Reversal as an Expression of Reversal of Meaning in the Bible” [Hebrew], in *The Study of the Bible in Memory of Tzvi Karl*, ed. A. Weiser and B. Z. Lourie (Jerusalem: Qiryat Sefer, 1960), 226–63; D. Leibel, “Variant Readings” [Hebrew], *BM* 8 (1964): 187–97; D. F. Payne, “Old Testament Exegesis and the Problem of Ambiguity,” *ASTI* 5 (1967): 48–68; D. Lys, “Notes sur le Cantique,” in *Congress Volume: Rome, 1968*, ed. J. A. Emerton et al., VTS 17 (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 170–78; William L. Holladay, “Form and Word-Play in David’s Lament over Saul and Jonathan,” *VT* 20 (1970): 153–89; L. Peeters, “Pour une interprétation du jeu de mots,” *Semitics* 2 (1971–1972): 127–42; William L. Holladay, “The Covenant with the Patriarchs Overturned,” *JBL* 91 (1972): 305–20; Yosef Roth, “The Intentional Double-Meaning Talk in Biblical Prose” [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 41 (1972): 245–54; Stanley Gevirtz, “Of Patriarchs and Puns: Joseph at the Fountain, Jacob at the Ford,” *HUCA* 46 (1975): 33–54; W. Herzberg, *Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible* (PhD diss., New York University, 1979); J. Levenson, “The Paronomasia of Solomon’s Seventh Petition,” *HAR* 6 (1982): 135–38; Stanislav Segert, “Paronomasia in the Samson Narrative in Judges XIII–XVI,” *VT* 34 (1984): 454–61; S. Shaviv, “*nabi* and *nagid* in 1 Samuel ix 1–x 16,” *VT* 34 (1984): 108–19; Raphael Sappan, “Literal Meaning and Metaphorical Meaning by Way of Ambiguity in Biblical Poetry” [Hebrew], *BM* 30 (1985): 406–12; Gary A. Rendsburg, “The Mocking of Baal in 1 Kings 18:27,” *CBQ* 50 (1988): 414–17; Richard S. Hess, “Achan and Achor: Names and Wordplay in Joshua 7,” *HAR* 14 (1989): 89–98; David F. Pennant, *The Significance of Root Play, Leading Words and Thematic Links in the Book of Judges* (PhD diss., Council for National Academic Awards, 1989); Robert P. Gordon, “Word-Play and Verse-Order in 1 Samuel XXIV-5–8,” *VT* 40 (1990): 139–44; Thomas P. McCreesh, *Biblical Sound and*

Sense: Poetic Sound Patterns in Proverbs 10–29, JSOTSup 128 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991); Al Wolters, "Untying the King's Knots: Physiology and Wordplay in Daniel 5," *JBL* 110 (1991): 117–22; C. G. den Hertog, "Ein Wortspiel in der Jericho-Erzählung (Jos. 6)?," *ZAW* 104 (1992): 99–100; Patrick N. Hunt, "Subtle Paronomasia in the Canticum Canticorum: Hidden Treasures of the Superlative Poet," in *Goldene Apfel in silbernen Schalen: Collected Communications to the XIIIth Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament, Leuven 1989*, ed. Klaus-Dietrich Schunck and Matthias Augustin (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1992), 147–54; Benjamin Qedar-Kopfstein, "Paronomasia in Biblical Hebrew—Logical and Psychological Aspects" [Hebrew], in *Moshe Goshen-Gottstein—in Memoriam*, vol. 3 of *Studies in Bible and Exegesis*, ed. Moshe Bar-Asher et al. (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1993), 383–400; A. Hurvitz, "Toward a Precise Definition of the Term 'Amon in the Book of Proverbs 8:30' [Hebrew], in *The Bible in the Light of Its Interpreters: Sarah Kamin Memorial Volume*, ed. Sara Japhet (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1994), 647–50; Gary A. Rendsburg, "Talpiyyôt (Song 4:4)," *JNSL* 20 (1994): 13–19; Amiqam Gai, "You Are a Garden Locked Up, My Sister, My Bride; You Are a Spring Enclosed, a Sealed Fountain" [Hebrew], *BM* 42 (1996): 50–51; N. Lunn, "Paronomastic Constructions in Biblical Hebrew," *Notes on Translation* 10 (1996): 31–52; Shalom M. Paul, "Polysemous Pivotal Punctuation: More Janus Double Entendres," in *Texts, Temples, and Traditions: A Tribute to Menehem Haran*, ed. Michael V. Fox et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 369–74; N. Waldman, "Some Aspects of Biblical Punning," *Shofar* 14 (1996): 38–52; Shalom M. Paul, "A Lover's Garden of Verse: Literal and Metaphoric Imagery in Ancient Near Eastern Love Poetry," in *Tehillah le-Moshe: Biblical and Judaic Studies in Honor of Moshe Greenberg* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 99–110; Edward L. Greenstein, "Jethro's Wit: An Interpretation of Wordplay in Exodus 18," in *On the Way to Nineveh: Studies in Honor of George M. Landes*, ed. S. L. Cook and S. C. Winter (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1999), 155–71; Victor A. Hurowitz, "Nursling, Advisor, Architect? נמנן and the Role of Wisdom in Proverbs 8,22–31," *Bib* 80 (1999): 391–400; Mazal Dori, "The Ambiguity of Double Meaning" [Hebrew], *Hagige Giva* 7 (1999): 11–23; Nachman Levine, "Twice as Much as Your Spirit: Pattern, Parallel, and Paronomasia in the Miracles of Elijah and Elisha," *JSOT* 85 (1999): 25–46; Bill T. Arnold, "Word Play and Characterization in Daniel 1," in Noegel, *Puns and Pundits*, 231–48; Nachman Levine, "The Tower of Babel Deconstructed: Linguistic Structure, Social Structure, and Structural Structure," *Nachalah: The Yeshiva University Journal for the Study of Bible* 2 (2001): 131–45; Gary A. Rendsburg, "Hebrew Philological Notes (II)," *HS* 42 (2001): 187–95; John S. Kselman, "Ambiguity and Wordplay in Proverbs XI," *VT* 52 (2002): 545–47; Nachman Levine, "Suffering and Thought in Lamentations 3: Form and Content" [Hebrew], *Megadim* 35 (2002): 93–99; D. Dan, "Reflected Meaning, Sound Meaning and Sound in Song of Songs" [Hebrew], *BM* 48 (2003): 207–14; Amos Frisch, "Three Syntactical Discontinuities in I Regum 9–11," *ZAW* 115 (2003): 88–93; Nili Shupak, "A Fresh Look at the Dreams of the Officials and of Pharaoh in the Story of Joseph (Genesis 40–41) in the Light of Egyptian Dreams" [Hebrew], *JANES* 30 (2003): 103–38; Lawrence Zalcman, "Prov 5, 19c: שְׂגִיאוֹת מִי יִבֵּן," *ZAW* 115 (2003): 433–34; David Henshke, "When One Sets Out on a Journey': On Double Meanings and Their Consequences" [Hebrew], *Leshonenu* 67 (2004): 87–102; Nachman Levine,

scholars generally ascribe to it magical, theological, or mantic hermeneutical functions.² Sheldon Greaves's comment is representative:

"Semantic-Sonant Chiasmus in the Torah: Reversed Sound and Reversed Sense" [Hebrew], *BM* 183 (2005): 313–28; Levine, "Sarah/Sodom: Birth, Destruction, and Synchronic Transaction in Gen. 18–19," *JSOT* 31 (2006): 131–46; Patrick N. Hunt, *Poetry in the Song of Songs: A Literary Analysis*, SBL 96 (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008); Edward L. Greenstein, "Reanalysis in Biblical and Babylonian Poetry," in *Birkat Shalom: Studies in the Bible, Ancient Near Eastern Literature, and Postbiblical Judaism Presented to Shalom M. Paul on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Chaim Cohen et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 499–510; Lénart J. de Regt, "Wordplay in the OT," *NIDB* 5:898–900; Aaron D. Rubin, "Gen. 49:4 in Light of Arabic and Modern South Arabian," *VT* 59 (2009): 499–502; Charles Halton, "Samson's Last Laugh: Š/ŠHQ Pun in Judges 16:25–27," *JBL* 128 (2009): 61–64; Karolien Vermeulen, "Eeny Meeny Miny Moe: Who Is The Craftiest To Go?," *JHS* 10 (2010): 1–13; Francis Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise: Identity and Difference in the Song of Songs*, 2nd ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2011); Karolien Vermeulen, "The 'Song' of the Servant—Gen 24:23," *VT* 61 (2011): 499–504; Vermeulen, *To Play or Not to Play: The Role and Function of Wordplay in Genesis 1–11* (PhD diss., University of Antwerp/Ghent University, 2013); Moshe Garsiel, *From Earth to Heaven: A Literary Study of the Elijah Stories in the Book of Kings* (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2014); David B. Schreiner, "Why נִיר in Kings," *JSOT* 39 (2014): 15–30; Valérie Kabergs, "Lovely Wordplay in Canticles 8,6a," *ZAW* 126 (2014): 261–64; Zvi Ron, "Wordplay in Genesis 2:25–3:1," *JBQ* 42 (2014): 3–7; Karolien Vermeulen, "The Intentional Use of Polysemy: A Case Study of דָּבָר סֶתֶר (Judg 3:19)," in *Approaches to Literary Readings of Ancient Jewish Texts*, ed. Karolien Vermuelen (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 115–36; Vermeulen, "Mind the Gap: Ambiguity in the Story of Cain and Abel," *JBL* 133 (2014): 29–42; Roland Meynet, *Les huit psaumes acrostiches alphabétiques* (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2015); Robin Baker, *Hollow Men, Strange Women: Riddles, Codes, and Otherness in the Book of Judges* (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Jeff Hayes, "Intentional Ambiguity in Ruth 4:5: Implications for Interpretation of Ruth," *JSOT* 41 (2016): 159–82; Karalina Matskevich, "Double-Plotting in the Garden: Stylistics of Ambiguity in Genesis 2–3," in *Doubling and Duplicating in the Book of Genesis: Literary and Stylistic Approaches to the Text*, ed. Elizabeth R. Hayes and Karolien Vermeulen (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016), 167–82; Jonathan Grossman, "The Ambiguity of 'רָחֵם' in Deuteronomy, Second Isaiah, and Enûma Eliš," in *Ben Porat Yosef: Studies in the Bible and Its World: Essays in Honor of Joseph Fleishman*, ed. Michael Avioz, Omer Minka, and Yael Shemesh, AOAT 458 (Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 2019), 253–69.

2. Representative in Egyptology are Kurt Sethe, "*m-hnw* 'Im Innen': Eine Rebuspielerei," *ZÄS* 59 (1924): 61–63; Siegfried Schott, *Mythe und Mythenbildung im alten Ägypten* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1945); Constantin Emil Sander-Hansen, "Die phonetischen Wortspiele des ältesten Ägyptischen," *AO* 20 (1946–1947): 1–22; Fritz Hintze, *Untersuchungen zu Stil und Sprache neu-ägyptischer Erzählungen*, DAWB 6 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1952); O. Firchow, *Grundzüge der Stilistik in den Altägyptischen Pyramidentexten*, UÄS 2 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1953); Siegfried Morenz, "Wortspiele in Ägypten," in *Festschrift Johannes Jahn zum XXII. November MCMLVII* (Leipzig: Seemann, 1957), 23–32; Jan

Zandee, "Das Schöpferwort im alten Ägypten," in *Verbum: Essays on Some Aspects of the Religious Function of Words, Dedicated to Dr. H. W. Obbink*, ed. T. P. van Baaren et al., STRT 6 (Utrecht, Holland: Drukkerij en Uitgeverij, 1964): 33–66; Gerhard Fecht, *Literarische Zeugnisse zur 'persönlichen Frömmigkeit' in Ägypten: Analyse der Beispiele aus den ramessidischen Schulpapyri* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1965); Gerhard Fecht, *Stilistische Kunst*, HdO 1/2 (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 19–51; Helmut Satzinger, "A Pun in the Lansing Papyrus," *JEA* 59 (1973): 227–28; E. S. Meltzer, "A Possible Word-Play in Khamuas I?," *ZÄS* 102 (1975): 78; Ariel Shisha-Halevy, "A Shenoutean Pun and the Preservation of a Precoptic Lexemic Distinction," *JEA* 64 (1978): 141; Joris F. Bourghouts, "Magie," *LÄ* 2 (1980): cols. 1137–1151; Waltrund Guglielmi, "Eine 'Lehre' für einen reiselustigen Sohn," *WdO* 14 (1983): 147–66; Pascal Vernus, "Écriture du rêve et écriture hiéroglyphique," *Littoral* 7–8 (1983): 27–32; Jan Assmann, *Ägypten: Theologie und Frömmigkeit einer frühen Hochkultur* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Taschenbücher, 1984); Herman te Velde, "Egyptian Hieroglyphs as Signs, Symbols, and Gods," *VR* 4–5 (1985–1986): 63–72; Waltraud Guglielmi, "Zu einigen literarischen Funktionen des Wortspiels," in Junge, *Studien zu Sprache und Religion*, 491–506; Guglielmi, "Wortspiel," *LÄ* 6 (1986): cols. 1287–1291; John L. Foster, "Wordplay in *The Eloquent Peasant*: The Eighth Complaint," *BES* 10 (1989–1990): 61–76; O. Goldwasser, "The Allure of the Holy Glyphs: A Psycholinguistic Perspective on the Egyptian Script," *GM* 123 (1991): 37–50; Joachim Friedrich Quack, *Studien zur Lehre für Merikare* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1992); O. Goldwasser, *From Icon to Metaphor: Studies in the Semiotics of the Hieroglyphs*, OBO 142 (Fribourg: University Press, 1995); Waltraud Guglielmi, "Der Gebrauch rhetorischer Stilmittel in der ägyptischen Literatur," in *Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms*, ed. Antonio Loprieno, PÄ 10 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 465–97; Pascal Vernus, "Langue littéraire et diglossia," in *Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms*, ed. A. Loprieno (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 555–64; Ludwig D. Morenz, "Der Erste sei Zweiter, oder: Der Leib als Kopf- ein Wortspiel als diffamierendes und also textkonstituierendes Mittel," *GM* 156 (1997): 81–84; Antonio Loprieno, "Le sign étymologique: Le jeu de mots entre logique et esthétique," in *Le pensée et l'écriture pour une analyse sémiotique de la culture égyptienne: Quatre séminaires à l'École Pratique des Hautes Études Section des Sciences religieuses 15–27 mai 2000*, ed. Antonio Loprieno (Paris: Cybele, 2001), 129–58; Loprieno, "Egyptian Linguistics in the Year 2000," in *Egyptology at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century: Proceedings of the Eighth International Congress of Egyptologists*, ed. Z. Hawass (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2003), 73–90; F. Servajean, *Les formules des transformations* (Le Caire: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 2003); Marleen de Meyer, "Some Ptolemaic Spielerei with Scribal Palettes," *JEA* 90 (2004): 221–23; Mario H. Beatty, "Translating Wordplay in the Eighth Petition of the Eloquent Peasant: A New Interpretation," *CCdE* 9 (2006): 131–41; Emi Shirakawa, "Choice of Vocabularies: Wordplay in Ancient Egypt," in *Current Research in Egyptology 2004: Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Symposium*, ed. R. Dann (Oxford: Oxbow Press, 2006), 133–37; Verena Lepper, "New Readings of an Old Text: Papyrus Westcar," in *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Egyptologists*, ed. Jean-Claude Goyon and Christine Cardin, vol. 2, OLA 150 (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 1125–36; Joshua Roberson, "An Enigmatic Wall from the Cenotaph of Seti I at Abydos," *JARCE* 43 (2007): 93–112; Christian Leitz, *Die*

Gaumonographien in Edfu und ihre Papyrusvarianten: Ein überregionaler Kanon kultischen Wissen im spätzeitlichen Ägypten, vols. 1–2, Soubassementsstudien 3, SSR 9 (Weisbaden: Harrassowitz, 2014); Richter, *Theology of Hathor of Dendera*; D. Laboury, “Tradition and Creativity: Toward a Study of Intericonicity in Ancient Egyptian Art,” in *(Re)productive Traditions in Ancient Egypt: Proceedings of the Conference Held at the University of Liège, 6th–8th February 2013*, ed. T. Gillen, AeLeo 10 (Liège: Presses Universitaires de Liège, 2017), 229–58.

In Assyriology, see G. Böstrom, *Paronomasi iden äldre Hebreiska Maschalliteraturen med särskild hänsyn till proverbial* (Lund: Gleerup, 1928); E. A. Speiser, “Word Plays on the Creation Epic’s Version of the Founding of Babylon,” in *Oriental and Biblical Studies: Collected Works of E. A. Speiser*, ed. L. J. Finkelstein and M. Greenberg (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1967), 53–61; Anne D. Kilmer, “Les jeux de mots dans les rêves de Gilgamesh et d’Atrahasis” (Paper read at the Universitaire des Sciences Humaines, Strasbourg, 1983); Walter Farber, “Associative Magic: Some Rituals, Word Plays, and Philology,” *JAOS* 106 (1986): 447–49; Anne D. Kilmer, “The Symbolism of the Flies in the Mesopotamian Flood Myth and Some Further Implications,” in *Language, Literature, and History: Philological and Historical Studies Presented to Erica Reiner*, ed. Francesca Rochberg-Halton, AOS 67 (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1987), 175–80; Piotr Michalowski, “Presence at the Creation,” in *Lingering Over Words: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Literature in Honor of William L. Moran*, ed. Tzvi Abusch, John Huehnergard, and Piotr Steinkeller, HSS 37 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990), 381–96; Nick C. Veldhuis, *A Cow of Sin*, LOT 2 (Groningen: Styx Publications, 1991); B. L. Eichler, “*mar-URU*: Tempest in a Deluge,” in *The Tablet and the Scroll: Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William W. Hallo*, ed. M. E. Cohen et al. (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 1993), 90–94; Jack M. Sasson, “The Divine Divide: re FM 2.71.5’,” *NABU* (1994): 39–40; Scott B. Noegel, “A Flare for Style and Depth of Allusion: The Use of Fire and Water Imagery in Enuma Elish Tablet I,” *JAGNES* 5 (1995): 82–87; Victor A. Hurowitz, “Advice to a Prince: A Message from Ea,” *SAA. Bulletin* 12 (1998): 39–53; Pierre Villard, “Allusions littéraires et jeux de lettres dans les rapports des devins d’époque néo-assyrienne,” in *Intellectual Life in the Ancient Near East: Papers Presented at the 43rd Rencontre assyriologique internationale, Prague, July 1–5, 1996*, ed. Jiri Prosecky (Prague: Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Oriental Institute, 1998), 427–37; Victor A. Hurowitz, “Literary Observations on ‘In Praise of the Scribal Art,’” *JANES* 27 (2000): 49–56; Michael Roaf and Annette Zgoll, “Assyrian Hieroglyphs: Lord Aberdeen’s Black Stone and the Prisms of Esarhaddon,” *ZAW* 91 (2001): 264–95; Benjamin R. Foster, “The Sargon Parody,” *NABU* (2002): 79–80; Nathan Wasserman, *Style and Form in Old-Babylonian Literary Texts*, CM 27 (Leiden: Brill; Boston: Styx, 2003); Anne D. Kilmer, “Visualizing Text: Schematic Patterns in Akkadian Poetry,” in *If a Man Builds a Joyful House: Assyriological Studies in Honor of Erle Verdun Leichty*, ed. Ann K. Guinan et al., CM 31 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 209–19; Andrea Seri, “The Fifty Names of Marduk in *Enūma eliš*,” *JAOS* 126 (2006): 507–19; Victor A. Hurowitz, “Finding New Life in Old Words: Word Play in the Gilgamesh Epic,” in *Gilgamesh and the World of Assyria: Proceedings of the Conference Held at the Mandelbaum House, The University of Sydney, 21–23 July 2004*, ed. J. Azize and N. Weeks, ANESS 21 (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 67–78; Hurowitz,

Word play was thought to play an active role in magic by taking advantage of the linkage that was thought to exist between the word for an object and the object itself. In practical terms this means that if the magician can use a verb or an object in the incantation that puns with the object or condition he or she is trying to alter, the association creates a link to that object that will achieve the desired result.³

The difference in contextualization is due in part to the different textual corpora that have comprised the focus of “wordplay” research, but also to the fields of literary and rhetorical criticism, which have had more sustained forays into biblical studies than Assyriology and Egyptology.⁴ Moreover, even when considered literary or rhetorical in aim, there still remains a great deal of variety within biblical studies with regard to the specific functions that “wordplay” can possess and the terminology used to describe them. Given this complex state of affairs, I herewith provide a list and description of previously proposed functions. I have adopted most of the terminology from other scholars, though in some cases, I offer

“‘Shutting Up’ the Enemy—Literary Gleanings from Sargon’s Eighth Campaign,” in *Treasures on Camels’ Humps: Historical and Literary Studies from the Ancient Near East Presented to Israel Eph’al*, ed. Mordechai Cogan and Dan’el Kahn (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2008), 104–20; J. Bilbija, “Interpreting the Interpretation: Protasis-Apodosis-Strings in the Physiognomic Omen Series *Šumma Alamdimmu* 3.76–132,” in *Studies in Ancient Near Eastern World View and Society Presented to Marten Stol on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday, 10 November 2005, and His Retirement from Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam*, ed. R. J. van der Spek (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2008), 19–27; Illya Vorontsov, “Bemerkungen zu einigen in der Komposition an.gim.dím.ma zu findenden Korrespondenzen zwischen einzelnen Trophäen von Ninurta und deren Verortung,” *NABU* (2008): 31–33; Vorontsov, “Adapas Licht,” in *Organization, Representation, and Symbols of Power in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the 54th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale at Würzburg 20–25 July 2008*, ed. Gernot Wilhelm (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns 2012), 795–804; David Danzig, *Name Word Play and Marduk’s Fifty Names in Enūma Eliš* (Master’s Thesis, Yale University, 2013); Enrique Jiménez, “‘As Your Name Indicates’: Philological Arguments in Akkadian Disputations,” *JANEH* 5 (2018): 87–105. On the disciplinary disconnect between Egyptology, biblical studies, and Assyriology, see Antonio Loprieno, “Defining Egyptian Literature: Ancient Texts and Modern Theories,” in Loprieno, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 39–58.

3. Sheldon W. Greaves, “Ominous Homophony and Portentous Puns in Akkadian Omens,” in Noegel, *Puns and Pundits*, 113.

4. Michael V. Fox, “Ancient Egyptian Rhetoric,” *Rhetorica* 1 (1983): 9–22, includes wordplay in his discussion of Egyptian rhetorical features. See similarly L. Coulon, “La rhétorique et ses fictions: Pouvoirs et duplicité du discours à travers la littérature égyptienne du Moyen et du Nouvel Empire,” *BIFAO* 99 (1999): 103–32; Nadine Dokoui-Cabrera, “La rhétorique dans le conte du Paysan Eloquent ou le Maître de Parole,” *CCdE* 9 (2006): 143–53.

different labels in order to obtain greater specification or to organize the functions more efficiently. In this chapter, I resist classifying the types of “wordplay” that appear in the proof texts in order to focus on the topic of function. Thus, as in chapter 2, I simply refer to the device used with the terms *paronomasia* or *polysemy*, as I already have defined them. In general, I demonstrate each of the functions that scholars have proposed for multiple Near Eastern languages, though I have made no attempt to illustrate each function with *all* of the languages in consideration. Instead, I intend the list to be representative and to prepare the reader for the next chapter, in which I detail the many different polysemous and paronomastic devices. I have organized the entries to proceed from the aesthetic to the rhetorical to the performative, though throughout I draw attention to the nebulous nature of these distinctions. The seventeen functions, which I label wherever possible in adjectival form, include: aesthetic, onomatopoeic, emphatic, rhetorical, humorous, ironic, deceptive, referential, allusive, appellative, structural, mnemonic, hermeneutic, concealing, theological/didactic, displaying erudition, and performative. All of the previously proposed functions for various types of polysemy and paronomasia fit neatly into one (or more) of these broad headings.

3.1. AESTHETIC

Some scholars have understood certain forms of “wordplay” as purely aesthetic in purpose, sometimes referring to it as euphonous. The remark of the biblicist Pietru Saydon is illustrative. He viewed paronomasia as “an endeavor to reproduce by means of the close connexion or juxtaposition of like-sounding words that internal sensation of the Beautiful which is intended to affect the ear.”⁵ My choice of the term *aesthetic* over *euphonous* for this function recognizes that the ancients appreciated texts on a visual level as well. This is most certainly the case with monumental inscriptions, but also with texts on scrolls and tablets.

In Akkadian, scribes sometimes show a fondness for the visual effect of a text. Thus, an Akkadian hymn to Nergal spells certain keywords first logographically and then syllabically.⁶ Akkadian acrostics, discussed in the next chapter (4.1.12), also furnish a visibly structural aesthetic. The cuneiform signs themselves also had their own aesthetic—what Herman Vanstiphout has called “orthocalligraphy”—and writing them properly was held in high esteem.⁷ Moreover, the tablets on which the scribes wrote their texts also possess their own aesthetic. One also finds cuneiform texts written directly over artistic reliefs in

5. P. P. Saydon, “Assonance in Hebrew as a Means of Expressing Emphasis,” *Bib* 36 (1955): 37.

6. Noted by Foster, *Before the Muses*, 624.

7. See Vanstiphout, “*Mihiltum*, or the Image of Cuneiform Writing,” 152–70.

palaces and on statues in a way that permits a blending of textual and artistic aesthetics. As the reliefs and Akkadian texts were painted, the visual effect must have been stunning. Moreover, the placement of texts at eye level, which only a minority could have read, only reified the gap between those privy to divine secrets and those outside the inner circle.

An excellent demonstration of the Akkadian aesthetic occurs on Sennacherib’s so-called King’s Prism, in which the signs KUR.U₂ in one line (col. 1, l. 10) appear directly over U₂.KUR in the next (l. 11).⁸ In the first line, KUR.U₂ is read *šadû* “mountain,” whereas in the second, U₂.KUR is read syllabically (i.e., *ú-šat*) as part of the verb *ú-šat-(li-ma-an-ni-ma)* “granted me.” The juxtaposition of one over the other is visually striking.

Egyptian inscriptions too exhibit a highly developed sense of aesthetics, often displaying significant interconnections between images and texts.⁹ Arlette David’s characterization is particularly insightful.

Wordplays (puns, rebuses) and sound-plays based on alliteration and paronomasia are well known in ancient Egyptian literature, and this somewhat legitimizes the idea that the same devices hide in representational contexts when the name of a depicted object is associated by paronomasia with another meaningful concept in the given environment. Such visual/scriptural plays and associations would have been recognized by a member of the Egyptian elite, familiar with a language and an iconography whose transparency is lost to us.¹⁰

New Kingdom royal stelae (e.g., those of Ramesses II, Merneptah, and Ramesses IV) sometimes distribute their cartouches in well-organized zigzag patterns.¹¹ Other inscriptions are even more elaborate. Such is the case with the Shabaka Stone (BM no. 498), which contains the well-known Memphite Theology. The stela’s top horizontal register simultaneously provides the titulary from the middle outwards in both directions. The one running right to left reads: *‘nh sb[?]q t3.wj*

8. Observed by Vanstiphout, “*Mihiltum*, or the Image of Cuneiform Writing,” 158. For the inscription, see A. Kirk Grayson and Jamie Novotny, *The Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib, King of Assyria (704–681 BC)*, part 1, RINP 3 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 128.

9. See Herman te Velde, “Egyptian Hieroglyphs as Linguistic Signs and Metalinguistic Informants,” in Kippenberg et al., *The Image in Writing*, 169–79; John Baines, *Visual and Written Culture in Ancient Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

10. Arlette David, “Hoopoes and Acacias: Decoding an Ancient Egyptian Funerary Scene,” *JNES* 73 (2014): 236.

11. See the excellent discussion in Kenneth A. Kitchen, *Poetry of Ancient Egypt*, DMA 1 (Jonsered: Paul Åströms Förlag, 1999), 476–77.

*nb.ti sb[š]q t3.wj hr.w-nb.w sb[š]q t3.wj nsw.t-bt nfr-k3 -r' s3 r' [š3-b3-k3] mr.j pth
rsi inb.w=fmrr nḥ.(w) mī r' d.t (l. 1a).¹²*

The living Horus, who illuminates the Two Lands, who belongs to the Two Ladies, who illuminates the Two Lands, the Golden Horus, who illuminates the Two Lands, King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Neferkare, the son of Re, [Shabaka], beloved of Ptah-South-of-his-Wall, who lives like Re forever.

Note here the three-fold use of *sb[š]q* “splendid,” which paronomastically anticipates the name *š3b3k3* “Shabaka” and recalls his Horus and Nebty name: *sb[š]q-t3.wj* “Illuminator of the Two Lands.” Enhancing the symmetrical composition, common in Egyptian inscriptions, is the rest of the text, which contains a number of less common features, such as a reversal of the normal order of reading. One reads the majority of the inscription left to right in vertical columns, even though the individual signs face to the right. The elaborate visual register permits a six-fold representation of Horus to appear side by side in different lines on the left side of the stone. A similar composition appears near the center of the stela. Elsewhere horizontal registers cut into the vertical readings. So, for example, one reads *ntr.w hpr.w m pth* “the gods who came into being in Ptah” (l. 48), horizontally above four different vertically-oriented columns, each of which begins with the name Ptah and contains an image of him. These lines visually underscore the central message of the inscription—that Ptah is the creator of all other gods.

Concerns with sonic aesthetics appear to govern the creation of a Ramesside period love poem, whose opening line classifies the work as: *h3.t- m r3.w n.w t3 šhmḥ.t-ib 3.t* “the beginning of the words of the great entertainer (lit ‘heart pleaser’),” perhaps a songstress for the goddess Hathor (P.Chester Beatty I 1.1).¹³ Such texts were performed on special occasions like a *hrw nfr* “party” (lit. “good day”). Since the love poem is filled with polysemy and paronomasia, it is likely that it was meant to be appreciated for its sonic aesthetics. Indeed, as Christopher Eyre reminds us:

The oft repeated modern myth that “the Egyptians” never created art for art’s sake derives from inappropriate cultural assumptions, and essentially trivial comparisons. It is not based on any coherent argument from data, and should be dismissed, to be replaced by a proper analysis of the integration of aesthetic

12. The right side has *skr* “Sokar” instead of “Ptah.” On the text, see A. El Hawary, *Wortschöpfung: Die Memphitische Theologie und die Siegesstele des Pije—Zwei Zeugen kultureller Repräsentation in der 25. Dynastie*, OBO 243 (Fribourg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 115.

13. See Michael V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 51–77, 393–99.

motivation and reception with the context of patronage in which individual works were produced.¹⁴

We also should recall that the poem was sung and accompanied by instruments, so some of the sonic pleasure might have derived from its musical performance or the interaction of words and music. Eyre’s comment with regard to the use of paronomasia in the Eloquent Peasant is *ad rem*.

The art lies in a technique that bears some comparison to a variation on a musical theme—a theme of sounds—but little to that of a development of a philosophical or narrative thesis. The limited number of sounds is central to the sophistication of the thematic performance.¹⁵

At the same time, we do well to recognize that a dichotomy between “entertainment texts” and “cultural texts” (e.g., rituals and myths), categories coined by Assmann,¹⁶ may be more apparent than real. In particular, Eyre and Richard Parkinson have drawn attention to the problematic nature of the dichotomy, the former calling for “a more inclusive definition of literature, where liturgy and ritual overlap in performance categories with more autonomous literary genres.”¹⁷ Therefore, while we still can distinguish between “performed texts” and “performative texts” (see 3.17), the same types of devices can operate in both for aesthetic and nonaesthetic purposes.

Northwest Semitic inscriptions also exhibit a strong visual aesthetic. For example, some Ugaritic texts employ anaphora, the repetition of words at the start of successive lines, in a way that forms an extended vertical pattern of cuneiform that is as evident visually as it is aurally.¹⁸ In many ways, such arrangements anticipate the later Masoretic stichometry of Biblical Hebrew texts.¹⁹ Sometimes texts are arranged in order to exploit polysemy and paronomasia, as in the Ugaritic Tale of Kirtu (*CAT* 1.16.vi.22–23), in which the verb *yṯb* “he returns” (from the

14. Christopher J. Eyre, “The Performance of the Peasant,” *LingAeg* 8 (2000): 11.

15. Eyre, “Performance of the Peasant,” 23.

16. Jan Assmann, “Kulturelle und Literarische Texte,” in Loprieno, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 59–82.

17. Eyre, “Performance of the Peasant,” 12; Richard B. Parkinson, “Imposing Words: The Entrapment of Language in The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant,” *LingAeg* 8 (2000): 27–51.

18. Jonathan Yegorov and Shamir Yona, “Visual Poetry in the Ugaritic Tablet KTU 1.4,” *JANES* 33 (2018): 203–10. I thank the authors for sharing their work with me.

19. On this, see Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 2nd ed. (Assen: Royal Van Gorcum; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2001), 212–13, pls. 10–12.

root *t-w-b*) appears just over *yṭb* “he sits” (from *y-t-b*). Though the former is not precisely atop the latter, the proximity brings the two into contrast.²⁰

An even more obvious example was engraved into the famous Mesha stela (*KAI* 181.12–13), where the verb *וַאֲשַׁב* *w-’šb* (l. 12) appears directly above the verb *וַאֲשַׁב* *w-’šb* (l. 13) in the very center of the stela. Their visual juxtaposition draws attention to the fact that the two visually identical forms are unrelated. The first means “and I captured,” whereas the second is read “and I caused to settle.”²¹ In addition, two uses of *אֲנִי* *’nk* “I” are similarly juxtaposed in lines 28–29.²² The combined visual imprint of the inscription reinforces the king’s actions: “I captured and I settled.”

Even aside from the physical arrangement of a particular text, some cases of polysemy and paronomasia appear to have little function other than enhancing the aesthetic of the text. For instance, the Egyptian Harper Song on the north wall of the passage in the tomb of Neferhotep (TT 50) describes the arrival of funeral processions to tombs by noting: *s ‘ḥ ‘t s ‘ḥ.w=sn* “their mummies are erected” (l. 15). Here the scribe has employed the causative conjugation of the verb *‘ḥ* “stand” in order to anticipate the same consonants found in *s ‘ḥ.w* “mummies.”²³ Though used to describe a funerary ritual, the paronomasia occurs in the literary context of a song, and thus, it likely enhanced the music that accompanied it.

Similarly, in the poetic narrative of the Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor, the sailor recounts his sea voyage in perfect paronomastic parallelism: *ph.n=n ph.wj w3w3.t snl.n=n snmw.t* “we ended at the end of Wawat, we sailed alongside Senmut” (ll. 9–10).²⁴ Here the *ph.wj* “end” of Wawat, echoes the verb *ph* “reach an end” in the first stich, and the name *snmw.t* “Senmut” resounds the verb *snl* “pass” in the second. Note also that the verb *ph* “reach an end” occurs at the start of the line, which adds an aesthetic dimension to the stich.²⁵ Even if we assume the sailor is trying to impress his superior with his linguistic skills, the devices appear to be primarily aesthetic in function.

20. Frank H. Polak, “The Discourse Structure of the Mesha Inscription: ‘I-Style,’ Intonation Units, and Oral Performance,” in *Marbeh Hokmah: Studies in the Bible and the Ancient Near East in Loving Memory of Victor Avigdor Hurowitz*, ed. Shamir Yona et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 422, observes the “wordplay” here but not the placement of the verbs in the inscription.

21. On the rendering of the first verb, see Gary A. Rendsburg, “וַאֲשַׁב in Mesha Stela, Line 12,” *Maarav* 14 (2007): 9–25. Paronomasia between the two Semitic roots also obtains in the biblical book of Ruth. See Jonathan Grossman, *Ruth: Bridges and Boundaries*, ATD 9 (Bern: Lang, 2015), 186–89.

22. I thank my former student Clinton Moyer for the latter observation.

23. See Miriam Lichtheim, “The Songs of the Harpers,” *JNES* 4 (1945): pl. VI.

24. G. A. Rendsburg, “Literary Devices in the Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor,” *JAOS* 120 (2000): 20.

25. I thank one of the publisher’s anonymous reviewers for this catch.

In the Egyptian Admonitions of Ipuwer (P.Leiden 1.344.r), some of the eloquent remarks of the prophet also look to be aesthetic in purpose. One such statement occurs when the prophet describes the future by predicting: *wnm=tw m smw s'm=tw m mw* “one eats plant-fodder and one swallows water” (6.1). The repetition of the sounds /m/ and /w/, as well as the two-fold use of /s/, lend the line an impressive, yet softened, sing-song effect.

Greenstein categorizes the function of some biblical Hebrew “rhyming word-plays” as having a euphonic function.²⁶ Among the expressions he cites are the description of the Israelite tabernacle as having *לְבָתִּים לֶבְבָתִּים* *lā-bāttīm lā-baddīm* “holders for the poles” (Exod 25:27) and the mention of *אֵת קַרְקָרָיו וְאֵת קַרְשָׁיו* *’ēṭ qārāsāw wə-’ēṭ qārāsāw* “its hooks and its frames” (Exod 35:11). Indeed, it is difficult to ascribe to such cases a nonaesthetic purpose. However, we also must remember that it is difficult to know what sounds pleased or displeased, and so assessing a passage’s euphony or cacophony/dissonance remains a value judgment. As for the kinds of device that the two examples represent, see hendiadic paronomasia (4.2.10).

3.2. ONOMATOPOEIC

When paronomasia invokes the sound of something to which a text refers, it constitutes onomatopoeia.²⁷ A fine Akkadian example noted by Watson occurs in the Song of Erra, in which the line *šikar našpi duššupi* “sweet light ale” evokes the foaminess and drinking of beer (1.58).²⁸ Andrew George has observed that one hears the sounds of kisses when the officers bid Gilgamesh and Enkidu farewell to the Cedar Forest in the Epic of Gilgamesh: *šakkanakkūššu unaššaqu šēpīšu* “the officers were kissing his feet” (3.211).²⁹ Onomatopoeia occurs elsewhere in the epic, when Ishtar proposes marriage to Gilgamesh, who resists her advances by listing the fates of her former lovers. His reference to Dumuzi is of special relevance:

26. Greenstein, “Wordplay, Hebrew,” 970.

27. See Leo I. Weinstock, *Onomatopoeia and Related Phenomena in Biblical Hebrew: A Survey of Certain Correlations between Sound and Meaning in the Lexical and Phonological Levels of a Semitic Language* (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1979); Weinstock, “Sound and Meaning in Biblical Hebrew,” *JSS* 28 (1983): 49–62; Anne-Caroline Rendu Loisel, *Les Chants du monde: Le paysage sonore de l’ancienne Mésopotamie* (Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Midi, 2016), 68–74.

28. Noted by Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 235. On other devices in this text, see Scott B. Noegel, “‘Word Play’ in the Song of Erra,” in Heimpel and Frantz-Szabó, *Strings and Threads*, 162–93.

29. Noted as alliteration by Andrew R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, vols. 1–2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 817.

46. *a-na* ^dDUMU-*zi* *ḥa-mi-ri* *šu-uḥ-re-ti-ki*
To Dumuzi, the husband of your youth,
47. *šat-ta a-na šat-ti bi-tak-ka-a tal-ti-meš-šú*
to him you have allotted perpetual weeping, year on year.
48. *al-la-lá bit-ru-ma ta-ra-me-ma*
You loved the speckled *allallû*-bird,
49. *tam-ḥa-ši-šu-ma kap-pa-šu tal-te-eb-ri*
You struck him and broke his wing,
50. *iz-za-az ina qí-šá-tim i-šas-si kap-pi*
(Now) he stands in the woods crying “my wing”!
(SB 6.46–50)

Here the bird’s cry *kappî* “my wing” is onomatopoeic.³⁰ Moreover, informing Gilgamesh’s remark is a lexical tradition that first equates the Akkadian *allallû*-bird with the Sumerian bird known as SIPAD.TUR^{mušen}, that is, “little shepherd-bird,” hence its connection to the shepherd Dumuzi.³¹ In addition, as George informs us, another lexical tradition reveals that the *allallû* is a homonym of *allallû* “warrior.”³² In fact, we learned this a bit earlier in the epic when Gilgamesh asked Ishtar:

42. *a-a-ú ḥa-me-ra-ki i-b[u]r ana da-ris*
“What bridegroom of yours endured forever?”
43. *a-a-ú al-lal-ki [šá ana šamē] i-lu-ú*
“What brave warrior [*allalki*] of yours is there [who] went up
[to heaven]?”
(6.42–43)³³

Carleton Hodge has pointed out a fine Egyptian example that appears on the gable in the west antechamber of the tomb of King Unas, where the Pyramid Texts call for the cleansing of the deceased king in the field of rushes. The text invokes

30. See the commentary ḤAR-gud (recension C) to ḤAR-ra = *ḥubullu* (MSL 8:2, p. 172, 18): *al-lal-lum kap-pa ip-pu-uš* “the *allallû*-bird makes a *kappa*-noise.” Noted by George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, 834.

31. See *Hh* 18; CAD A1, s.v. “*allallû*.” Also noted by George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, 834.

32. Malku 1.27: *al-lal-lu = qar-ra-du*. On the interpretation of animal sounds as demonstrations of mantic ability, see Scott B. Noegel, “When Animals Speak,” *JANES* 34 (2020): 107–35. Our understanding of Mesopotamian divinatory practices also has been applied fruitfully to the famous serpent in Genesis. See Duane E. Smith, “The Divining Snake: Reading Genesis in the Context of Mesopotamian Ophiomancy,” *JBL* 134 (2015): 31–49.

33. George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, 833, states that this passage “involves an untranslatable word play.” “The former meaning anticipates the story of the bird maimed by Ishtar and the latter provides a human parallel with *ḥāmeru* in the first line of the couplet, and so introduces an implicit contrast between the capabilities of the bird and the man.”

the wind god Shu by uttering: *šw sšwī sw šw sšwī sw* "O Shu, lift him up! O Shu, lift him up!" (Spell 253, §275f).³⁴ One can hear the sound of the wind in the divine name *šw* "Shu," the verb *sšwī* "lift," and the pronoun *sw* "him." Since the text is an incantation, we may regard this case of onomatopoeia as also having a performative function (see 3.17).

The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor illustrates onomatopoeia when the giant serpent threatens the sailor by saying: "I will turn you into ash" (l. 72). Here the noun "ash" *ss*, imitates the hissing of a snake. Jacqueline Jay points to another example in the same text in the narrator's description of the snake's approach: *ḥt.w ḥr gmgm t3 ḥr mnmn* "the trees were shaking, the ground was quaking" (ll. 59–60). Here the forms *gmgm* and *mnmn*, as well as the repeated sound /ḥ/ mimic the creaking of trees and grinding of the earth. This line also constitutes geminate parallelism (see 4.2.12).³⁵

Eyre also draws our attention to the following example of onomatopoeia in the poetical stela of Thutmose III, in which Amun-Ra inspires pharaoh by saying: *ḥt.t=ī ḥm.jt tp=k sswn=s st ḥr=s ḥs ḥ3q m nbd.w-qd* "my uraeus at your brow, she burns them up and she makes easy prey of those of warped character" (l. 9). The line brilliantly repeats the sibilant /s/ to reproduce the snake's hissing sound.³⁶

In Ugaritic, paronomasia has an onomatopoeic function in the Tale of Aqhat, in a passage that announces the coming of a drought: *bl ṯl bl rbb bl šr' thmtm bl ṯbn ql b' l* "no dew, no shower, no roiling of the great deeps, no goodly voice of Baal" (CAT 1.19.i.44–46). Though the text proclaims the lack of Baal's voice, that is, thunder, it evokes it in the rumbling of the repeated sounds /b/, /' /, /l/, /m/, and /r/, all of which resound the word "thunder" (cf. רָעַם *ra'am*) and the very name of the stormgod *b' l* "Baal."

A similar case appears in the Hebrew Bible. The repetition of the sounds /b/ and /' /, the sibilants /s/ and /š/, and the consonants in the words "mighty sound" (גָּדוֹל קוֹל *qōl gādōl*) permit one to hear a peal of thunder and howling wind in Isaiah's prophecy: וְרָעַם וְקוֹל גָּדוֹל סוּפָה וְסַעֲרָה *bə-ra'am ū-b-ra'aš wə-qōl gādōl sūpāh ū-sə'ārāh* "with thunder and quake and mighty sound, storm and tempest" (Isa 29:6).³⁷ In another of Isaiah's well-known pronouncements we hear: וְהִנָּתְּנוּ חֶרְבֵּיהֶם לְמִזְמָרוֹת וְהִנָּתְנוּ חֶרְבֵּיהֶם לְמִזְמָרוֹת *wə-kittəṯū ḥarḥōṯām lə-'ittīm wə-ḥānītōlēhem lə-mazmērōl* "they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks" (Isa 2:4). As Watson cleverly espied, the seven-fold

34. Carleton T. Hodge, "Ritual and Writing: An Inquiry into the Origin of Egyptian Script," in *Linguistics and Anthropology: In Honor of C. F. Voegelin*, ed. M. Dale Kinkade et al. (Lisse, The Netherlands: Peter de Ridder Press, 1975), 343.

35. Jay, *Orality and Literacy in the Demotic Tales*, 103.

36. Eyre, "Is Egyptian Historical Literature 'Historical' or 'Literary'?", 420.

37. One similarly hears the wind whistling when Eliphaz says that, because of the wind, תְּסַמֵּר שְׁעַר בָּשָׂר *təsamēr ša'arəṯ bəšārī* "the hair of my flesh bristled" (Job 4:15).

rhythmic appearance of the consonant ט (i.e., /t/ and /t̥/) along with the repeated consonants *h* and *k* reproduce the sounds of pounding metal.³⁸

Isaiah uses the sibilants /š/ and /s/, and the bilabials /m/, /b/, and /p/ (the latter two mostly aspirated as /b̥/ and /p̥/), to capture the sound of beating wings in his description of the seraphim: שש כנפים לש כנפים לאחד בשמים יכסה פניו ובשמים יכסה רגליו ובשמים יעופף *šēš kənāpāyīm šēš kənāpāyīm lə-’eḥād bi-štayīm yaḵasseh pānāw ū-bi-štayīm yaḵasseh raḡlāw ū-bi-štayīm ya’ōpēp* “six wings, six wings to each, with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his legs, and with two he flew” (Isa 6:2).³⁹

As Victor Hurowitz observed, Num 21:9 is equally onomatopoeic: ויעש משה נחש נחשת וישמהו על הנס והיה אם נשך הנחש את איש והביט אל נחש הנחשת וחי *way-ya’as mōšeh nahaš nəḥōšēl wa-yəšīmēhū ‘al han-nēs wə-hāyāh ‘im nāšaḵ han-nāhāš ‘ēl ‘iṣ wə-hibbīl ‘el nahaš han-nəḥōšēl wā-hāy* “and Moses made a bronze serpent, and placed it on a pole, and it was that if the snake bit a person he would look at the bronze serpent and survive.” In this short passage, we hear the sound of the pharyngeal fricative /ħ/ six times and the sibilants /s/, /š/, and /š/ eleven times. The paronomasia reproduces the sound of serpent’s hiss.⁴⁰ A similar case appears in Jer 8:17 (see 4.2.5). Richard Freund similarly has heard a snake’s hissing in the explanation of the first woman: הנחש השיאני *han-nāhāš hiššī’anī* “the serpent deceived me” (Gen 3:13).⁴¹

The narrative depicting the plague of frogs offers an extraordinary display of onomatopoeia. Not only do we hear croaking in the very word צפרדעים *šəpārda’īm* “frogs,” itself an onomatopoeia, we hear it eleven times in only sixteen verses, far more often than the story demands.⁴² Three of the consonants in the noun “frog” (*p*, *r*, ‘) repeat eight times in the title פרעה *par’ōh* “pharaoh.”⁴³ Four times we also hear the sounds /r/ and /š/ repeated in מצרים *miṣrāyīm* “Egypt” (Exod 8:2) and ארץ מצרים *ereṣ miṣrāyīm* “the land of Egypt” (Exod 8:1, 2, 3). In Exod 8:5, Moses asks pharaoh, “do you glorify yourself (התפאר *hiṭpā’ēr*)?,” using a verb that reverberates the consonants *p* and *r*. The /š/ sound then echoes again,

38. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 236.

39. Luis A. Schökel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics*, SB 11 (Roma: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1988), 31, viewed the reduplication of consonants in Isa 6:4 as evoking the trembling of the temple: וַיִּמָּלֵא עָשָׁן *way-yānu ū’ ammōt has-sipim miq-qōl haq-qōrē’ wə-hab-bayīt yimmālē’ āšān* “and the doorposts and thresholds trembled at the voice of the one who called and the house was filled with smoke.”

40. See Victor A. Hurowitz, “Healing and Hissing Snakes: Listening to Numbers 24:4–9,” *Scriptura* 87 (2004): 278–87.

41. Richard A. Freund, “Lying and Deception in the Biblical and Post-biblical Tradition,” *SJOT* 5 (1991): 46.

42. Exod 7:27, 7:28, 7:29, 8:1, 8:2, 8:3, 8:4, 8:5, 8:7, 8:8, 8:9.

43. Exod 7:26, 8:4, 8:5, 8:8 (2x), 8:11, 8:15 (2x).

when the narrator states that “Moses and Aaron went out (וַיֵּצְאוּ *way-yēšē*) and cried (וַיַּעֲקֹק *way-yiś* ‘aq) to Yahweh” (Exod 8:8). We next hear that the dead frogs began to pile up in the הַצִּרְתִּי *ḥāšērōl* “courtyards” (Exod 8:9), again repeating the sounds /š/ and /r/. The story reaches a fever-pitch of croaking in Exod 8:10, when we learn that “they gathered (וַיַּצְבְּרוּ *way-yiṣbārū*) them together in heaps (הַמְרִים *ḥōmārīm* *ḥōmārīm*) and the land (הָאָרֶץ *hā-’āreṣ*) stank.”⁴⁴ Not only does the rare verb for “gather” and the noun “land” again employ the sounds /š/ and /r/, but the repeated plural for the heaps (lit. “heaps, heaps”) imitates the rhythmic feel of croaking.

3.3. EMPHATIC

Polysemy and paronomasia can serve an emphatic function in several ways. They can underscore a keyword (*Leitwort*) or theme (*Leitmotiv*) of a text, or, as Greenstein observes, they can draw attention to an idea or association.⁴⁵

An example from Akkadian that serves to emphasize and connect ideas appears in the Legend of Sargon, King of Battle, where we read: *šarru-gi-en šar kiššati šum ni-iz-kur ur-ri-da-nu ni-ma-aḥ-ḥa-ra ki-iš-šú-ti ú-ul qar-ra-da-nu* “we have invoked [Sargo]n, king of the universe. ‘Come down to us, that we may receive strength for we are no warriors’” (verso 18). Connected here are the nouns *kiššatu* “universe” and *kiššūtu* “strength,” both of which emphasize the king’s absolute rule.⁴⁶ The paronomasia must have been appreciated since Sennacherib uses it again later.⁴⁷

Another example that emphasizes an idea or association occurs in the Song of Erra (4.123–125), where the god threatens:

44. Rendsburg, “Alliteration in the Exodus Narrative,” 89, examines Exod 8:15 as a case of alliteration, but he does not treat the larger function of onomatopoeia operative here. More accurately speaking, the paronomasia between the noun “frog” and the verb “gather” in this verse demonstrates parasonance.

45. This category includes two separate functions proposed by Greenstein, “Wordplay, Hebrew,” 970, i.e., “To Highlight an Idea or Association” and “The Leading Word,” since both of them share emphasis as a motive.

46. In the previous verse (l. 17), in a fragmentary portion of the text, we also find *kiššu* “strength”: *ina qereb akkadi kišši lilqut* “may he plunder in the midst of strong Akkad.” However, according to Ernest F. Weidner, “Der Zug Sargons von Akkad nach Kleinasien: Die ältesten geschichtlichen Beziehungen zwischen Babylonien und Ḫatti,” *BS* 6 (1922): 71, *ki-iš-ši* might also be read as *ki-mil-lim* “revenge” or possibly *kī millim* “like a flood,” even though the latter is “Sehr unwahrscheinlich.” Foster, *Before the Muses*, 252, sees l. 18 as an example of “wordplay.”

47. See Sennacherib’s Annals 2.1–2, discussed below.

123. *ir-kal-la lu-un-niš-ma li-is-bu-’u-ú šá-ma-mi*
 “I want to make Irkalla quake. May the heavens roll too!
124. *šá šul-pa-è-a šá-ru-ru-šu lu-šam-qit-ma kakkabāni* (MUL.MEŠ) *šá-ma-m[i] lu-šam-sik*
 As for Shulpea, I want to annihilate its brilliance. I want to do away with the stars in the heavens.
125. *šá iṣ-ši šu-ru-us-su lip-pa-ri-ma la i-šam-mu-ḥa pi-i-ri-šú*
 As for the tree, I want to cut its roots so that it sprouts cannot shoot.”

Each of the highlighted words repeats the sounds /š/ and /m/, while the terms *šamāmū* “heavens” (2x), *lušamqitma* “I want to annihilate,” *lušamsik* “I want to do away with,” and *išammuḥa* “shoot,” each contains the sound /šam/. The verb *lunnišma* “quake” comes close with the sound /šma/. The repetition of these consonants plus the relative pronoun *ša* (2x) reinforce the noun *šamāmū* “heavens,” which is the focus of the passage. Observe too how paronomasia emphasizes Erra’s intention to cut *šurussu* “(its) roots” off the cosmic tree and destroy the *šarūrušu* “(its) brilliance” of the heavens.⁴⁸

An example of paronomasia emphasizing a keyword in Egyptian comes from the Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor, where the verb *dp* “taste” reminds us of the *dp.t* “ship” that is central to the entire narrative (ll. 124, 181).⁴⁹ Line 124 is particularly pertinent: *rš.wj sḏd dp.t.n=f sni ḥ.t mr* “how happy is the man who relates what he has tasted after a bitter thing passes.” Another case of polysemy in the same text serves to emphasize the serpent’s wisdom. In particular, Parkinson has drawn our attention to the sailor’s description of the serpent as *’rq sw r ḥnt* “bent forward” (l. 66), which suggests by homonymy *’rq ḥnt* “wise beforehand.”⁵⁰ Such polysemy foreshadows the serpent’s foreknowledge that unfolds later in the story.

Elsewhere, paronomasia can emphasize a contrast. In the Tale of Sinuhe (P.Berlin 3022, l. 252), Sinuhe contrasts his fear of pharaoh with the pharaoh’s stately presence by recalling: “I found his majesty (*ḥm=f*) on a great throne, on a dais of electrum. I stretched out on my belly. I did not know (*ḥm.n=i*) myself in his presence.” Here the near homonyms *ḥm* “majesty” and *ḥm* “be ignorant” are brought into sharp relief. Emphatic paronomasia also emphasizes a *Leitwort* when Sinuhe describes the pharaoh to the king of Byblos:

He is the one who strides ahead to shoot those falling back,
 giving no end [*ph.wj*] to the one who turns his back [*sš*].
 He is the one who is stout-of-heart in the moment of the attack [*sšsš*].
 He is the turner who never gives his back [*sš*].

48. Discussed in Noegel, “‘Word Play’ in the Song of Erra,” 170.

49. Rendsburg, “Literary Devices in the Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor,” 21.

50. Richard B. Parkinson, *The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems, 1940–1640 BCE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 99 n. 10.

He is the broad-of-heart when he sees the soldiering-pack [ʕ3.t].

(ll. 56–59)

Note that the end of each stich is related paronomastically. The second and fourth lines end with *s3* “back,” but the former is the back of the enemy, while the latter is the back of pharaoh. The third line concludes with *s3s3* “battle charge,” which echoes the two-fold use of *s3* “back.” The fourth line’s ʕ3.t “soldiering-pack” reinforces the paronomasia by employing the sibilant /ʕ/ with /3/. In the second of these lines, the scribe utilized the noun *ph.wj* “end,” written with the hind-quarter sign 𓂏, thus visually providing a “backside.”

An emphatic use of paronomasia appears in the autobiography of Ahmose from his tomb at El Kab (ll. 1–11).⁵¹ In his account of how Thutmose I ran an arrow through a Nubian rebel, Ahmose relates how the pharaoh returned to Karnak *n ʕ.t m ʕd* “sailing downstream” with the corpse *m shd m ʕ3.t bʕk n ʕm=f* “hung upside-down on the prow of his boat, ‘Falcon’” (l. 35). Here *ʕd* “downstream” reverberates in *shd* “upside down,” even though the former takes the boat determinative 𓂏, while the latter illustrates the act with the upside down man sign 𓂏.

In the Dispute between a Man and His Ba, the crocodile serves as a visual *Leitmotiv*, sometimes featuring in the text and other times possessing solely a visual function. During the dispute, the *ba*-spirit offers an anecdote about a man who *rs m dp.t r ʕ hr ʕ pr.(t) ʕn ʕm.t=f ms.w=f 3q tp ʕ sn m grh ʕr mr.jt msh.w* “gazing from his boat, as the sun was setting, (he) disembarked with his wife and children and got lost by a lake at night surrounded (by a) bank of crocodiles” (ll. 72–75).⁵² Here the verb *sn* “surrounded” atypically carries the crocodile determinative 𓂏. The reader (but not the listener), thus sees a crocodile before hearing the noun *msh.w* “crocodiles” (which is written with the pluralized logogram 𓂏). A few lines later, the man in the *ba*’s story laments: *mʕj=i ʕr ms.w=s sd.w m swʕ.t m3.w ʕr n ʕnti ni ʕh.t=sn* “I will grieve for her (the mother’s) children, who were crushed in the egg, who saw the face of Khenti before they had lived” (ll. 78–80). Here the determinatives 𓂏 and 𓂏 follow the name of the crocodile god Khenti. Soon afterwards the man complains to his *ba*-spirit: *b ʕ rn=i mk r st(i) msh.w r ʕmsj.t ʕr ʕ.w ʕr mr.jt msh.w* “my name reeks, behold, more than the smell of crocodiles, more than a slaughter site with sandbanks of crocodiles” (ll. 96–97). In the first stich, *msh.w* “crocodiles” is spelled phonetically and takes the determinative 𓂏. In the second, it is simply spelled logographically as 𓂏. The *ba*-spirit then continues: *b ʕ rn=i m-ʕk dmi n ʕtj snn bšt.w m33 s3=f* “my name reeks through you, (more than) the city of a ruler that conspires against him when he turns his back”

51. Kurt Sethe, *Urkunden der 18. Dynastie*, vol. 1.4 (Leipzig: Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1905), 9.

52. The word here rendered “crocodiles” might also be understood as a determinative for *mr.jt* “bank,” and thus as a visual depiction of a riverbank filled with crocodiles.

(ll. 102–103). Here *itj* “ruler” is written logographically as 𒌷. Aurally and visually the text teems with crocodiles.

Polysemy and paronomasia on keywords or themes can occur over an extended distance in Near Eastern texts.⁵³ In the biblical narratives concerning Noah, one frequently hears the flood survivor’s name echoed paronomastically.⁵⁴ In the previous chapter, I discussed the naming of 𐤏𐤍 *nōah* (meaning “rest”) based on his father’s prediction that 𐤏𐤍𐤁𐤏𐤍 *yānahāmēnū* “he will comfort us” (Gen 5:29). Yet paronomasia also obtains in the explanation for why Yahweh decided to save Noah: “Noah found grace (𐤏𐤍 *hēn*) in Yahweh’s eyes” (Gen 6:8). When the flooding stops, the narrator recalls the name by recording that the ark 𐤏𐤍𐤁𐤏𐤍 *wa-tānah* “rested” on a mountain (Gen 8:4). When Noah sends out a dove to look for dry land, we learn that it could find no 𐤏𐤍𐤁𐤏𐤍 *mānōah* “resting place” (Gen 8:9). As Herbert Marks observes, the narrator references his name again when Noah offers a sacrifice to God: “Yahweh smelled the smell of the soothing-odor (𐤏𐤍𐤁𐤏𐤍 *han-nīhoah*)” (Gen 8:21).⁵⁵

3.4. RHETORICAL

Scholars ascribe a rhetorical function to polysemy and paronomasia particularly when they perceive it as serving to impress or persuade. Usually, this occurs in direct discourse, whether the recorded speech of individuals or prophecies.

In Akkadian, we find a particularly clever use of rhetorical polysemy in a letter from Mari.⁵⁶ The missive seeks to impress the recipient with the scribe’s verbal prowess in a way that bespeaks his adroitness with managing large military projects.⁵⁷ The relevant portion of the letter reads:

53. See similarly, Karolien Vermeulen, “To See or Not to See: The Polysemy of the Word 𐤏 in the Isaac Narratives (Gen 17–35),” *JHS* 9 (2009): 2–11.

54. Sasson, “Word Play in the O.T.,” 970.

55. Herbert Marks, “Biblical Naming and Poetic Etymology,” *JBL* 114 (1995): 21–42, argues for an even more extended use of the appellative paronomasia here.

56. Such devices occur with some frequency in Akkadian and Sumerian letters. In addition to those discussed herein, see, e.g., Hayim Tadmor, “The Aramaization of Assyria: Aspects of Western Impact,” in *Mesopotamien und seine Nachbarn: Politische und kulturelle Wechselbeziehungen im Alten Vorderasien vom 4. bis 1. 595 Jahrtausend v. Chr.*, ed. Hans-Jörg Nissen and Johannes Renger, BBVO 1 (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1982), 451; Jack M. Sasson, “Water Beneath Straw: Adventures of a Prophetic Phrase in the Mari Archives,” in *Solving Riddles and Untying Knots: Biblical, Epigraphic, and Semitic Studies in Honor of Jonas C. Greenfield*, ed. Ziony Zevit, Seymour Gitin, and Michael Sokoloff (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 599–608; Michalowski, “Ancient Poetics,” 148–49.

57. *ARMT* 26/2, ll. 9’21’.

- 9'. *l₁a-tam-ri-im u ir-meš-šu al-li-ik-ma*
 “I went (without taking the time to inform) Atamrum and his servants
- 10'. *i-na ša-bi-im ša be-lī-ia šī-ri-im-tam*
 into the army of my lord; I introduced the *širimtam* and
- 11'. *aš-ku-un-ma 8 gi-ḥá bu-ur-t[a]-am ep-[t]e[-e-ma]*
 I opened a well eight measures deep.
- 12'. *me-e ú-še-li-ma a-na a-tam-ri-im me-e*
 I made the water rise, and Atamrum
- 13'. *ú-ṭe₄-ḫi-ma a-tam-rum ma-di-iš iḫ-du*
 I supplied with water, so that Atamrum is rejoicing greatly.
- 14'. *ù ki-a-am iq-bé-em um-ma-a-mi i-na qa-li-ka-m[a]*
 At that time, he said to me: ‘Certainly, by your care (alone)
- 15'. *i-na É DIĜIR še-tu na-ra-am ša [be-l]í-ka*
 in this temple, there is a *nārum/narūm* of your lord.
- 16'. *a-na wa-ar-ki-it u₄-mi tu-[uš]-zi-iz*
 For all the days to come you have erected (it)!’
- 17'. *i-na-an-na mu-ú ša iš-tu ši-it ni-ši*
 Since the departure of the people, there is no water
- 18'. *i-na bīt (É) ilu (DIĜIR) še-tu ú-ul i-ba-aš-šu-ú*
 in that temple.
- 19'. *a-[n]a-[k]u [ú-š]a-ab-ši ša-al-ma-am*
 I have created a statue
- 20'. *[ša be-lī-i]a a-na wa-ar-ki-it u₄-mi*
 of my lord. For all the days to come,
- 21'. *[i-na É ^dnè-iri₁₁-gal ša ḫu-ub-ša-lim^{ki} uš]-zi-iz*
 I have erected (it) in the temple of Nergal of Hubšalum.”

Jean-Georges Heintz has pointed out that *na-ra-am* (l. 15') can mean both “water course” (*nārum*) and “stela” (*narūm*). As the former, it recalls the mention of water and the clearing of a well (ll. 11'–12'), and as the latter, it looks ahead to the erection of a commemorative stela in line 19'.⁵⁸ In addition, *šābim*, certainly means “army” here, but its appearance with *šakānu* suggests a “waterwork, irrigation.”⁵⁹ The author’s rhetorical use of polysemy allows him to dazzle the ruler

58. See J. G. Heintz, “Myth(olog)èmes d’époque amorrite et amphibologie en ARMT XXVI, 419, ll.3'–21'?,” *NABU* (1994): 59.

59. See CAD S, s.v. “*šabû*.” See Scott B. Noegel, “Yasîm-El’s Sophisticated Rhetoric: A Janus Cluster in ARMT XXVI, 419, l. 10',” *NABU* (1995): 81–82. Wolfgang Heimpel, *Letters to the King of Mari: A New Translation, with Historical Introduction, Notes, and Commentary* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 358 n. 256, aptly notes that the text reads *ina šābim* “among the army/waterworks” and not *ana šābim* “for the army/waterworks.” Nevertheless, as discussed in chapter 2, polysemy does not need to be grammatically perfect to be effective.

with his skill and to identify his concise mastery over words with his efficient handling of the army and waterworks projects.

The Egyptian Tale of the Eloquent Peasant tells the story of a man who is robbed and continuously mistreated by the district governor, whom he tries to persuade by means of nine lengthy poetic pleas.⁶⁰ At the end of his second petition, he bemoans: *dr-s3lr n mw nb mk w3 hr mtnw iw mni mh nb* “O, remover of all distress on the water. See, I am underway without a boat, as one, one who moors all of the drowned” (P.3023 + P.Amherst 1, ll. 167–168). According to John Foster, the repetition of the sounds /l/, /m/, and /n/ create paronomasia between nearly every word in the line, indicating that the author wanted these passages to impress and persuade. Nevertheless, the aesthetic, rhetorical, and the literary often blur in ancient texts. Persuasive here is Eyre’s comment that the Tale of the Eloquent Peasant

is therefore worth encouraging and recording for re-performance. Whether or not the text was, in local terms, of overwhelming aesthetic quality, we must assume that the formal literary devices and structure found in both the speeches and the narrative are characteristic of the aesthetic purpose, expectation and interaction between author/performer and audience. They are the devices of “fine speaking.”⁶¹

Moreover, we must be cautious not to emphasize the rhetorical and literary over the performative, because in this same tale the peasant claims that the magistrate cannot compensate him for his speech, because it *pr.r.t m r n r ‘ ds=f* “emanates from the mouth of Ra himself” (l. 350).⁶²

Paronomasia for apparent rhetorical effect also appears in monumental inscriptions. In the chronicle of Thutmosis III’s battle at Megiddo inscribed at Karnak we find the pharaoh addressing his troops before the final capture of the city:

mh=tn [iqr mš ‘=i nht] mk rd3 [h3s.wt nb.t m dmi htf wd] m hrw pn r ntt sr.w nb.w n h3s.wt [mh.]t štbw m hnw=f r ntt mh pw m dmi h3 p3 mh m mkt mh=tn dr3 sp 2.

Grasp well, [my excellent army]. Behold, [the foreign lands] are placed [in the city according to the decree] of Ra today, because every chieftain of all

60. No manuscript of this text is complete, but there exist four copies, from which a composite can be made: P.Berlin 3023, P.Berlin 3025, P.Berlin 10499, and P.Butler 527 (= P.BM 10274). See Richard B. Parkinson, *The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant: A Reader’s Commentary*, LASM 10 (Hamburg: Widmaier Verlag, 2012).

61. Eyre, “Performance of the Peasant,” 11.

62. See Foster, “Wordplay in *The Eloquent Peasant*,” 67.

[northe]rn lands is shut up inside it; the capture of Megiddo is the capture of a thousand towns. Grasp well, grasp well. (l. 90)

Here the form *mḥ* occurs several times for “grasp,” alongside *mḥ.t* “northern,” and the two-fold use of *mḥ* “capture.” Pharaoh’s remarks rhetorically connect his troop’s ability to grasp fully what he is saying with the intended capture of Megiddo.

Arguably the most common function ascribed to polysemy and paronomasia in biblical texts is a rhetorical one.⁶³ Indeed, this view has dominated biblical scholarship on the prophetic corpus, the Psalms, and the Jobian dialogues.⁶⁴

63. See already David Yellin, “On Biblical Rhetoric” [Hebrew], in *Selected Writings*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sepher, 1939), 1–149.

64. Prophetic corpus: J. Jacobowitz, “Paronomasia: Mic 1:9–16” [Hebrew], *Sinai* 32 (1953): 196–208; James Muilenburg, “A Study in Hebrew Rhetoric: Repetition and Style,” in *Congress Volume: Copenhagen 1953*, ed. G. W. Anderson et al., VTSup 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1953), 97–111; Alexander M. Honeyman, “*Māgôr Mis-sābīb* and Jeremiah’s Pun,” *VT* 4 (1954): 424–26; P. Wernberg-Møller, “The Pronoun *’tmh* and Jeremiah’s Pun,” *VT* 6 (1956): 315–16; Dahood, “Some Ambiguous Texts in Isaiah,” 41–49; William L. Holladay, “Style, Irony, and Authenticity in Jeremiah,” *JBL* 81 (1962): 44–54; D. W. Thomas, “A Pun on the Name Ashdod in Zephaniah ii.4,” *ExpT* 74 (1962–1963): 63; Asher Weiser, “Double Meanings in the Book of Isaiah” [Hebrew], *BM* 20 (1964): 25–32; James Barr, “Did Isaiah Know About Hebrew ‘Root Meaning,’” *ExpT* 75 (1964): 242; D. F. Payne, “Characteristic Word-Play in ‘Second Isaiah’: A Reappraisal,” *JSS* 12 (1967): 207–29; Shalom M. Paul, “The Image of the Oven and the Cake in Hosea 7:4–1,” *VT* 18 (1968): 114–20; Michael Fishbane, “Jeremiah IV.23–26: A Recovered Use of the Creation Pattern,” *VT* 21 (1971): 161–62; Jean Ouellette, “Le mur d’étain dans Amos VII.7–9,” *RB* 80 (1973): 329–30; William H. Irwin, “Syntax and Style in Isaiah 26,” *CBQ* 41 (1979): 240–61; Michael De Roche, “Zephaniah I 2–3: The ‘Sweeping’ of Creation,” *VT* 30 (1980): 104–9; P. Doron, “Paronomasia in the Prophecies to the Nations,” *HebAbst* 20–21 (1979–1980): 36–43; Yehoshua Gitay, “Deutero-Isaiah: Oral or Written?,” *JBL* 99 (1980): 185–97; J. N. Carreira, “Kunstsprache und Weisheit bei Micha,” *BZ* 26 (1982): 50–74; Lawrence Boadt, “Intentional Alliteration in Second Isaiah,” *CBQ* 45 (1983): 353–63; E. D. Mallon, “A Stylistic Analysis of Joel 1:10–12,” *CBQ* 45 (1983): 537–48; Shalom M. Paul, “משא מלך שרים,” Hos 8:8–10 and Ancient Near Eastern Royal Epithets,” *ScrHier* 31 (1986): 193–204; Lawrence Zalcman, “Ambiguity and Assonance at Zephaniah II 4,” *VT* 36 (1986): 365–71; Baruch Halpern, “‘The Excremental Vision’: The Doomed Priests of Doom in Isaiah 28,” *HAR* 10 (1986): 109–21; Robert B. Chisholm, “Word Play in the Eighth-Century Prophets,” *BSac* 144 (1987): 44–52; B. Renaud, “La composition du livre de Nahum,” *ZAW* 99 (1987): 198–218; D. Schmidt, “Critical Note: Another Word-Play in Amos?,” *Grace Theological Journal* 8 (1987): 141–42; Al Wolters, “Wordplay and Dialect in Amos 8:1–2,” *JETS* 31 (1988): 407–10; Ivan Jay Bell, *A Rhetorical Study of Zephaniah* (Berkeley, CA: BIBAL Press, 1988); T. J. Finley, “‘The Apple of His Eye’ (*bābat ʾênô*) in Zechariah II 12,” *VT* 38 (1988): 337–38; R. D. Patterson and M. E. Travers, “Literary

Analysis and the Unity of Nahum,” *GTJ* 9 (1988): 45–58; John H. Walton, “Vision Narrative Wordplay and Jeremiah XXIV,” *VT* 39 (1989): 508–9; Ellen F. Davis, “A Strategy of Delayed Comprehension: Isaiah LIV 15,” *VT* 40 (1990): 217–20; Anthony J. Petrotta, *Lexis Ludens: Wordplay and the Book of Micah*, AUS 7, TR 105 (New York: Lang, 1991); Knut Holter, “The Wordplay on לָא (“God”) in Isaiah 45, 20–21,” *SJOT* 7 (1992): 88–98; Katrina Larkin, *The Eschatology of Second Zechariah: A Study of the Formation of a Mantological Wisdom Anthology* (Kampen: Kok, 1994); Anthony R. Ceresko, “Janus Parallelism in Amos’s ‘Oracles against the Nations’ (Amos 1:3–2:16),” *JBL* 113 (1994): 485–90; H. G. M. Williamson, “Sound, Sense and Language in Isaiah 24–27,” *JJS* 46 (1995): 1–9; Amos Frisch, “*W’nth*’ (Hosea 2:17)—An Ambiguity” [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 69 (1999): 445–47; James R. Linville, “What Does ‘It’ Mean? Interpretation at the Point of No Return in Amos 1–2,” *BI* 8 (2000): 400–24; Al Wolters, “Wordplay in Zechariah,” in Noegel, *Puns and Pundits*, 223–30; Hyun Chul Paul Kim, *Ambiguity, Tension, and Multiplicity in Deutero-Isaiah*, SBL 52 (New York: Lang, 2003); Jonathan Grossman, “‘Structural Ambiguity’ in Ezekiel 33–38” [Hebrew], *BM* 49 (2004): 194–224; David Marcus, “Recovering an Ancient Paronomasia in Zechariah 14.5,” in *Inspired Speech: Prophecy in the Ancient Near East. Essays in Honour of Herbert B. Huffmon*, ed. John Kaliner and Louis Stulman (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2004), 130–43; Herbert Migsch, “Jeremia XXXV 8b–9—Eine Indirekte Rede?,” *VT* 54 (2004): 119–24; James R. Linville, “Letting the ‘Bi-word’ ‘Rule’ in Joel 2:17,” *JHS* 5 (2004): 1–15; Daniel I. Block, “What Has Delphi to Do with Samaria? Ambiguity and Delusion in Israelite Prophecy,” in *Writing and Ancient Near East Society: Essay in Honor of Alan Millard*, ed. E. A. Slater, C. B. Mee, and Piotr Bienkowski (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2005), 189–216; Theodore A. Perry, “Cain’s Sin in Gen. 4:1: Oracular Ambiguity and How to Avoid It,” *Prooftexts* 25 (2005): 258–75; James D. Moore, *The Common-Sense of Wordplay: A Sociolinguistic Study of the Function of Wordplay in the Book of Nahum* (Master’s Thesis, Vanguard University of Southern California, 2007); Michael Rosenbaum, “‘You Are My Servant’: Ambiguity and Deutero-Isaiah,” in *Bringing the Hidden to Light: Studies in Honor of Stephen A. Geller*, ed. Kathryn F. Kravitz and Daniel M. Sharin (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 187–216; Benjamin D. Sommer, “Ambiguity and the Rhetoric of Turning in Isaiah,” in Cohen et al., *Birkat Shalom*, 321–45; Christopher B. Hays, “Damning Egypt/Damning Egypt: The Paronomasia of *skr* and the Unity of Isa 19, 1–10,” *ZAW* 120 (2008): 612–17; Yair Hoffman, “The Wandering Lament: Micah 1:10–16,” in *Treasures on Camels’ Humps: Historical and Literary Studies from the Ancient Near East Presented to Israel Eph’al*, ed. Mordechai Cogan and Dan’el Kahn (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2008), 86–98; Nili Wazana, “Wordplays in the Visions of Amos” [Hebrew], in Yona et al., *Marbeh Hokmah*, 101–21*; Ronald L. Androphy, *Paronomasia in the Former Prophets: A Taxonomic Catalogue, Description, and Analysis* (DHL diss., Jewish Theological Seminary, 2011); Tania Notarius, “Playing with Words and Identity: Reconsidering לָרִיב בָּאֵשׁ, אֶנְדָּה, and קָץ/קֵץ in Amos’ Visions,” *VT* 67 (2017): 59–86.

Psalms: J. W. Bowker, “Psalm CX,” *VT* 17 (1967): 31–41; Pirmin Hugger, “Die Aliteration im Psalter,” in *Wort, Lied, und Gottesspruch: Beiträge zu Psalmen und Propheten; Festschrift für Joseph Ziegler*, ed. J. Schrenier (Würzburg: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1972), 81–90; A. Fitzgerald, “A Note on Psalm 29,” *BASOR* 215 (1974): 61–63;

An excellent example of this is Benjamin Sommer's keen insight into a number of Isaiah's prophecies. In particular, he has shown that we may read some of them both positively or negatively (Isa 6:11–13, 7:15–22), and others, as negatively at first, but positive in the end (Isa 31:1–5, 29:1–24). As he explains, the tension between the two readings "stands at the core of Isaiah's rhetoric and indeed of his world view."⁶⁵ In essence, the prophet wants the negative view to linger and to keep his audience entertaining an ominous edge. James Roberts similarly has remarked concerning Isaiah's use of polysemy: "Some ambiguities, far from impoverishing the impact of the message in which they are embedded, actually represent an intentional enhancement of its power."⁶⁶

3.5. HUMOROUS

Ascertaining what the peoples of the ancient Near East considered humorous is extremely difficult, because humor is culturally defined and we lack an ability to

Patrick D. Miller, "Poetic Ambiguity and Balance in Psalm XV," *VT* 29 (1979): 416–24; Wilfred G. E. Watson, "Reversed Rootplay in Ps. 145," *Bib* 62 (1981): 92–95; Edward L. Greenstein, "Mixing Memory and Design: Reading Psalm 78," *Prooftexts* 10 (1990): 197–218; Lowell K. Handy, "Sounds, Words and Meanings in Psalm 82," *JSOT* 47 (1990): 51–66; Paul R. Raabe, "Deliberate Ambiguity in the Psalter," *JBL* 110 (1991): 213–27; Gary A. Rendsburg and S. L. Rendsburg, "Physiological and Philological Notes to Psalm 137," *JQR* 83 (1993): 385–99; Sheri L. Klouda, "The Dialectical Interplay of Seeing and Hearing in Psalm 19 and Its Connection to Wisdom," *BBR* 10 (2000): 181–95; James R. Linville, "Psalm 22:17b: A New Guess," *JBL* 124 (2005): 733–44; John S. Kselman, "Double Entendre in Psalm 59," in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception*, ed. Peter Flint and Patrick D. Miller Jr. (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 184–89; Samuel W. Jess, *Hooked on Wordplays: Concatenation with Psalm Titles* (Master's Thesis, Acadia Divinity College, 2012).

Jobian dialogues: David R. Blumenthal, "A Play on Words in the Nineteenth Chapter of Job," *VT* 16 (1966): 497–501; Yair Hoffman, "The Use of Equivocal Words in the First Speech of Eliphaz (Job IV–V)," *VT* 30 (1980): 114–19; J. C. Holbert, "'The Skies Will Uncover His Iniquity': Satire in the Second Speech of Zophar (Job XX)," *VT* 31 (1981): 171–79; Shalom M. Paul, "Job 4:15—A Hair Raising Encounter," *ZAW* 95 (1983): 119–21; Curtis, "Word Play in the Speeches of Elihu (Job 32–37)"; Ellen van Wolde, "A Text Semantic Study of the Hebrew Bible, Illustrated with Noah and Job," *JBL* 113 (1994): 19–35; Stanley M. Burstein, "Greek Contact with Egypt and the Levant, ca. 1600–500 B.C.: An Overview," *Ancient World* 27 (1996): 20–28; Edward L. Greenstein, "The Language of Job and Its Poetic Function," *JBL* 122 (2003): 651–66; Greenstein, "Features of Language in the Poetry of Job," in *Das Buch Hiob und seine Interpretationen. Beiträge zum Hiob-Symposium auf dem Monte Verità vom 14.19. August 2005*, ed. Thomas Krüger et al. (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2007), 81–96. On such devices in the prose of Job, see Michael Carasik, "Janus Parallelism in Job 1:20," *VT* 65 (2015): 1–6.

65. Sommer, "Ambiguity and the Rhetoric of Turning in Isaiah," 334.

66. J. J. M. Roberts, "Double Entendre in First Isaiah," *CBQ* 54 (1992): 48.

comprehend fully the cultural matrices that inform it. We must be especially careful not to classify a text as funny, simply because it appeals to our contemporary Western sense of humor. Even if we broaden our definition of humor to include satire and sarcasm, as I have done here, our task remains difficult.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, I share below a few of the proposals that scholars have offered.

Sumerologists have seen a number of texts as having a humorous and/or satirical effect, even if not exclusively so, including the Tale of the Three Ox Drivers from Adab, the Song of the Hoe, the Rulers of Lagash, The Class Reunion, paradoxical proverbs, and so-called nonsensical texts.⁶⁸ Most of these employ some sort of polysemy and paronomasia. To demonstrate, I offer a couple of proverbs drawn from the work of Bendt Alster:

Ì.ĠIN.ĠIN.NA.KE₄.EŠ
 Ì.KAŠ₄.KAŠ₄.NA.KE₄.EŠ
 BA.AN.DU BA.AN.DU
 MU.MU.ŠÈ BA.AN.DUG₄

Because he always went,
 Because he always ran,
 “He went! He went!”
 —They called him as a name.

67. An examination of terms for “laugh” in ancient Near Eastern languages demonstrates this well. In Sumerian, ZÚ.LI₉.LI₉ “laugh,” sometimes appears in contexts that we would not consider funny. For simple joy and merry-making, Sumerian employs ĤÚL (= Akkadian *ḥidūtu*). I.SI.IŠ.LÁ “break down, give way” occurs in reference to tears or laughter. The Akkadian *šāḥu* “laugh,” like its Ugaritic and Hebrew cognates, does not always correlate with the “funny” or “comical” by modern Western standards. See Benno Landsberger, “*šāḥu* = ‘lachen,’” *ZA* 40 (1931): 297–98; Landsberger, “Lexikalisches Archiv,” *ZA* 42 (1934), 163–65; Benjamin R. Foster, “Humor in Cuneiform Literature,” *JANES* 6 (1974): 69–85.

68. See, e.g., Foster, “Humor in Cuneiform Literature”; Alster, “Paradoxical Proverbs and Satire in Sumerian Literature,” 201–30; Alster, “Literary Aspects of Sumerian and Akkadian Proverbs,” in Vogelzang and Vanstipout, *Mesopotamian Poetic Language*, 9–10; Edmond Sollberger, “The Rulers of Lagaš,” *JCS* 21 (1967): 279–91; Civil, “Anzu-Bird and Scribal Whimsies,” 271; Eckart Frahm, “Humor in assyrischen Königsinschriften,” in Prosecky, *Intellectual Life in the Ancient Near East*, 147–62; Michalowski, “Where’s Al? Humor and Poetics in the Hymn to the Hoe,” in *Cuneiform Studies in Honor of David I. Owen on His Seventieth Birthday*; J. Cale Johnson and Markham J. Geller, *The Class Reunion—An Annotated Translation and Commentary on the Sumerian Dialogue Two Scribes*, CM 47 (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

The proverb draws a paronomastic relationship between BA.AN.DU “he went” and BA.AN.DUG₄ “they called him” in order to “etymologize” a name.⁶⁹ See similarly, another proverb that operates on the meaning of a name.

The lion had caught a helpless she-goat:

(She said) “Let me go! I will give you an ewe, a companion of mine, in the bargain!”

(The lion said) “If I am to let you go, tell me your name!”

The she-goat gave the lion the following answer: “You do not know my name? ‘I cheated you’ [UMUM_x MU.E.DA.AK.E] is my name.”⁷⁰

When the lion came to the fold, “I have released you!” he shouted.

She answered from the other side: “You have released me, You were clever [UMUM_x MU.E.AK]: As far as sheep are concerned, there are none of them here!”

Here the name UMUM_x MU.E.DA.AK.E “I cheated you” provides the raw materials for the nearly identical sounding response: UMUM_x MU.E.AK “you were clever.”⁷¹ Thus, both of the Sumerian examples also share an appellative function (see 3.10).

Examples of humorous texts in Akkadian include a number of proverbs, love poem parodies, a few royal inscriptions, At the Cleaners, the Aluzinnu texts, and the Tale of the Poor Man of Nippur.⁷² The latter story offers some of the most convincing examples. It follows a destitute man named Gimil-Ninurta who brings a goat offering as a tribute to the mayor of Nippur. The mayor mistakenly assumes that he is bribing him and so he throws him out. Gimil-Ninurta then takes

69. Alster, “Paradoxical Proverbs and Satire in Sumerian Literature,” 209.

70. The parallel to Homer, *Od.* 9.366 is remarkable.

71. Alster, “Paradoxical Proverbs and Satire in Sumerian Literature,” 214.

72. See F. R. Kraus, “Altnesopotamisches Lebensgefühl,” *JNES* 19 (1960): 117–32; C. J. Gadd, “Two Sketches of from the Life of Ur,” *Iraq* 25 (1963): 177–88; Foster, “Humor in Cuneiform Literature”; Willem H. P. Römer, “Der Spassmacher im alten Zweistromland, zum ‘Sitz im Leben’ altnesopotamischer Texte,” *Persica* 7 (1975–1978): 43–68; Erica Reiner, “Why Do You Cuss Me?,” *PAPS* 130 (1986): 1–6; Alasdair Livingstone, “‘At the Cleaners’ and Notes on Humorous Literature,” in *Ad bene et fideliter seminandum: Festgabe für Karlheinz Deller zum 21. Februar 1987*, ed. Gerlinde Mauer and Ursula Magen, AOAT 220 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Verlag Butzon & Bercker; Kevelaer Neukirchener Verlag, 1988), 175–87; Franco d’Agostino, “Some Considerations on Humour in Mesopotamia,” *RdSO* 72 (1988): 273–78; d’Agostino, *Testi umoristici babilonesi e assiri*, TOA 2/4 (Brescia: Paideia, 2000); Frahm, “Humor in assyrischen Königsinschriften”; Andrew R. George, “Ninurta-Pāqidāt’s Dog Bite, and Notes on Other Comic Tales,” *Iraq* 55 (1993): 63–75; Baruch Ottervanger, *The Tale of the Poor Man of Nippur*, SAACT 12 (Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project: Helsinki, 2016). On humor in Hittite texts, see Gary Beckman, “Proverbs and Proverbial Allusions in Hittite,” *JNES* 45 (1986): 19–30.

vengeance on the mayor three times through trickery, beating him senseless each time. In his study of the text, Jerrold Cooper remarks: “The humor of deception and satire is both created and maintained by numerous devices of language and style, among which irony and sarcasm are prominent.”⁷³ Bolstering Cooper’s observation is the text’s extensive use of polysemy and paronomasia.⁷⁴ For example, the tribute (i.e., *biltu*) that Gimil-Ninurta brings the mayor resounds when the mayor refers to it as an outrage (*hibiltu*), and when Gimil-Ninurta, disguised as a doctor, lures the mayor into a dark room by saying “my cures (*bulūya*) only work in the dark.”⁷⁵ Such cases abound in the text, and perhaps may be considered as contributing to the story’s humor. On the other hand, the devices also demonstrate the principle of *lex talionis* (see 3.15.3).

A number of Egyptian texts have been classified as humorous and/or satirical, including The Tale of Sinuhe, The Contendings of Horus and Seth, The Tale of Setne I, and the so-called Demotic Satirical Poem,⁷⁶ and these also display

73. Jerrold S. Cooper, “Structure, Humor, and Satire in the Poor Man of Nippur,” *JCS* 27 (1975): 167.

74. Scott B. Noegel, “Word Play in the Tale of the Poor Man of Nippur,” *ASJ* 19 (1996), 169–86; see also Manfred Dietrich, “‘Armer Mann von Nippur’: Ein Werk der Krisenliteratur des 8. Jh. v. Chr.,” in *Of God(s), Trees, Kings, and Scholars: Neo-Assyrian and Related Studies in Honour of Simo Parpola*, ed. Mikko Luuko, Saana Svård, and Raija Mattila, *StudOr* 106 (Helsinki: Finnish Oriental Society, 2009), 333–52.

75. As observed by Foster, *Before the Muses*, 447 n. 1, paronomasia on the noun *biltu* “tribute” also occurs in the dream accounts of the Etana Myth (Middle Assyrian version), where it appears in conjunction with *biltu* “weight” and *epeltu* “reeds.” On the intimate relationship between paronomasia, polysemy, and dream accounts, see Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*.

76. See Baudouin van de Walle, *L’humour dans la littérature et l’art de l’ancienne Égypte*, SABMD 4 (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor Het Nabije Oosten, 1969). For The Tale of Sinuhe and The Contendings of Horus and Seth as satires, see Patrick F. Houlihan, *Wit and Humor in Ancient Egypt* (London: Rubicon, 2001), 7–8, 10–12. On the Tale of Setne I, see Richard Jasnow, “‘And Pharaoh Laughed...’: Reflections on Humor in Setne I and Late Period Egyptian Literature,” *Enchoria* 27 (2001): 62–81. For the Demotic satirical poems known as the Harpist’s Song and the Song for the Bastet Festival, see Friedhelm Hoffmann and Joachim Friedrich Quack, *Anthologie der demotischen Literatur*, EAL 4 (Münster: Münster Lit, 2007), 305–20, 370–72. For the Demotic tale of Amasis and the Skipper, see Robert K. Ritner, “The Tale of Amasis and the Skipper,” in *The Literature of Ancient Egypt: An Anthology of Stories, Instructions, and Poetry*, ed. William Kelly Simpson (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 450–52; Guglielmi, “Der Gebrauch rhetorischer Stilmittel in der ägyptischen Literatur,” 495–97. Ironically, the famous Satire on the Trades is mostly regarded as a serious text. See also the joke examined by Nicole B. Hansen, “Still Laughing after All These Years: An Ancient Egyptian ‘Joke’ Survives the Millennia,” *JSSA* 38 (2011): 77–79, which also reads like a parable.

evidence of polysemy and paronomasia.⁷⁷ Patrick Houlihan explains: “The ancient Egyptians undoubtedly chuckled at writing that employed wit, satire, word-plays, irony, puns, metaphors, similes, and other sophisticated literary devices.”⁷⁸ Nevertheless, the use of the same devices in Egyptian incantations and in other ritual and mythological texts gives cause to wonder whether we fully understand ancient humor.⁷⁹ Waltraud Guglielmi reminds us:

Im Unterschied zu unserem Sprachgebrauch überwiegt in Äg. die ernsthafte Verwendung des Wortspiels. Es ist kein geistreiches oder heiteres Spiel, sondern bekundet und begründet durch Klangähnlichkeit Wesensähnlichkeit. Der gleiche oder ähnliche Klang zweier Wörter, sei es auch nur der im Konsonantenbau, suggeriert einen Zusammenhang in der Sache.⁸⁰

Humor has been ascribed to a number of texts in the Hebrew Bible,⁸¹ though again, often they illustrate irony or mockery rather than humor, *per se*. Sasson asserts that Hebrew paronomasia can exhibit “a spirit of playfulness,” though he does not specify with an example.⁸² Watson similarly suggests that biblical “wordplay” can “amuse.”⁸³ Greenstein argues that one function of Hebrew “wordplay” is to satirize, and points to Isaiah’s quip: הוֹי גִבּוֹרִים לְשִׁתּוֹת יָיִן וְאַנְשֵׁי חַיִּל לְמִסָּךְ שֶׁכָּר *hōy gibbōrīm li-štōt yāyin wə-’anšē ḥayil li-msōk šēkār* “Ah, to those heroes in drinking wine, men of valor in mixing beer” (Isa 5:22). He observes that the line references גִבּוֹרִים *gibbōrīm* “warriors” and אַנְשֵׁי-חַיִל *’anšē ḥayil* “men of valor,” normally military men, in a new and ironic context.⁸⁴ Yet, while the passage does appear satirical, it involves neither polysemy nor paronomasia.

77. See Waltraud Guglielmi, “Probleme bei der Anwendung der Begriffe ‘Komik,’ ‘Ironie,’ und ‘Humor’ auf die altägyptische Literatur,” *GM* 36 (1979): 69–85.

78. Houlihan, *Wit and Humor in Ancient Egypt*, 1.

79. On the problems with defining humor in ancient Egypt, see Jasnow, “‘And Pharaoh Laughed...,’” who notes that irony is often the primary operative feature.

80. Guglielmi, “Wortspiel,” col. 1287.

81. See, e.g., Baumgartner, “L’humour dans l’Ancien Testament”; Francis Landy, “Humour as a Tool in Biblical Exegesis,” in *On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Athalya Brenner and Yehuda T. Radday (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1990), 101–17; E. A. Russell, “Some Reflections on Humour in Scripture and Otherwise,” *IBS* 13 (1991): 199–210; John Ellington, “Wit and Humor in Bible Translation,” *The Bible Translator* 42 (1991): 301–13; David Marcus, *From Balaam to Jonah: Anti-prophetic Satire in the Hebrew Bible*, BJS 301 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1995).

82. Sasson, “Word Play in the O.T.,” 968.

83. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 245. A similar approach also dominates such studies in contemporary settings. See, e.g., Walter Redfern, *Puns* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984).

84. Greenstein, “Wordplay, Hebrew,” 970.

3.6. IRONIC

As the previous discussion illustrates, polysemy and paronomasia in the service of humor, satire, or sarcasm also can demonstrate irony. Nevertheless, irony differs as a functional category in that it is not always humorous, satirical, or sarcastic. In its most basic sense, irony involves incongruity; it involves opposites. It can be verbal, when words are used to convey something different from what they appear to mean, or situational, when the outcome of events is contrary to what one expects.⁸⁵ Some texts exhibit dramatic irony in that they withhold information from the character that is known to the reader/audience.⁸⁶ Polysemy is uniquely fitted to accomplish all three types of irony, as scholars of ancient Near Eastern literature well know.

Thus in the Akkadian Song of Erra, we find an ironic use of polysemy in the repeated noun *šiptu*, used for both “governance” and “destruction.”⁸⁷ Peter Machinist explains:

Lastly, there is the *šiptu* (= “governing order”) of heaven and earth, which, as we have observed, dissolves if Marduk leaves his seat (I 132, 170). So when Erra promises, in taking Marduk’s place, that he will keep this *šiptu* strong (I 182), we are treated to the patent irony that Erra does indeed maintain *šiptu*—but the *šiptu* of “destruction,” as is made explicit later (IV 76–77; V 53, 58).⁸⁸

One expects Erra’s *šiptu* to be righteous “governance,” but it turns out to mean “destruction” for his subjects.

Irony pervades a number of Egyptian texts.⁸⁹ In the Tale of the Eloquent Peasant, we find a string of eulogistic statements that one can read ironically in more

85. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 308–9.

86. The opposite also can occur, when information is withheld from the reader/audience, but known to the character. See Scott B. Noegel, “A Crux and a Taunt: Night-Time Then Sunset in Genesis 15,” in *The World of Genesis: Persons, Places, Perspectives*, ed. Philip R. Davies and David J. A. Clines, JSOTSup 223 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 128–35; Serge Frolov, “The Semiotics of Covert Action in 1 Samuel 9–10,” *JSOT* 31 (2007): 429–50.

87. See, Noegel, “‘Word Play’ in the Song of Erra,” 175.

88. Peter Machinist, “Rest and Violence in the Poem of Erra,” *JAOS* 103 (1983): 224–25.

89. See, e.g., Gerhard Fecht, *Der Habgierige und die Maat in der Lehre des Ptahhotep, 5. und 19. Maxime*, ADAIK 1 (Glückstadt: Augustin, 1958); Richard B. Parkinson, “Literary Form and the Tale of the Eloquent Peasant,” *JEA* 78 (1992): 163–78; Christopher J. Eyre, “Irony in the Story of Wenamun: The Politics of Religion in the Twenty-First Dynasty,” in *Literatur und Politik im pharaonischen und ptolemäischen Ägypten. Vorträge der Tagung zum Gedenken an Georges Posener 5.-10. September 1996 in Leipzig*, ed. Jan Assmann and Elke Blumenthal, BdE 127 (Le Caire: Institut français d’archéologie orientale, 1999),

than one way. The peasant’s claim is a case in point: *nn gr rđl.n=k mdw=f* “there is none whom you have made to speak (who is still) silent” (B1 316). About this statement, Parkinson remarks: “(It) may express the High Steward’s power, but, since ‘silence’ is a desired state for the peasant and his speaking a result of agony, it implies a denunciation.”⁹⁰ In fact, words previously used by the peasant in praise of the high steward are used ironically to rebuke him later. At first, he is the “lord who eradicates falsehood [*grg*], who creates [*shpr*] truth and creates [*shpr*] every good thing [*bw*], who destroys every (evil) thing [*bw*]” (B1 272–273). Yet, later we hear that “the cultivator of the wicked thing (*bw*) is watering his garden with evil, to grow [*shpr*] his garden with falsehood [*grg*]” (B1 294–96). Parkinson adds:

The effect of this irony has been considered humorous, but humour is not easily identified and is not an inevitable concomitant or irony. Irony is, rather, ‘common ground between tragedy and comedy’, and the context determines whether a particular instance is humorous.⁹¹

In the Ugaritic Tale of Kirtu, Kirtu has a dream in which the god El predicts an oncoming siege during which a number of individuals who normally would be exempt from service must join the expedition. One of these is the *yhd* “sole survivor” (CAT 1.14.ii.43). The *yhd* designates someone, like a widow or orphan, who is bereft of family.⁹² Yet, technically speaking, Kirtu too is a *yhd*, since he also has lost his family. The use of *yhd* offers an ironic critique of the king, for it brings into contrast the sole survivor, who must leave home and enter military service, and Kirtu, who conscripts him, risking the survivor’s life, for the very purpose of finding a wife and starting his own family.⁹³

Later in the text, verbal irony again obtains in the hungry cries of the people who are faced with a drought while the king remains sick in his bed. They lament, “emmer in the furrows, like wheat crowns [*l tl[m] k trtrt*] in the tilth ... spent is all the bread from their storage” (CAT 1.16.iii.9–14)!⁹⁴ Here the use of *trtrt* “crowns” for “heads of grain,” allusively underscores the irony that normally it is

235–52; Jean Winand, “The Report of Wenamun: A Journey in Ancient Egyptian Literature,” in *Ramesseid Studies in Honour of K. A. Kitchen*, ed. Mark Collier and Steven Snape (Bolton: Rutherford, 2011), 541–59.

90. Parkinson, “Literary Form and the Tale of the Eloquent Peasant,” 173.

91. Parkinson, “Literary Form and the Tale of the Eloquent Peasant,” 175.

92. DULAT, s.v. “*yhd*.”

93. Noegel, “Kirtu’s Allusive Dream,” 307. When the narrator describes the actualization of the event (CAT 1.14.iv.21), he instead employs the numeral *ahd* “one,” which removes any allusion to Kirtu.

94. The words appear to be placed in the mouth of El, though the beginning of the column is missing some thirty lines.

the king's responsibility to ensure the land's fertility through sacrifice to Baal. Further emphasizing the irony is the phrase *tl[m] k* "furrows, like," which paronomastically suggests *mlk* "king." Moreover, enforcing the allusion to a royal crown immediately afterwards is the mention of "heads" in the narrator's description: *nšu riš ḥrṭm l ʾzr [] 'bd dgn* "the plowmen raise their heads, toward [], the servants of Dagan."

Watson has drawn our attention to a euphemistic use of ironic language in the narrator's account of Anat's search for the deceased Baal: "she reached 'Pleasure' [*n 'my*], land of pasture, 'Delight' [*ysmt*], the fields by the shore of Death's realm" (*CAT* 1.5.vi.28–30). As he describes, "The immediate context converts the euphemisms 'Pleasure' and 'Delight' into their opposites, both belonging to the 'code' of death."⁹⁵ On euphemism and polysemy, see *Double Entendres* (4.1.2).

Edwin Good has proposed a number of cases in the Hebrew Bible.⁹⁶ One of his finest comes from Isaiah's pronouncement against the king of Babylon, which brings into ironic contrast the king, whose oppression *שָׁבַת* *šābat* "has ceased" (Isa 14:4, 2x), and Yahweh, who *שָׁבַר* *šābar* "broke" his *שֵׁבֶט* *šebet* "staff" on account of his hubris (Isa 14:5).⁹⁷ An ironic use of polysemy involves the figure of *נָבָל* *nābāl* "Nabal," whose name ostensibly means "noble, generous," a definition one is inclined to accept at first given the narrator's introduction of him as a powerful man with many possessions (1 Sam 25:2).⁹⁸ We hear his name no

95. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 309.

96. Edwin M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament* (Sheffield: Almond, 1981), 121–25. Good's types correlate with what I call antanaclasis, polysemy, contronym, parasonance, and allusive paronomasia. His work focuses entirely upon irony, which he sharply distinguishes from sarcasm, invective, parody, and satire.

97. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament*, 163, observes the paronomasia between "cease" and "break," but he did not catch the additional case with "staff," which I add here. More accurately, these are cases of homoeopropheron (see 4.2.1).

98. The meaning "noble" for this root is attested in Arabic. See William Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon: Supplement*, vol. 8 (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1968), 3027, s.v. "نبل." However, the earliest attestation appears to be in the ninth century CE, which makes it possible that the word entered Arabic via French or Latin. On the other hand, the name also appears in a Neo-Punic inscription, where it cannot mean "fool." See *KAI* 105. Whether the name relates to the Hebrew *נָבָל* *nēbel* "jar, pitcher, wineskin" or "harp, lute," or to Ugaritic (*nbl*) and Akkadian (*nablu*) "flame," seems unlikely, though the story does associate Nabal with a wineskin by way of paronomasia in 1 Sam 25:37. See Peter J. Leithart, "Nabal and His Wine," *JBL* 120 (2001): 525–27. In any event, even in a literary context, we must assume that the primary meaning of the name Nabal in ancient Israel (and in Phoenician) was not "fool," since no parent would give a child such a name. For a comprehensive discussion of the etymology and use of this root in Hebrew, see *TDOT* 9:157–71.

less than seven times,⁹⁹ until his wife informs David: “as his name is, so is he: Nabal (נָבָל *nābāl*) is his name and foolishness (וְנִבְלָהּ *ū-nḇālāh*) is with him” (1 Sam 25:25).¹⁰⁰ Such cases are made explicit by figures in the story. However, there are many cases of paronomasia on names in 1 and 2 Samuel that shape our understanding of literary figures without doing so explicitly. As Moshe Garsiel observes, such cases are “linked to the characterization of these personages and the evaluation of their acts. At times the exposition derived from the name bears an ironic character.”¹⁰¹

Some biblical scholars have shown polysemy to be an effective tool for dramatic irony as well. For example, Meshel argues that the author of Job employs polysemy in key passages that combine with

dramatic irony to serve as an organizing principle of the book, allowing for two simultaneous, incompatible readings to coexist—one from the limited perspective of one or more of the characters; the other from the privileged perspective of the reader.¹⁰²

Thus, in Job 4:6, Eliphaz asks: הֲלֹא יִירָאֲתָךְ בְּסִלְתְּךָ תִּקְוָתְךָ וְהִם דְּרָכֶיךָ *hā-lō' yir'ātākā kislātekā tiqwātākā wā-tōm darākēkā* “is not your piety your confidence, your blamelessness your hope?” Operative here are an odd syntax and polysemy. One would expect to find the copula וְ *wā* “and” joined to תִּקְוָתְךָ *tiqwātākā* “your hope,” but it is not. In addition, בְּסִלְתְּךָ *kislātekā* means “your confidence,” but also echoes “your foolishness.”¹⁰³ As a result, Eliphaz could be understood to ask “is not your piety, your hope, and your blamelessness your foolishness?” One reading belongs to Eliphaz, while the other is the reader’s. Meshel concludes: “Eliphaz certainly did not intend to denote that it was folly on Job’s part to be so righteous;

99. 1 Sam 25:3, 25:4, 25:5, 25:9, 25:10, 25:14, 25:19.

100. This chapter offers a veritable cornucopia of paronomasia and polysemy. See Moshe Garsiel, “Wit, Words, and a Woman: 1 Samuel 25,” in Brenner-Idan and Radday, *On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible*, 161–68; Garsiel, “The Story of David, Nabal and Abigail (1 Samuel 25): A Literary Study of Wordplay on Names, Analogies, and Socially Constructed Opposites,” in *Abigail, Wife of David, and Other Ancient Oriental Women*, ed. Daniel Bodi (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2013), 66–78.

101. Moshe Garsiel, “Word Play and Puns as a Rhetorical Device in the Book of Samuel,” in Noegel, *Puns and Pundits*, 182. See similarly the treatment of “wordplay” in Falkowitz, *Sumerian Rhetoric Collections*; Cherry, *Paronomasia and Proper Names in the Old Testament*; and Guglielmi, “Der Gebrauch rhetorischer Stilmittel in der ägyptischen Literatur,” in Loprieno, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 479–81.

102. Meshel, “Whose Job Is This?,” 48. See also Carolyn J. Sharp, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

103. Though the meaning “fool” is spelled כְּסִיל *kasīl*, the paronomasia is effective.

the reader, however, knows that in a very concrete sense it was Job's greatest error."¹⁰⁴

3.7. DECEPTIVE

Scholars have suggested three different ways in which polysemy and paronomasia serve deceptive ends. The first occurs when authors employ crafty words or signs to trick their readers/audience. The second obtains when literary figures employ polysemy in their speeches to deceive. Often the reader/audience also is gulled by the ruse. The third happens when authors instill ambiguity in narratives that involve deception and/or tricksters.

Concerning the first type: one could characterize many polysemous devices as inherently deceptive. In fact, many types encourage readers and listeners to interpret a sign, word, or line in one way as a kind of set up, only to prompt a reinterpretation thereafter. The effect can be unsettling and produce uncertainty, even anxiety, especially when it occurs in omens, oracles, or prophetic discourse.¹⁰⁵

Of course, it is important to stress that while readers/listeners might feel deceived in the process, the motive may not have been deception, but destabilization. In fact, Isaiah sometimes uses polysemy to demonstrate that the divine message is not what it might appear at first (see 3.4).¹⁰⁶ Jeremiah at times employs polysemy and paronomasia to illustrate the transformative power of the divine word.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, while such devices may seem deceptive, they may simply embody the process of revelation—the act of seeing one thing in another, like seeing דָּקֵשׁ *šōqēd* “(divine) watchfulness” in an דָּקֵשׁ *šāqēd* “almond tree” (Jer 1:11–12). Nevertheless, a few cases do appear patently deceptive in purpose.

Miguel Civil has found especially misleading a number of composite Sumerian logograms that suggest one reading on the surface, but must be understood as learned references to Akkadian.¹⁰⁸ One such usage occurs in the hymn known as Inanna and Ebiḫ. In this text, Inanna threatens to attack the people of the mountains of Ebiḫ for showing her no respect, and lists a number of

104. Meshel, “Whose Job Is This?,” 60.

105. See Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 46–50; Noegel, “Augur Anxieties in the Ancient Near East,” in *Ancient Divination and Experience*, ed. Lindsay G. Driediger-Murphy and Esther Eidinow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 17–43.

106. Davis, “Strategy of Delayed Comprehension: Isaiah LIV 15”; Sommer, “Ambiguity and the Rhetoric of Turning in Isaiah,” 334.

107. See Scott B. Noegel, “‘Literary’ Craft and Performative Power in the Ancient Near East,” in *Approaches to Literary Readings of Ancient Jewish Texts*, ed. Karolien Vermuelen (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 19–38.

108. See Civil, “Anzu-Bird and Scribal Whimsies,” 271.

weapons she will ready against them: “I shall prepare arrows in the quiver. I shall... slingstones with the rope (ÉŠ.MAḪ.GIN_x). I shall begin polishing my lance. I shall prepare the throwstick and the shield” (ll. 41–44). Instead of employing the signs ÉŠ.MAḪ.GIN_x “rope,” the text reads EN.TI.GIN_x, that is, EBIḪ.GIN_x. The peculiar writing draws attention to the fact that the Sumerian reflects both the Akkadian *ebīḫu* “rope” and *ebīḫ*^{K1} “mount Ebiḫ.”

Similarly, in the Curse of Akkade, we find an idiomatic expression for putting a population under administrative control: *marḫaši*^{K1} *li-um-ma* GUR.RU.DÈ “to put the (people of) Marḫaši back on the tablets” (l. 20). One can read the Akkadian signs *li-um-ma* as referring to *lē’ū* “writing tablets,” hence the translation, or as *le’ū* “wild bulls,” thus producing the translation: “to turn the (people of) Marḫaši into wild bulls.”¹⁰⁹ Benjamin Foster also has characterized a case of bilingual polysemy in the annals of Sargon as particularly misleading.¹¹⁰ I treat this passage below under Bilingual Polysemy (4.1.7).

Deceptive polysemy and paronomasia of the second type, in direct speech, also occurs in ancient Near Eastern texts. In the Epic of Gilgamesh 11.43–47, the god Ea, himself a trickster figure,¹¹¹ instructs Utnapishtim on what to tell the villagers when he starts building the boat. He is to say: “he (Ea) shall rain upon you abundance... in the morning, cakes [*kukkū*], and in the evening, he shall rain down a pouring of wheat [*kibātu*].” Almost a century ago, Carl Frank noticed that Ea’s *kukkū* “cakes” and *kibātu* “wheat” paronomastically suggest impending *kukkū* “darkness” and *kibittu* “heaviness.”¹¹² Utnapishtim was able to “read between the lines” of the deceptive message. The village would suffer for not sharing his wisdom.

Others have argued that Ea’s advice to Adapa in the Tale of Adapa and the Southwind is polysemously deceptive. To prepare Adapa for his presentation before the divine tribunal, Ea instructs him: *akala ša mu-ti ukallūnikkūma lā takkal mē mu-ū-ti ukallūnikkūma lā tašatti* “they will offer you food of death, but you must not eat, they will offer you water of death, but you must not drink” (B 29’–33’). However, later Anu offers him *akal* “food” and *mē* “water” of *balāṭi* “life” (B 60’–62’). Adapa does not accept the offering, and as a consequence, he misses an opportunity to become immortal. Stephanie Dalley proposes that the ruse hinges on reading *akala ša mu-ti* “food of death” as *akala šamūti* “food of

109. Civil, “Anzu-Bird and Scribal Whimsies,” 271.

110. Foster, “Humor in Cuneiform Literature,” 82–83.

111. Kramer and Maier, *Myths of Enki*; Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 27–28; Martin Worthington, *Ea’s Duplicity in the Gilgamesh Flood Story: The Ancient Word* (London: Routledge, 2019).

112. Carl Frank, “Zu den Wortspielen *kukku* und *kibātu* in Gilg. Ep. XI,” *ZA* 36 (1925): 218.

heaven.”¹¹³ Anne Kilmer suggests that we read the *mē mu-ú-ti* “water of heaven” as *mē emūti* “water of transformation.”¹¹⁴ Sasson opines that the polysemy here involves understanding *akala ša mūti* “food of death” as *akala ša muti* “food of humankind.”¹¹⁵ Shlomo Izre’el further argues that Ea’s deception rests on the double meaning of *balāti*, which not only means “life,” as opposed to “death,” but “immortality.”¹¹⁶ Clearly, Ea’s words, which gain him the epithet “the crafty one,” require careful contemplation before they are heeded, for misunderstanding them has serious consequences.

Deceptive paronomastic speech in Egyptian texts occurs in the Contendings of Horus and Seth (P. Chester Beatty I, recto), in which the two gods compete for the throne of Osiris and thus the “office” of kingship. Since the literary context involves trickery, this example represents the latter two types of deceptive “wordplay” defined above. According to Miriam Lichtheim, one finds paronomasia on the noun *ḥw.t* “office” (𓂏𓂛𓂏𓂛) in the myth, which, of course, is the object of the competition (1.2, *passim*).¹¹⁷ We first see this when Isis plans a ruse on the ferryman, who is given strict orders not to transport her to the island court. In 5.7, she transforms herself into an *ḥw.t* “old woman.” Though perhaps etymologically related to the noun “office,” *ḥw.t* is written here as 𓂏𓂛𓂏𓂛 (with the elderly man determinative), thus anticipating the theme. When Isis arrives at the dock (5.10), she apprises the ferryman that she came to deliver flour to a hungry

113. Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh and Others* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 88 n. 9.

114. Anne D. Kilmer, “Verse Translation of Adapa (Amarna Version),” in *Mesopotamian Poetic Language*, 111–14.

115. Jack M. Sasson, “Another Wrinkle on Old Adapa,” in *Studies in Ancient Near Eastern World View and Society Presented to Marten Stol on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. R. J. van der Spek et al. (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2008), 1–10. However, Sasson argues that there is no deception here, but rather a misunderstanding on Adapa’s part. He also questions whether Dalley and Kilmer’s proposals constitute “puns,” since they are not homonyms. Nevertheless, as will be shown numerous times in this work, the word is not the operative linguistic unit in Akkadian, but rather the sign.

116. Shlomo Izre’el, *Adapa and the South Wind: Language Has the Power of Life and Death* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2001), 137. See also Frank H. Polak, “Some Aspects of Literary Design in Ancient Near Eastern Epic,” in *kinattūtu ša dārāti: Raphael Kutscher Memorial Volume*, ed. Anson F. Rainey, TAUOP 1 (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, Institute of Archaeology, 1993), 135–46.

117. Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 2 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973), 223 n. 10, notes that the nouns “office” and “cattle” sound alike, but she does not note the extent to which they are homonyms or how important the paronomasia is to the central theme of the narrative. I note that “office” (written as 𓂏𓂛𓂏𓂛) appears in 1.2, 1.4, 1.11, 2.1, 3.2, 3.8, 4:5, 4.7 (2x), 4.10, 6.12–13, 8.7, 8.8, 8.11, 12.3, 13.3, 13.5, 15.13 (2x), 16.8 (final verse).

young boy who herds flocks on the island. The word she uses for “herd” is *ʿw.t*. The normative orthography for “herd” is , but here it appears as  (with the standard and scroll determinatives). Thus, *ʿw.t* “herd” and *lʿw.t* “office” are written identically. After gaining access to the island, Isis then magically transforms herself into a beautiful young woman (6.9), and she discloses to Seth that she is the wife of a man who died and that she had borne a son who now herds the flocks. The word for “flocks” is again *ʿw.t*. This time it is written slightly differently, with an amphibolous orthography (see 4.1.14), employing both the standard and animal tail determinatives, that is, . In 6.11, Isis again refers to the *ʿw.t* “flock” and there it is spelled . In fact, Isis’s story to Seth appears to be a parable in which paronomasia give clues to the true meaning of a statement.¹¹⁸

Let me say, my great lord []; as for me, I was the wife of a herdsman and I bore him a son. My husband died, and the boy began to tend the flock [] of his father []. But then a stranger came. He sat down in my stable and said to my child []: “I shall beat you. I shall take the flock [] of your father [], and I shall throw you out.” (6.8–6.11)

In addition to the repetition of “flock,” which suggests “office,” note that the divine horus determinative  appears after the personal pronouns in her statement, thus suggesting the divine nature of the characters in her story, without orally stating such. When Seth repeats the story to Pre-Ra-Horakhty, the falcon determinative appears again (7.4–7.8). The trickster god Seth did not miss the paronomastic allusion to the “office,”¹¹⁹ for in 7.7, he himself refers to the “flock” in Isis’s story as an *lʿw.t* “office” ().¹²⁰

118. A similar use of paronomasia obtains in Nathan’s parable to David (2 Sam 12:1–12). See below.

119. See Herman te Velde, “The Egyptian God Seth as a Trickster,” *JARCE* 7 (1968): 37–40.

120. Paronomasia abounds in this text. After Seth’s own statement tricks him, Isis turns herself into a *qri* “kite” and alights upon the *qdi* “tip” of an acacia tree. The former reminds us of the *qdr* “stranger” (6.10, 6.12), and the latter of the *qdi* “ferrying” that brought Isis to the island. In 9.9, Horus cuts off the head (*qdi*) of his mother Isis. Later still, in 11.8, Isis makes Horus’s penis drip semen into a cooking pot (*qdi*). In 10.8, after Seth removes Horus’ eyes, Hathor finds Horus in the desert, milks a gazelle, and says to Horus: *l-wn l.r.t=k di=l nš=l l.r.t l.m* “Open your eyes, that I may put this milk in it.” Paronomasia obtains between the nouns *l.r.t* “eyes” and *l.r.t* “milk.” Moreover, both words contain the sign . She pours it into the right eye, then the left (10.8). In 10.9, she commands him again saying “open your eyes,” and “she looked at them and found that they were whole.” In 11.3, Seth’s penis (*hnw*) stiffens (*nht*) and so he moves quickly (*hnw*) to put it in between the thighs of Horus. In 12:2, they stand in the presence of the Ennead. The words “in the

Deceitful speech in the Hebrew Bible abounds, perhaps most famously in the mouth of the serpent in the garden of Eden. Immediately after we hear of the couple's *עֲרֻמִּים* 'ārūmmīm “being naked” (Gen 2:25), the narrator paronomastically alerts us to the snake's *עָרֻם* 'ārūm “cunning” (Gen 3:1).¹²¹ The clue that deceptive speech is afoot is soon realized when the serpent gets the woman to question what God had commanded by asking, “has God said ‘you shall not eat of any tree of the garden?’” (Gen 3:1). The query reverses what God had said and leaves out a crucial piece of information, for his words were “from any tree of the garden you may indeed eat, but from the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for on the day you eat from it you will surely die (*מִוֹת תָּמוּת* *mōt tāmūt*)” (Gen 2:16–17). The woman's response to the serpent represents an eisegetical, albeit mistaken, paraphrase of the divine command: “of the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat, but of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, God said: ‘you shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, lest you die (*לֹא-מוֹת תִּמָּוֶת* *lō' mōt tāmūtūn*)” (Gen 3:3). The woman not only changed the emphatic verbal construction to an ordinary finite verb form, she added the mention of “fruit” and the notion of “touching.” It is at this point that the snake emphatically informs her: *לֹא-מוֹת תִּמָּוֶת* *lō' mōt tāmūtūn* “you shall not die” (Gen 3:4). Of course, the serpent meant “you shall not die ... immediately,” whereas God meant “eventually,” since breaking the command resulted in human mortality.

Another textbook example of deceptive speech comes from the mouth of Nathan the prophet, who offers a “parable” to David:

There were two men in one city: one rich, and one poor [*רָאשׁ* *rā š*]. The rich man had many flocks and herds; but the poor man [*רָשׁ* *rā š*] had nothing except one little ewe lamb, which he had acquired [*קָנָה* *qānāh*] and reared; and it grew up together with him, and with [*עִמּוֹ* *immō wə- im*] his children; it ate from his

presence of” (*m-bḥ*) are written with the sign , which of course, has been used for the nouns “phallus” and “semen.” (It also is used in 13.9 when Seth builds his stone boat in the presence of the Ennead.) In 12.3–12.4, Seth tells the Ennead that he has done “the work of a man” to Horus, which causes them to spit in Horus' face. The word “man” is *ḥ3.ti* (). The word “work” is *k3.t*, which is homophonous with *k3.t* “vulva,” used of Hathor in 4.2. The word “work” usually takes the determinative , but in this passage it is spelled , thus making the paronomasia visually more obvious. In 4.2, “vulva” is spelled as . The bard underscores the connection when Hathor reveals her vulva, and the Lord of All laughs (*sbḥ.t*) in response. After Seth makes his claim, Horus similarly laughs (*sbḥ.t*) in 12.4.

121. Discussed fully by Ellen Robbins, *The Storyteller and the Garden of Eden* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012). Cf. *אָדָם עָרֻם כֹּסֶה דָּעַת וְלֵב פְּסִילִים יִקְרָא אֲוֶלֶת* 'ādām 'ārūm kōšēh dā'at wə-lēb kāsīlīm yiqrā' 'iwwelet “a wise man conceals what he knows, but the heart of the foolish proclaims folly” (Prov 12:23).

morsel (of bread), and drank from his cup, and lay in his bosom, and it was like a daughter [בַּת *bat*] to him. And a traveler came to the rich man, and he spared to take [לָקַחַת *lā-qahat*] from his own flock and from his own herd, to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but took [וַיִּקַּח *way-yiqqah*] the lamb of the poor man [הָאִישׁ הָרָשׁ *hā-’iś hā-rā’š*], and prepared it [וַיַּעֲשֶׂה *wāy-ya’āśehā*] for the man who had come to him. (2 Sam 12:1–4)

David apparently realized that the parable was about adultery since he first pronounced a death sentence upon the man (2 Sam 12:5), but then realizing it was about him, he commanded a four-fold restitution for the lamb in accordance with the law (Exod 21:37). It is then that Nathan reveals its meaning: “you are the man!” (2 Sam 12:7). Nathan’s speech tricked David into passing judgment upon himself. Yet, had David listened more closely, he would have realized that Nathan’s words were loaded. Thrice the prophet refers to the victim as “poor.” While imperceptible to the ear, readers will note that the text spells it defectively once as רָשׁ *rāš* and twice as רָשׁ רָאֵשׁ *rā’š*. The defective spelling draws our focus to the paronomasia implicit in the forms, as the root ראש *r-’-š* also suggests “first, former.” The effect is especially striking near parable’s end when Nathan uses the full expression הָאִישׁ הָרָאֵשׁ *hā-’iś hā-rā’š* “the poor man,” thus paronomastically identifying him as the “first husband,” (cf. Hos 2:9 אִישׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן *’iśi hā-ri’šōn* “my former husband”). Moreover, the words רָשׁ *rā’š* “poor” and עָשִׁיר *’āšir* “rich” constitute a paronomastic word pair that features especially in proverbs that contrast the two (Prov 14:20, 28:6).¹²² The verb קָנָה *qānāh* “acquire” also can be used for betrothal (Ruth 4:5),¹²³ and the verb לָקַח *lāqah* “take” twice used, can refer to marriage (Gen 4:19, 12:19, 25:1). Nathan’s addition that the lamb נִבְחִיקוּ *ū-b-ḥēqō* *tiškāb* “lay in his bosom” also is rich in sexual overtones (cf. Gen 19:33, Exod 22:15, Mic 7:5), and by fronting the words “his bosom” before the verb, the phrase underscores Bathsheba’s rightful place with Uriah. The prophet’s mention of the lamb’s treatment like a בַּת *bat* “daughter” also evokes the first part of the name בַּת-שֶׁבַע *bat-šeba* “Bathsheba,”¹²⁴ especially following

122. Studied by Solfrid Storøy, “On Proverbs and Riddles: Polar Word Pairs and Other Poetic Devices, and the Words for ‘Poor and Needy’ in the Book of Proverbs,” *SJOT* 7 (1993): 270–84.

123. Noted already by David Qimḥi (1160–1235 CE). Cf. Ben Sira (D II Recto 36:29): קָנָה [קִנְיָן] אִשָּׁה [רְאִישִׁית] *qnh šh r[’šyt] q[ny]n* “One who acquires a wife gets the best acquisition.”

124. Observed also by Peter W. Coxon, “A Note on ‘Bathsheba’ in 2 Samuel 12,1–6,” *Bib* 62 (1981): 247–50, who notes that the LXX records the restitution as seven-fold, which reflects on the second half of her name, שֶׁבַע *šeba* “seven.” Noted also by Moshe Garsiel, *The Story and History of David and His Kingdom*, part 1 of *The Book of Samuel: Studies in History, Historiography, Theology and Poetics Combined* (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 2018), 463.

the juxtaposed prepositions עִמּוֹ וְעִם *immō wə-‘im* “with him and with,” which elicit the patronymic element עַם *‘am* “people” in her father’s name (אֱלִיָּאִים *‘ēlī-‘ām* “Eliam” in 2 Sam 11:3, and עַמִּיָּאֵל *‘ammī-‘ēl* “Amiel” in 1 Chr 3:5). Note too the use of the verb וַיַּעֲשֶׂה *wāy-ya-‘āšēhā* “and he prepared it” (lit. “and he did her”), a sexual *double entendre* found elsewhere (Gen 9:24, Ezek 23:3, 23:8, 23:21).¹²⁵ Finally, Nathan’s repetition of the phrase “the man who had come to him” (once with “wayfarer” instead of “man” [2 Sam 11:4]) recalls David’s summoning of Uriah, who “came to him” from the battlefield (2 Sam 11:7).¹²⁶

A final example of deceitful speech appears in the mouth of King Jehu who gathered all the people as a trick to sort out and kill all those who worshiped Baal. At first, he told them:

Ahab worshiped [עָבַד *‘āḇad*] Baal a little; Jehu will worship him [עֲבֹדְנִי *ya-‘āḇdennū*] much. Now summon to me all the prophets of Baal, all his worshipers [עֲבָדָיו *‘ōḇḏāw*], and all his priests, let none be missing, for I will make a great sacrifice to Baal. All who are missing [יִפְּאָקֵד *yippāqēḏ*] will not live. (2 Kgs 10:18–19)

The narrator then clarifies his motive since it otherwise would be ambiguous: “Jehu did it deceptively (בְּעֵקֶבָה *ḥə-‘ōqbāh*) with the intent that he may destroy (הָאֲבִיד *ha-‘āḇīd*) the worshipers (עֲבָדֵי *‘ōḇḏē*) of Baal” (2 Kgs 10:19). According to Ora Prouser, the ruse is embodied in the paronomasia between עָבַד *‘āḇad* “worship” and אָבַד *‘āḇad* “destroy.”¹²⁷ Moreover, Jehu’s threat that “whoever shall be missing (יִפְּאָקֵד *yippāqēḏ*) shall not live,” masks a polysemous promise, since the verb יִפְּאָקֵד *yippāqēḏ* “be missing” also means “shall be punished.”¹²⁸

One also finds deceptive polysemy and paronomasia in stories that involve acts of trickery. Usually this takes the form of ambiguous passages or structural arrangements that compel one to remain uncertain with regard to events or a

125. The story prepares the reader for the twist of meaning by employing the infinitive לַעֲשׂוֹת *la-‘āśōt* “to prepare” (lit. “do”) in 2 Sam 12:4.

126. In 2 Sam 12:4, we find both אִישׁ הַבָּאֵל *‘orēah hab-bā’ lō* “the wayfarer who had come to him” and אִישׁ הַבָּא אֵלָיו *‘is hab-bāh ‘ēlāw* “the man who had come to him,” with a change of nouns and prepositions. In 2 Sam 11:7, we hear that וַיָּבֹא אִישׁ הַדֶּרֶךְ אֵלָיו *way-yābō-‘ūriyyāh ‘ēlāw* “And Uriah came to him.” That Uriah is the wayfarer in the parable is clear in David’s query to Uriah: הֲלוֹא מִדֶּרֶךְ אָתָּה בָּא *hālō-‘ mid-derek ‘attāh ḥā’* “did you know come from a journey?” (2 Sam 11:10).

127. Found in Ora Horn Prouser, *The Phenomenology of the Lie in Biblical Narrative* (PhD diss., Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1991), 96–97.

128. On the many meanings of this verb, see Bernard Grossfeld, “The Translation of Biblical Hebrew פָּקַד in the Targum, Peshitta, Vulgate, and Septuagint,” *ZAW* 96 (1984): 83–101.

figure’s character.¹²⁹ Aside from the cases of polysemy and paronomasia I discussed above in the Tale of the Poor Man of Nippur, I know of no other uses of these devices in Akkadian texts involving deception. For an Egyptian example, I already have discussed the Contendings of Horus and Seth. With regard to the presence of positive use of lying and deception in the Bible, Prouser’s contextualization is worth stressing.

While the ideal of the truth is conveyed in biblical wisdom literature as well as elsewhere in the Bible, in biblical narrative lying was not considered a moral issue of absolutes. Rather, deception was considered an acceptable and generally praiseworthy means for a weaker party to succeed against a stronger power. It was not deemed appropriate, however, for a more powerful person to dissemble in order to achieve his or her goals.¹³⁰

The account of Jacob and Esau will illustrate. When the twins’ mother cooks up a scheme to hoodwink Esau out of his blind father’s blessing, Jacob reminds her, “behold my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man. Should my father feel me, I shall seem to him like a deceiver” (Gen 27:11–12). Jacob’s contention is polysemous for “smooth man” (אִישׁ חֲלָק *’iš ḥālāq*) also means a “deceitful man.”¹³¹ When Esau’s father informs him “your brother came with deceit and has taken away your blessing,” Esau replies:

Is he not rightly named Jacob [יַעֲקֹב *ya’āqōḇ*]? For he has deceived me [וַיַּעֲבֹדֵנִי *way-ya’qəḇēnī*] these two times: he took away my birthright [בְּכֹרְתִי *bəḵorātī*], and behold, now he has taken away my blessing [בִּרְכָתִי *birḵātī*]. (Gen 27:36)

129. Though here too one can find polysemous or paronomastic speech. See Jonathan Grossman, “The Use of Ambiguity in Biblical Narratives of Deception and Deceit” [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 73 (2006): 483–515.

130. Prouser, *Phenomenology of the Lie in Biblical Narrative*, i (abstract). Other useful publications on the subject include: David Marcus, “David the Deceiver and David the Dupe,” *Prooftexts* 6 (1986): 163–71; Susan Niditch, *Underdogs and Tricksters* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1987); Freund, “Lying and Deception in the Biblical and Post-biblical Tradition”; Michael James Williams, *Deception in Genesis: An Investigation into the Morality of a Unique Biblical Phenomenon*, SBL 32 (New York: Lang, 2001); Dean Andrew Nichols, *The Trickster Revisited: Deception as a Motif in the Pentateuch* (New York: Lang, 2009); John E. Anderson, *Jacob and the Divine Trickster: A Theology of Deception and Yhwh’s Fidelity to the Ancestral Promise in the Jacob Cycle*, Siphrut 5 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011).

131. Observed by Prouser, *Phenomenology of the Lie in Biblical Narrative*, 194. There is additional polysemy here in that the line “I shall seem to him” literally reads “I will be in his eyes,” thus reminding us that Isaac is blind (Gen 27:1).

While polysemy and paronomasia are not here used to deceive, they feature prominently in the narrative, because it is about trickery. Deception, polysemy, and paronomasia combine also in the continued narratives involving Jacob and Laban.¹³²

The story of Judah and Tamar offers another case study. It reports how Tamar disguised herself as a prostitute in order to trick Judah into fulfilling the law of the levir (Gen 38). After Tamar's first husband dies, and also his younger brother, Tamar waits for the last brother, Shelah, to reach marriageable age. Yet fearing that his last son also would die (Gen 38:11), Judah reneges on his promise, and so Tamar takes matters into her own hands. As Yair Zakovitch long ago espied, the name שְׁלָה *šēlāh* "Shelah" means "deceive" (cf. 2 Kgs 4:28), a connotation amplified by the reference to his birth at כְּזִיב *kəzīb* "Kezib" (Gen 38:5), which also connotes "lie."¹³³ Moreover, the narrator describes Tamar's disguise by saying אֶלְמָנוּתָהּ וַתִּסַּר בְּגָדֶיהָ *wa-tāsar biḡdē 'almānūtāh mē'āleyhā* "and she put off from her the garments of widowhood" (Gen 38:14). Here the verb תִּסַּר *tāsar* means "put off" as one would a garment, but also "reject, turn away" (Josh 11:15, Ps 66:20). In addition, the noun בְּגָד *beḡd* "garment" also connotes an act of "wickedness," in this case one involving deception.¹³⁴ Thus, we also may hear "and she rejected the deceptive-wickedness of widowhood," encapsulating in a single line the means and motive of her actions. In many such cases, one finds polysemy and paronomasia illustrating the principle of *lex talionis*, so that the one who dupes is duped in kind (see 3.15.3).¹³⁵

132. See Garsiel, *Biblical Names*, 53–54, who suggests that the root רמה *r-m-h* "deceive" plays a key role as a Leitwort that identifies Laban the "Aramaean" as Laban the "deceiver." For additional devices at work in Genesis and elsewhere, see Scott B. Noegel, "Drinking Feasts and Deceptive Feats: Jacob and Laban's Double Talk," in Noegel, *Puns and Pundits*, 163–80; Noegel, "Evil Looms: Delilah—Wicked Weaver of Wiles," *CBQ* 79 (2017): 187–204.

133. Zakovitch, "Status of the Synonymous Word and the Synonymous Name in the Creation of Midrashic Name Derivations"; Garsiel, *Biblical Names*, 124–25.

134. Cf. 1 Sam 19:13, in which Michal helps David escape from her father by an act of deception: "Michal then took the *teraphim*, placed it on the bed, and (put) a net of goat hair at its head, and covered (it) with the cloth [בְּבִגְדִי *bab-bāḡēd*]. The phrase "with the cloth" also suggests "deceptive-wickedness." Underscoring the ambiguity is the use of the verb "cover" without a direct object, which allows one to think that she also "covered up (the matter)." On the etymology and semantic range of the verb בָּגַד *bāḡaḡ* "wickedness, wrongful behavior, breach of trust," see Edward L. Greenstein, "On the Use of Akkadian in Biblical Hebrew Philology," in *Looking at the Ancient Near East and the Bible through the Same Eyes*, ed. Kathleen Abraham and Joseph Fleishman (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2012), 335–53.

135. See Noegel, "Drinking Feasts and Deceptive Feats"; Noegel, "Evil Looms."

A final example, discovered by Gerald Morris, occurs in the prophecy of Hosea against Ephraim:

As for the merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand.

He loves to oppress.

And Ephraim said: “Surely I have found myself wealth [יָנֵס 'ōn].

In all my labors, they have found in me no iniquity [לֹא יָמְצְאוּ לִי 'āwōn] that was sin.”

(Hos 12:8–9)

Underscoring the context of mercantile deception are the parallel lines מָצָאתִי יָנֵס *māṣā' lī 'ōn lī* “I have found myself wealth” and לֹא יָמְצְאוּ לִי *lō' yimṣə' ū lī 'āwōn* “they have found in me no iniquity,” which force one to recognize the paronomasia between יָנֵס *'ōn* “wealth” and יָמְצְאוּ *'āwōn* “iniquity.” As Morris explains, the passage clarifies “that Ephraim’s wealth is inseparable from his iniquity and guilt. Ephraim is hoist with his own petard.”¹³⁶

It is important to note that the very use of polysemy and paronomasia as tools for conveying deception in narratives reveals that the authors were aware that such devices indeed could deceive. As such, this function anticipates later Greek works, like those of Homer, wherein one similarly finds polysemy and paronomasia employed to deceive and to convey deception.¹³⁷

3.8. REFERENTIAL

Polysemy and paronomasia also can have a referential function. As such, they often establish comparisons and contrasts.¹³⁸ Two demonstrations of this function occur in the Akkadian Epic of Gilgamesh, in the account of Enkidu and the prostitute, Shamhat. The first appears in the narrator’s statement that “Shamhat undid her skirts [*didāša*],” (1.188) which paronomastically references the hunter’s prediction just two lines earlier: “his (Enkidu’s) love [*dadūša*] will caress and embrace you” (1.186). The second occurs shortly thereafter, in the narrator’s report that “she treated the man [*lulla*] to the work of a woman” (1.192), which anticipates the line “afterwards, he (Enkidu) was sated with her delights [*lalāša*]” (1.195). The paronomasia ties Shamhat’s skirt to his love and Enkidu to her delights.

136. Gerald Morris, *Prophecy, Poetry, and Hosea*, JSOTSup 219 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 87.

137. See Bruce Louden, “Categories of Homeric Wordplay,” *TAPA* 125 (1995): 27–46; Scott Richardson, “The Devious Narrator of the *Odyssey*,” *CJ* 101 (2006): 337–59.

138. This includes the function labeled by Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 245, as “to equate two things.”

In Akkadian, a referential function can operate on the level of individual signs as well. In the Descent of Ishtar, the narrator describes the underworld by saying that it is a place “where dust is their sustenance, their food is clay. They do see not light, in darkness they dwell” (ll. 8–9). Here the first sign used to write “see,” that is, *im* (in *im-ma-ru*) also constitutes a logogram read as IM, which means *tiġtu* “clay,” the very word in the previous verse. The informed reader cannot help but catch the reference. In fact, the Sumerogram appears later in line 33, in Ereškigal’s rhetorical query, “should I eat clay (IM) like bread?” Similarly, in line 29, the sign for the wood determinative GIŠ classifies the noun ^{GIŠ}*bīni* “tamarisk,” but in the very next line it is read phonetically as *iš* in *iš-li-ma* “became dark.” To offer just one more example, I turn to line 33, in which the *kal* sign is read phonetically in the verb *a-kal* “I shall eat,” but logographically in the very next line as GURUŠ meaning *eṭlu* “young man.”¹³⁹

In Egyptian, one finds a referential function in the Autobiography of Ankhṭifi inscribed in his tomb at Mo‘alla.

*ī[w] īn.n [wī] ḥr r wīs-ḥr n ‘w=s r grg=s [īr].n=<ī> ḥr wn ḥr ḥr mr.t grg=s ḥr īn=f
wī r=s r grg=s gm.n=<ī> pr ḥww ttf mī grg.t*

Horus brought me to the nome of Edfu to reestablish it, and I did. For Horus desired it to be reestablished, because he brought me to it to reestablish it. I found the House of Khuu inundated like a marsh. (1a.2–1a.3)

Here the three-fold repetition of *grg* “reestablish” concludes by references to an inundated *grg.t* “marsh,” thus identifying the reconstruction of the temple with the primeval time of Egyptian creation.

The Ugaritic Tale of Kirtu also illustrates a referential use of polysemy. In Kirtu’s dream, El informs him that the king will soon issue a call to arms so complete that even those normally spared from conscription will serve. Even *zbl* ‘*ršm yšu* “the sick man will carry (his) bed” (*CAT* 1.14.ii.45–46). El’s nocturnal message is polysemously potent. Since the noun *zbl* can mean “sick man” or “prince, ruler,” and the verb *yšu* can mean “carry” or “take,” we may also render *zbl* ‘*ršm yšu* “the ruler will take (his) bed.”¹⁴⁰ When the conscription occurs, Kirtu is healthy (*CAT* 1.14.iv.23–24), so *zbl* must refer to a drafted sick man.¹⁴¹ However, the alternative rendering of the god’s ominous missive is realized later

139. The defective spelling of *a-kal* for *akkal* perhaps serves to draw attention to the special device.

140. *DULAT*, s.v. “*zbl* I” and “*zbl* III”; s.v. “*nša*.” On such devices in this epic, see Noegel, “Kirtu’s Allusive Dream.”

141. Though *yšu*, rather the preterite *nša*, remains problematic. Perhaps we should render it as a jussive.

when Kirtu finds himself on a sickbed for neglecting his vow to the goddess 'Athirat. At that time, Kirtu's son Yaššib chides him in a way that recalls El's prediction. Perceiving that his father's illness had caused him to neglect his royal duties, including those affecting those previously conscripted by him (!), he berates him: *km aht 'rš mdw anšt 'rš zbln* “illness has become your lover, sickness a bed companion” (CAT 1.16.vi.35–36),¹⁴² thus again utilizing *zbl* for its allusive charge.

The Hebrew Bible contains numerous examples of polysemy and paronomasia used for referential ends. Such a function is attested most famously in the one-upmanship that takes place during the debates between Job and his friends. As the repartee unfolds, one hears the words of one character used with different meanings by another.¹⁴³ For example, Job first uses the root קוה *q-w-h* “hope” when lamenting the day of his birth (3:9): “let one hope (קוה יָקוּ *yəqaw*) for light and have none.” Eliphaz then employs the nominal form תִּקְוָה *tiqwāh* “hope” in 4:6, but alludes to its other meaning “thread” by employing it with the noun דָּל *dal* “poor,” which is related to דָּלָה *dallāh* “thread of a loom.” Job then retorts, “my days go swifter than a weaver's shuttle (אָרֶגֶץ *āreḡ*); they go without תִּקְוָה *tiqwāh*” (Job 7:6). In light of what Eliphaz has said, one cannot tell here if תִּקְוָה *tiqwāh* means “thread” or “hope.” Moreover, the former meaning matches the previous stich, while the latter finds support in the next line. Bildad then enters the debate and likens the “hope” (תִּקְוָה *tiqwāh*) of the godless to the web of an עֲקָבִישׁ *akkābīš* “spider” (8:13–14). The impact of his statement derives from the fact that Job's “weaver's shuttle” (אָרֶגֶץ *āreḡ*) also suggests a “spider.”¹⁴⁴ Yet, Job's friends do not best him, for in the end Yahweh vindicates Job from a whirlwind and asks, “who has laid its (the earth's) pillars, do you know? Or who has measured it with a plumbline [קוּ *qūw*] (38:5)?

142. Koowon Kim, *Incubation as a Type-Scene in the 'Aqhatu, Kirta, and Hannah Stories: A Form Critical and Narratological Study of KTU 1.14 I–I.15 III, 1.17 I–II, and 1 Samuel 1:1–2:11*, VTSup 145 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 224, observes the irony but not the polysemy.

143. Noegel, *Janus Parallelism in the Book of Job*, 131–36.

144. Though the root ארג *-r-g* does not occur in the Bible as a noun meaning “spider,” we do find the verb referring to a spider's actions in Isaiah's rebuke of liars who אָרְגוּ וְעָבִישׁ *wə-qūrē 'akkābīš yē'əroḡū* “they weave the webs of a spider” (Isa 59:5). We also hear how אֲרֵבֵיהֶם לֹא יִהְיוּ לְבִגָּה *qūrēhem lō' yihyū lə-ḥeḡeḡēd* “their webs do not become a garment” (59:6). In the Near East, spiders are generally thought of as little “weavers.” The Akkadian word for “spider” (*uttūtu/ettūtu*) informs the name of the Sumerian goddess of weaving, Uttu. CAD E, s.v. “*ettūtu*.” The Sumerian and Akkadian terms for “weave,” i.e., ZÉ-ZÉ = DUN-DUN (Akk. *šatū*), also refer to a “spider's web.” CAD Š/2, s.v. “*šatū* B.” The Akkadian *qū* “thread” also means “spider web.” CAD Q, s.v. “*qū* A.”

3.9. ALLUSIVE

Allusive paronomasia (sometimes called “translexical punning”) occurs when a text evokes a word, text, or tradition that does not occur in the present context.¹⁴⁵ Cases of allusive paronomasia appear already in Sumerian texts. See the following proverb: KASKAL NÍĜ.KÚ.DA LÚ.NU.KUŠ.Û U₄.ŠÚ.UŠ.E KI BÍ.IB.RI.RI.GE “the widow scavenges evenings on the road for something to eat.” According to Robert Falkowitz, the signs U₄.ŠÚ.UŠ.E allude to the reading U₄.ŠÚ.A (= Akkadian *berû*) “hungry,” thus suggesting that the widow scavenges hungrily/at night.¹⁴⁶ Another proverb reads: ŠÀ.SUR NU.UB.RA.KAR ZÌ.NI NU.ŠUB.BÉ GI.ŠÀ.SUR NU.UB.RA.KAR ZÌ.NI NU.ŠUB.BÉ “he did not take away the sieve and his flour does not fall (through) it.” Here the signs GI.ŠÀ.SUR evoke ŠÀ.SUR “diarrhoea,” and the sign ZÌ doubles for ŠĒ “feces.” The result alters the rendering to “(though) the diarrhoea was not taken away, his feces do not fall.”¹⁴⁷

Allusive paronomasia occurs in an Old Assyrian text from Kanesh about Sargon of Agade, about which Marc van der Mieroop states: “The author of this text was extremely skillful and produced a piece of literature that contains numerous puns and wordplays.”¹⁴⁸ Indeed, in the text the king reports, “for seven days and fifteen days I stayed with my creditors (*ummiānu*) at the meal” (l. 43), a statement that van der Mieroop sees as an allusion to the royal *ummiānu* “troops.”

There is a strange statement that he had spent his time with his creditors, a common Old Assyrian term which can easily be confused with the term for troops or soldiers. To an Old Assyrian audience, used to deal with these people in their business practices, this may have had a special resonance.¹⁴⁹

We find allusive paronomasia at work in some Akkadian omen texts as well, such as the following extispicy reading: “when (the) lobe is (shaped) like (the grapheme) *kaškaš*, (then) Adad (the storm god) will inundate (with rain).”¹⁵⁰ The

145. Cherry, *Paronomasia and Proper Names in the Old Testament*, 33–34, employs the adjective “adumbrative.” However, to my mind, this term suggests shadowing and/or concealment and thus mischaracterizes the function. See similarly many of the observations found in Yair Zakovitch, *The Hidden Biblical Dictionary* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2014).

146. Falkowitz, *Sumerian Rhetoric Collections*, 165.

147. Falkowitz, *Sumerian Rhetoric Collections*, 245.

148. Marc van der Mieroop, “Sargon of Agade and his Successor in Anatolia,” *Studi Micenei ed Egeo-anatolici* 42 (2000): 148.

149. Van der Mieroop, “Sargon of Agade and his Successor in Anatolia,” 156.

150. Stephen J. Lieberman, “The Names of the Cuneiform Graphemes in Old Babylonian Akkadian,” in *Essays on the Ancient Near East in Memory of Jacob Joel Finkelstein*, ed. Maria de Jong Ellis (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1977), 148 n. 24.

grapheme known as *kaškaš* echoes the adjective *kaškaššu* “overpowering,” which is an epithet of the storm god Adad. Thus, the feature of the exta portends a flood by the stormgod, even though Adad appears nowhere in the protasis.

Baruch Ottervanger observed a particularly clever use of allusive paronomasia in the use of the interjection *ua* “woe, alas” in The Tale of the Poor Man of Nippur: KI.MIN *ina maḥrīšu us-a ānḥakuma qib[i]* “Likewise, he (the chief), said in his presence: ‘Alas, am I tired!’” (l. 93).¹⁵¹ The scribe has employed the sign *us* in the interjection, because it doubles as a logogram for *laḥru* “sheep,” and thus, it stands as a fitting follow-up to the *pasillu*-sheep, which the poem mentions in the preceding line.

One also finds allusion at work in the Epic of Gilgamesh. Kilmer has demonstrated how the two items seen in the hero’s dream, a *kišru* “meteorite” that fell on top of him from *anu* “heaven,” and a *ḥaššinnu* “axe” that one embraces as “a wife,” paronomastically allude to a *kezru* “male prostitute” and an *assinu* a “male servant of Ishtar,” respectively.¹⁵² The allusions prefigure the hairy Enkidu (2.iii.23), whose dalliance with a prostitute transforms him from an animal of the steppeland to a civilized human, and whose relationship with Gilgamesh becomes intimate. Underscoring the force of the allusions is the prostitute’s statement to Enkidu that Uruk is “the abode of Anu and Ishtar” (*mūšab* ^d*Anim* ^d*Ištar*, 1.iv.37, 44).

The Ramesside dream manual demonstrates allusive paronomasia in Egyptian. One of its omens reads: *ḥr wnm ḫw n mšḥ nfr wnm ḫ.t sr [pw]* “consuming the flesh of a crocodile; good, it means consuming the possessions of an official” (r. 2.22). The dream’s protasis connects to its apodosis by way of the repeated action of “consuming.” Yet, the crocodile in the dream alludes to an official, because, as we have seen already, the logogram  can be read as *ḫtj* “ruler.”¹⁵³ Officials are often likened to crocodiles in other Egyptian texts, because of their alleged greed. Elsewhere in the manual we find another example: *ḥr st ḫḥ m ḏr.t=f nfr smḥ p[ḫ]ḫ=f ḫrḫ-n-ḫḫ.(t)* “cutting up a bull with his own hand; good, (it means that) his (own) opponent will be killed” (r. 4.16). The bovine sign (i.e., ) is read as *ḫḥ* “bull.” Nevertheless, it also forms a lexical association with *ḫḫ* “killed” by way of the noun *smḥ* “wild bull” (the determinative for which is also ) or , because *smḥ* also can mean “kill.” Nevertheless, the *smḥ* “wild bull”

151. Ottervanger, *Tale of the Poor Man of Nippur*, 36.

152. Anne D. Kilmer, “A Note on an Overlooked Word-Play in the Akkadian Gilgamesh,” in *Zikir Šumim: Assyriological Studies Presented to F. R. Kraus on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. G. Van Driel, Th. J. H. Krispijn, M. Stol, and K. R. Veenhof (Leiden: Brill, 1982), 128–32; Kilmer, “More Word Play in Akkadian Poetic Texts,” in Noegel, *Puns and Pundits*, 89–101. On additional polysemy in this passage, see Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 59–65. The Epic of Zimri-Lim (1.24) exploits the polysemy of *kišru* for “knot” of rope and “soldiers.” See Adam Miglio, “Epic of Zimri-Lim,” *COS* 4:232 n. 14.

153. As shown above in reference to the Dispute between a Man and His Ba, l. 102.

does not appear in the text. Strengthening the allusion are a number of well-known cases of paronomasia that connect bovines to smiting and killing in the Pyramid Texts (Spell 580, §1543–1544).

O you who smote [*hwī*] my father, who killed one greater than himself.
 You have smitten [*hwī*] my father, you have killed one greater than you.
 O my father Osiris this king, I have smitten [*hwī*] for you him who smote you as
 an ox [*īh*].
 I have killed [*smī*] for you him who killed [*smī*] you as a wild bull [*smī*].
 I have broken [*ngī*] for you him who broke [*ngī*] you as a long-horn [*ngī*].
 On whose back [*hr sī=f*] you were, as a subjected bull [*hr sī=f*].

Janet Johnson and Robert Ritner proposed another example from the Demotic Chronicle. In that text, a prophecy associates *ibj* “honey” with the *tšr* “red crown” (of Lower Egypt), based on paronomasia between *ibj* “honey” and *bl.t* “crown of Lower Egypt,” even though the latter does not appear (5.23–24).¹⁵⁴

Sometimes allusion is created solely on a visual register. Witness the following description in the Memphite Theology (Shabaka Stone, BM 498): *rd.n wr.tī hk3.w m tp=f* “then there sprouted the two great magicians from his head” (l. 14b–c). Appearing after *wr.tī hk3.w* “the two great magicians” are the determinatives  and , thus suggesting visually, but not audibly, that the crowns of upper and lower Egypt are meant.

Similarly, much of the Tale of Wenamun (P.Moscow 120) is taken up with Wenamun’s attempt to keep a statue of Amun out of sight of the Byblian king and with the question of whether Amun is still present as lord over the Lebanon (and Cyprus) as he was in times past. When a Byblian seer prophesies in an ecstatic trance, “bring the god up! Bring the envoy who is carrying him up! It is Amun who sent him! It is he who made him come!” (1.39–40), Wenamun allows him to be entranced well into the night. Then, under cover of darkness, Wenamun hides the statue of Amun, saying: *h3j=f 3tp=ī p3 ntr r tmī dl.t ptrī sw k.tī īr.t* “when it (night) descends, I will load the god so that no other eye can see him” (1.42).¹⁵⁵ Though the verb *īmn* “hide” does not occur, it is implicit in the act of hiding Amun

154. Janet H. Johnson and Robert K. Ritner, “Multiple Meaning and Ambiguity in the ‘Demotic Chronicle,’” in *Studies in Egyptology Presented to Miriam Lichtheim*, ed. Sarah Israelit-Groll, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1990), 496–97. For additional polysemy in the Demotic Chronicle, see Sandra L. Lippert, “Komplexe Wortspiele in der Demotischen Chronik und im Mythos vom Sonnenauge,” *Enchoria* 27 (2001): 88–100.

155. For the text, see Bernd U. Schipper, *Die Erzählung des Wenamun: Ein Literaturwerk im Spannungsfeld von Politik, Geschichte und Religion* (Fribourg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005).

from sight, in the name of the god *ḫmn* “Amun” (“Hidden One”), and in the name of the central character Wenamun (i.e., *wn-ḫmn* lit. “Amun is present”).¹⁵⁶

A particularly savvy use of allusive paronomasia in Ugaritic appears in the Tale of Aqhat, in which Baal refers to the hero Danel as one: *d in bn lh km aḥh w šrš km aryh* “who has no son like his brothers, no offspring like his kinsmen” (CAT 1.17.i.18–19). The phrase *d in bn lh* “who has no son” subtly evokes the name *dnīl* “Danel.” Elsewhere in the story, we find another example in Danel’s call to his daughter Paghit (CAT 1.19.ii.1–5):

1. *šm ‘ pḡt ṯkmt [] my*
Listen, Paghit, bearer of water,
2. *ḥspt l š ‘ r ṯl yd [t]*
Collector of dew from the fleece,
3. *hlk kbkbm mdl ‘ r*
Who knows the course of the stars. Bridle the donkey.
4. *šmd pḥl št gṇny dt ksp*
Harness the ass. Lay on my silver bridle,
5. *dt yrq nqbny*
My golden harness.

Of note here is the verb *mdl*, which only can mean “bridle” in this context. However, *mdl* also means “meteor, thunderbolt.”¹⁵⁷ Its use following *kbkbm* “stars” cannot be accidental.

Paronomasia also has an allusive purpose in the Epic of Baal. When the god Yam sends El a message demanding that he deliver Baal to him so Yam might attack him, Yam prefaces his dictate by labeling the missive *ṯm ym b ‘ lkm* “the decree of Yam, your master” (CAT 1.2.i.17). Since Yam’s use of *b ‘ lkm* “your master” usurps Baal’s authority by placing him below Yam, the use of *b ‘ lkm* here belies Yam’s intention to harm *b ‘ l* “Baal.”

See too the following Ugaritic incantation against venomous reptiles (CAT 1.100.73–76).

156. For an additional paronomastic reference to the name Wenamun, see Winand, “Report of Wenamun,” 550.

157. The meaning “thunderbolt” occurs in the Epic of Baal (CAT 1.5.v.7) where Baal is commanded to take his clouds, winds, *mdl*, and rains and head for the underworld. Of interest is that, in l. 11, he also is commanded to take his daughter *ṯly* Tally (i.e., “Dew”). The passage thus similarly joins *mdl* to dew. Cf. CAT 1.3.ii.40–41: *ṯl šmm tskḥ [r]bb nskḥ kbkbm* “Dew which the heavens pour on her (Anat), showers the stars pour on her.” The belief that dew came from the stars was widespread. See Erica Reiner, *Astral Magic in Babylonia*, TAPS 85.4 (Philadelphia, PA: American Philosophical Society, 1995).

tn km [mhry] nhšm

Give as my [bride-price] snakes.

yhr tn km mhry

A serpent give as my bride-price,

w bn bṭn ittny

And the sons of adders as my gift.

ytt nhšm mhrk

I herewith give snakes as your bride-price,

bn bṭn itnnk

The sons of adders as your gift.

Since the charm uses three terms for snake in close succession, two of which repeat, it is difficult not to hear and see in the repeated noun *itnn* “gift” the primordial serpent *tnn* “Tannīn.”¹⁵⁸

The Hebrew Bible contains abundant demonstrations of the allusive function of polysemy and paronomasia.¹⁵⁹ Ezekiel’s prophecy against Egypt rails against “the young men of iniquity (אָנָן *’āwen*)” (Ezek 30:17) in a way that alludes to the city of Heliopolis (אֹן *’ōn*), spelled with the same consonants.

In 1 Kgs 18:4, the narrator informs us that Obadiah had hidden one hundred of Yahweh’s prophets from Jezebel, who sought to kill them. The expression אֶחָדָם *way-yahbī’ēm* “and he hid them” offers a not-so-subtle allusion to Jezebel’s husband, king אַחָאב *’ah ’āb* “Ahab.”

Job’s comparison of his brothers to unreliable streams represents another fine allusion: “(they) are dark [הַקְדָּרִים *haq-qōḏrīm*], because of the ice, and in which [עֲלֵמֹה *’ālēmō*] the snow hides itself [יִתְעַלֵּם *yit ’allem*]. At the time they grow warm, they vanish.... The caravans of Tema looked, the companies of Sheba waited for them” (Job 6:16–19). As Moshe Garsiel points out, the toponyms קֶדָר *qēḏār* “Qedar” and עֵילָם *’ēlām* “Elam” do not appear in the text, but their association with Sheba and Tema elsewhere in the Bible suggests that they are invoked by paronomasia—the former via הַקְדָּרִים *haq-qōḏrīm* “dark” and the latter by way of עֲלֵמֹה *’ālēmō* “in which” and יִתְעַלֵּם *yit ’allem* “hides itself.”¹⁶⁰

158. Wilfred G. E. Watson, “Allusion, Irony and Wordplay in Mic. 1, 7,” *Bib* 65 (1984): 103–5, uses this text to shed light on the similar use of the cognate אֶתָנָן *’etnān* “gift” twice in Mic 1:7. Watson sees the lexeme as an allusion to תַּנְיָן *tannīn* “dragon.” I would add an additional allusion to the dragon via תַּנְיִים *tannīm* “jackals” in Mic 1:8. For a similar connection between the two words, see the discussion of Jer 51:34–37 (3.17). I merely have extended Watson’s keen insight to the Ugaritic charm. I thank Wilfred Watson for his personal communication on the subject, September 11, 2017. Dennis Pardee, “Ugaritic Liturgy against Venomous Reptiles (RS 24.244),” *COS* 1:298, translates *’inn* as “wife-price.”

159. On allusion in the Hebrew Bible generally, see Ziony Zevit, ed., *Subtle Citation, Allusion, and Translation in the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2017).

160. Garsiel, *Biblical Names*, 142–43.

Numerous allusions in the book of Jonah suggest that the fish that swallowed the prophet was none other than Leviathan.¹⁶¹ When Jonah cries out: וַתִּשְׁלִיכֵנִי מִצִּדֵּי יָם וַיִּהְיֶה סָבִיב יָם וַיִּהְיֶה סָבִיב יָם וַיִּהְיֶה סָבִיב יָם *wa-tašlīkēnī mēšūlāh bi-lḥaḥ yammīm wē-nāhār yēsōḥēḥēnī* “you cast me into the deep, in the heart of the seas, River surrounded me” (Jon 2:4), we hear an identification of the fish with Judge River (i.e., Leviathan) in וַיִּהְיֶה סָבִיב יָם וַיִּהְיֶה סָבִיב יָם *wē-nāhār yēsōḥēḥēnī* “River surrounded me.” Implicit in the root סבב *s-b-b* is a twisting, undulating, or encircling motion, as one would use of a watery serpent. Jonah’s complaint that אֶפְפוּנִי מִיָּם עַד־נֶפֶשׁ *’āpāpūnī mayīm ‘aḏ neṣēs tēhōm yēsōḥēḥēnī* “waters engulfed me, even to (my) throat, Deep surrounding me” (2:6), employs the noun תְּהוֹם *tēhōm* “Deep,” the lair of the *tannīn* (Isa 51:9–10, cf. Job 41:24, Ps 148:7).

A related form of allusive paronomasia examined recently by Jonathan Kline draws upon earlier textual traditions in order to reconfigure them to meet new theological needs.¹⁶² For example, Mal 1:11–12 employs the idiom מִמְּוֶרֶחַ שֶׁמֶשׁ וְעַד־מְבֹאֵי *mim-mizrah šemeš wē-‘aḏ mabō’ō* “from the rising of the sun to its setting” found only in Ps 50:1 and 113:3, to evoke the Psalms’ context of universal praise for Yahweh’s name. However, whereas Ps 113:3 refers to the מְהֻלָּל *məhullāl* “praise” of his name, Mal 1:12 refers to the priests מְהַלְלִים *məhallālīm* “profaning” it. We may consider such examples generally as also having a referential or hermeneutic function, though their lack of specific reference forces me to classify them as allusions.¹⁶³

A later example of an allusion of this kind appears in b. Ketub. 10b, in which R. Abaye shares his mother’s advice on the best times to eat dates: תִּמְרֵי מִקְמֵי *tmry mqmy nhm’ ky nrg’ l-dyqwl’ btr nhm’ ky ‘br’ l-dš* “eating dates before ‘bread’ (a meal) is like an ‘axe’ to a date palm,” and after ‘bread’ (a meal) is like a ‘bolt to a door.’” Though the advice is in Aramaic, it nonetheless depends on understanding it in Akkadian, though Akkadian is nowhere present. As Markham Geller notes, understanding the advice depends on knowing that the Akkadian *aru* can mean “frond of a date palm,” “to cut branches (of a date palm),” but also “to vomit.” In addition, the “door” is here a euphemism for the anus. The bolt, when understood as the Akkadian *sikkūru*

161. See Scott B. Noegel, “Jonah and Leviathan: Inner-Biblical Allusions and the Problem with Dragons,” *Henoch* 37 (2015): 236–60, for the complete evidence.

162. Jonathan G. Kline, *Allusive Soundplay in the Hebrew Bible*, AIL 28 (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2016), 93–99, based on his dissertation *Transforming the Tradition: Soundplay as an Interpretive Device in Innerbiblical Allusion* (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2014).

163. Benjamin D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40–66* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 36–61, sees the allusions in Isa 40–66 as having six main functions: reversal, reprediction, repetition of a promise, fulfillment of earlier prophecies, historical recontextualization, and typological linkage. Each of these is a variant within the broader hermeneutic category.

“bolt,” and derived from *sekēru* “stop up,” then becomes a subtle reference to constipation.¹⁶⁴

3.10. APPELLATIVE

Some forms of paronomasia reflect on the name of a god, person, place, or thing. This function also has been called *nomen omen* and *midrashic name derivation*.¹⁶⁵ The former expression is unhelpful,¹⁶⁶ because not all appellative forms of

164. Markham J. Geller, “Akkadian Healing Therapies in the Babylonian Talmud,” *MPIW* 259 (2004): 1–60.

165. On *nomen omen*, see G. B. Gray, *Studies in Hebrew Proper Names* (London: Black, 1896); J. Fichtner, *Die altorientalische Weisheit in ihrer israelitisch-jüdischen Ausprägung*, BZAW 62 (Giessen: Töpelmann, 1933); A. Bertholet, *Wortanklang und Volksetymologie in ihrer Wirkung auf religiösen Glauben und Brauch*, APAWPHK 6 (Berlin: Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1940); J. Fichtner, “Die Etymologische Ätiologie in den Namensgebungen der Geschichtlichen Bücher des Alten Testaments,” *VT* (1956): 372–96; Andrezej Strus, *Nomen Omen* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1978); Lester L. Grabbe, *Etymology in Early Jewish Interpretation: The Hebrew Names in Philo*, BJS 115 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988); Beat Weber-Lehnherr, “‘Nomen est omen.’ Einige Erwägungen zu Gen 32,23–33 und seinem Kontext,” *BN* 61 (1992): 76–83; Shamma Friedman, “*Nomen est Omen*: Dicta of the Sages Which Echo the Author’s Name,” in *These Are the Names: Studies in Jewish Onomastics*, ed. Aaron Demsky (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1999), 51–77. On the midrashic name derivation, see Yair Zakovitch, “Explicit and Implicit Name-Derivations,” *HAR* 4 (1980): 167–80; Zakovitch, “Status of the Synonymous Word and the Synonymous Name in the Creation of Midrashic Name Derivations”; E. Marino, *Etimologia o paronomasia? Il significato dei nomi del libro della Genesi* (Lugio, 1993); Yair Zakovitch, “Yabbok, Peniel, Mahanaim, Bethel: Name Midrashim as Reflections of Ideological Struggles” [Hebrew], *Ariel* 100–101 (1994): 191–204; Garsiel, *Biblical Names*; Marks, “Biblical Naming and Poetic Etymology”; Richard S. Hess, *Studies in the Personal Names of Genesis 1–11* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009); Greg Goswell, “Royal Names: Naming and Wordplay in Isaiah 7,” *WTJ* 75 (2013): 97–109.

166. Despite the seminal contribution of Strus, *Nomen Omen*. With regard to classics, paronomasia and polysemy on proper names in Greek and Latin is well known. See, e.g., Eugene S. McCartney, “Puns and Plays on Proper Names,” *CJ* 14 (1919): 343–58; Max Sulzberger, “ONOMA ΕΠΩΝΥΜΟΝ: Les noms propres chez Homère et dans la mythologie Grecque,” *RdEG* 183 (1926): 381–447; C. J. Fordyce, “Puns on Names in Greek,” *CJ* 28 (1932–1933): 44–46; J. Enoch Powell, “Puns in Herodotus,” *CR* 51 (1937): 103–5; Nathan A. Greenberg, “Epanastrophe in Latin Poetry,” *RO* 2 (1972): 1–17; Barbara Weiden Boyd, “Cydonea Mala: Virgilian Word-Play and Allusion,” *HSCP* 87 (1983): 169–74; M. I. Davis, “The Tickle and Sneeze of Love,” *AJA* 86 (1982): 115–18; Frederick Ahl, “The Art of Safe Criticism in Greece and Rome,” *AJP* 105 (1984): 174–208; Ahl, *Metaformations: Soundplay and Wordplay in Ovid and Other Classical Poets* (Ithaca, NY:

Cornell University Press, 1985); Ahl, "*Ars est celare artem* (Art in Puns and Anagrams Engraved)," in *On Puns: The Foundation of Letters*, ed. Jonathan D. Culler (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 17–43; D. P. Kubiak, "Piso's Madness (Cic. In Pis. 21 and 47)," *AJP* 110 (1989): 237–45; K. Sara Myers, "The Lizard and the Owl: an Etymological Pair in Ovid, *Metamorphoses* Book 5," *AJP* 113 (1992): 63–68; Anne Helgtulla, "Epigraphical Laughter," in *Laughter Down the Centuries*, ed. Siegfried Jäkel and Asko Tomonen, vol. 2. (Turku: Turun Yliopisto, 1994–1997), 145–59; Nicholas M. Horsfall, "Style, Language, and Meter," in *A Companion to the Study of Virgil*, ed. Nicholas M. Horsfall, MS 151 (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 217–48; Michael Paschalis, "Names and Death in Horace's Odes," *CW* 88 (1995): 181–90; Louden, "Categories of Homeric Wordplay"; Kenneth J. Reckford, "Horatius: The Man and the Hour," *AJP* 118 (1997): 583–612; Howard Jacobson, "Violets and Violence: Two Notes," *CQ* 48 (1998): 314–15; W. H. Keulen, "Significant Names in Apuleius: A 'Good Contriver' and His Rival in the Cheese Trade (Met 1,5)," *Mnemosyne* 53 (2000): 310–21; Barbara Weiden Boyd, "Arms and the Man: Wordplay and the Catasterism of Chiron in Ovid, 'Fasti' 5," *AJP* 122 (2001): 67–80; Joan Booth and Robert Maltby, eds., *What's in a Name? The Significance of Proper Names in Classical Latin Literature* (Wales: Classical Press of Wales, 2006); Richardson, "Devious Narrator of the *Odyssey*"; Norman Austin, "Name Magic in the *Odyssey*," in *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies: Homer's Odyssey*, ed. Lillian E. Doherty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 91–110; Jan Kwapisz, David Petrain, and Mikołaj Szymański, eds., *The Muse at Play: Riddles and Wordplay in Greek and Latin Poetry*, BA 305 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013); Philip Mitsis and Ioannis Ziogas, eds., *Wordplay and Powerplay in Latin Poetry*, TCSV 36 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016); James J. Clauss, "The Near Eastern Background of Aetiological Wordplay in Callimachus," in *Callimachus Revisted: New Perspectives in Callimachean Scholarship*, ed. J. J. H. Klooster et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 2019), 65–96. Such devices also appear in the New Testament. See Neil J. McLeney, "153 Great Fishes (John 21,11)—Gematriacal Atbash," *Bib* 58 (1977): 411–17; Earl Richard, "Expressions of Double Meaning and Their Function in the Gospel of John," *NTS* 31 (1985): 96–112; Karen H. Jobes, "The Function of Paronomasia in Hebrews 10:5–7," *TrinJ* 13 (1992): 181–91; S. Fisher, "How Many Angels Can Dance on the Head of a Pun?," *BAR* 19.3 (1993): 19, 76; J. A. Fitzmeyer, "Reply to Charles Abraham's 'The Pun on Peter,'" *BAR* 19 (1993): 68, 70; Thomas William Thatcher, *The Riddles of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1996); Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, vol. 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 1231–33; T. J. Lang, "'You Will Desire to See and You Will Not See [It]': Reading Luke 17.22 as Antanaclasses," *JSNT* 33 (2011): 281–302; Michael P. Knowles, "Serpents, Scribes, and Pharisees," *JBL* 133 (2014): 165–78. For similar devices found farther afield, see H. Kökeritz, "Rhetorical Word-Play in Chaucer," *PMLA* 69 (1954): 937–52; Roberta Frank, "Some Uses of Paronomasia in Old English Scriptural Verse," *Speculum* 47 (1972): 207–26; C. D. Orzech, "Puns on the Humane King: Analogy and Application in an East Asian Apocryphon," *JAOS* 109 (1989): 17–24.

paronomasia prefigure future moments or destinies.¹⁶⁷ The latter expression derives from the study of rabbinic texts and implies a context and usage that is not applicable to Akkadian and Egyptian materials. It usually also has been treated as a device rather than a function, as it is here. Greenstein employs the taxon *proper names* for what I call *appellative*, and groups them according to whether they provide an etymology (signaling the past), comment on a person's essence (set in the present), or portend someone's destiny (future).¹⁶⁸ Jan Assmann has coined the term *etymography* for this phenomenon in Egyptian texts, and this term has been adopted by some Assyriologists.¹⁶⁹ However, not all appellative paronomasia is based on etymology, nor does it always focus on a proper name. Rather it functions to resound or reflect on the name of a thing and/or its (potential) meaning or essence, or to draw connections—it is correlative in nature. Hence my choice of the adjective appellative, which encompasses both proper names and common nouns.

Informing many kinds of appellative paronomasia in ancient Near Eastern texts is a widespread belief that knowing the name of a thing gave one a degree of power over that thing. This belief lies at the heart of the Mesopotamian tradition of composing vast lexical and omen collections, which Mogens Trolle Larsen observes represent an effort “to present a systematic and ordered picture of the world.”¹⁷⁰ Joan Goodnick Westenholz similarly remarks: “On the intellectual

167. The etiological nature of such texts also has been called into question. See, e.g., Burke O. Long, *The Problem of Aetiological Narrative in the Old Testament*, BZAW 108 (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1968); Friedemann W. Golka, “The Aetiologies in the Old Testament: Part 1,” *VT* 26 (1976): 410–28; Golka, “The Aetiologies in the Old Testament: Part 2,” *VT* 27 (1977): 36–47; Petrus J. van Dyk, “The Function of So-Called Aetiological Elements in Narratives,” *ZAW* 102 (1990): 19–33. However, see still John Briggs Curtis, “A Folk Etymology of ‘Nābî,’” *VT* 29 (1979): 491–93.

168. Greenstein, “Wordplay, Hebrew,” 970. Appellative paronomasia may be related to the literary use of names whose meanings convey information about their characters or destinies. This phenomenon is well known to students of the Hebrew Bible, but it has been studied most closely by Egyptologists, who sometimes refer to such names as “charactonyms.” See Steve Vinson, “The Names ‘Naneferkaptah,’ ‘Inhweret,’ and ‘Tabubue’ in the ‘First Tale of Setne Khaemwas,’” *JNES* 68 (2009): 283–303, and n. 1, for additional references.

169. See Assmann, “Etymographie,” 37–63; Eckart Frahm, “Reading the Tablet, the Exta, and the Body: The Hermeneutics of Cuneiform Signs in Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries and Divinatory Texts,” in *Divination and Interpretation of Signs in the Ancient World*, 96 n. 9; Enrique Jiménez, “‘As Your Name Indicates’: Philological Arguments in Akkadian Disputations,” *JANEH* 5 (2018): 87–105.

170. Mogens Trolle Larsen, “The Mesopotamian Lukewarm Mind: Reflections on Science, Divination, and Literacy,” in *Language, Literature, and History: Philological and*

level, knowing the organization of the world made it possible to affect the universe by magical means.”¹⁷¹ Marduk’s fifty esoteric names appear to provide him a means of being invulnerable. Egyptian gods are also said to possess secret names, so that the power of sorcerers could not be used against them.¹⁷² In Ugaritic, we see this power deployed when the craftsman god Kothar-wa-Ḫasis names Baal’s weapons, thus empowering their flight (*CAT* 1.2.iv.7–27). The belief is manifested in various ways in the Hebrew Bible too. We see it in Yahweh’s secret name (Exod 3:13–14), and in the angel’s refusal to let Jacob know his name (Gen 32:30).¹⁷³ Indeed, regardless of whether one refers to a common object or a divine name, the ancients perceived the name to embody its identity, essence, and power.

There are two kinds of appellative paronomasia in ancient Near Eastern texts. The first reflects on the name of a god, person, place, or thing within a text. The second type, which is far more rare, reflects on the name of the author (or presumed author) of a text.

3.10.1. APPELLATIVE PARONOMASIA WITHIN THE TEXT

Appellative paronomasia of the first kind occurs already in Sumerian texts. In Gudea’s cylinder B 6.21–22, we find:

IG.GAL DIM ĜÍR.NU.NA
 GAL₅.LÁ GAL ĜÍR.SU^{KI}
^dIG.ALIM DUMU KI ÁĜ.ĜÁ.NI

The great door, the post of Ĝirnum,
 the chief bailiff of Ĝirsu,
 Igalim, his beloved son.

As Klein and Sefati observe, paronomasia identifies the IG.GAL “great door” with the minor deity ^dIG.ALIM “Igalim.”¹⁷⁴

In Cylinder A 2.20, the phrase ĜÛ.DÉ.A.NI ĜÍŠ BA.TUKU.ÀM “his call having been heard” echoes the name “Gudea.”¹⁷⁵ A praise poem of Shulgi similarly employs the sign ŠUL “young man” instead of the usual ĜURUŠ to echo

Historical Studies Presented to Erica Reiner, ed. Francesca Rochberg-Halton (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1987), 209–12, refers to lexical lists.

171. Joan Goodnick Westenholz, “Thoughts on Esoteric Knowledge and Secret Lore,” in Prosecky, *Intellectual Life in the Ancient Near East*, 453.

172. Pascal Vernus, “Name,” *LÁ* 4 (1982): cols. 320–326; Guglielmi, “Wortspiel,” col. 1288.

173. H. B. Huffmon, “Name 𐤇𐤔,” *DDD*, 610–12.

174. Klein and Sefati, “Word Play in Sumerian Literature,” 56.

175. Klein and Sefati, “Word Play in Sumerian Literature,” 59.

the name Shulgi in a statement about his name: “your father, who begot you, holy Lugalbanda, called your name: ‘Youth (ŠUL)-Whom-Anu-Knows-Among-the-Gods’” (Shulgi P b 38–39).¹⁷⁶

Perhaps the most prolonged case of appellative paronomasia in Sumerian appears in the myth of Enki and Ninhursag, which recounts how Ninhursag placed Enki in her vulva and gave birth to eight gods, each from a different part of Enki’s body.¹⁷⁷ Each of the gods’ names derives from the connection to the name of the body part. Thus, ^dAB.Ú is created from the UGU.DÍLI “brainpan,”¹⁷⁸ ^dNIN.SIKI.LÁ from the PA SIKI “top of the hair,” ^dNIN.GIRI₁₇.Ú.DÚ from the GIRI₁₇ “nose,” ^dNIN.KA.SI from the KA “mouth,” ^dNA.ZI from the ZI “throat,” ^dÁ.ZI.MÚ.A from Á “arm,” ^dNIN.TI from the TI “rib,” and ^dEN.SA₆.AG from the ZAG “side” (ll. 250–268).

An excellent demonstration in Akkadian is the Babylonian treatment of the name Babylon as if it derives from *bāb ilīm* “gate of the gods,” despite it being of substrate origin (written as Pabil or Babil) and of unknown etymology.¹⁷⁹ Elsewhere we find appellative paronomasia providing what William Hallo has referred to as a “scurrilous etymology.”¹⁸⁰ This device could be used negatively to shame, lampoon, or invite invective speculation about a person or place. With regard to the way Akkadian scribes wrote the ethnonym *hābiru*, Hallo observes:

The earlier (Old Babylonian) orthography used a logogram, SA.GAZ, which may be a loanword from Akkadian *šaggāšu* “murderer” and which was also used to express Akkadian *ḥabbātu* “robber.” The later (Middle Babylonian) orthography employed logograms like LÚ.GAZ, ERIM.GAZ, and (LÚ).SAG.GAZ, which may be interpreted as “smiter” or “crusher,” “people-smiter” and “head-crusher,” respectively.¹⁸¹

176. Klein and Sefati, “Word Play in Sumerian Literature,” 58.

177. See Pascal Attinger, “Enki et Ninhursag,” *ZA* 74 (1984): 27–31, 45–48; Klein and Sefati, “Word Play in Sumerian Literature,” 55–56.

178. As pointed out by M. Civil, “From Enki’s Headaches to Phonology,” *JNES* 32 (1973): 57–58, the sign UGU in UGU.DÍLI “brainpan” was pronounced /ag^wu/, and thus was close in sound to ABU.

179. See I. J. Gelb, “The Name of Babylon,” *JIAS* 1 (1955): 25–28; William W. Hallo, “Nebukadnezar Comes to Jerusalem,” in *Through the Sound of Many Voices: Writing Contributed on the Occasion of the Seventieth Birthday of W. Gunther Plaut*, ed. Jonathan V. Plaut (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1982), 768. The Babylonians also created KÁ.DIGIR.RA “gate of the gods” as a back translation into Sumerian.

180. William W. Hallo, “Scurrilous Etymologies,” in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom*, ed. David P. Wright et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 767–76.

181. Hallo, “Scurrilous Etymologies,” 776. See similarly, Christopher Rollston, “Ad Nomen Argumenta: Personal Names as Pejorative Puns in Ancient Texts,” in *In the Shadow*

A similar case appears in an Assyrian administrative letter addressed to the king, which refers derogatively to a recent wave of forced immigrants to Nineveh. In that dispatch, the Ninevite native employs the noun *šaglūti* “deportees,” so as to suggest *saklūti* “ignorants.”¹⁸²

The Akkadian use of polysemy and paronomasia for appellative ends also can make theological points. The *Atra-ḫasis Epic* underscores the divine origins of humankind by imbedding the noun *awīlu* “human being” cryptographically into the name of the god Wê-ila, who is slaughtered in order to create him.¹⁸³

223. *ᵈwe-e-i-la ša i-šu-ú te₄-e-ma*

Wê-ila, who had intelligence,

224. *i-na pu-ûḫ-ri-šu-nu iṭ-ṭa-ab-ḫu*

They slaughtered in their assembly. (1.223–224)

Note that the sign PI, here read as *we*, also has the phonetic value *aw*,¹⁸⁴ thus, producing *ᵈaw-e-i-la* “divine human being.” Stephen Geller explains:

The god Wê(ila) was chosen to be slaughtered because his name contained the phoneme /w/ through which the new creature, man [*awīlum*], was to be distinguished from divinity [*ilum*]. In the first line of the epic the phrase *ilu-awīlum* is to be regarded as a compound term.... It reflects an original unity of humanity and divinity that was sundered by slaughter of the god and the resulting differentiation of *ilum* and *awīlum*.¹⁸⁵

of Bezael: Aramaic, Biblical, and Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honor of Bezael Porten, ed. Alejandro F. Botta (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 367–86.

182. Observed by Tadmor, “Aramaization of Assyria: Aspects of Western Impact,” 451.

183. As observed by Karl Oberhuber, “Ein Versuch zum Verständnis von Atra-ḫasis I 223 und I 1,” in *Zikir Šumim*, 279–81; Jean Bottéro, “La Création de l’Homme et sa Nature dans le Poème d’Atrahasis,” in *Societies and Languages of the Ancient Near East: Studies in Honor of I. M. Diakonoff*, ed. M. A. Dandamayev et al. (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips, 1982), 24–32; followed by Stephen A. Geller, “Some Sound and Word Plays in the First Tablet of the Old Babylonian Atrahasis Epic,” in *Frank Talmage Memorial Volume I*, ed. B. Walfish (Haifa: University of Haifa Press, 1993), 63–70; and Tzvi Abusch, “Ghost and God: Some Observations on a Babylonian Understanding of Human Nature,” in *Self, Soul and Body in Religious Experience*, ed. Albert I. Baumgarten, Jan Assmann, and Gedaliahu Stroumsa (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 363–83; Bendt Alster, “*ilu awilum: we-e il-a*, ‘Gods: Men’ versus ‘Man: God’: Punning and the Reversal of Patterns in the Atrahasis Epic,” in *Riches Hidden in Secret Places: Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Memory of Thorkild Jacobsen*, ed. Tzvi Abusch (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 35–40.

184. Gelb, “WA = *aw*, *iw*, *uw* in Cuneiform Writing,” 194–96.

185. Geller, “Some Sound and Word Plays in the First Tablet of the Old Babylonian Atrahasis Epic,” 41. Cited also in Abusch, “Ghost and God,” 368. Note that just as the human was given an *eṭemmu* “spirit,” the god We-ila is said to have *tēmu* “intelligence.”

Wilfred Lambert has pointed to an excellent example in an exorcistic prayer from the first millennium BCE. The prayer employs the epithet *amaru* TUKUL “deluge weapon” in order to evoke the name ^dAMAR.UD “Marduk.”¹⁸⁶

Some cases in Akkadian demonstrate incredible erudition. In the Song of Erra, we find: ^d*en-gi₆-du-du* *bēlu muttallik mūši muttarrū ru-bé-e* “O Engidudu, lord who goes about the night, who always is a guide to the prince[s]” (1.21). Steve Tinney has shown how the sign *gi₆* in the name ^d*en-gi₆-du-du* “Engidudu” evokes the Sumerian GI₇ (= Akkadian *ru-bé-e* “prince[s]”) by homophony, and how *du-du* suggests DU.DU (= Akkadian *muttarrū* “guides”), thus providing an appellative etiology for the name. As he points out, *ru-bé-e* “prince[s]” is ambiguous as to whether it is singular or plural, and as a singular, it naturally evokes prince Marduk.

When one remembers that Marduk himself is practically always referred to in Erra as *rubū Marduk* it becomes clear that this epithet is a key point in the intertwining of the roles and characters of Išum, Erra and Marduk.¹⁸⁷

A particularly interesting demonstration appears in the Epic of Gilgamesh in reference to the monstrous Humbaba, about whom the counselors of Uruk ask: *mannu ša igerrūšu ina ^digi[gi]* “who is there among the Igigi that can oppose him (Humbaba)?” (2.226).¹⁸⁸ Here the phrase *igerrūšu* “oppose him” (from *gerū*) evokes ^d*girru* (GĪR) “divine fire,” which was just said to issue from the monster’s mouth (l. 222). Since fire is divinized (and carries the divine determinative), we may see this as paronomasia with an appellative purpose.¹⁸⁹

On the productive employment of paronomasia connecting these words, see Nils P. Heeßel, *Babylonisch-assyrische Diagnostik*, AOAT 43 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2000), 269.

186. Observed by W. G. Lambert and reported by Foster, *Before the Muses*, 594.

187. Steve Tinney, “^d*en-gi₆-du-du: muttarū rubē* A Note on Erra I 21,” *NABU* (1989): 4.

188. The two lines are repeated by Enkidu to the elders of Uruk in 2.279, 283, and again by the elders to Gilgamesh in 2.293, 296.

189. The Epic of Gilgamesh contains numerous cases of appellative paronomasia. See, e.g., the description of the battle against Humbaba in 5.134–135: *ina sârišunu uḥtappū sirara u labananu iṣṣalim urpatum peṣitum* “in their whirling around Sirara and Lebanon were sundered. White cloud was turned to black.” Here *sârišunu* “their whirling around” anticipates the name *sirara* “Sirara.” For other cases in Akkadian, see Victor A. Hurowitz, “^dNarru and ^dZulummur in the Babylonian Theodicy (BWL 88:276–77),” *JAOS* 124 (2004): 777–78; Hurowitz, “As His Name Is, So Is He: Word Play in Akkadian Texts” [Hebrew], in *Jubilee Volume for Avi Hurvitz*, ed. Steven E. Fassberg and A. Maman (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 2008), 69–88; Hurowitz, “Name *Midrashim* and Word Plays on Names in Akkadian Historical Writings,” in *A Woman of Valor: Jerusalem Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honor of Joan Goodnick Westenholz*, ed. Wayne Horowitz, Uri Gabbay, and

That such examples were not intended to be literary whimsy can be seen in a commentary to the Gula Hymn of Bulluṣarabi, which reads: ^d*Anum abī kīma šemīšūma im-ba-an-ni* “as Anu, my father, according to his name, called me.” As Alasdair Livingstone observes: “The phrase ‘according to his name’ seems to imply a play on Anu’s name: that is apparently *imbanni*, ‘he called me,’ understood as *imbi* ^d*ani*, ‘Anu called.’”¹⁹⁰ Indeed, the expression *kīma šemīšūma* “according to its name” appears also in Akkadian debate poetry, where it serves to reveal the essence and character of gods, people, and objects. Enrique Jiménez explains:

Such endeavors are extremely common in ancient Mesopotamian texts, where etymology is an exploration into the true, hidden nature of the denotata. Thus, an ancient commentary explains that the name of the wisdom god Ea, dissected into its two syllables, means “the creator of the incantation,” since /e/ means “to create” and /a/ means “incantation.” The purpose of this explanation is not only, and certainly not primarily, to elucidate the linguistic origin of the god’s name: rather, it aims to reveal his character and divine functions.¹⁹¹

A well-known example involving a common noun appears in the Egyptian Coffin Texts (Spell 1130, §465a), in which the Lord of All proclaims: *īw rmt m rm.wt īr.t=ī* “I made humankind from tears,” a statement that recalls Spell 80, §33d, in which Atum asserts: *rmt pr.t m īr.t=ī* “humankind emerged from my eye.” The same paronomasia occurs in the Hymn to Aten,¹⁹² and in the Book of the Cow of Heaven, where *rmt* “humankind” issues from the eye of the solar god.¹⁹³

Filip Vukosavovic, PBOA 8 (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2010), 87–104.

190. Alasdair Livingstone, *Mystical and Mythological Explanatory Works of Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), 45. See also W. G. Lambert, “The Gula Hymn of Bulluṣa-rabi,” *Or* 36 (1967): 105–32. Cf. the statement of Jesus in John 5:43, “I have come in my Father’s name,” which underscores the fact that Yahweh’s name is imbedded in Jesus’ name (i.e., Yehoshua, meaning “Yahweh saves”).

191. Jiménez, “‘As Your Name Indicates,’” 88–89.

192. In the Hymn to Aten it appears in column 6, where Aten is characterized as *m-shpr m3j m hm.wt īrj mw m rmt s’nh s3 m h.t n mw.t=f sgrh sw m tm.t rm.j=f* “one who grows seed in women, who turns semen into people, who sustains the son in the mother’s womb, who soothes him, to hush his tears.” The same hymn contains another clever use of paronomasia in column 7: *īw ḫ m swḫ.t mdw.j m īnr dī=k n=f ḫw m-hnw=s r s’nh=f* “the chick in the egg chirps in its shell, you give him breath in it to keep him alive.” Note specifically the use of *ḫ* “chick” and *ḫw* “breath.”

193. Noted also by Miriam Lichtheim, “Destruction of Mankind,” *COS* 1:36 n. 5. The same paronomasia also occurs in the Demotic Chronicle 4.21.

In a similar way, P. Westcar [= P. Berlin 3033] etymologizes infant names. When performing birth rituals, the goddess Isis addresses the forthcoming infants: “may you not kick [*s3h*] in her womb, in this name of yours Sahure [*s3h-r*] ... may you not stay dark [*kkw*] in her womb, in this name of yours Keku (*kkw*)!” (10.16–17, 10.23–24).¹⁹⁴

In the Poem of Victory in honor of Ramesses III, several cases of paronomasia tie the pharaoh’s exploits to his many titles. After referring to Ramesses by his title *hq3-ḥwn.w* “ruler of Heliopolis,” the text boasts that *h3q.n=f h3s.t [tmh.jw]* “he captured the foreign land of Temehu” and *ḥn.w r km.t* “carried (them and their spoils) to Egypt” (1.2–2.3). Here the verb *h3q* “capture” echoes *hq3* “ruler,” and the verb *ḥn.w* “carried” resounds *ḥwn.w* “Heliopolis.” The poem later calls the king a [*m3*] *hr h3rw* “lion against Hurru” (3.8), an epithet that recalls his name *wsr-m3‘.t-r* “Powerful One of Maat and Ra” (3.9).¹⁹⁵

The Poetical Stela of Thutmose III (CM 34010) similarly trumpets the king’s exploits by suggesting his name (i.e., *ḏhwtj-mss*). Hence the use of *mss* “totter” in *hr mss n shm.w=s* “the enemies were tottering before her (the uraeus’) might” (l. 10).

Deities too could be referenced by way of paronomasia. Such is the case in a stela of Ramesses II from Abu Simbel (C 20, ll. 9–10), on which the pharaoh’s military prowess is inscribed: *mḏ shm.t nšn.tḏ m-ḥt ḏd.t ḏh3b šsr.w=f r=sn shm m‘.wt=sn* “like Sekhmet raging during a plague, he flings his arrows against them, seizing on their limbs.” Here the verb *shm* “seizing” resounds the name *shm.t* “Sekhmet.”¹⁹⁶

The Pyramid Texts of Pepi I also illustrate this: *hr r=f tḏ wr pw hr gs=f ndḏ r=f ḏm.ḏ ndḏ.t* “truly this great one has fallen on his side. He who is in Nedyt (i.e., the place where Osiris was killed) was cast down” (Spell 442, §819a). Note how the verb *ndḏ* “cast down” serves as an inherent etymology for the toponym *ndḏ.t* “Nedyt.”¹⁹⁷

194. Laura Parys, *Le récit du Papyrus Westcar: Texte, traduction et interprétation*, Textes égyptiens 1 (Brussels: Safran, 2016), 70–73, 123. See similarly the many appellative cases of paronomasia and polysemy studied by H. W. Fairman, “The Myth of Horus at Edfu-I,” *JEA* 21 (1935): 26–36. Cf. the Ramesside Hymn to Sobek l. 53: *ḏd.n=k sk pn r it=f m rn=f skr* “you said, this one wipes (*sk*) the mouth (*r*) of his father in his name Sokar (*skr*).” Found in Alan Gardiner, “Hymns to Sobk in a Ramesseum Papyrus,” *RdE* 11 (1957), 49 and n. 6.

195. Found in Kitchen, *Poetry of Ancient Egypt*, 211–12.

196. The god Ra exploits the same paronomasia for appellative purposes in the Destruction of Mankind, ll. 14–15: *ḥw=ḏ r shm ḥm=sn [ḥm nsw] tw m s‘nd.w st ḥpr shm.t* “‘I shall have power (*shm*) over them as king, diminishing them.’ Thus, Sekhmet (*shm.t*) came into being.”

197. See similarly the following excerpt from the Book of the Night: *ḥpr m ḥpriḏ ḥfd r 3ḏ.t ‘q m r3.pr.<ḏ> m k3.t* “coming into being as Khepri, rising toward the horizon, entering the

Narrative texts like the Tale of Wenamun (P.Moscow 120) also exhibit this function. See, for example, the seemingly banal line *n-sw n-sw-b3-nb-ḡd.t n-sw hr.ḷ-hr.ḷ* “it belongs to (pharaoh) Smendes (Nesubanebjed), it belongs to Herihor” (1.15), in which the phrase *n-sw* “it belongs” immediately anticipates and follows the first part of Smendes’ name.

Similarly, in the Tale of Sinuhe (P.Berlin 3022), we hear the name *s3-nht* “Sinuhe” (“son of the sycamore”): *nml.n=i m3.tj m-h3w nh.t* “I traversed the Seas of Truth in the area of Nahat” (l. 8). Pharaoh’s children similarly illustrate their lingual abilities when they refer to Sinuhe as *s3-mh.jt* “son of the northwind,” rather than *s3-nh.t* “Sinuhe” (l. 276).¹⁹⁸

One finds an appellative function for paronomasia in Ugaritic texts as well. In El’s report to Shapash, we hear the name of the goddess Anat (*CAT* 1.6.iv.1–3, 12–14):

1. *pl ‘nt šdm y špš*
“Parched are the furrows of the fields O Shapash,
2. *pl ‘nt šdm [] il yštk*
Parched are the furrows of the divine fields.
3. *b ‘l ‘nt mhrṭt*
May Baal restore the furrows of the plowed land.”

Each of the lines employs the noun *‘nt* “furrows,” which is visually identical to the name *‘nt* Anat. It is impossible to know how similar the two words’ pronunciations were, but it is difficult to think the allusion would have been missed, and in any event, the appellative function is visually obvious.

There are also echoes of the god Yam in *CAT* 1.6.v.1–4:

1. *yīḥd b ‘l bn aṭrt*
Baal seizes the sons of Athirat.
2. *rbm ymḥš b ktp*
The mighty he strikes with a mace,
3. *dkym ymḥš b šmd*
The attackers he strikes with a weapon.
4. *šgr ym ymḥ l arš*
The young of Yam he drags back to the earth.

(birth) opening, emerging from the vulva.” Observed by Peter F. Dorman, “Creation on the Potter’s Wheel at the Eastern Horizon of Heaven,” in *Gold of Praise: Studies on Ancient Egypt in Honor of Edward F. Wente*, ed. Emily Teeter and John A. Larson, SAOC 58 (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1999), 86.

198. The appellative *s3-mh.jt* also can be understood “son of Mehit,” a lion-headed goddess of Thinis in central Egypt. See also Scott B. Noegel, “Appellative Paronomasia and Polysemy in the *Tale of Sinuhe*,” *Lingua Aegyptia* 26 (2018): 233–38.

The name Yam in line 4 is anticipated visually by the two-fold use of *ymḥš* “(he) strikes” and *dkym* “attackers.” The passage is abetted by paronomasia between *ymḥš* “(he) strikes,” *šmd* “weapon,” and *ymšḥ* “(he) drags.”¹⁹⁹

In CAT 1.15.v.19–21 we find paronomasia on the name of Kirtu’s son Yaššib:

19. ... *šbia špš*
... the niche of the sun,
20. *b’lmy w ymlk*
our lord, therefore Yaššib will reign
21. [*y*] *šb ‘ln* ...
over us.

Observe how the noun *šbia* “niche” anticipates the name Yaššib, and how the connection is enhanced by paronomasia between *b’lmy* “our lord” and *‘ln* “over us.”²⁰⁰

Paronomasia has an appellative function also in the Tale of Aqhat, in which Yatpan, the Sutean (*št*) warrior, informs the goddess Anat that Aqhat has *št trm* “set (down) a meal” (CAT 1.18.iv.14). In line 17 of the same text, Anat uses the same verb *št* “set” in her reply to the Sutean: *aštk km nšr b ḥbšy* “I will set you like a raptor in my belt.”

A final demonstration in Ugaritic occurs in Anat’s threat to El. After warning that she will kill him, she adds: *aqht w ypltk bn [dnil ...] w y ḏrk* “(Then cry) to Aqhat and he will save you, to the son of Danel ... and he will rescue you” (CAT 1.18.i.13–14). Note how *ypltk* “he will save you” paronomastically anticipates El’s title *lḫpn* “Benevolent” in the next line (l. 15).

Biblical scholars have long attributed an appellative function to paronomasia, especially in narratives involving the naming of infants.²⁰¹ For example, יֶעֱקֹב

199. Yam’s name appears elsewhere in the same text when Yam does battle with Baal. There we are told: *z ym l ymk* “Yam is fierce, he does not sink” (CAT 1.2.iv.17). The Tale of Kirtu also alludes to the names of gods in the description of how Kirtu lost his progeny: “a third, in health they died (*tmt*), a quarter by disease (*zblnm*)” (CAT 1.14.i.16–17. Here *tmt* “died” resounds *mt* “Mot” and *zblnm* “disease” echoes *zbl* “prince (Baal).” The two lines immediately following explicitly attribute Kirtu’s loss of progeny to “Reshep” and the “Lad of Yam.” Note also that the seventh portion of his progeny was felled by *šlh* “the sword,” which could allude to the chthonic deity *šlh* “Shaleh” (l. 20).

200. This pericope contains another example of appellative paronomasia between the noun *bḥr* “lad” and the toponym *ḥbr* “Hubur.”

201. See A. Guillaume, “Paronomasia in the Old Testament,” *JSS* 9 (1964): 282–90; Andrew F. Key, “The Giving of Proper Names in the Old Testament,” *JBL* 83 (1964): 55–59; Martin Noth, *Die israelitischen Personennamen im Rahmen der gemeinsemitischen Namengebung* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1966); James Barr, “The Symbolism of Names in the Old Testament,” *BJRL* 52 (1969–1970): 11–29; Cherry, *Paronomasia and Proper Names in*

ya ‘āqōḇ “Jacob” receives his name, because he grabbed the עֶקֶב ‘āqēḇ “heel” of his brother during birth (Gen 25:26). However, it is Garsiel’s seminal work that has revealed how truly pervasive this device is in biblical texts.²⁰²

As I have discussed in reference to the name Noah (see 2.5 and 3.3), some cases that have an appellative function are based on an aural connection, but not an etymological one. This is the case also in 1 Sam 1:20, in which Hannah names her son שְׁמוּאֵל šəmū’ēl “Samuel” explaining: מִיָּהוָה mē-YHWH šə’iltīw “I asked Yahweh for him.” Though the etymology of the name Samuel is debated, scholars agree that it is unrelated to the verb שָׁאֵל šā’al meaning “ask.”²⁰³ Nevertheless, the presence of the sounds /š/, /’/, and /l/ in both “Samuel” and “ask,” and in the same order, was sufficient to connect the two.²⁰⁴

Lawrence Zalcman has uncovered a particularly pronounced case of paronomasia that serves an appellative function in Zeph 2:4: עִזָּה תִּזְבָּה תְּהִיָּה כִּי עִזָּה עֲזֹבָה וְעֶקְרוֹן תִּעָקֵר לְשִׁמְמָה אֲשֶׁדּוֹד בַּצְּהָרִים יִרְשׁוּהָ וְעֶקְרוֹן תִּעָקֵר kī ‘azzāh ‘āzūḇāh tihyeh wə-’ašqalōn lišmāmāh ‘ašdōḏ baṣ-šōḥōrayīm yaḡāršūhā wə-’eqrōn tē ‘āqēr “for Gaza shall be forsaken, and Ashkelon a desolation, they shall drive out Ashdod at noon, and Ekron shall become barren.”²⁰⁵ The name עִזָּה ‘azzāh “Gaza” resounds in the verb עֲזֹבָה ‘āzūḇāh “forsaken” and עֶקְרוֹן ‘eqrōn “Ekron” in the verb תִּעָקֵר tē ‘āqēr “shall become barren.”²⁰⁶ In addition, the name אֲשֶׁדּוֹד ‘ašdōḏ “Ashdod” suggests the verb שָׁדַד šādaḏ “destroy.” Moreover, as Zalcman adds:

the Old Testament; David Bivin, “The Pun on Peter Works Better in Hebrew,” *BAR* 19 (1993): 18–19; Robert Řehák, *Synchronní metody výkladu hebrejských proprií ve Starém zákoně a v rabínské literatuře* [*Synchronic Methods of Interpreting of Hebrew Proper Names in the Old Testament and Rabbinic Literature*] (PhD diss., Charles University, 2007).

202. Garsiel, *Biblical Names*. This work has been taken up by some of his students as well. See, e.g., Jonathan Grossman, *Ambiguity in Biblical Narrative and Its Contribution to the Literary Formation* [Hebrew] (PhD diss., Bar-Ilan University, 2006), 157–59; Grossman, *Esther: The Outer Narrative and the Hidden Reading*, SLTHS 6 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011); Grossman, *Text and Subtext: On Exploring Biblical Narrative Design* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2015); and Grossman, *Ruth*.

203. Cf. Klaas Spronk, “Shamgar ben Anat (Judg 3:31)—A Meaningful Name,” *ZAW* 128 (2016): 684–87, argues that the name should be understood as suggesting שָׁם šām and גָּר gār, meaning “a foreigner there.” The name would then mark his role as a foreign hero, comparable to that of Jael. This reading depends on the device known as *notariqon*, see 4.1.11.

204. Similar appellative paronomasia informs the account of the necromancer of Endor in 1 Sam 28:3–25, in which we find שְׁמוּאֵל šəmū’ēl “Samuel,” שָׁאֵל šā’ul “Saul,” שָׁאֵל šā’al “ask,” and שְׁאוּל šə’ul “Sheol” brought into close relief.

205. Zalcman, “Ambiguity and Assonance at Zephaniah II 4.”

206. עִזָּה reflects PS ḡazzāh, whereas עֲזֹבָה represents PS ‘āzūḇāh, so the paronomasia between them is effective primarily visually.

Indeed, the verse comprises an elaborate sequence of *double entendres*, in which the cities of the Philistines are personified as women and consigned to four of the most bitter fates a woman can endure: abandonment, spinsterhood, divorce, and barrenness.²⁰⁷

As Isaac Kalimi has shown, some cases of appellative paronomasia found in the Chronicles represent changes that the Chronicler has made to Samuel and Kings in order to drive home theological points or to draw hermeneutical lessons from someone's life. For instance, see the following addition to 1 Sam 31 found in 1 Chr 10:13: "So Saul [שָׂאֹול *šā'ūl*] died because of his unfaithfulness to Yahweh ... and also for asking [לְשֹׂאֹול *li-š'ōl*] counsel of a necromancer to seek (advice)."²⁰⁸ See also 1 Chr 28:9: "And you Solomon [שְׁלֹמֹה *šālōmōh*], my son, know the God of your father, and serve him with a perfect [שָׁלֵם *šālēm*] heart and a willing spirit."²⁰⁹

Paronomasia with an appellative purpose also informs the pious boast of the Moabite king Mesha: "I built a high place of salvation [עֵץ יִשׁוּעַ], because Chemosh saved me [הִשְׁעֵנִי, *h-š'ny*] from all kings" (ll. 3–4). Here the highlighted words recall the king's name מִשָּׁע [*mš'*] "Mesha."²¹⁰

The Phoenician inscription of Azitawadda (*KAI* 26C, l. 7) offers a particularly clever example of paronomasia for appellative ends. After telling how he founded a city that he named after himself, Azitawadda asks Baal of the Mace (בַּעַל כִּרְנַתְרִישׁ *b'l krntryš*) to bless it with prosperity: וְכֵן הָקֵרַת ז' בַּעֲלַת שִׁבְעָ וְתִרְשׁ *w-kn h-qrt z b'lt šb' w-trš* "and may this city possess grain and new wine" (C, l. 7).²¹¹ The petition echoes the name Baal in the verb בַּעֲלַת *b'lt* "possess" and the noun כִּרְנַתְרִישׁ *krntryš* "mace" in the words קֵרַת "city" and תִּרְשׁ "wine."²¹²

207. Zalcman, "Ambiguity and Assonance at Zephaniah II 4," 367.

208. Isaac Kalimi, "Paronomasia in the Book of Chronicles," *JSOT* 67 (1995): 37; Kalimi, "Utilization of Pun/Paronomasia in the Chronistic Writing," in *An Ancient Israelite Historian: Studies in the Chronicler, His Time, Place, and Writing*, ed. I. Kalimi (Assen, the Netherlands: Royal Van Gorcum Press, 2005), 67–82.

209. Kalimi, "Paronomasia in the Book of Chronicles," 38.

210. The repeated use of אָב *'b* "father" in the inscription (ll. 2–3) in conjunction with the repeated name מֹאָב "Moab" *m'b* (ll. 1–2) also constitutes an appellative form of paronomasia. Cf. Gen 19:37, in which the author understands the etymology of the name "Moab" pejoratively to mean אָב *'āb* + מִן *min* "from the father," i.e., by way of incest. Zakovitch, "Explicit and Implicit Name-Derivations," 168, notes that "in the Moabite dialect the Hebrew *ō*-vocalization is pronounced *ē*. The name being derived, then is *Mē'āb*." He compares the forms with מֵ *mē*- in Gen 19:32, 19:34, 19:36.

211. Cf. Prov 3:10.

212. On the interpretation "mace-bearer," from the Greek *κορυνηφόρος*, see Philip C. Schmitz, "Phoenician KRNTYŠ, Archaic Greek *KOPYNHTHPIOΣ, and the Storm

One also finds an appellative use of paronomasia in the Aramaic Levi Document from Qumran. When the mother of Merari (מררי *mrry*) recalls his birth, she states:

for I was bitter [מר לי *mr ly*] on his account particularly, for when he was born he was dying. And I was very bitter [והוה מריר לי *whwwh mryr ly*] on his account since he was about to die, and I implored and beseeched on his account, and there was bitterness [מרר *mrr*] in everything. (XI, 8)

Amram (עמרם *'mrm*) too is given his name in XII, 4, as his grandmother recalls, “for I said [אמרת *'mrt*] when he was born, ‘This one will raise up [מרים עמא *myry m*] the people from the la[nd of Eg]ypt. Accordingly [his name] will be called the exalted pe[ople] [עמא ראמא *'m' r' m'*].”²¹³

The Aramaic acrostic poem entitled *The World Trembled* provides a fine example of appellative paronomasia when providing an explanation for the name of the river Nile. In line 6, we read: “the morning [שחרה *šhrh*] star shone forth like light [נוהרה *nwhrh*], to redeem the black one [שחורה *šhwrh*] from the land of the Nile [שחירה *šhyrh*].” Though the Hebrew term for the Nile derives from the Egyptian *š-hr* “pool of Horus,” the consonants provide ample opportunity for a false etymology that connects it to the “morning,” and notions of “blackness,” with its connotation of “pollution.”²¹⁴ Adding to the paronomasia is *נוהרה nwhrh* “light,” which repeats the final sound /ra/.²¹⁵ The employment of paronomasia for appellative purposes would enjoy continued use by the later rabbis, as we find in the Talmud and various midrashic texts.²¹⁶

God of Aleppo,” *KUSATU* 10 (2009): 119–60, who also surveys previous interpretations of this difficult word.

213. See Jonas C. Greenfield, Michael E. Stone, and Esther Eshel, *The Aramaic Levi Document: Edition, Translation, Commentary*, *Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha* 19 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 94–95, 98–99, 191, 198. The first example in the passage about Merari is in Hebrew, not Aramaic. The authors use the expression “name midrash” for the device, which also occurs on the names Kohath, Jochebed, and Gershom in 11:6–7, 11:10, 18:3.

214. Alphons S. Rodrigues Pereira, *Studies in Aramaic Poetry (c. 100 B.C.E.–c. 600 C.E.): Selected Jewish, Christian and Samaritan Poems*, SSN 34 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1997), 63.

215. This late poem also might constitute paronomasia between the sounds /h/ and /ħ/, since the gutturals might have been confused or might have lost some of their force by this time.

216. See J. D. Wynkoop and P. Van den Biesen, “A Peculiar Kind of Paronomasia in the Talmud and Midrash,” *JQR* 2 (1911): 2–23; Nachman Levine, “On Midrash on Talmudic Names: A Literary Device and Its Significance” [Hebrew], *JSIS* 11 (2012): 1–21.

3.10.2. APPELLATIVE PARONOMASIA ON THE AUTHOR'S NAME

An appellative function appears evident also in cases of polysemy and paronomasia that invoke the name of an author (or supposed author) of a text, which Garsiel has referred to as a “subtle colophon.”²¹⁷ Enthusiasts of classical music are familiar with this device in the work of Johann Sebastian Bach, who imbedded his name into the notes that comprised his musical compositions.²¹⁸

An excellent demonstration of colophonic paronomasia in Akkadian occurs in the famous code of Hammurapi. Bill Arnold has shown that the king's name (‘*ammu* + *rapi* = “The [Divine] Kinsman Heals”) resounds in the noun *ammi* “people” in the prologue: *mušēpi kīnātim mušūšir ammi* “[I am the king] who proclaims truth, who puts the people in order” (4.53–54). In this way, the text subtly avows that “the great ‘Kinsman-Heals’ has himself healed his people by ordering them with truth and justice.”²¹⁹

On the Šitti-Marduk *kudurru* (land grant stone inscription), one finds the epithet *nāšir kudurrēti* “guardian of the land-grant stones,” placed in the center of the inscription. Hurowitz observed that the title is unique to this *kudurru* and that it serves as a colophonic reference to the main subject of the inscription, Nebuchadrezzar (i.e., Nabû-kudurrī-ušur, lit. “O Nabû, guard my heir/land-grant stone”).²²⁰

The Egyptian Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor illustrates this function as well. The text's colophon informs us that the text is *sš sš.w iqr n db'.w=f imn.j sš imn-ʿ* “a writing of the writer, clever-fingered, Ameny's son Amenea” (ll. 188–189). According to Parkinson, the epithet “clever-fingered” recalls the sailor's “cleverness” at the start of the story (l. 1) and the count's dismissal of it at the end

217. Moshe Garsiel, “Implicit Puns upon Names as Subtle Colophons in the Bible,” in *Haim M. L. Gevanyahu Memorial Volume*, ed. Joshua J. Adler (Jerusalem: World Jewish Bible Center, 1990), 1–8; Garsiel, “Puns upon Names: Subtle Colophons in the Bible,” *JBQ* 23 (1995): 182–87.

218. For example, the last original page of Bach's *Art of the Fugue* contains the cryptic spelling of Bach's name with musical notation. In music, the B-A-C-H motif is the sequence of notes B flat, A, C, B natural. See Douglas R. Hofstadter, *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 80.

219. Bill T. Arnold, “Wordplay on ‘Hammurapi’ in CH iv 54,” *NABU* (2016): 72.

220. Hurowitz, “Some Literary Observations on the Šitti-Marduk Kudurru (BBSt. 6),” 47–48. Perhaps related to this device is the poet's clever demonstration of the “truth of his title” *bin šar dadmī* in the Standard Babylonian version of the Anzu Myth. See Marianna E. Vogelzang, “Kill Anzu! On a Point of Literary Evolution,” in *Keilschriftliche Literaturen Ausgewählte Vorträge der XXXII. Rencontre assyriologique internationale, Münster, 8.–12.7.1985*, ed. Karl Hecker and Walter Sommerfeld, BBVO 6 (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1986), 70.

(l. 183), thus creating a distance between the author of the story and its didactic message:

The audience of the Tale can experience the uncertainty of reality, and learn of the cataclysmic end of the earth, but at a safe distance: the scribe is distanced from all the cataclysms and is safely assured of his “cleverness”, although the narrator cannot be.²²¹

In addition, the name Amun, twice contained in *ʾmn.j s3 ʾmn-ʾ3* “Ameny’s son Amenaā,” also recalls the *mn.t* “mooring-post” at the start of the tale.²²²

In Ugaritic, we find the name of the scribe Ilimilku (*ilmlk*) imbedded in the Tale of Kirtu in the queries of El to the grief-stricken hero: “what ails Kirtu that he weeps, the gracious one, heir of El? Is it the kingship of Bull El, his father that he desires?” (*CAT* 1.14.i.40–42). Here the name *il* “El” and the noun *mlk* “kingship” are juxtaposed in a way that allows one to see *il mlk* as a subtle colophon. See also *CAT* 1.4.iv.38–39, where the line *hm yd il mlk yḥss* “does the ‘hand’ of El the king excite you?,” permits the reading: “Does the hand of Ilimilku instruct you?”²²³

There are many examples of colophonic paronomasia in the Hebrew Bible. The Song of Songs contains several cases of paronomasia on the name of its supposed author Solomon (שְׁלֹמֹה *šālōmōh*). These occur in the lines “for why (שָׁלָמָה *šallāmāh*) should I be as one who strays” (1:7); “return, return, O Shulammit (הַשׁוּלַמִּית *haš-šūlammīt*)” (7:1), and in the noun שָׁלוֹם *šālōm* “peace” (8:10). The name שְׁלֹמֹה *šālōmōh* itself follows the latter paronomasia closely in 8:11. Several lexemes in the Song reference Solomon’s other name יְדִידְיָה *yəḏīdyāh* “Beloved of Yah(weh)” (2 Sam 12:25),²²⁴ in particular the repeated forms דְּדִי *dōdekā* “your love” and דּוּדִי *dōdī* “my beloved” (e.g., Song 1:4, 2:9, 2:17, etc.).

Another subtle colophon in Isa 12:2–3 exploits the root יָשַׁע-שׁ-י “triumph, deliver” to echo the name יִשְׁעִיָּהוּ *yāša‘ yāhū* “Isaiah.”

221. Richard B. Parkinson, “The Dream and the Knot: Contextualizing Middle Kingdom Literature,” in *Definitely: Egyptian Literature. Proceedings of the Symposium “Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms,” Los Angeles, March 24–26, 1995*, ed. Gerald Moers, LASM 2 (Göttingen: Seminar für Ägyptologie und Koptologie, 1999), 63–82, quotation on p. 78.

222. As observed by Rendsburg, “Literary Devices in the Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor,” 20.

223. I thank my graduate student Corinna Nichols for these observations.

224. Garsiel, “Puns upon Names,” 187. I add to Garsiel’s fine collection paronomasia on Job’s name (אֹיֵב *ōyēb*) in Job 13:24 and 33:10, which suggests אֹיֵב *ōyēb* “enemy.” See also Scott B. Noegel, “Another Look at Job 18:2,3,” *JBQ* 23 (1995): 161.

Behold the God of my triumph [יְשׁוּעָה *yəšū ‘āḥ*]! I am confident, unafraid! For my strength [עֲזָתִי *‘ōzzī*] and might is Yah, Yahweh, and he will be my deliverance [לִישׁוּעָה *lī-šū ‘āh*]. Joyfully shall you draw water, from the fountains of triumph [הַיְשׁוּעָה *ha-yəšū ‘āh*].

In addition, the use of עֲזָתִי *‘ōzzī* “my strength” (12:2) represents a subtle allusion to King Uzziah (עֲזַיְיָהוּ *‘uzzīyāhū*), the king during whose reign Isaiah began prophesying. The counterpart passages in 2 Chr 26:8–16 also demonstrate a knowledge of the paronomasia by repeating the root חֲזַק *ḥ-z-q* “be strong, strengthen,” a synonym for עָז *‘ōz*. Garsiel concludes: “These two implicit references to the names of the prophet and the first king of his period seem to constitute a subtle colophon.”²²⁵ I add to Garsiel’s observations that the repetition of the root חֲזַק *ḥ-z-q* recalls the name Hezeqiah (חֲזַקְיָהוּ *yəḥizqīyāhū*), another king in whose reign Isaiah prophesied.

3.11. STRUCTURAL

Some forms of paronomasia function to organize and connect textual units. This category includes Watson’s proposed functions “to assist composition” and “to link a poem or its parts.”²²⁶ Structural paronomasia differs from referential paronomasia in that the former functions as a reason for a text’s organization and composition, whereas the latter invites readers to compare and contrast the use of lexemes within a text.

Paronomasia serves as an organizational principle in some Akkadian lexical series like ERIM.ḪUŠ = *anantu*, AN.TA.GÁL = *šaḡû*, and SIG₇.ALAN = *nabnītu*.²²⁷ The latter series, for example, places the entry *erû* “be pregnant” closely before *erû* “grinding slab,” *erû* “eagle,” *erû* “copper,” and *urû* “to cut a branch.”²²⁸ Indeed, as the editors of the series observe: “Any given entry that occurs in a tablet may stimulate the inclusion of an item that is either

225. Garsiel, “Puns upon Names,” 184.

226. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 245.

227. Antoine Cavigneaux, et al., eds., *The Series Erim-huš = anantu and An-ta-gál = šaḡû*, MSL 17 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1985); I. J. Finkel and M. Civil, eds., *The Series SIG₇.ALAN = Nabnītu*, MSL 16 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1982). See now also Nick C. Veldhuis, *History of the Cuneiform Lexical Traditions*, GMTR 6 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2014), 106, 169, 220–22.

228. Finkel and Civil, *Series SIG₇.ALAN = Nabnītu*, 32. A similar use of the polyseme *erû* for “eagle,” “nakedness,” and “conception,” and possibly “copper” occurs in the *Etana* myth. Noted by Abraham Winitzer, “Etana in Eden: New Light on the Mesopotamian and Biblical Tales in Their Semitic Context,” *JAOS* 133 (2013): 441–65.

homophonous, or shares at least one, usually two, of its radicals.”²²⁹ Paronomasia also links several omens in the omen series for malformed animal births known as *Šumma Izbu*.²³⁰

A similar strategy appears in some Egyptian texts. The Ramesside dream manual contains several examples. The omen in r. 2.8 reads: [*hr*] *rdl.t n=f hmt m* [...] [*nfr*] *h.t [qšl]=f im=sn* “giving him copper as [...]; [good], [it means] something at which he will be exalted.” It is followed in r. 2.9 by [*hr ...*]; *hm.t=f n hšj [nfr] hm ḏw.wt pw lrj=f* [...] “his woman to a married man; [good], it means that the bad things related to him will retreat.”²³¹ The two omens were written in sequence, because *hr* “upon” and *hmt* “copper” in the protasis of the first omen resound in *hr* “upon,” *hm.t* “woman,” and *hm* “retreat” in the second omen.

Some Egyptian poems use paronomasia to connect the first verse to the last in a way that forms an inclusio. Such is the case, as Loprieno has shown, with the love poem in P.Harris 500, which begins with the line “Absynth [*s ʾm*] plants are there, and one feels great [*s ʾ*] in front of them,” and concludes, “if I am met by any of your glances, it would be better than food and drink [*wm-swʿ*].”²³²

To date no Ugaritic texts have provided evidence for an organizational structure based on polysemy or paronomasia. The scribes of Ugarit did produce lexical texts, wherein one might expect to find such a feature, especially as these are not local traditions, but the result of Mesopotamian influence. Nevertheless, many remain unpublished.²³³

However, the Hebrew Bible contains several examples of paronomasia serving as an organizing principle.²³⁴ In Gen 4:20–22, the narrator states that

229. Finkel and Civil, *Series SIG⁷.ALAN = Nabnītu*, 31.

230. See Nicola De Zorzi, *La Serie Teratomantica Šumma Izbu: Testo, Tradizione, Orizzonti Culturali*, vols. 1–2, HANEM 15 (Padova: S.A.R.G.O.N. Editrice e Libreria, 2014), 194–96; Markham J. Geller, “The Concept of the Semitic Root in Akkadian Lexicography,” in *Multilingualism, Lingua Franca and Lingua Sacra*, ed. Jens Braarvig and Markham J. Geller, Studies 10 (Berlin: Max Plank Institute for the History of Science, 2018), 299–306.

231. Noegel and Szpakowska, “‘Word Play’ in the Ramesside Dream Manual.”

232. Cited by Loprieno, “Puns and Word Play in Ancient Egyptian,” 15, with some variation. See also Guglielmi, “Zu einigen literarischen Funktionen des Wortspiels,” 491–505. This is group C, no. 18, lines A, E in Fox, *Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs*, 26.

233. See Veldhuis, *History of the Cuneiform Lexical Traditions*, 279–80, 297–99.

234. Joel Kaminsky, “Reflections on Associative Word Links in Judges,” *JSOT* 36 (2012): 411–34, has shown how certain keywords can serve to link individual stories in Judges. He notes (430) how William L. Holladay once “presented an example of an associational method of scribal editing in Jeremiah 18 in which a passage concerning a potter (Jer. 18.1–12) sits next to an oracle that mentions Lebanon (Jer. 18.13–17). He pointed out that this same juxtaposition of topics occurs in Isaiah 29, in which a potter and his clay are mentioned in 29.16, immediately followed by 29.17, a verse that mentions Lebanon. Of

Lamekh's first wife was named Adah, and that she bore Yabal and Yubal, the latter of whom was the "father of all those who play the lyre and flute." The very next verse begins with the name of his second wife Zillah (זִלְלָה *šillāh*), whose name derives from a root meaning "musical tone or ring," whence מְצִלְתַּיִם *məšiltayīm* "cymbals." Thus, the passages about Adah and Zillah are connected by means of paronomasia.²³⁵ Moreover, the same verses relate the births of three children with similar sounding names: יָבָל *yābāl* "Yabal," יֻבָל *yūbāl* "Yubal," and תֻּבָּל קַיִן *tūbāl qayīn* "Tubal-cain."

Some of the legal materials also appear to have been organized according to paronomastic principles. Alexander Rofé has noticed that the law forbidding prostitutes in the temple was placed after the law concerning the ill treatment of runaway slaves (Deut 23:17–19), because the latter contains the noun אֶתְנָן *ʾetnan* "fee" and the former the similar sounding verb תֹּנֶנְנִי *tōnennū* "oppress him."²³⁶

Cassuto similarly opined that the list of Moses's spies draws upon paronomastic associations of their names. Thus, גַּדִּי אֶל בֶּן סוּדִי *gaddī ʾel ben sōdī* "Gaddiel the son of Sodi" naturally preceded the similar sounding גַּדִּי בֶן סוּסִי *gaddī ben sūsī* "Gaddi the son of Susi," and סֶתוּר *səṭūr* "Sethur" was followed by נַחֲבִי *naḥbī* "Nahbi," because both names bear the meaning "hide" (Num 13:10–11, 13:13–14).²³⁷

Nachman Levine has argued that paronomasia can function to connect a literary unit or even form an *inclusio* when carried on vertically through a poem (much like the Egyptian poem cited above). For example, Ps 26 begins, "judge me, O Yahweh, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in Yahweh without wavering [אֶמְדָּה *ʾem ʾādā*]" (26:1), and concludes: My foot stands [עֲמְדָה *ʾamḏāh*] in an even place, in the congregation will I bless Yahweh" (26:12). The

course, one still needs to explain why these two topics sit next to each other in Isaiah 29. It turns out that this juxtaposition in Isaiah is most likely due to the fact that 29.16 and 29.17 each contain the same *niphal* third masculine singular imperfect form of חָשַׁב, 'will be accounted' or 'will be reckoned'. Once the two oracles in Isaiah were firmly grouped together it seems that the editors of Jeremiah drew on other elements of the already close association between Isa. 29.16 and 29.17. In short, whoever edited Jeremiah remembered that the idea of a potter and his clay creation resided next to a passage invoking Lebanon in Isaiah, whereupon this associative link was used to order some of the random oracles in Jeremiah. Holladay's insight provides evidence of an ancient filing system based on associations, which is exactly what one would expect to find in Israelite scribal culture in which scribes living in a primarily oral culture were seeking to order scrolls of diverse materials in associative ways."

235. Garsiel, *Biblical Names*, 95.

236. See Alexander Rofé, "The Arrangement of the Laws in Deuteronomy," *ETL* 64 (1988): 265–85.

237. "Sethur" from the root סִתַּר *s-t-r* and "Nahbi" from חָבַא *h-b-ʾ*. Cassuto's observations are cited by Rofé, "Arrangement of the Laws in Deuteronomy," 265.

3.12. MNEMONIC

A mnemonic function has been attributed to some cases of polysemy and paronomasia. Nathan Wasserman has argued that such devices abetted the memorization of proverbs in Mesopotamian culture.²⁴¹ Loprieno has suggested that aiding the memory was one of the primary functions of paronomasia in Egyptian texts since it produced a rhythmic effect.²⁴² Since many poems were sung or enchanted and enjoyed a musical accompaniment, it is likely that the music also helped memorization. Aramaic paronomasia similarly served the later Masoretes as memory aids.²⁴³

However, the most frequent claims for a mnemonic function relate to the creation of acrostics. Acrostics work by reading vertically the initial letter or sign of each successive word in a poem (see 4.1.12). In the Hebrew Bible, many acrostics proceed through the alphabet. Indeed, the compositional use of the alphabet in some of these same acrostics is so sophisticated that a mnemonic function seems likely.

Others have suggested that biblical acrostics functioned to convey a sense of order,²⁴⁴ or in the case of the book of Lamentations, to provide readers with a mechanism for interacting with their emotions through reason.²⁴⁵ Still other acrostics appear to demonstrate the erudition of a scribe or to perform a ritual function (see 4.1.12). Thus, an Akkadian acrostic found in The Dialogue of Saggil-kinam-ubbib reads: "I, Saggil-kīnam-ubbib, the exorcist, am adorant of the god and the king." Other Akkadian acrostics spell out divine names and appear to add power to prayers.²⁴⁶ One Egyptian acrostic appears equally performative in that it reads in multiple directions and contains a hymn to the goddess Mut.²⁴⁷ Another from Egypt records the prayer of a man who is deceased.²⁴⁸ Therefore,

241. In Akkadian proverbs, for example. See Wasserman, *Style and Form in Old Babylonian Literary Texts*, 171.

242. Loprieno, "Puns and Word Play in Ancient Egyptian," 15–17.

243. See David Marcus, *Scribal Wit: Aramaic Mnemonics in the Leningrad Codex*, TS 10 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2013).

244. Delbert R. Hillers, *Lamentations: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, AB 7A (New York: Doubleday, 1992).

245. Elie Assis, "The Alphabetic Acrostic in the Book of Lamentations," *CBQ* 69 (2007): 710–24.

246. On biblical and Mesopotamian acrostics, see John F. Brug, "Biblical Acrostics and Their Relationship to Other Ancient Near Eastern Acrostics," in *The Bible in the Light of Cuneiform Literature: Scripture in Context III*, ed. William W. Hallo et al., ANETS 8 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 283–304.

247. H. M. Stewart, "A Crossword Hymn to Mut," *JEA* 57 (1971): 87–104.

248. Jan Zandee, *An Ancient Egyptian Crossword Puzzle* (Leiden: Ex Oriente Lux, 1966).

while some acrostics likely functioned as *aides-mémoire*, others appear to have been demonstrations of piety and/or devices of ritual empowerment.

3.13. HERMENEUTIC

Polysemy and paronomasia can function as hermeneutical tools. One primarily finds them employed this way in four corpora: divinatory accounts, medical diagnoses, commentaries, and riddles, though in some cases, paronomasia for appellative purposes also can serve in this capacity (see 3.10).

3.13.1. DIVINATORY

Divinatory texts throughout the ancient Near East demonstrate strong paronomastic connections between their protases and apodoses.²⁴⁹ Thus, in an Akkadian dream omen compendium one finds: “if one dreams he is eating a raven [*ārbu*]; it means he will have plenty [*irbu*].”²⁵⁰ Here the similarity in sound between the two highlighted nouns leads to the dream’s interpretation. Nicla De Zorzi has discovered a number of examples in the omen series for malformed animal births known as *Šumma Izbu*.²⁵¹ For example, “if a sow gives birth, but (the babies) die [*imūtū*]: its master will soon receive an order [*amāta*].” The verb *imūtū* “they will die” in the protasis connects paronomastically to *amāta* “order” in the apodosis (22.86). See also omen 6.42: “if there is a malformed birth, and in its belly [*libbišu*] there is an egg [*pelūmma*], and inside [*libbi*] the egg [*pelī*] there is a chick [*atmu*]: the throne will change; the lake [*tāmtu*] will dry up [*ibbal*].” As De Zorzi notes, paronomasia obtains between *atmu* “chick” and *tāmtu* “lake.” To her astute observations, I add that the repeated noun *libbu* “inside, heart” finds a match in *ibbal* “it will dry up.” I further suggest that the change of throne in the apodosis derives from the two-fold mention of the *pelū* “egg,” which suggests *palū* “reign, length of reign.”

249. See Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*; Noegel, “Dreams and Dream Interpreters in Mesopotamia and in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament),” in *Dreams and Dreaming: A Reader in Religion, Anthropology, History, and Psychology*, ed. Kelly Bulkeley (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave-St. Martin’s Press, 2001), 45–71.

250. Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 11–18; Stefania Ermidoro, “Eating and Drinking in Dreams: Tablet A of the Assyrian ‘Dream Book,’” in *Libiamo ne’ lieti calici: Ancient Near Eastern Studies Presented to Lucio Milano on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday by Pupils, Colleagues and Friends*, ed. Paola Corò et al., AOAT 436 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2016), 172–74, 177–78.

251. De Zorzi, *La Serie Teratomantica Šumma Izbu*, 192; 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): 43–75.

A more complex example is the following dream omen:

If (in a dream) he seizes a fox (KA.A = Akkadian *šēlibu*); he will seize a Lamassu (AN.KAL), but if he seizes a fox in his hand (ŠU), and it escapes; he will have seized a Lamassu, but it also will escape from his hand (ŠU).²⁵²

The interpretation derives from the knowledge that if one writes the word for “fox” syllabically as *še7-lib-bu*, the same signs also have the values (A).AN.KAL-*u*, meaning “Lamassu.” Though the reading is not exactly equivalent, it provides enough of a correlation to justify the interpretation. Indeed, as I have discussed above (2.5), polysemy need not be grammatically perfect to be effective. Moreover, the dreamer is said to seize the fox in his ŠU (= Akkadian *qātu*) “hand.” Elsewhere we find the following identification: ^dLAMMA = ^dŠU, LAMMA being Sumerian for Lamassu.²⁵³

Not only do Akkadian divinatory texts employ polysemy and paronomasia as a hermeneutic, but literary texts that report divinatory activity do so as well.²⁵⁴ In the Old Babylonian version of the Epic of Gilgamesh, the interpretations that Gilgamesh’s mother offers are linked to the objects in his dream by way of polysemy and paronomasia. He reports his dream as follows (1.i.7–14):

7. [kiš]-rum ša a-nim im-qú-tam a-na še-ri-ia
A [meteor]ite of Anu fell down upon me.
8. aš-ši-šu-ma ik-ta-bi-it e-li-ia
I picked it up, but it was too heavy for me.
9. ú-ni-ís-su-ma nu-uš-ša-šu ú-ul el-ti-’i
I pushed at it, but I could not budge it.
10. uruk^{ki} ma-tum pa-ḫi-ir e-li-šu
The land of Uruk gathered around it.
11. eṭ-lu-tum ú-na-ša-qú šī-pi-šu
The young men were kissing its feet.
12. ú-um-mi-id-ma pu-ti
I braced my forehead
13. i-mi-du ia-ti
and they supported me.
14. aš-ši-a-šu-ma at-ba-la-aš-šu a-na še-ri-ki
I picked it up and carried it off to you.

252. Scott B. Noegel, “Fox on the Run: Catch a Lamassu by the Pun,” *NABU* 73 (1995): 101–2.

253. *CAD* L, s.v. “*lamassu*.”

254. For other Akkadian dream accounts, see Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 57–88.

Of particular interest is the noun *kišru*, which in the context of the dream means "meteorite," but also can mean a "steppeland plant" as well as "strength." The word *šēriya* appears to be the preposition and suffix, that is, "upon me," though *šēri* also can mean "steppeland." His mother draws upon the alternate meanings of these words when she says that his dream portends the coming of one who is Gilgamesh's equal and *ina šēri iwalidma* "born of the steppeland."²⁵⁵

In the Egyptian dream manual, one finds that if a man dreams of: *dī=tw n=f t hq nfr h.t pw hq hr=f [n=sn]* "white bread being given to him; good, it means something at which his face will brighten" (r. 3.4). Here the appearance of *t hq* "white bread" in the protasis resounds in the verb *hq* "brighten" in the apodosis.²⁵⁶ The same device appears in the only extant literary report of a dream interpretation in Egypt.²⁵⁷

Examples of polysemy and paronomasia as hermeneutical tools in the Bible abound, especially in prophetic contexts. Thus, in the vision of Amos in 8:1–2, Yahweh shows the prophet a basket of *qayīs* "summer fruits," which is interpreted as signaling the *qēs* "end" of Israel.²⁵⁸ Similarly, in the book of Jeremiah, Yahweh shows the prophet a *šāqēd* "almond-branch," which is decoded to mean that Yahweh will *šōqēd* "watch" to ensure that his word is fulfilled (Jer 1:11–12).

As in Akkadian texts, polysemy and paronomasia can serve a hermeneutical purpose in biblical literary texts that report divinatory practice. Elsewhere I have shown how the interpretation of the Midianite's dream in Judg 7:13 derives from

255. The connection to strength is emphasized even more in the Standard Babylonian version of the text where Gilgamesh says of the meteorite *aššišuma dan elīya* "it was too strong for me" (l. 249), which his mother interprets as *ina māti* (KUR) *dan emūqi īšu* "he is the mightiest in the land, he has strength" (l. 269). Here the noun *dannu* "strength" ties the omen to its interpretation (contra OB l.i.8: *iktabit elīya* "it was too heavy for me"). For a complete discussion of the dreams in the Epic of Gilgamesh, see Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 57–82.

256. Noegel and Szpakowska, "'Word Play' in the Ramesside Dream Manual," 200. "Wordplay" as a divinatory hermeneutic appears first in the New Kingdom in Egypt. See Scott B. Noegel, "On Puns and Divination: Egyptian Dream Exegesis from a Comparative Perspective," in *Through a Glass Darkly: Magic, Dreams, and Prophecy in Ancient Egypt*, ed. Kasia Szpakowska (Swansea, Wales: The Classical Press of Wales, 2006), 95–119. Such devices also appear in the Demotic dream manual. See Aksel Volten, *Demotische Traumdeutung (Pap. Carlsberg XIII und XIV Verso)*, AA 3 (Copenhagen: Einar Munsgaard, 1942).

257. The dream stela of Tantamani, now housed in the Nubian Museum in Aswan, Egypt. For a discussion, see Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 100–106.

258. See Shalom Paul, *Amos*, Hermeneia 30 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1991), 253–54; Noegel, "'Sign, Sign, Everywhere a Sign,'" 143–62.

the polyvalent meanings inherent in the words used to describe the dream.²⁵⁹ As we are told, Gideon overheard the man saying: “Listen, I had this dream. (In it) there was a moldy loaf of barley rolling through the Midianite camp. It came to the tent and struck it, and it fell; it turned it upside down, and the tent collapsed.” Immediately afterwards, the other soldier interprets his dream: “That can only mean the sword of the Israelite Gideon, son of Joash. God is delivering Midian and the entire camp into his hands” (Judg 7:13–14).

There are several words in the dream that inform its interpretation. First is [צָלִיל] צָלֹל [*šalōl* [*šalīl*] “moldy, stale,” which also can mean “quivering” or a “tingling sound” implying terrifying news (e.g., 2 Kgs 21:12, Jer 19:3, Hab 3:16).²⁶⁰ The second is the expression שֶׁעָרִים לֶחֶם *leḥem šə‘orīm* “loaf of barley,” which David Yellin brilliantly espied as an echo of שֶׁעָרִים לָחֶם *lāhem šə‘ārīm* “fighting in the gates” in the Song of Deborah (Judg 5:8).²⁶¹ Another Hebrew word used in the account of the dream, which also carries military overtones, is the verb הִפָּק *hāpāk* “overturn, overthrow,” used both of the whirling bread loaf and the tent which the bread strikes. The verb appears in conjunction with violent destruction so frequently that it will suffice to cite a few references: the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:21), the city of Ammon (2 Sam 10:3), and Nineveh (Jon 3:4). When combined, the polysemes inherent in the words used to describe the dream, much like the Mesopotamian omen and literary texts discussed above, offer the raw materials for interpreting the dream.

The use of polysemy and paronomasia as hermeneutical tools anticipates its later use in Greek oracles and divinatory texts, and rabbinic dream interpretation.²⁶²

3.13.2. MEDICAL DIAGNOSES

Since various physical afflictions were deemed generally to be the result of transgressions, impurity and/or the act of ghosts or demons in the wider Near

259. See Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 141–46, which offers additional evidence beyond that provided here. See too now Robin Baker, “Double Trouble: Counting the Cost of Jephthah,” *JBL* 137 (2018): 29–50.

260. Noted independently by Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 506 n. 1. However, the observation was first made by M. Th. Houtsma, “לֶחֶם-לְחֹם-מִלְחָמָה,” *ZAW* 22 (1902): 329–31, see 330.

261. Yellin, “Polysemy in the Bible,” 2. Noted also by Robert G. Boling, *Judges: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 6A (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 148.

262. See Konrad Ohlert, *Rätsel und Rätselspiele der alten Griechen* (Berlin: Mayer & Müller, 1912); Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 191–251; Simone Beta, *Il labirinto della parola: Enigmi, oracoli e sogni nella cultura antica*, Saggi 956 (Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore, 2016).

East,²⁶³ the difference between divinatory compendia and medical diagnoses may seem subtle to some. However, since medical diagnoses were the result of observation alone and not based on the performance of divinatory acts (e.g., reading oil in water, animal entrails, or celestial bodies), I offer them here as a separate category.

An example from Akkadian will demonstrate:

U₄ GIG SAG-sú NIGIN-šu ri-ta-šu ù GÌR.MEŠ-šu i-ra-ú-ba ŠU ra-bi-ti šà ki
šà-aš-šà-ti-ma

If the patient's head seems to spin (and) his hands tremble: ‘hand’ of the great one who is like tetanus.”

Here a connection between the symptom and the cause is based on paronomasia between *ra’ābu* “tremble” and *rabû* “great one.”²⁶⁴

The Edwin Smith Surgical Papyrus also employs paronomasia at times to diagnose a symptom:

It is seminal emission [*mns*’] which befalls his penis. (It means) that his penis is erect and has a discharge [*nšw*] from the end of his penis. It is said, “It remains stationary [*mn s’w*],” when it cannot sink downward (and) it cannot lift upward. (10.19–21)²⁶⁵

Here the *mns*’ “seminal emission” and *nšw* “discharge” paronomastically suggest the explanation *mn s’w* “remains stationary.”

3.13.3. COMMENTARIES

The use of polysemy and paronomasia as hermeneutical tools also occurs in ancient commentaries. A Babylonian commentary on the creation story Enuma Elish extrapolates many fanciful and sublime interpretations from Marduk’s fifty

263. See Markham J. Geller, “Akkadian Healing Therapies in the Babylonian Talmud,” *MPIW* 259 (2004): 1–60; JoAnn Scurlock, *Magico-Medical Means of Treating Ghost-Induced Illnesses in Ancient Mesopotamia*, AMD 3 (Leiden: Brill/Styx, 2006); Scurlock and Burton Andersen, *Diagnoses in Assyrian and Babylonian Medicine: Ancient Sources, Translations, and Modern Medical Analyses* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005); Susanne Beck, *Exorcism, Illness, and Demons in an Ancient Near Eastern Context: The Egyptian Magical Papyrus Leiden I 343 +345*, PALMA 18 (Leiden: Sidestone, 2018).

264. Examined in Scurlock and Andersen, *Diagnoses in Assyrian and Babylonian Medicine*, 68, with the “pun” noted on 693 n. 203.

265. Adopted from James Henry Breasted, *Hieroglyphic Transliteration, Translation, and Commentary*, vol. 1 of *The Edwin Smith Surgical Papyrus*, OIP 3 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1930), 329–30, with some minor changes.

names. His first name is “Asari, bestower of civilization, who established surveys, creator of grain and fibrous plants, who causes vegetation to sprout.” The commentary explains Marduk’s epithets by deriving them from the polyvalent syllabic and logographic components used to write them. Thus, in reference to the name Asari it records that the sign RU (used for RI) = “bestow” (= Akkadian *šarāku*), the sign SAR = “cultivation,” and the sign A = “border.” SAR also suggests “grain” and “herbs,” and when SAR is read as MA₄ it means “cause to sprout” (= Akkadian *ašû*). Moreover, SAR can refer to “vegetation.”²⁶⁶ As Hallo explains, the names “represent transparently ‘unscientific’ etymologies based on the syllabic or logographic orthography of the name, and many others constitute equally imaginative displays of linguistic acrobatics.”²⁶⁷

One Mesopotamian medical commentary goes a step farther in attempting to explain the word GUDUM₂ “ghost.” The exorcist’s gloss on this word splits the cuneiform sign into two separate signs, in this case BAR “to open” and U (read as BÛR) “ear,” and renders it “the one who opens the ears.”²⁶⁸ The same method is applied elsewhere to the sign designating the *gallû*-demon, that is, 𒄩𒍪. In this case, the cuneiform sign is read as if composed of ŠI and UR, and understood as pseudo-Sumerian signs that yield IGI TÊŠ meaning “the eye that comes to shame.”²⁶⁹

Though some Egyptian texts show evidence of hermeneutical glosses based on polysemy and paronomasia, the Egyptians never developed the commentary as a literary genre.²⁷⁰ The same can be said for the scribes of Ugarit and ancient Israel.

Nevertheless, a tradition of textual commentary does emerge in formative Judaism, as represented in the Dead Sea scrolls. Of particular interest are the

266. Jean Bottéro, “Les noms de Marduk, l’écriture et la ‘logique’ en Mésopotamie ancienne,” in *Memoirs of the Academy of Arts and Sciences: Essays on the Ancient Near East in Memory of Jacob Joel Finkelstein*, ed. Maria de Jong Ellis, vol. 19 (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1977), 5–28. See similarly in Alan Lenzi, “Scribal Hermeneutics and the Twelve Gates of *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*,” *JAOS* 135 (2015): 733–49.

267. Hallo, “Scurrilous Etymologies,” 768.

268. As espied by Scurlock and Andersen, *Diagnoses in Assyrian and Babylonian Medicine*, 437.

269. Scurlock and Andersen, *Diagnoses in Assyrian and Babylonian Medicine*, 437. They also point out the connection between this demon, eye pain, and shame in the following diagnosis for a psychiatric affliction: [DIŠ NA *ma-a*]m-ma IGI-ma TÚG-su it-ta-na-as-suk-û-rap-pad IGI^{II}-šû ú-ma-ḥa-aš NA BI 𒄩𒍪 DIB-su “[if a person] sees somebody and continually throws off his garment, he wanders about (and) strikes his eyes, a *gallû* afflicts that person.”

270. Phillipe Derchain, “Theologie et Littérature,” in Loprieno, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 351–60.

commentaries on biblical texts known as pesharim.²⁷¹ The root פִּשַׁר *p-š-r*, whence “pesharim,” essentially means “interpret,” and it has its origins in divination, especially by way of dreams.²⁷² In fact, as Alex Jassen remarks, “the pesharim seem to reflect a systematic incorporation of several recurring structural and formal aspects found in dream and omen literature.”²⁷³

A fine demonstration of paronomasia in the service of hermeneutics occurs in the Qumranic text known as the Pesher to Habakkuk (1QpHab XIII, 9). In Hab 2:6, the prophet proclaims that the righteous will make of the defiant a מַשָּׁל *māšāl* “proverb.” The Pesher to Habakkuk interprets the passage as alluding to the Priest of Wickedness who became a מַשָּׁל *mšl* “ruler.”²⁷⁴

In the Pesher to Nahum (3–4, III, 1–5), וְשִׁמְתִּיךָ *wə-šamtīk* “I will make you (a spectacle)” in Nah 3:6, is understood to mean אֲשַׁמְתֶּם *šmtm* “I will make you guilty.” As Shani Berrin observes, the interpretation relies on reading the consonant *šin* (שׁ) in וְשִׁמְתִּיךָ *wə-šamtīk* as a *šin* (שׁ), and thus deriving the verb from the root שִׁמַּם *š-m-m* “be guilty.”²⁷⁵ Elsewhere in the Pesher to Nahum (3–4 III, 8–9), we find the prophet’s reference to a הֵיל *hēl* “rampart” (Nah 3:8), interpreted as אֲנָשֵׁי הֵיל *nšy hyl* “men of power.”²⁷⁶

271. Lou H. Silberman, “Unriddling the Riddle: A Study in the Structure and Language of the Habakkuk Pesher,” *RdQ* 11 (1961): 323–64; Michael Fishbane, “The Qumran Pesher and Traits of Ancient Hermeneutics,” in *Proceedings of the Sixth World Congress of Jewish Studies: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 13–19 August, 1973*, ed. Malka Jagendorf and Avigdor Shinan (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1977), 97–114; Robert Eisenman, “Playing on and Transmuting Words—Interpreting ‘Abeit-Baluto’ in the Habakkuk Pesher,” in *Mogilany 1989: Papers on the Dead Sea Scrolls Offered in Memory of Jean Carmignac. Part II: The Teacher of Righteousness, Literary Studies*, ed. Z. J. Kapera (Krakow: The Enigma Press, 1991), 177–96; G. Doudna, “Wordplay in Pesher Nahum,” in *4QPeshar Nahum: A Critical Edition* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 253–65; Alex P. Jassen, “The Pesharim and the Rise of Commentary in Early Jewish Scriptural Interpretation,” *DSD* 19 (2012): 363–98.

272. See Isaac Rabinowitz, “‘Peshar/Pittārōn’: Its Biblical Meaning and Its Significance in the Qumran Literature,” *RdQ* 8 (1973): 219–32; Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 24, 131.

273. Jassen, “Pesharim and the Rise of Commentary in Early Jewish Scriptural Interpretation,” 397.

274. Noted by William H. Brownlee, *The Midrash Peshar of Habakkuk*, SBLMS 24 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979), 133, 143–44.

275. Shani I. Berrin, *The Peshar Nahum Scroll from Qumran: An Exegetical Study of 4Q169*, STDJ 53 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 259 n. 89.

276. Berrin, *Peshar Nahum Scroll from Qumran*, 279.

The hermeneutic application of polysemy and paronomasia would continue in Judaism, often under some degree of Mesopotamian influence, and as such, it appears in the Talmud and later midrashic literature.²⁷⁷

3.13.4. RIDDLES

Riddles have long been associated with polysemy and paronomasia. The earliest riddles appear in Sumerian tablets from Lagash dating to the twenty-fourth century BCE.²⁷⁸ A local product, they provide clues to the names of a number of towns by referring to a canal, divine name, name of a fish, and name of a snake. The reader is left to ponder the solution as the text offers none. However, a number of other riddles, perhaps known by the rubric A.DA “contest,” and dating to the

277. Norman Walker, “The Masoretic Pointing of Jeremiah’s Pun,” *VT* 7 (1957): 413; Lieberman, “A Mesopotamian Background for the So-Called Aggadic ‘Measures’ of Biblical Hermeneutics?”; Jonah Fraenkel, “Paronomasia in Aggadic Narratives,” *ScrHier* 27 (1978): 27–35; R. Brown, *The Enjoyment of Midrash: The Use of the Pun in Genesis Rabba* (PhD diss., Hebrew Union College, 1980); Jeffrey H. Tigay, “An Early Technique of Aggadic Exegesis,” in *History, Historiography, and Interpretation: Studies in Biblical and Cuneiform Literatures*, ed. Hayim Tadmor and Moshe Weinfeld (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1983), 169–89; Antoine Cavigneaux, “Aux sources du Midrash: L’herméneutique babylonienne,” *AO* 5 (1987): 243–55; H. Eilberg-Schwartz, “Who’s Kidding Whom? A Serious Reading of Rabbinic Word Plays,” *JAAR* 55 (1988): 765–88; D. Stern, *Parables in Midrash: Narrative and Exegesis in Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); S. T. Lachs, “Sexual Imagery in Three Rabbinic Passages,” *JSJ* 23 (1992): 244–48; Daniel Boyarin, “Thoughts on Midrashic Hermeneutics: Manna and Quails in the *Mekhilta*” [Hebrew], in *Moshe Goshen—Gottstein-in Memoriam*, vol. 3 of *Studies in Bible and Exegesis*, ed. Moshe Bar-Asher et al. (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1993), 41–52; Galit Hasan-Rokem and David Shulman, eds., *Untying the Knot: On Riddles and Other Enigmatic Modes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Zvi Malachi, “‘Creative Philology’ as a System of Biblical and Talmudic Exegesis: Creating Midrashic Interpretations from Multi-Meaning Words in the Midrash and the Zohar,” in Noegel, *Puns and Pundits*, 269–87; Chaim Milikowsky, “Rabbinic Interpretation of the Bible in the Light of Ancient Hermeneutical Practice: The Question of the Literal Meaning,” in “*The Words of a Wise Man’s Mouth are Gracious*” (*Qoh* 10,12): *Festschrift for Günter Stemberger on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. M. Perani, *SJ* 32 (de Gruyter: Berlin, 2005), 7–28; Shamir Yona, “Rhetorical Features in Talmudic Literature,” *HUCA* 77 (2006): 90; Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 235–51; Jonathan Grossman, “The Abarbanel’s Stance towards the Existence of Ambiguous Expressions in the Bible” [Hebrew], *BM* 52 (2007): 126–38; Victor M. Armenteros, “La Creatividad en el Reposo: La Sinagoga como Marco Hermenéutico en el Judaísmo Antiguo,” *DL* 9 (2010): 69–102; Uri Gabbay, “Akkadian Commentaries from Ancient Mesopotamia and Their Relation to Early Hebrew Exegesis,” *DSD* 19 (2012): 267–312.

278. Robert D. Biggs, “Pre-Sargonic Riddles from Lagash,” *JNES* 32 (1973): 26–33.

eighteenth century BCE, conclude with the formula KI.BÚR.BI “its solution,” and then give the answer.²⁷⁹ Civil remarks: “Phonological ambiguities, double-entendres, and all kinds of word plays are everywhere essential features of the genre.”²⁸⁰

1. É AN.GIN₇ URU₄ KI.GAR.RA
2. É DUB.ŠEN.GIN₇ GADA MU.UN.DU
3. É UZ.GIN₇ KI.GAL.LA GUB.BA
4. IGI.NU.GÁL BA.AN.KU₄
5. IGI Ì.GÁL BA.AN.TA.È
6. KI.BÚR.BI É.DUB.BA.ÀM

A house based on a foundation like the skies,
 A house one has covered with a veil like a (secret) tablet box,
 A house set on a base like a “goose,”
 One enters in blind,
 Leaves it seeing.
 Its solution: the school.

The DUB sign in DUB.ŠEN “chest” (l. 2) offers a clue to its interpretation, as does the repetition of É “house” three times (ll. 1–3), for both combine to suggest the É.DUB.BA “school.” In addition, several signs are polysemous. AN can mean “heaven,” but also “god” or “ear of grain.” URU₄ “foundation” can be read as ENGAR “farmer” or ABSÎN “furrow.” We may understand DUB.ŠEN as “tablet box,” but also ^{URUDA}ŠEN “kettle” or ^{URUDA}DUR₁₀ “ax.” As a result, we also may read the first line as “a house placed in a furrow like an ear of grain.”²⁸¹

1. 𒀠.EL.ŠU KA [...] Á BÍ.IN.[GAR?]
2. GÚ.MU.DA 𒀠.IM.DA.LÁ]
3. KI.BÚR.BI GAL₄.LA.[ÀM]

The [...] mouth (?) has vanquished the fortress,
 so that I can embrace it (?).
 Its solution: the vagina.

279. Civil, “Sumerian Riddles,” 17–35; Civil, “Sumerian Riddles, Additional Remarks,” *NABU* (1988): 29–30, adds also the noun I.BIL.U, which Izi = *išātu* 5.31–32 identifies with the Akkadian *hittu* and *tēltu*, the former cognate with Hebrew *חִידָה* *hīḏāh* “riddle.” The list (l. 33) also offers I.BIL.U.DUG₄.GA = *hi-a-du*, which appears to be cognate. See also Held, “Marginal Notes to the Biblical Lexicon.”

280. Civil, “Sumerian Riddles,” 17. See pp. 18–19 for the original sources.

281. Civil, “Sumerian Riddles,” 19–20.

Here the Sumerian 𒂍.𒂗.𒂗 is a loanword from Akkadian *ḫalṣu* “fortress” (with a by-form *ḫilṣu*), a noun selected to evoke the Sumerian 𒂍.𒂗.𒂗 “full of (sexual) charm.”²⁸²

1. ŠUŠKIN^{KI}.ŠÈ Ì.DU.DÈ.EN.MA.A
2. EĞIR.MU.ŠÈ Ì.IM.GUR.RE.EN
3. [KI].BÚR.BI ^{GIŠ}NIMBAR.Á[M]

I had to go to Susa,
and then I have come back.
Solution: the date palm.

The solution to this riddle rests on the realization that Susa was in the NIM “upper country,” and on the knowledge that one of the words for “back” was BAR. Thus, NIM + BAR = NIMBAR “palm tree.”²⁸³ A few other Sumerian riddles are known, but their interpretations are difficult.²⁸⁴

The production of Sumerian riddles at a time when the language was no longer spoken would suggest that we should find riddles in Akkadian. Indeed, several do exist, though most of them are too fragmentary to know if they employ polysemy or paronomasia. Those from the Old Babylonian period provide their own solutions, albeit without the formula “its solution,” whereas the few Kassite exemplars provide the Sumerian formula.²⁸⁵

The Egyptians have not left us riddles as a distinct literary genre.²⁸⁶ However, some texts appear to function like riddles. Michael Fox has suggested some Egyptian love poems as cases in point. Concerning P.Harris 500 B, in which a young girl works bird traps, he explains:

282. Civil, “Sumerian Riddles,” 26.

283. Civil, “Sumerian Riddles,” 28.

284. A. Cavigneaux, “Miettes de l’edubbâ,” in *Tablettes et images aux pays de Sumer et d’Akkad. Mélanges offerts à Monsieur Limet*, ed. Ö. Tunca and D. Deheselle (Liège: Université de Liège, 1996), 11–26. There also are “quasi-riddles” or seemingly impossible challenges imbedded in the plotline of the Sumerian tale of Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta. See Herman L. J. Vanstiphout, *Epics of Sumerian Kings: The Matter of Aratta*, WAW 20 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 49–96.

285. Jan J. van Dijk, *Texts of Varying Content*, Texts in the Iraq Museum 9 (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 53; M. Stol, “Malz,” *RIA* 7 (1989): 328; Niek Veldhuis, “Kassite Exercises: Literary and Lexical Extracts,” *JCS* 52 (2000): 72; Michael P. Streck and Nathan Wasserman, “Dialogues and Riddles: Three Old Babylonian Wisdom Texts,” *Iraq* 73 (2011): 123–24.

286. Thus, Guglielmi, “Der Gebrauch rhetorischer Stilmittel in der ägyptischen Literatur,” 495 n. 191, who cites Fox and states: “Die literarische Gattung Rätsel ist nicht belegt; zur Rätselung in Liebesliedern, die zugleich kühne Metaphorik darstellt.”

This song presents a riddle. At the end of the song we learn that the girl did not set her trap today, but at the start we are told that the goose was trapped in a net. How so? To solve a riddle one must look for levels of meaning beyond the obvious, and indeed this song may be understood in two ways.²⁸⁷

The solution to the problem is that the “trap” is “love.”²⁸⁸ In a similar way, the capture of the *wḏ dšr* “red fish” in the Cairo Love Songs (Group A), presents a riddle, to wit: “the fish is identified with the boy’s heart. The girl ‘captures his heart’ as one captures a fish.”²⁸⁹ Another poem poses the following conundrum:

How skilled is she, (my) sister, at casting the lasso,
 yet she’ll [draw in] no cattle!
 With her hair she lassoes me,
 with her eye she pulls (me) in,
 with her thighs she binds,
 with her seal she sets the brand.²⁹⁰

The reader is forced to ponder how the man’s beloved can be skilled with a rope, but can catch no cattle. The answer, which is metaphorically laid out in the next few lines, is that the lover is the catch, and she has captured him with her very being. While such texts certainly force one to explore the meaning of extended metaphors, they do not constitute riddles in a formal sense, as they are not pithy puzzles that possess a formula for alerting the audience to a solution. They are not posed as problems to be solved, and they do not rely on polysemy or paronomasia. On the other hand, the most ancient Sumerian riddles provide no answers to their puzzles and the Old Babylonian riddles offer no formula before providing the answers. Therefore, it would seem that the difference between riddles and metaphorical puzzles may be one of degrees.

Riddles do not appear in Ugaritic texts, but they do appear in the Hebrew Bible.²⁹¹ In fact, the start of the book of Proverbs informs us that in order to obtain wisdom and insight into the proverbs one must try: *וְהָבִין מִשְׁלַל וּמִלִּצָּה דְּבָרֵי חֲכָמִים* *la-hābīn māšāl ū-mliṣāh dibrē ḥākāmīm wə-ḥiḏōtām* “to understand parables and figures, the words of the wise and their riddles” (Prov 1:6).²⁹² See

287. Fox, *Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs*, 18–20, 34, 73, 289.

288. I thank Michael Fox for discussing his use of the title “riddle” here, which is not in a formal generic sense. “Sort of riddle” is perhaps more apt. Personal communication, September 22, 2017.

289. Fox, *Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs*, 34.

290. Fox, *Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs*, 73.

291. James L. Crenshaw, “Riddles,” *ABD* 5:721–23.

292. See similarly the Sumerian proverbs examined in Klein and Sefati, “Word Play in Sumerian Literature,” 55–56.

similarly Samson's famous riddle: *מֵהָאֵכָל יֵצֵא מֵאֵל וּמֵעַז יֵצֵא מִתּוֹק* *mē-hā- 'ōkēl yāṣā' ma 'ākāl ū-mē- 'az yāṣā' māṭōq* "out of the eater, something to eat; out of the strong, something sweet" (Judg 14:14), the answer to which, as Joshua Porter has shown, hinges on the polysemy of *אַרִי* *'ārī* for both "lion" and "honey."²⁹³ Levine suggests that additional ties to the riddle come from its geographic setting, which the narrator places in Timnah just west of the camp of דָּן *dān* "Dan," which settled between צֹרָה *ṣōr 'āh* "Tzorah" and Eshtaol (Jud 13:25). The Danites lived in לַיִשׁ *layiš* "Laish" (Judg 18:29), meaning "lion," and the place name Tzorah means "hornet, bee" (Exod 23:28), which evokes the "honey."²⁹⁴

It may be that, much like the evidence from ancient Egyptian, some biblical texts themselves appear to function like riddles. They are inherently ambiguous, offer extended metaphors, and demand interpretation that is not readily obtainable without linguistic clues, either explicitly found in the text or implicit to it. In fact, Greenstein argues that we may understand the entire story of Sampson like a riddle.²⁹⁵ Such also is the account of Daniel's "writing on the wall," which Al Wolters observes, functions like a riddle.²⁹⁶ Karel Deurloo has made similar arguments for Ps 19.²⁹⁷ For Doug Ingram, the entire book of Qoheleth constitutes a riddle—a deliberate didactic tool to encourage his audience to question the meaning of his words and the ambiguities of life.²⁹⁸

It bears stressing that riddles can have very different functions depending on the social setting in which they are posed, many of which are serious affairs—initiations, weddings, funerals, and verbal contests (recall the Sumerian term A.DA). Samson's riddle took place at a wedding. The queen of Sheba presented riddles to Solomon to test him (1 Kgs 10:1, 2 Chr 9:1). Ezekiel and Habakkuk understood the riddle as a synonym to the מָשָׁל *māšāl* "proverb," in essence, an extended metaphor (Ezek 17:2, Hab 2:6). Other texts suggest that the riddle has a didactic function (Ps 49:5, 78:2, Prov 1:6). Still elsewhere the riddle is connected

293. J. Roy Porter, "Samson's Riddle: Judges XIV, 18," *JTS* 13 (1962): 106–9. The meaning "honey" for *אַרִי* *'ārī* is not attested in biblical Hebrew, but it does appear in Ugaritic.

294. Nachman Levine, "Samson The Riddle: Place Names, Wordplay, Structure, and Meaning" [Hebrew], *Megadim* 45 (2007): 61–72. Levine also argues that the answer to the riddle may be Samson himself.

295. See Edward L. Greenstein, "The Riddle of Samson," *Prooftexts* 1 (1981): 237–60.

296. Al Wolters, "The Riddle of the Scales in Daniel 5," *HUCA* 57 (1991): 155–77.

297. Karel A. Deurloo, "Psalm 19: Riddle and Parable," in *Goldene Apfel in silbernen Schalen: Collected Communications to the XIIIth Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament, Leuven 1989*, ed. Klaus-Dietrich Schunck and Matthias Augustin, BEATAJ 20 (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1992), 93–100.

298. Doug Ingram, *Ambiguity in Ecclesiastes*, LHBOTS 431 (New York: T&T Clark International, 2006); Ingram, "The Riddle of Qohelet and Qohelet the Riddler," *JSOT* 37 (2013): 485–506.

to oracles received through indirect means (Num 12:8, Dan 8:23). As a formal literary genre, the riddle continued to have a long life in Judaism and in the Mediterranean world generally.²⁹⁹

3.14. CONCEALING

Some forms of “wordplay” were intended to conceal secrets. We find this already in a number of Sumerian texts composed by Akkadian scribes in a highly artificial style best labeled as “Crypto-Sumerian.” Thorkild Jacobsen explains: “such a style was considered a proof of supreme learning and that what to us appears as blunders and ignorance, to them was seen rather as profound erudition posing challenging riddles to less acute minds.”³⁰⁰ These texts were Sumerian translations of Akkadian. To demonstrate, I turn to a bilingual inscription of Shamash-shum-ukin commemorating his rebuilding of the city wall of Sippar. In line 18, we encounter the Sumerian ZÉ.EB.BI.DA.AŠ ҔU.MU.NI.IN.RI, which the scribe used to render the Akkadian *ṭābiš lu irme* “he comfortably took up residence.” Without the Akkadian as a guide, one usually would render the signs ZÉ.EB.BI.DA.AŠ as containing ZEBBED, the EME.SAL dialectal equivalent for DUGUD, meaning “heavy, importantly.” Instead, it is read as ZEB.ED.A.Š(E) “become good,” and thus, “took up residence that he would enjoy (i.e., be comfortable in).” Moreover, ZEBBED suggests by dint of sound, ZEBED “honored.”³⁰¹

In the same text, the Sumerian KUŠ₄.BI MUŠ.GA.E.NE oddly renders the Akkadian *pilludūšunu nussuqūtu* “their choice rituals” (l. 21). Though MUŠ.GA is EME.SAL for MÚŠ.TÚM *naparkū* “cease work,” the Akkadian reads *nussuqūtu* “choice.” The writing constitutes a learned extrapolation on *naparkū*, for *naparkū* also translates Sumerian SAḪ_x (ҔA.A), which the author identifies with SUḪ *nasāqu* “choose, pick out.”³⁰²

299. Dan Pagis, *A Secret Sealed: Hebrew Baroque Emblem Riddles from Italy and Holland* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1986); Pagis, “Toward a Theory of the Literary Riddle,” in *Untying the Knot: On Riddles and Other Enigmatic Modes*, ed. Galit Hasan-Roken and David Shulman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 81–108; Galit Hasan-Roken, “‘Spinning Threads of Sand’: Riddles as Images of Loss in the Midrash on Lamentations,” in Hasan-Roken and Shulman, *Untying the Knot*, 109–24; Dina Stein, “A King, a Queen, and the Riddle Between: Riddles and Interpretation in a Late Midrashic Text,” in Hasan-Roken and Shulman, *Untying the Knot*, 125–47; Kwapisz, Petrain, and Szymański, *Muse at Play*.

300. Jacobsen, “Abstruse Sumerian,” 291.

301. See Jacobsen, “Abstruse Sumerian,” 287.

302. Jacobsen, “Abstruse Sumerian,” 287.

A number of Akkadian commentaries employ cryptographic writing in order to keep their contents from the non-initiated.³⁰³ Often these involve the use of signs that double as numbers. I treat these in the next chapter under Isopsephy (4.1.10). Elsewhere it involves a sophisticated rendering of Akkadian into Sumerian or vice versa, as we saw in the inscription of Shamash-shum-ukin above. George's comment on cryptography in Mesopotamian texts is worth citing in full:

The purpose of cryptography in the scribal life of ancient Mesopotamia, whether employed in the body of a text ... or, as is more common in the late period, in the colophon, was to restrict understanding to the small band of élite scholars, who were initiated, presumably by a long apprenticeship, into the most esoteric traditions of cuneiform learning. As the scribal commentaries and other expository texts show, the intellectual traditions of Sumero-Babylonian learning were intimately bound up with the inherent ambiguity and flexibility of cuneiform orthography. The invention of Sumerian versions of Akkadian names can thus be seen as a device typical of the learned scribe, who seeks at once to show off his scholarship and to render his work inaccessible to those of lesser learning. The use of this device throughout our story clearly marks the text out as belonging to the world of scholarship.³⁰⁴

There are numerous examples of cryptographic writing in Egyptian texts,³⁰⁵ most notably in later Ptolemaic inscriptions, like those at the temples of Esna and

303. Otto Neugebauer, "Unusual Writings in Seleucid Astronomical Texts," *JCS* 1 (1947): 217–18; Ernst F. Weidner, "Geheimschrift," *RIA* 3 (1957): 185–91; Hermann Hunger, "Kryptographische astrologische Omina," in *Lišān mithurti. Festschrift Wolfram Freiherr von Soden zum 19.4.1968 gewidmet von Schülern und Mitarbeitern*, ed. Wolfgang Röllig, AOAT 1 (Kevelaer: Verlag Butzon & Bercker; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969), 133–45; Erica Reiner, "Deux cryptogrammes akkadiens," *RA* 63 (1969): 170–71; Henri Limet, "Le secret et les écrits: Aspects de l'ésotérisme en Mésopotamie ancienne," *Homo Religiosus* 13 (1986): 243–54; Livingstone, *Mystical and Mythological Explanatory Works of Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars*; George, "Ninurta-Pāqidāt's Dog Bite, and Notes on Other Comic Tales," 64–65; Eckart Frahm, "The 'Exorcist's Manual': Structure, Language, 'Sitz im Leben,'" in *Sources of Evil: Studies in Mesopotamian Exorcistic Lore*, ed. Greta Van Buylaere et al., AMD 15 (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 9–47.

304. George, "Ninurta-Pāqidāt's Dog Bite, and Notes on Other Comic Tales," 64.

305. See Étienne Drioton, "Essai sur la cryptographie privée de la fin de la XVIII^e dynastie," *RdE* 1 (1933): 1–50; Drioton, "Une figuration cryptographique sur une stèle du Moyen Empire," *RdE* 1 (1933): 203–29; Drioton, "La cryptographie égyptienne," *CdE* 9 (1934): 192–206; Drioton, "La cryptographie égyptienne," *Revue lorraine d'anthropologie* 6 (1934): 5–28; Drioton, "Les jeux d'écriture et les rébus de l'Égypte antique," *Le Rayon d'Égypte* 8 (1935): 173–75; Drioton, "Notes sur le cryptogramme de Montouemhet," *AIPHO* 3 (1935): 133–40; Drioton, "Un rébus de l'ancien empire," *MIFAO* 46 (1935):

Dendera.³⁰⁶ While there is consensus that such writing served to conceal, the purpose of the concealment is debated. Some suggest that the writing was intended solely for the gods, and thus hidden from mortal eyes. However, it could have been concealed because it contains the secrets of priests. Alternatively, it

697–704; Drioton, "Le cryptogramme de Montou de Médamoud," *RdE* 2 (1936): 21–33; Drioton, "Les protocols ornementaux d'Abydos," *RdE* 2 (1936): 1–20; Drioton, "Note sur un cryptogramme récemment découvert à Athribis," *ASEA* 38 (1938): 109–16; Drioton, "Deux Cryptogrammes de Senenmout," *ASEA* 38 (1938): 231–46; Drioton, "Senenmout cryptographie," in *Atti del XIX Congresso internazionale degli Orientalisti, Roma, 23–29 settembre 1935–XIII* (Roma: Tipografia del Senato, G. Bardi, 1938), 132–38; Drioton, "Cryptogrammes de la reine Nefertari," *ASEA* 39 (1939): 133–44; Drioton, "Recueil de cryptographie monumentale," *ASAE* 40 (1940): 305–429; Drioton, "La cryptographie du Papyrus Salt 825," *ASEA* 41 (1942): 100–134; Drioton, "L'écriture énigmatique du Livre du Jour et de la Nuit," in *Le Livre du Jour et de la Nuit*, ed. A. Piankoff (Le Caire: Imprimerie de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1942), 81–121; Drioton, "A propos du cryptogramme de Montouemhêt," *ASEA* 42 (1943): 177–81; Drioton, "Procédé acrophonique ou principe consonantal?," *ASEA* 43 (1943): 319–49; Drioton, "Chawabtou à inscriptions cryptographiques," *ASEA* 45 (1945): 72–81; Drioton, "Le cynocéphalie et l'écriture du nom de Thot," *ASEA* 45 (1945): 69–72; Drioton, "Plaques bilingues de Ptolémée IV," in *Discovery of the Famous Temple and Enclosure of Serapis at Alexandria with an Explanation of the Enigmatic Inscriptions on the Serapeum Plaques of Ptolemy IV*, by Alan Bowe, *ASEAS* 2 (Le Caire: Imprimerie de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1946), 97–112; Drioton, "La cryptographie de la chapelle de Toutânkhamon," *JEA* 35 (1949): 117–22; Drioton, "Les principes de la cryptographie égyptienne," *CRAIBL* (1953): 355–64; H. G. Fischer, "Hieroglyphen Cryptography," *LÄ* II (1977): col. 1196; David Silverman, "Cryptographic Writing in the Tomb of Tutankhamun," *SÄK* 8 (1980): 233–36; John Coleman Darnell, *The Enigmatic Netherworld Books of the Solar-Osirian Unity: Cryptographic Compositions in the Tombs of Tutankhamun, Ramesses VI and Ramesses IX*, OBO 198 (Fribourg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004); Ludwig D. Morenz, *Bild-Buchstaben und symbolische Zeichen: Die Herausbildung der Schrift in der hohen Kultur Altägyptens*, OBO 205 (Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg, 2004), 42–49, 63–66, 80–84; Benoît Lurson, "Cryptography, the Full Moon Festivals of Min, and the King: Reading the Cryptographic Inscription of the Chapel of Min in the Temple of Ramses II at Abydos," *JARCE* 53 (2017): 223–41; Valérie Angenot, "Rébus, calembours et images subliminales dans l'iconographie égyptienne," in *Rébus d'ici et d'ailleurs: écriture, image, signe*, ed. Claire-Akiko Brisset, Florence Dumora, and Marianne Simon-Oikawa (Paris: hémisphères éditions, 2018), 85–103.

306. See generally, Hellmut Brunner, "Änigmatische Schrift (Kryptographie)," in *Ägyptologie: Ägyptische Schrift und Sprache*, ed. Bertold Spuler, HdO 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1959), 52–58; Erich Winter, "Die Rolle der Kryptographie in der ägyptischen Hieroglyphenschrift," *ADVGM* 8 (1966): 7–10; Erik Hornung, "Die Welt im Spiegel der Zeichen," *Eranos-Jahrbuch* 55 (1986): 403–38; Sylvie Cauville, "Entre exigence décorative et significations multiples: Les graphies suggestives du temple d'Hathor à Dendara," *BIFAO* 102 (2002): 91–135.

could have had a ritually performative function or simply could have demonstrated a scribe's expertise. Still others view it merely as visual poetry.³⁰⁷

Some Akkadian texts equate the use of polysemy with "the hidden things and secrets of the gods."³⁰⁸ One finds this especially in hermeneutic texts and those that read cuneiform signs for their numerical values (see 4.1.10).³⁰⁹ Moreover, hiddenness in itself can constitute a divine attribute, and so concealment via polysemy can provide a means of demonstrating a theological tenet (see 3.15.2).

There is little evidence that Israelite writers employed polysemy in order to conceal secrets, though one cannot rule it out entirely, for as Prov 25:2 relates: כְּבֹד אֱלֹהִים הִסְתֵּר דְּבָר tapūhē zāhāb bə-māškīyyōt kāseḇ dāḇār dāḇur 'al 'āpānāw "the glory of God is to conceal a matter (lit. "word")." Indeed, the Israelites appreciated clever speech, as the following proverb informs us: כְּסֵף דְּבָר דְּבָר עַל-אָפְנִי tapūhē zāhāb bə-māškīyyōt kāseḇ dāḇār dāḇur 'al 'āpānāw "apples of gold in settings of silver are (like) a word skillfully spoken in the (right) circumstance" (Prov 25:11). If there is any one type of polysemy in Hebrew that we might consider a form of concealment it is transposition (see 4.1.13). Nevertheless, even these polysemes must be revealed to be understood.

3.15. THEOLOGICAL/DIDACTIC

One often finds polysemy and paronomasia making theological or other didactic points. This usually has one of four primary aims. The first is to show that two things, whether people, cities, divinities, or objects, possess a shared essence in substance and/or character. The second intends to illustrate the ineffable, to express incomprehensibility of a divine text, even the impenetrability of the godhead. The third is to demonstrate the principle of *lex talionis* "the law of retribution" and thus to posit a relationship of cause and divine consequence. The fourth aim is to offer lessons by way of moral precepts, advice on statecraft, or other forms of wisdom.

3.15.1. DEMONSTRATE SHARED ESSENCE

In the Atra-ḫasis Epic, the god Nintu creates the first mortal by mixing clay with the flesh and blood of the slain god Wê-ila (1.225–226). In order to demonstrate

307. On this form of writing, see especially Morenz, *Sinn und Spiel der Zeichen*.

308. Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 36–45.

309. Erle Leichty, "The Colophon," in *Studies Presented to A. Leo Oppenheim, June 7, 1964*, ed. Robert D Biggs (Chicago, IL: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1964), 147–54; Laurie E. Pearce, *Cuneiform Cryptography: Numerical Substitutions for Syllabic and Logographic Signs* (PhD diss., Yale University, 1982); Pearce, "The Number-Syllabary Texts," *JAOS* 116 (1996): 453–74.

shared essence, the text draws a paronomastic connection between the divine *eṭemmu* “spirit” of the god Wê-ila and the *ṭemu* “intelligence” of the first *awīlu* “man.”³¹⁰

The biblical counterpart to this account is the stream of paronomastic terms that inform how God created the first אָדָם *’ādām* “human” from the הָאֲדָמָה *’ādāmāh* “soil” (Gen 2:7). The paronomastic association between the two, which we also may see as serving an appellative purpose (see 3.10), compels one to infer that the two possess a shared essence. Indeed, the reddish color (i.e., אֲדֹמ *’ādōm*) inherent in both terms suggests their fertility.³¹¹ Moreover, the implicit suggestion in both of דָּם *dām* “blood” (implied, but not present in the text),³¹² and the use of טָלַח *’ēḏ* “subterranean water” to form the clay from which God creates Adam (Gen 2:6), together invoke the common Semitic idiom for giving birth: “water and blood.”³¹³ The paronomasia between the terms for “human,” “soil,” “blood,” and “subterranean water,” naturally places the water used to make clay in contrast with blood, for both are vital to human existence. In fact, man’s procreation ultimately depends upon the soil and water as much as it does upon his own life-giving blood and the blood of menstruation and parturition.³¹⁴ Likewise, the land depends on the man to till the field as much as it does upon water to produce the blood of grapes and all other seed-bearing plants. Thus, the land and the man not only share essence, they are codependents.³¹⁵

3.15.2. DEMONSTRATE DIVINE INEFFABILITY

The ability of polysemous signs and words to convey multiple meanings also can illustrate the incomprehensibility of the godhead. A Sumerian exemplar occurs in the poem *Ninmešarra*, composed by Enheduanna, the first poet in the historical record. Annette Zgoll has shown that there are two entirely different ways of reading the opening line of her poem: NIN ME ŠÁR.RA U₄ DALLA È.A. The

310. On the allusive paronomasia in the Akkadian text, see Abusch, “Ghost and God”; Alster, “*ilu awilum*,” 35–40.

311. Scott B. Noegel, “Scarlet and Harlots: Seeing Red in the Hebrew Bible,” *HUCA* 87 (2017): 1–47.

312. The terms for *blood* and *human* are linguistically related. See A. Militarev, “Etimologija i interpretacija drevnepis’mennyh pamjatnikov: Biblejskie terminy ‘sem’ja,’ ‘potomstvo,’ ‘plemja,’ ‘narod,’ ‘čelovečeskij rod,’” *Vestnik Eurejskogo Universiteta* 7 (2002): 7–58.

313. On water and blood in reference to births, see M. Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible: Its Mediterranean Setting*, CM 14 (Groningen: Styx Publications, 2000), 125.

314. Gen 2:7 identifies God’s breath as giving life to the first human, though elsewhere we find blood as a source of life (e.g., Gen 9:4, Lev 17:11).

315. See Noegel, “Scarlet and Harlots.”

first underscores the positive aspects of Inanna: “queen of all the MEs, too numerous to count, rising forth as glorious light.” The second emphasizes her destructive leanings: “queen of innumerable battles, (as) a rising raging storm.”³¹⁶ The readings pivot on a double polysemy (see 4.1.6): the sign ME means “divine properties that permit cosmic activity” (= Akkadian *paršu*) or “battle” (= Akkadian *tāḥāzu*); and the sign U₄ means “light, day” (= Akkadian *ūmu*) or “storm” (= Akkadian *ūmu*). In one line, Enḫeduanna has portrayed the dual nature of Inanna, a goddess of paradoxes and liminality.

Demonstrating this function in Akkadian are a number of polysemous merisms in *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* (Poem of the Righteous Sufferer), which force one to realize the unknowable nature and character of Marduk.³¹⁷ Throughout the opening hymn the poet describes Marduk as a god of extreme contrasts. Indeed, we hear that he is *ēziz mūši muppašir urri* “furious at night, relaxed at dawn” (1.2.4). The line does more than characterize the god’s fickleness, for as Lambert observes, the Marduk cult held that “all other powers of the universe were but aspects of him.”³¹⁸ Moreover, many of the merisms 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...?³¹⁹

The poem continues:

8. *mu-us-saḥ-ḥir ka-ra-as-su ka-bat-ta-šú ta-a-a-rat*
His mood turns, his emotion pivots,
9. *šá nak-bat qa-ti-šú la i-na-áš-šu-ú šá-ma-’u-ú*
The force of whose hand, the heavens cannot hold,

316. Zgoll, *Der Rechtstfall der En-ḫedu-Ana im Lied nin-me-šara*, 2–3, 177.

317. See Scott B. Noegel, “Suffering Ambiguity in *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*: On Erudition, Ideology, and Theology in Tablet I,” *BiOr* 73 (2016): 613–36.

318. W. G. Lambert, “The Historical Development of the Mesopotamian Pantheon: A Study in Sophisticated Polytheism,” in *Unity and Diversity: Essays on the History, Literature, and Religion of the Ancient Near East*, ed. Hans Goedicke and J. J. M. Roberts (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 198.

319. William Moran, “Notes on the Hymn to Marduk in *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi*,” *JAOS* 103 (1983): 256.

10. *rit-tuš rab-ba-a-ti ú-kaš-šu mi-i-ta*
Whose palm is gentle, it assists the dying.
11. ^dAMAR.UTU *šá nak-bat qa-ti-šú la i-na-áš-šu-ú šá-ma-'u-ú*
Marduk, the force of whose hand, the heavens cannot hold,
12. *rab-ba-a-ti rit-ta-šú ú-kaš-šu mi-i-ta*
Gentle is his palm, it assists the dying.
13. *šá i-na lib-ba-ti-šú up-ta-at-ta-a qab-ra-a-tum*
On account of whose wrath, graves are opened. (1.9–13)

Here the poet simultaneously lauds and arraigns Marduk's extreme qualities. Observe the ambiguity of 1.8: *musahḫir karassu kabattašu târat* “his mood turns, his emotion pivots.” One can read the line positively or negatively; it is impossible to know in which direction Marduk's mood is said to swing. In addition, the verbs *saḫāru* and *tāru* have semantic parameters that permit the meanings “turn, return, repeat, and transform.”³²⁰ Further, since Marduk is the subject of the previous line, it is possible to read him as the subject of *musahḫir* rather than his *karašu* “mood.” This becomes meaningful when we recognize the paronomasia by which *karašu* “mood” suggests *karašû* “catastrophe,” and *kabattu* “passion” suggests *kabittu* “grievous matter.”³²¹ The allusions characterize Marduk as the one who brings catastrophe and his emotion as a grievous matter. Polysemy also obtains in the repeated verb *kāšu* (1.10, 12), which means “help, assist” or “delay.”³²² 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 (1.13) and the sufferer's own protracted illness for which others prepare an open tomb (2.114).³²³ Note too the two-fold use of *rabbātu*, which means “gentle, calm” or “large, powerful, grievous, overbearing.”³²⁴ One simultaneously hears that the very palm that is gentle can be overbearing, even for the heavens (1.9, 11). The combined polysemes characterize Marduk as the one who brings compassion and understanding, or conversely, catastrophe. His being and actions are unpredictable and incomprehensible; even a master diviner cannot fully know what Marduk intends, whether for weal or woe. The union of all things into his godhead also forces one to contemplate the ultimate source of human suffering.

Pondering the source of human suffering has a biblical analogue in Eliphaz's quip to Job: *לְכָל בְּיָדָם לֵבָדָם* *kī 'ādām lə-'āmāl yūllāḏ* “for mankind is born

320. CAD S, s.v. “*saḫāru*”; CAD T, s.v. “*tāru*.”

321. CAD K, s.v. “*karašû*”; CAD K, s.v. “*kabittu*.”

322. CAD K, s.v. “*kāšu* A, B.”

323. Ludlul 2.114: *peti kimāḫḫī* (KI.MAH) *ersû šukānūa* “open is my tomb, my grave-ornaments prepared.”

324. CAD R, s.v. “*rabbātu*”; CAD R, s.v. “*rabbu* A”; CAD R, s.v. “*rabbātu* (*rabbātu*).”

for toil/trouble” (Job 5:7).³²⁵ Typically, scholars suggest repointing the verb to make it a passive (*niphal*) form יִלְדָּי *yilwālēd*. However, before the Masoretes added vowels, the verb יָלַד also permitted the reading יָלַד *yōlēd* (*qal* active participle) or יָלַד *yōlīd*, a causative (*hiphil*) conjugation, thus allowing us to render the line with quite the opposite sense: “humankind begets trouble.”³²⁶ In fact, many manuscripts also read יָלַד, which would permit a reading יָלַד *yulad* (a *qal* or *hophal* passive) or יָלַד *yolīd* (*hiphil*).³²⁷ Thus, the pre-Masoretic text leaves ambiguous whether humans are born into a divinely created world of suffering or if they cause their own suffering. Meshel’s comment with regard to Hebrew polysemy is apposite:

It could be viewed as an art of subversive writing in the face of intellectual persecution, or it could be viewed as reflecting the authors’ fundamental doubt with regard to the nature of the divine. Alternatively, it may be viewed more generously as reflecting a religious experience that encapsulates the tension between diametrically opposite understandings of the workings of Yhwh.³²⁸

Perhaps the most well-known biblical example of polysemy to express divine ineffability is the divine name that God reveals to Moses: אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה *’ehyeh ’āšer ’ehyeh* (Exod 3:14). Given the modal possibilities of the Hebrew imperfect verb, one may render variously as “I am who I am,” “I will be who I will be,” “I am who I will be” or “I will be who I am.” It also is ambiguous whether אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר *’āšer ’ehyeh* is part of the name or the explanation the deity offers for why his name is אֶהְיֶה *’ehyeh*.³²⁹ The deity’s name is a first person imperfect verb that defies a single translation, and thus it remains beyond the certainty of human ken. Of course, typically the name appears in the third person: יהוה “Yahweh” (lit. “he is who he is, will be who he will be, etc.”).

3.15.3. DEMONSTRATE *LEX TALIONIS*

Lex talionis is a legal, theological, and literary principle sometime called “measure for measure” or “poetic justice.” It is operative in law, e.g., “an eye for an eye” (Hammurapi’s Code 196–201; Exod 21:23–25), and in prophecies and

325. See Seow, “Orthography, Textual Criticism, and the Poetry of Job,” 77.

326. Suggested already by Ferdinand Hitzig, *Das Buch Hiob, übersetzt und ausgelegt* (Leipzig: Winter, 1874), 35.

327. The alternative readings are widely discussed in commentaries on Job and require no citation here.

328. Meshel, “Whose Job Is This?,” 73.

329. For this latter observation I thank one of the publisher’s anonymous reviewers.

narratives that seek to link cause and consequence. As such, this category incorporates the function “to denote reversal,” suggested by Watson.³³⁰

Sennacherib’s Annals (2.24–25) offer a fine demonstration.³³¹

1. UN.MEŠ KUR.KUR *ki-šit-ti ŠU.II-ia* INA *lib-bi ú-še-šib*
I populated the land with those that I had conquered.
2. UN.MEŠ KUR ^{LÚ}*kaš-ši-i ú* KUR ^{LÚ}*ia-su-bi-gal-la-a-a*
The people of the land of the Kassites and the land of the Yasubigallai ...

Here the name *kašši* “Kassites” echoes ^{LÚ}*kišitti* “I conquered,” thus drawing a connection between the peoples and their punishment. Reinforcing the paronomasia is the word order of the two verses, which both begin with UN.MEŠ KUR = *nišī māt* (*mātāti* for KUR.KUR). This particular example also serves an appellative function (see 3.10).

Paronomasia in the service of *lex talionis* also occurs in the Akkadian Tale of the Poor Man of Nippur. When the poor man is wronged by the mayor, he threatens him by saying: “For the single offense that you inflicted on me (*piltu tēm[id]anni*), I, for one, will pay you back three-fold” (ll. 67–68). Here the noun *piltu* is a by-form of *pištu* “offense, insult.” Its appearance here with the verb *emēdu* suggests that we also read *piltu* as *biltu* “tribute, load” (cf. the idiom *biltu emēdu* “impose tribute”).³³² The polysemy reinforces the connection between the tribute that the mayor exacts unfairly on the poor man and the offense that will justify his punishment.

In Egyptian, the concept of *lex talionis* appears in the Prayer of Paheri in his tomb in El Kab: *ʾw ib=k m sk=k m šd=k n šh.t ʾbr.w hpr hr.t=k m ʾr.t.n=k* “your heart rejoices as you plow in your plot in the Field of Reeds. You are rewarded for what you have done” (ll. 15–16).³³³ In the Tale of Sinuhe (P.Berlin 3022), Sinuhe boasts the principle after felling the foreign champion: “what he planned to do to me, I did to him” (ll. 144–145).

We see the concept of *lex talionis* expressed positively in paronomastic form in the Poetical Stela of Thutmose III (CM 34010), in which Amun specifically credits the pharaoh with building his sanctuary: *ʾr n=i mrr.t nb.t k3=i s ʾh ʾn=k ʾwnn=i m k3.t nḥḥ* “who does for me all that my *ka* desires. You have built my

330. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 246.

331. Grayson and Novotny, *Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib*, 3.

332. Noegel, “Word Play in the Tale of the Poor Man of Nippur,” 173–74. See also Nicla De Zorzi, “Literature as Scholarship: Some Reflections on Repetition with Variation and the Construction of Meaning in Šamaš Hymn 112–117,” *KASKAL: Rivista di storia, ambienti e culture del Vicino Oriente Antico* 16 (2019): 159–82.

333. Sethe, *Urkunden der 18. Dynastie*, 116.

sanctuary as a work of eternity” (l. 24). Note how the connection is realized by way of paronomasia between *k3* “ka-spirit” and *k3.t* “work.”

The demonstration of *lex talionis* is intimately related to the use of polysemy and paronomasia to interpret omens of all kinds. We have seen several instances of Akkadian and Egyptian omens connected to their apodoses by way of a similarity of sounds and/or the learned readings of individual signs used to record the omens (3.13.1).³³⁴ This is because omens are divine messages and their interpretations are divine judgments. They must in fact demonstrate a causal relationship between an omen and its consequence.

In the Hebrew Bible, prophets often draw attention to the punishment that Yahweh will mete out by tying it paronomastically to the people’s transgression.³³⁵ Often this serves, with Watson, to denote reversal.³³⁶ Jeremiah’s prophecy illustrates this well:

Make known in Noph [נֹפֶךְ *ḥə-nōp̄*] and in Tahpanes [וּבְתַחְפָּנְהִס *ū-b-tahpanhēs*]; say, “stand forth and prepare yourself, for the sword has devoured round about you. Why is your strong one overthrown [נִשְׁחָפַּךְ *nishap̄*]? He did not stand, because Yahweh thrust him down.” (Jer 46:14–15)

The sounds /n/ and /p/ in נִשְׁחָפַּךְ *nishap̄* “overthrown” appear in the toponym Noph, and all of its consonants occur in the toponym Tahpanes, thus creating a link between the transgressors and their shared punishment.

Isaiah similarly declares:

But as for you who forsake Yahweh and forget my holy mountain, who spread a table for Fortune [גַּד *gaḏ*] and fill bowls of mixed wine for Destiny [מָנִי *mānī*], I will destine [מַנִּילִי *mānīlī*] you for the sword, and you will all bend down for the slaughter. (Isa 65:11–12)

Two cases of paronomasia obtain here. The first connects the worship of מָנִי *mānī* “Destiny” with Yahweh’s promise מַנִּילִי *mānīlī* “I will destine.”³³⁷ The second is the punishment by “sword,” which reminds us of the audible connections between

334. See Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*.

335. On *lex talionis* as a literary device, see Marcus, “David the Deceiver and David the Dupe”; Yael Shemesh, “Measure for Measure in Biblical Narrative” [Hebrew], *BM* 158 (1999): 261–77; Shemesh, “Measure for Measure in the David Stories,” *SJOT* 17 (2003): 8–10; Noegel, “Drinking Feasts and Deceptive Feats.”

336. Levine, “Vertical Poetics,” 65–82, also examines cases of paronomasia that demonstrate reversal.

337. See Shalom M. Paul, *Isaiah 40–66: Translation and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 600.

גַּד *gaḏ* “Fortune” and the verb גָּדַד *gāḏaḏ* “cut off,” even though the latter does not appear (see 3.9).

Francis Landy has drawn attention to similar use of paronomasia and polysemy in Hos 10:5:

The inhabitants of Samaria feel dread [יָגֻרֻּי *yāḡūrū*] for the calves [עֲגֻלֹת *‘ēḡlōt*] of Beth-aven. Its people mourn for it, and so do its idolatrous priests—those who rejoiced [יָגִילוּ *yāḡilū*] over it and over its glory—for it has departed [גָּלָה *gālāh*] from them.

The paronomasia that obtains between יָגִילוּ *yāḡilū* “rejoiced” and גָּלָה *gālāh* “departed” underscores a connection between the act (idolatrous worship) and consequence (exile). Moreover, as Landy remarks, the verb גָּלָה *gālāh* “also may mean ‘to uncover’.” In that case, the motif of exposure, associated in the Hebrew Bible with sexual shame, combines with that of captivity.³³⁸ To his observations, I note the presence of additional paronomasia between these words, the verb יָגֻרֻּי *yāḡūrū* “feel dread,” and noun עֲגֻלֹת *‘ēḡlōt* “calves.”

Paronomastic demonstrations of *lex talionis* in biblical narratives often illustrate how characters receive measure-for-measure for what they do to others. The biblical stories of Jacob are replete with this use of paronomasia.³³⁹ To cite one example, one hears the name לָבָן *lābān* “Laban” echoed in the narrative involving Jacob’s manipulation of Laban’s flocks (Gen 30:25–43), when Jacob selects all the animals that have לָבָן *lābān* “white” on them (Gen 30:35), and collects fresh rods of לִבְנֶה *libneh* “poplar” (Gen 30:37), in which he peels לְבָנֹת *lāḇnōt* “white streaks” in order to reveal their הַלְבָּן *hal-lābān* “whiteness” (Gen 30:37). The reader will note that each of the examples cited in this group simultaneously functions appellatively. The use of polysemy and paronomasia to demonstrate *lex talionis* would enjoy a long life in later Jewish texts as well.³⁴⁰

Illustrating *lex talionis* in Aramaic is a wisdom saying in the Proverbs of Ahiqar: “[if] you have [dr]awn your bow and shot your arrow (חַט *ḥt*) at a more righteous man than yourself, it is a sin (חַטָּא *ḥtā*) against the gods” (C1 1:128). Here paronomasia connects the act of shooting the arrow and the sin.

338. Francis Landy, *Hosea*, 2nd ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2011), 128.

339. Noegel, “Drinking Feasts and Deceptive Feats.”

340. Note the rabbinic expression: בְּמִדָּה שֶׁ-בָּא מִדֵּין לוֹ *b-mdh š-‘dm mwdd bh mwddyn lw* “by the measure that a man measures, by it he is being measured.” See also Ishay Rosen-Zvi, “Measure for Measure as a Hermeneutical Tool in Early Rabbinic Literature: The Case of Tosefta Sotah,” *JJS* 58 (2006): 269–86.

3.15.4. DEMONSTRATE LESSONS

Polysemy and paronomasia also can serve didactic purposes that are less theologically motivated, whether to demonstrate moral precepts, offer advice on statecraft, or impart wisdom to apprentices. Such is the case in the Akkadian Counsels of Wisdom, where a wise man warns his son against getting into disputes by saying: *šaltumma šuttatūm šeḫitūm* “disputes are a covered pit” (l. 38).³⁴¹ The repetition of the /t/, /m/, and /š/ sounds, combined with the two emphatics (š and t), strengthens the connection between disputes and a covered pit. Later, we also hear:

81. *ma-ri lu-u lib-ba-šú-ma šá ru-bé-e at-ta*
My son, if it be the wish (lit. “his heart”) of the prince that you are his,
82. *na-aš-ra-am-ma* ^{ZA}KIŠIB (*kunukka*)-šá lu al-lat
If you attach his closely guarded seal (around your neck),
83. *pi-ti-ma na-šir-ta-šú e-ru-ub ana lib-bi*
Open his treasury, enter within.³⁴²

Note how the sounds /b/ and /š/ in *libbašu* “his heart,” repeat in *ša rubê* “of the prince” (l. 81). Echoes of *rubû* (l. 81) are heard again in *erub* “enter” (l. 83), and *libbu* (l. 83). Moreover, the first *libbu* (l. 81) is used of the king’s mind (lit. “heart”), while the second refers to the inside of the treasury (l. 83). The advice also offers a subtle twist in that by guarding (*našramma*) the seal, the son will have access to the *naširtu* “treasury.”

In the Egyptian Instructions of Ptahhotep (P.Prisse 9.9–9.13 [ll. 281–297]), Ptahhotep urges against having illicit sex with women of the household.³⁴³

- Be mindful of getting near the women.
No place in which it is done can be good.
No face can be sharp while splitting it open [*hr ph³ st*],
For a thousand men are diverted from what is best for them:
A short moment, the likeness of a dream;
One attains death by experiencing it [*hr rh³ st*].
It is a wretched liaison [*ts*], an inimical shooting [*st*].
One emerges from doing it with the mind of rejecting it.
As for him who fails by lusting for it,
No plan can succeed with him.

341. *BWL*, 100–1.

342. *BWL*, 102–3.

343. The versification of P.Prisse is that of Zbyněk Zába, *Les Maximes de Ptahhotep* (Prague: Éditions de l’Académie Tchécoslovaque des Sciences, 1956).

According to James Allen, a number of polysemes present in the text comprise sexual innuendos.³⁴⁴ The expression *hr ph3 st* “splitting it open” can refer to the private area of the house and also female sexual organs. The words *hr rh st* “experiencing” (lit. ‘knowing’) it can mean “have sexual relations.” The *ʿ3s* “liaison” (lit. ‘knot’) too can mean “sex.” Finally, we may understand the verb *st* “shooting” as “ejaculation” as well. For similar examples of Egyptian polysemy, see 4.1.2).

A didactic use of polysemy that similarly informs matters of statecraft occurs in the biblical book of Proverbs, in which one is instructed on how to deal with the shifting moods of a king (Prov 16:14–16).

The king’s wrath is a messenger of death,
But a wise man can appease it.
By means of the light of the king’s face there is life.
His favor is like a rain cloud in spring.

We are then told: קְנֵה-חֵכְמָה מִה־טוֹב מִחֶרֶץ וּקְנֹת בִּינָה נִבְחָר מִכֶּסֶף *qənoh ḥōḵmāh mah ṭōḥ mēḥārūš ū-qnōt bīnāh nibḥār mik-kəšep* “how much better to acquire wisdom than gold, and to acquire understanding is to be chosen more than silver!” Tying this line to the previous two is the polyseme חֶרֶץ *ḥārūš*, which one can read as the noun “gold,” and thus a perfect parallel with כֶּסֶף *kəšep* “silver,” or as a passive participle from the root חֶרַץ *ḥ-r-š*, meaning “decree, decision” (e.g., 2 Sam 5:24, 1 Kgs 20:40, Isa 10:22). The latter reading permits us to understand the preposition מִן *min*, not in the comparative sense (i.e., “more than”), but with a causative force (i.e., “due to”). Thus the first stich of l. 16 allows us to see it as a follow-up to the previous verse: “how good it is to acquire wisdom due to a (royal) decree.” The alternative reading underscores the importance of currying the king’s favor. Moreover, the appearance of נִבְחָר *nibḥār* “be chosen” before כֶּסֶף *kəšep* “silver” in this passage offers an ironic turn of phrase on the expression כֶּסֶף נִבְחָר *kəšep nibḥār* “high-grade (i.e., select) silver” (Prov 10:20).

In Prov 22:22, we find polysemy and paronomasia used for delivering moral precepts: אַל-תִּגְזֹל דָּל כִּי דֹל-הוּא וְאַל-תִּדְבֹּא עֲנִי בַשְּׁעַר *’al tiḡzāl dāl kī dāl hū’ wə-’al təḏakē’ ānī baš-šā’ar* “Do not rob the poor for he is poor/a door, and do not crush the needy at the gate.” Of interest is the word דָּל *dāl* used here for its dual meaning “poor” and “door.” When read as the former it emphasizes the poverty of the victim. When read as the latter, it offers a fitting parallel for שַׁעַר *šā’ar* “gate.” G. R. Driver explains:

344. The translation is also that of James P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian Literature: Eight Literary Works of the Middle Kingdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 191–92.

The meaning is that a poor man must not be robbed simply because he is poor and helpless and, having little or nothing to lose, does not take the trouble to shut the door of his house when he goes out, thus leaving it open as invitation to a thief to enter and take what he can find.³⁴⁵

We find a similar purpose behind such devices in the Hebrew text of Ben Sira, which Eric Reymond has shown, “evinces numerous expressions whose impact depends, to some extent, on ambiguity created through various kinds of wordplay and metaphor, the purpose of some of which seems to be increasing the linguistic dexterity of his students.”³⁴⁶ Indeed, as Ben Sira (8:8; Ms A) instructs us:

אל תטש שיחה חכמים ובחידתיהם התרטש
כי ממנו תלמ[ו]ן לקח להתיצב לפני שרים

ʾl tṭš šyḥh ḥkmym w-b-ḥydyḥm htrṭš
ky mmnw tlmwd lqḥ lḥtyšb lpny šrym

Do not forsake the meditation of the wise,
In their riddles abandon yourself.
For from it you will learn understanding,
To stand before princes.

3.16. DISPLAYING ERUDITION

Scholars also have suggested that some forms of polysemy and paronomasia serve to demonstrate an author’s mastery of the scribal arts—what Watson categorizes as “lending authenticity.” Throughout the ancient Near East, scribal expertise in polyvalent readings belonged to a privileged few who kept their knowledge secret. We may characterize this as an ideology of privilege and erudition.³⁴⁷

This ideology wielded a great deal of perceived social and cosmological power. When the decoding of divine omens is involved, the act of interpretation

345. G. R. Driver, “Playing on Words,” in *Proceedings of the Fourth World Congress of Jewish Studies. Papers*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1967), 123.

346. Eric D. Reymond, “The Wisdom of Words in the Wisdom of Ben Sira,” *Bib* 95 (2014): 226. See also Nicolas Seger, *L’Utilisation de la polysémie des racines hébraïques chez Ben Sira* (PhD diss., Université Strasbourg, 2005).

347. Note the similar view of Chaim Cohen and Jacob Klein, “Akkadian *Hapax Legomena*: Scribal Ego and Foreign Words,” *Maarav* 21.1–2 (2014): 103–25, who note concerning *hapax legomena* in cuneiform lexical texts: “Thus the rationale for such massive usage of *hapax legomena* in the lexical lists (including the large percentage of foreign words therein) can only be the scribes’ desire to take pride in and exhibit their vast erudition” (105). On the ideology of Egyptian scribes, see Ragazzoli, *Scribes*, 467–89.

shapes behaviors and beliefs. By harnessing the performative power of a divine message, interpreters determined an individual’s fate. Thus, the interpretation of signs by way of polysemy and paronomasia functioned also as a form of social control. Since one must go to the experts to obtain an interpretation, the display of erudition empowers the interpreter while demonstrating and promoting his/her cosmological and ideological systems.³⁴⁸ It is possible that such a function also lies behind the polysemy and paronomasia that appear in colophons and acrostics (see 4.1.10 and 4.1.12).

Moreover, when literary figures decode divine messages, they typically do so with great success. Their abilities therefore justify the divinatory or insider establishment that they represent, and reify the ideologies that support the notion that such work demands well-trained and divinely inspired experts. In this way, figures like Utnapishtim, Joseph, and Daniel are not merely literary characters in a story, but embodiments of the divinatory establishment. We find this already in the Sumerian Tale of Enlil and Namzitarra. There we learn of a *gudug*-priest named Namzitarra who, while hurrying home from serving in Enlil’s temple, meets a raven that asks: “where (are you coming) from Namzitarra?” (l. 3).³⁴⁹ Though he hears the message in Sumerian, the context clarifies that the raven was croaking.

12. ^dEN.LÍL.LE IGI.NI MU.NI.IN.GI₄

Enlil had changed his appearance:

13. UGA^{mušen}-AŠ Û.MU.NI.IN.KU₄

having turned into a raven,

14. GÙ AL.DÉ.DÉ.E

he was croaking.

Namzitarra then realizes that this is no ordinary raven, but the god Enlil in disguise, and he immediately replies: “you are not a raven, you are Enlil!” (l. 15). Amazed, the raven asks: “how did you recognize that I am Enlil, the one who decrees the fates?” (l. 16).³⁵⁰ Namzitarra responds:

17. U₄ ^dEN.ME.ŠÁR.RA ŠEŠ AD.DA.ZU EŠE₅.DA.A

When Enmesharra, your uncle, was captured,

18. NAM.^dEN.LÍL BA.E.DE₆.A U₄.DÈ EN.GIM NAM GA.ZU.E.ŠÈ

348. See Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 50–55, 176–82; Noegel, ““Sign, Sign, Everywhere a Sign.””

349. See M. Civil, “Enlil and Namzitarra,” *AfO* 25 (1974–1977): 65–71. Bendt Alster, *Wisdom of Ancient Sumer* (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2005), 327, classifies the text as a fable, but I see no personification here.

350. W. G. Lambert, “A New Interpretation of *Enlil and Namzitarra*,” *Or* 58 (1989): 508–9, translates this line: “How do you know that I, Enlil, am the one who decrees the fates?”

And you carried Enlilship away (from him), (you) said: “Now I shall surely know the fates, like a lord.”

Civil points out that Namzitarra’s discovery derives from his ability to decode the croaking.³⁵¹ Specifically, Namzitarra’s statement in line 18 evokes the words UGA ZU, that is, “to know the raven.”³⁵² Vanstiphout also observes that the last few signs in line 18 permit the reading NAM.GA.ZU meaning “I surely know this/you.”³⁵³ Namzitarra’s special ability to understand the language of the animal kingdom is a literary trope in ancient Near Eastern texts that is founded in *bona fide* divinatory praxis.³⁵⁴ It marks his wisdom and priestly status. Indeed, as a reward for his wisdom, Namzitarra receives a hereditary prebend.³⁵⁵

3.17. PERFORMATIVE

The ubiquity of polysemy and paronomasia in so many diverse textual contexts tells us much about the perceived utility that it had in erudite circles. It also underscores the importance of recognizing the underlying conceptual framework that informs them, for it evidences the existence of a perception in which written signs and words have the potential to be a great deal more than what they signify.³⁵⁶ Lying behind this is a belief in the performative or “illocutionary” power of words, a concept made familiar by more theoretical works on “magic.” Scholars who discuss this concept (also known as “speech act theory”), point out that words can function at times not merely as expressions, but as vehicles of performance, in that they themselves affect a particular action. Thus, in a more contemporary context, saying “I do” in a wedding ceremony constitutes the very means by which a wedding becomes legal. Though often discussed in juridical and ritual contexts (like the wedding), the performative dimension of words was

351. Civil, “Enlil and Namzitarra.” See also Bendt Alster, “Scribes, Sages, and Seers in Ancient Mesopotamia,” in *Scribes, Sages, and Seers: The Sage in the Eastern Mediterranean World*, ed. Leo G. Purdue (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 47–63.

352. Civil, “Enlil and Namzitarra,” 67, and Herman L. J. Vanstiphout, “Some Notes on ‘Enlil and Namzitarra,’” *RA* 74 (1980): 67–71, attribute l. 18 to Enmesharra, whereas Alster, *Wisdom of Ancient Sumer*, 329, and Lambert, “A New Interpretation of Enlil and Namzitarra,” 508–9, attribute the line to Enlil.

353. Vanstiphout, “Some Notes on ‘Enlil and Namzitarra,’” 68.

354. See Noegel, “When Animals Speak,” 107–35.

355. See Vanstiphout, “Some Notes on ‘Enlil and Namzitarra,’” 68; Cooper, “Puns and Prebends.”

356. See Noegel, “‘Sign, Sign, Everywhere a Sign,’” and the essays in Magali De Haro Sanchez, ed., *Écrire la magie dans l’antiquité: Actes du colloque international (Liège, 13–15 octobre 2011)*, PL 5 (Liège: Presses Universitaires de Liège, 2015).

far more pervasive in antiquity. In ancient Mesopotamia, the very act of writing was credited with divine origins, and so the illocutionary element of language naturally played a more significant role. Georges Contenau explains:

Since to know and pronounce the name of an object instantly endowed it with reality, and created power over it, and since the degree of knowledge and consequently of power was strengthened by the tone of voice in which the name was uttered, writing, which was a permanent record of the name, naturally contributed to this power, as did both drawing and sculpture, since both were a means of asserting knowledge of the object and consequently of exercising over it the power which knowledge gave.³⁵⁷

This mindset has been used to explain the paronomastic connections between protases and apodoses in divinatory contexts, as Jean Bottéro remarks:

In Mesopotamia, where nouns were not considered to be arbitrary epiphenomena and consequently subjective elements, but were thought to be the real objective expression of the proper essence of things, each phonetic similarity was to be considered serious and very significant: two realities whose names coincided were bound as closely together as their designations.³⁵⁸

Given such a context, we should not be surprised to find polysemy and paronomasia operative in Akkadian magical texts. Indeed, as Wasserman observes, incantations are “the richest genre in rhetorical inventiveness.”³⁵⁹ Witness for example the following potency incantation: *a-kan-nu MIN re-mu MIN man-nu ú-[ram-me-k]a ki-ma qi-i ra-mu-ti* “Wild ass, wild ass, wild bull, wild bull! Who made you as limp as untied cords?”³⁶⁰ The spell connects *rēmu* “wild bull” with *ramû* “untie” and *ramûti* “slack.”³⁶¹

357. George Contenau, *Everyday Life in Babylon and Assyria* (London: Edward Arnold, 1955), 164.

358. J. Bottéro, *Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 121.

359. Wasserman, *Style and Form in Old Babylonian Literary Texts*, 178.

360. Robert D. Biggs, *ŠA.ZI.GA: Ancient Mesopotamian Potency Incantations*, TCS 2 (Locust Valley, NY: Augustin, 1967), 19.

361. It is of some note that Akkadian and Babylonian scholars made productive use of the similarity in sound between “untie” (*CAD* R, s.v. “*ramû*”), *rīmu* “love” (*CAD* R, s.v. “*rāmu*”), “wild bull” (*CAD* R, s.v. “*rīmu*”), *rēmu* “womb, pity” (*CAD* R, s.v. “*rēmu*”), and *ramû* “set, bestow, occupy” (*CAD* R, s.v. “*ramû*”). A few examples will demonstrate. In a Hymn to Sin, we find: *rīmu ālid naphari ša itti šiknat napišti šubtu elleti ramû* “womb that gives birth to all things, that has occupied a holy residence among mankind.” The line ties *rīmu* “womb” to *ramû* “set, bestow, occupy” Cited in *CAD* R, s.v. “*ramû*.” The text appears in Edmund Guthrie Perry, *Hymnen und Gebete an Sin* (Leipzig:

An Akkadian ritual for pacifying a crying baby offers the following instructions: “in a tavern, where the beer barrels [*hubūru*] are, during the silent time [*qūltu*] of night you sweep together dust from between them.” The dust from the vats of *hubūru* “beer” linguistically assists in making a salve to silence (*qūltu*) the infant’s *hubūru* “noise.”³⁶²

See also the Akkadian anti-witchcraft series *Maqlū* 1.126–130, which contains twenty-five consecutive words that derive either from the root *kašāpu* “bewitch” or *epēšu* “do (magic)”:

<i>kaššāpu ikšipanni</i>	<i>kišpī ikšipanni kišipšu</i>
<i>kaššāptu takšipanni</i>	<i>kišpī takšipanni kišipši</i>
<i>ēpišu īpušanni</i>	<i>ipšū īpušanni epussu</i>
<i>ēpištu tēpušanni</i>	<i>ipšū tēpušanni epussi</i>
<i>muštēpištu tēpušanni</i>	<i>ipšū tēpušanni epussi</i>

The (male) witch who bewitched me,
bewitch him with the witchcraft with which he bewitched me.

The (female) witch who bewitched me,
bewitch her with the witchcraft with which she bewitched me.

The hexer who hexed me,
hex him with the hex with which he hexed me.

The hextress who hexed me,
hex her with the hex with which she hexed me.

The sorceress who hexed me,
hex her with the hex with which she hexed me.³⁶³

The repetition of the sounds /p/, /š/, or /s/ evokes the verb *pasāsu* “break, annul, cancel,”³⁶⁴ while *muštēpištu* suggests the *pištu* “revilement” of the witch.³⁶⁵

Hindrichs, 1907), 1. In the Epic of Gilgamesh 1.35–36, the hero is described as: *rīmu* (AM) *ša* ^d*lugalbanda* ^d*GIŠ-gimmaš gitmālu emūqi ēniq arḫi širti rimat-ninsun* “wild bull of Lugalbanda, Gilgamesh, perfect of strength, suckling of the exalted cow, Wild-Bull-Ninsun!” Concerning *rīmu*, which could mean “beloved” or “wild bull,” George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, 783, notes: “There may be intentional ambiguity in the expression *rīm Lugalbanda*,” even though the meaning “wild bull” takes preference.

362. Observed by Farber, “Associative Magic,” 448; Farber, *Schlaf, Kindlein, Schlaf! Mesopotamische Baby-Beschwörungen und Rituale* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1989), 44–45.

363. On this series, see Tzvi Abusch, *The Witchcraft Series Maqlū*, WAW 37 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 50–53.

364. CAD P, s.v. “*pasāsu*.”

365. The latter was suggested by Victor A. Hurowitz, “Alliterative Allusions, Rebus Writing, and Paronomastic Punishment: Some Aspects of Word Play in Akkadian Literature,”

Daniel Schwemer’s remark with regard to first millennium Akkadian incantations is apposite:

The marked word order and parallelisms are often further augmented by phonetic figures of speech; especially common are the repetition of vowel patterns (assonance) or the repetition of sounds in the stressed syllables of words or at the end of words (alliteration; homoioteleuton).³⁶⁶

According to James Ford, polysemy empowers an Akkadian incantation against the demoness Lamaštu.³⁶⁷ The pertinent passage reads: *ušēšiaši a-pa-ni ušāhlipašši šé-er-re-nim* (YOS 11:19.13–14). It is ambiguous whether one should read *a-pan-ni* as “window” (*appānu*) or “cane-brake” (*apu*), and *šé-er-re-nim* as “door-pivot” (*šerru*), “snake” (*šerru*), or “steppe” (*šēru*). Therefore, the incantation permits multiple options: “they made her [Lamashtu] go out through the window/to the cane brake, they made her slip (out) through the door-pivot/like a snake/to the steppe.” Ford summarizes the performative impact of the multiple readings: “Lamaštu is not only expelled from the house but at the very same time is also sent back to the place from which she came, thus ensuring a far more effective exorcism.”³⁶⁸

The Egyptian conception of text was very similar, as David Frankfurter points out: “Egyptian letters were the chief technology of a hierocratic scribal elite who preserved and enacted rituals—and by extension the cosmic order itself—through the written word.”³⁶⁹ In fact, there is good reason to see many of the so-called “literary devices” of Egyptian scribes as possessing a performative function. Not only did Egyptian scribes conceive of their writing system as divine in origin, they were particularly concerned with being *ḥ r* “effective in speech,” *spd ḏšs.w* “clever of sayings,” and *mnḥ tpj.w-r* “excellent of utterances,” notions grounded in the proper performance of magical texts.³⁷⁰ As the text known as the Immortality of Scribes (P.Chester Beatty IV, BM 10684, verso 2.5–3.11) informs us: *ḥmn=st ḥkḏ.w=sn r ḫ tmm šd m sbḏjt* “they (scribal masters) hid their magic from the whole land, to be read in (their) instructions” (8.6–7). According to the

in Noegel, *Puns and Pundits*, 86–87, who also opined that the repetition of the consonants might have served like the spitting sounds “pooh pooh” to ward off evil.

366. Daniel Schwemer, “‘Form Follows Function’? Rhetoric and Poetic Language in First Millennium Akkadian Incantations,” *WdO* 44 (2014): 281.

367. J. N. Ford, “Wordplay in the *Lamaštu* Incantations,” in Cohen et al., *Birkat Shalom*, 585–95.

368. Ford, “Wordplay in the *Lamaštu* Incantations,” 595.

369. David Frankfurter, “The Magic of Writing and the Writing of Magic: The Power of the Word in Egyptian and Greek Traditions,” *Helios* 21 (1994): 192.

370. See, e.g., Richter, *Theology of Hathor of Dendera*, 17–19. See also Ragazzoli, *Scribes*, 506–10.

Memphite Theology, the entire world is essentially a hieroglyphic text that records the god Ptah's concept of creation. Therefore, we may understand polysemy and paronomasia in Egyptian texts as a manipulation of the cosmos through the written word.³⁷¹ This perceived power explains a Coffin Text spell (§647) that invokes Ptah by referring to him as "creative" (*ptḥ*) and "strong" (*ph.tj*), adjectives that evoke his name.³⁷²

Equally performative are Amun's declaration to Thutmosis III in his so-called Poetical Stela (CM 34010): *sn.ti=k ḡl.n=i sn s3 ḥ3w=k 'wj ḥm=i ḥr ḥr ḥr šhr ḡw.t* "(as for) your sisters (i.e., Isis and Nephthys), I have placed them as protection behind you. The arms of my majesty are raised to crush evil" (l. 23). Note how the act of crushing is amplified by the four-fold repetition of the consonants *ḥr*, once as the verb "raise," twice as the preposition "up" or "upon," and then in embedded form in the verb *šhr* "crush." Strengthening the connection visually is the appearance of the face sign ◈ *ḥr* in each word.³⁷³

On a situla in the Louvre is an inscription that ritually connects Osiris with Khnum of Elephantine by employing the following words: *ḥnm=s n=k ḥnm.w* "she (Sothis) associates you with Khnum."³⁷⁴ Here the ritual of identification takes place in the very word *ḥnm* "associate," which anticipates *ḥnm.w* "Khnum."

One finds paronomasia in the service of magic also at Ugarit. Consider the following incantation, in which the deity Horon removes the poison of a snakebite (CAT 1.100, 65–67).³⁷⁵

'r 'rm yn 'rnh

With the tamarisk, he scatters it,

ssnm ysynh

With the date-palm branch, he slashed it,

371. Assmann, "Etymographie: Zeichen im Jenseits der Sprache," 54–56.

372. A connection between execration texts and the Tale of Sinuhe demonstrates well the difficulty in distinguishing performative from the literary. See the keen observations of Hans-Werner Fischer-Elfert, "The Hero of Retjenu: An Execration Figure (Sinuhe B 109–113)," *JEA* 82 (1996): 198–99.

373. Additional paronomasia obtains between *sn.wt* "sisters" and *sn* "them." A similar paronomastic use of *ḥr* appears in the Tale of Sinuhe (P. Berlin 3022), ll. 277–278, where pharaoh's children say of Sinuhe: *rwi.n=f t3 n ḥr.(it)=k nn 3jt ḥr n m3 ḥr=k* "he abandoned the land for dread of you. There will be no destruction for the face that sees your face." Here *ḥr* is used for "dread," then twice for "face," each time using the sign ◈.

374. Cited in Martin Bommas, *Der Temple des Khnum der 18. Dyn. auf Elephantine* (PhD diss., Ägyptisches Institut, 2000), 8. From Paul Pierret, *Recueil d'inscriptions inédites du musée égyptien du Louvre*, vol. 2 (Paris: F. Vieweg, 1878), 116.

375. Sheldon W. Greaves, "Wordplay and Associative Magic in the Ugaritic Snake-Bite Incantation RS 24.244," *UF* 24 (1994): 165–67.

‘dtm y’dynh

With a flowing current, he made it disappear,

ybltm yblnh

With a stream, he took it.

Note how the spell embeds the sounds of the noun *‘r ‘r* “tamarisk” in the verb *n ‘r* “shake,” the *ssn* “date-palm” in the verb *nsy* “slash,” the *‘dt* “current” in the verb *‘dy* “cause to disappear,” and the *yblt* “stream” in the verb *ybl* “took.” In essence, the success of the charm depends on the sympathetic connection between the names of the ritual objects and the purpose they effect.

A similar use of paronomasia occurs in the following Ugaritic performative charm.

1. *ydy dbbm d ġzr ... tg htk r[]*
(Baal) shall drive off the young man’s accuser, the affliction of your staff [].
2. *b ‘l tg htk w tsu lpn ql t ‘y*
Baal, the affliction of your staff. So, you shall depart before the voice of the incantation priest,
3. *k qtr urbtm k btn ‘mdm*
Like smoke through an aperture, like a snake up a pillar,
4. *k y ‘lm zrh k lbim skh*
Like goats to a rock, like lions to a lair.
5. *ht nqh u qrb ht thta l gbk*
Staff, attention! Draw near, staff! May it harm your back
6. *w trš ‘l mntk tlhm lhm*
And waste your figure. (CAT 1.169)³⁷⁶

It is unclear whether the spell aims to protect one from sorcery or to heal impotence, because the noun *ht* “staff” serves elsewhere in Ugaritic texts as a euphemism for “penis” (e.g., CAT 1.23, 37–49). Nevertheless, the performative nature of the text obtains by way of voice-empowered similes that involve polysemy and paronomasia. The first identifies the removal of the pain of a *ht* “staff” with *yhta* “harm.” The second relies on reading *tg htk* “the affliction of the staff” as a single word *tghtk* “may you cast out!”³⁷⁷ The latter echoes the start of the spell: “(Baal) shall drive off [*ydy*]!”

Polysemy and paronomasia can have a performative function in the Hebrew Bible as well. This occurs in two different ways. Either an author can make reference to a performative act and employ it in a way that captivates the transformation, or a text can represent a speech act itself and embody

376. Adopted from Daniel Fleming, “Ugaritic Incantation Against Sorcery,” in *COS* 1:301–2, with some variation.

377. See *DULAT*, s.v. “*ghht*.”

transformation via polysemy and paronomasia. For an example of the former, I turn to Ps 107:33, where Yahweh's power is described: יָשָׁם נְהָרוֹת לְמִדְבָּר וּמִצְּאֵי לְצִמְאֹן מַיִם *yāšēm nēhārōt la-miḏbār ū-mōšā'ē mayīm la-šimmā'ōn* "he transformed rivers into a desert, flowing springs into drought-land." Here the Psalmist captures the transformation by rearranging the letters of the spring that is מִצְּאֵי *mōšā'ē* "flowing" to create צִמְאֹן *šimmā'ōn* "drought-land."³⁷⁸

For an example of an extended speech act that embodies the performative transformation via polysemy and paronomasia, I refer to Jer 51:34–37, a prophecy of Yahweh's judgment against Babylon.³⁷⁹

34. Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has devoured us:
He has thrown us into confusion; he has made us an empty jar.
Like the primordial dragon [תַּנְיִן *tannīn*] he has swallowed us and filled his stomach with our delicacies, and then he has spewed us out.
35. "May the violence done to us and our children be upon Babylon," say the dwellers of Zion.
"May our blood be on those who live in Babylonia," says Jerusalem.
36. Therefore, this is what Yahweh says:
"See, I will defend your cause and avenge you;
I will dry up her sea, and make her fountain run dry.
37. Babylon shall become rubble heap [גָּלִילִים *gallīm*], a den of jackals [תַּנִּינִים *tannīm*], an object of horror and hissing, without inhabitant."

In this prophecy a series of powerful devices serves as the ritual instruments by which the spoken word enacts Babylon's violent reversal of fortunes. The first is גָּלִילִים *gallīm* in line 37, a polyseme that can mean "rubble heap" or "water waves." Since God has just stated that he will dry up Babylon's waters, *gallīm* first suggests the meaning "waves." It is only when we hear the remainder of the passage and its reference to wasteland that we realize it must mean "rubble heap." The prophecy has transformed Babylon's abundant "waters" into "rubble" simply by changing the linguistic context of the word—the transformation happens in the recitation.

Bolstering these connections in line 37 is the noun תַּנִּינִים *tannīm* "jackals." Just previously, Yahweh had described the king as a תַּנְיִן *tannīn*, i.e., "the primordial dragon," who was swallowing Jerusalem (l. 34). By altering one consonant, the prophet transforms the dragon of chaos into wasteland jackals.

The prophecy continues with performative language in l. 44 where Yahweh issues his sentence: "I shall punish Bel (בֶּל *bēl*) in Babylon (בַּבְּלָיִל *bā-bāḇēl*), and I will make him disgorge what he has swallowed (בִּלְעוֹ *bil'ō*)." The paronomasia

378. Ps 107:33 is nearly identical to Isa 41:18. Only the person is different: the former in third person, the latter in first person.

379. See also Noegel, "'Literary' Craft and Performative Power in the Ancient Near East."

between “Bel,” “Babylon,” and “swallow,” reminds us of the primordial dragon, while providing a talionic tie between the nation’s crime and God’s verdict against its national god (see 3.15.3).

The combined impact of these cases of paronomasia and polysemy, like those in divinatory texts, is more than literary or rhetorical style. It constitutes the ritual means by which divine judgment is put into effect and by which the divine word is understood to transform one reality into another. In this case, the prophet’s words quite literally transform Babylon the dragon into a lair for jackals and its abundant water into wasteland rubble.³⁸⁰

3.18. COMPLEXITIES

It is important to recognize that many of the proposed functions surveyed here are not mutually exclusive and depend to some degree on perspective. A device in a prophetic utterance may have a rhetorical effect, demonstrate *lex talionis*, draw attention to erudition, and also pack a performative punch. Paronomasia can be both appellative and allusive.³⁸¹ Acrostics may help in the memorization of texts, but also demonstrate erudition and serve as a ritual means of giving order to the cosmos. Applicable here is Yuri Lotman’s observation: “Texts, as a rule, are multifunctional: the same text fulfills not one, but several (sometimes many) functions.”³⁸²

Scholars often draw a sharp distinction between the literary and the performative, but the ancients did not share this view.³⁸³ Wasserman’s comment with regard to the “literary” aspects of Old Babylonian incantations is on point:

There was no such intrinsic Mesopotamian concept of “literary corpus,” or of *belles lettres* at all, and the modern concept of the “belletristic text” is totally alien to the Mesopotamian literary system. This does not mean, however, that we should deprive the Mesopotamian mind from admiring and enjoying aesthetically their own literary tradition.³⁸⁴

380. See Scott B. Noegel, “The Ritual Use of Linguistic and Textual Violence in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East,” in *State, Power, and Violence*, ed. Margo Kitts et al., RDSR 3 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010), 33–46.

381. See Sheree E. Lear, “The Daughter of a Foreign God: Wordplay as an Interpretive Key in Malachi 2:11,” *VT* 65 (2015): 467–73.

382. Yuri Lotman, *Analysis of the Poetic Text*, trans. D. Barton Johnson (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1976), 6. Quoted by Wasserman, *Style and Form in Old Babylonian Literary Texts*, 183.

383. On this point, see Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*.

384. Wasserman, *Style and Form in Old Babylonian Literary Texts*, 183.

I concur with Wasserman that literary approaches to ancient Near Eastern texts have contributed profoundly to our understanding of their subtleties and complexities, but I also contend that our modern conceptions of “literature” and the impact of literary and rhetorical criticism (especially in biblical studies) sometimes deter us from deriving the full import of many Near Eastern textual devices. Elsewhere I have shown how “wordplay” served as a *techné* of performative power and how it reveals mantic preoccupations and anxieties.³⁸⁵ I aver that it might be worthwhile to consider whether performative functions lie behind the early use of other “poetic” devices such as parallelism, chiasmus, and keywords. Perhaps we similarly should see intertextual references as efforts to embed the power of one text or tradition into another. Such are very real possibilities given the interdisciplinarity of ancient literati and their ontological understanding of speech and script.

385. Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*; Noegel, “‘Literary’ Craft and Performative Power in the Ancient Near East”; Noegel, “Augur Anxieties in the Ancient Near East.”

TAXONOMY

In this chapter, I provide a taxonomy for the study of “wordplay” in ancient Near Eastern texts. This taxonomy divides the phenomenon into two major classes. The first is that of polysemy, of which there are fourteen types, and the second is paronomasia, of which there are twelve types. All forms of polysemy involve multiple meanings and/or readings in a *single* context. All forms of paronomasia operate *across* word divisions and involve a *dissimilarity in meaning*. Thus, many (but not all) cases of polysemy are effective on a purely visual register, whereas all cases of paronomasia (in a consonantal writing system) are effective both aurally and visually. If accomplished in a nonconsonantal writing system, some cases of paronomasia may not operate simultaneously on aural and visual registers. With Casanowicz, I treat alliteration and assonance not as types of paronomasia, but as the audible effects of many different devices.

Since we lack an emic terminology, I have elected to use terms from ancient Greek for those devices that have counterparts in that language. In addition to the rubric terms, polysemy and paronomasia, these include: acrostic, amphiboly, anagram, anastrophe, antanaclasis, epanastrophe, homoeopropheron, homoio-teleuton, homonymy, isopsephy, and *notarigon*.¹ The fact that these terms accurately identify the Near Eastern devices makes their adoption wholly felicitous. Moreover, my use of Greek terminology serves to clarify that the devices are far more ancient and Eastern than Greek usage might suggest. It is likely that they made their way west along with the itinerant seers and diviners who transmitted so many other aspects of their craft.² Wherever possible, I

1. The Greek terms are attested from the fifth century BCE–fifth century CE, depending on the device. In fig. 3, I list all of the devices and their first attested textual references in chronological order.

2. Literature on the transmission of Near Eastern thought to the Mediterranean world is voluminous. Representative publications include: Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, trans. John Raffan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985); Burkert, “Homerstudien und Orient,” in *Zweihundert Jahre Homer-Forschung: Rückblick und Ausblick*, ed.

demonstrate each type of polysemy and paronomasia as it appears in Akkadian, Egyptian, Ugaritic, Hebrew, and/or Aramaic, and less often in Sumerian and Northwest Semitic epigraphic remains.

4.1. TYPES OF POLYSEMY

To date scholars have identified fourteen types of polysemy. These include: contronymic polysemy, *double entendre*, antanaclasis, unidirectional polysemy, multidirectional polysemy, double polysemy, bilingual polysemy, polysemy clusters, numerical polysemy, isopsephy, *notariqon*, acrostics (also telestichs and menostichs), transposition, and amphiboly. Each of these may perform different functions depending on its context. Moreover, these types and their functions can, and often do, overlap. Thus, a case of double polysemy or of amphiboly may also constitute a multidirectional polysemy, and be part of a polysemy cluster; unidirectional polysemy and antanaclasis also can serve as *double entendres*, and so on. There appears to be no limit to the sophistication of ancient writers.

4.1.1. CONTRONYMIC POLYSEMY

A word that bears its own meaning and its opposite is called a contronym (also called auto-antonym or enantiosemy). Those familiar with Semitic languages

Joachim Latacz, ColR 2 (Stuttgart: de Gruyter, 1991), 155–81; Scott B. Noegel, “Greek Religion and the Ancient Near East,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Greek Religion*, ed. Daniel Ogden (London: Blackwell, 1993), 21–37; Martin L. West, “Ancient Near Eastern Myths in Classical Greek Religious Thought,” in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. Jack M. Sasson (New York: Scribner, 1995), 33–42; Stanley M. Burstein, “Greek Contact with Egypt and the Levant, ca. 1600–500 B.C.: An Overview,” *Ancient World* 27 (1996): 20–28; Stephanie Dalley, “Occasions and Opportunities: 1. To the Persian Conquest,” in *The Legacy of Mesopotamia*, ed. by Stephanie Dalley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 9–33; Dalley and A. T. Reyes, “Mesopotamian Contact and Influence in the Greek World: 1. To the Persian Conquest,” in Dalley, *Legacy of Mesopotamia*, 85–106; Robert Rollinger, “The Ancient Greeks and the Impact of the Ancient Near East: Textual Evidence and Historical Perspective (ca. 750–650 BCE),” in *Mythology and Mythologies: Methodological Approaches to Intercultural Influence: Proceedings of the Second Annual Symposium of the Assyrian and Babylonian Intellectual Heritage Project Held in Paris, France, October 4–7, 1999*, ed. Robert M. Whiting (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2001), 233–64; Christopher A. Faraone, “From Magic Ritual to Semiotic Game: The Transformation of Neo-Assyrian Love Spells in Classical and Hellenistic Greece,” in *Ideologies as Intercultural Phenomena: Proceedings of the Assyrian and Babylonian Intellectual Heritage Project, Chicago, October 27–31, 2000*, ed. A. Panaino and G. Pettinato, MeIS 3 (Helsinki: Associazione Culturale Mimesis, 2002), 61–74; Jan N. Bremmer, *Greek Religion and Culture, the Bible and the Ancient Near East*, JSRC 8 (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

sometimes refer to the phenomenon as اَضْدَاد *'addād*, a term that derives from medieval Arabic parlance.³ An example of a contronym in English is “cleave,” which means both “join” and “separate.” Contronymic polysemy occurs in ancient texts when writers exploit contronyms for their opposing meanings. For the present purpose, it does not matter whether contronyms are the result of two unrelated words that have assimilated or a widening semantic range of a single lexeme. Such linguistic matters mattered little to the ancients.

Contronyms appear to be a rare phenomenon in Mesopotamia. In Sumerian, I can think only of one possible example, GALAM.MA. Usually, the signs carry a positive meaning as “artful, exalted one,” but in the Instructions of Shuruppak (l. 255), they take on the negative meaning “despot.”⁴ Nevertheless, GALAM.MA simply may be an oxymoron meaning something like “clever fool.”⁵

To my mind, the only possible case of contronymic polysemy in Akkadian occurs in a hymn to the god Shamash, in which the poet employs the noun *arnu* for its meanings “crime” and “punishment”: “you give the unscrupulous judge experience of fetters. Him who accepts a present and yet lets justice miscarry, you make bear his *arnu*” (ll. 97–98).⁶ Here the mention of fetters in the previous line suggests that we understand it as “punishment.” However, the reference to bribery and injustice forces us to understand it also as “crime.” As such, the contronymic polysemy underscores the notion of *lex talionis* (see 3.15.3).

Contronyms are difficult to locate in Egyptian texts.⁷ Indeed, the appearance of contronyms is sometimes the unintended result of translation. For example, one

3. The first major work on the subject is that of Abū Bakr ibn al-Anbārī (885–940 CE), *Kitāb 'al-Addād*. See also Carl Abel, “Über den Gegensinn der Urworte,” in *Sprachwissenschaftliche Abhandlungen* (Leipzig: Verlag Wilhelm Friedrich, 1885); Theodor Nöldeke, *Neue Beiträge zur semitischen Sprachwissenschaft* (Strassburg: Trübner, 1910), 67–108; Robert Gordis, “Studies in Hebrew Roots of Contrasted Meaning,” *JQR* 27 (1936–1937): 33–58; David Cohen, “*Addad* et ambiguïté linguistique en arabe,” in *Études de linguistique sémitique et arabe* (Paris: Mouton, 1970), 79–100; Cohen, “Ambivalence, indifférence et neutralization de sèmes,” in *Études de linguistique sémitique et arabe*, 101–4; Rudolf Meyer, “Gegensinn und Mehrdeutigkeit in der althebr. Wort- und Begriffsbildung,” *UF* 11 (1979): 601–12; Hans-Peter Müller, “Polysemie im semitischen und hebräischen Konjugationssystem,” *Or* 55 (1986): 365–89; John H. Hospers, “Das Problem der sogenannten semantischen Polarität im Althebräischen,” *ZAH* 1 (1988): 32–39.

4. Observed by Alster, “Paradoxical Proverbs and Satire in Sumerian Literature,” 203.

5. See Bendt Alster, *The Instructions of Shuruppak: A Sumerian Proverb Collection*, Mesopotamia 2 (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1974), 113.

6. See W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 132–33, who does not discuss the contronym.

7. I would like to thank Thomas Schneider for his insights on contronyms in Egyptian, all of which inform this section. Schneider has pointed out to me that the proposed cases of

might think that the common Egyptian lexeme *tm* is a contronym since it can mean “complete, whole,” but also serve as a verb of negation. However, the basic meaning of *tm* may simply be “exhaustion,” and thus it can have positive and negative applications. Consider the similar case of the lexeme *nfr* “perfection, goodness,” which also is employed for “zero” and for negation. It too may simply express ineffability. Some have considered the nouns *ḥm* “majesty” and *ḥm* “servant” a single contronym, but they are unrelated homonyms.⁸ In any event, I know of no case in which *ḥm* is exploited for both potential meanings in a single context. The two nouns *šw* “light” and *šw* or *šw.t* “shade” are perhaps contronyms,⁹ but again, I know of no place where they are employed polysemously in a single context. Moreover, since we do not know whether any of the proposed contronyms were pronounced the same, at most they would function paronomastically and/or visually.

Ugaritic texts also give no evidence of contronyms. In addition, the Ugaritic script records no vowels, so the same restrictions apply concerning visual contronyms as in Egyptian.

Contronyms do exist in biblical Hebrew and sometimes they are employed for paronomastic purposes.¹⁰ We already have seen a strictly visual Hebrew contronym in Job 26:12, in which Yahweh both stilled and stirred the sea, thus creating a type of merism (see 2.4.5). A contronym that operates aurally appears in the account of Saul, who tells Samuel that he rushed to perform the sacrifice in his absence: “וַאֲנִי מִן־עֵלְאָה *wā-’ēl’appaq* and I offered the burnt-offering” (1 Sam 13:12). As Jonathan Grossman observes, the verb אֵלָא *’āpāq*, here in the reflexive conjugation, can mean “I compelled myself” or “I restrained myself.”¹¹ In one strike, the author has captured in Saul’s own words his impetuosity and his attempt to soften his statement upon realizing that he had usurped Samuel’s cultic role.

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan captures well the latter contronym in Aramaic by translating the verb with another contronym וַאֲנִי מִן־עֵלְאָה *wā-’iṭḥasnēṭ*, which

Egyptian contronyms found in Abel, “Über den Gegensinn der Urworte,” 311–67, are all erroneous.

8. See Thomas Schneider, “Contextualizing the Tale of the Herdsman,” in *Egyptian Stories: A British Egyptological Tribute in Honour of Alan B. Lloyd on the Occasion of His Retirement*, ed. Thomas Schneider and Kasia Szpakowska, AOAT 347 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2007), 311–12 n. 12.

9. Unless the one is a *nisba* form of the other, in which case “shade” is simply “that which belongs to the light.”

10. See already David Yellin, “The Full Contronym in the Bible” [Hebrew], *Leshonenu* 5 (1938): 276–94.

11. Grossman, *Ambiguity in the Biblical Narrative and Its Contribution to the Literary Formation*, 154–57.

similarly means both “I strengthen myself” and “I restrained myself.”¹² On the rendering of polysemy in the textual witnesses, see chapter 5 (5.3.7).

Due to its inherent polarity, contronymic polysemy has a particularly unsettling effect on readers/listeners, for it is one thing for a sign or word to have multiple meanings, but quite another for those meanings to be opposite to each other. For traditional exegesis, such divergent readings are impossible. Yet the tension between contradictory meanings is precisely the point of the device. It can encapsulate conflicting actions and intents, as in the case of Saul, or embody all actions, as a type of merism, as in the case of Yahweh and the sea. Contronymic polysemy can be effective visually and/or aurally.

4.1.2. DOUBLE ENTENDRES

A *double entendre* is an idiom or other figure of speech that may be understood in two ways. The first is straightforward and innocuous, whereas the second is usually risqué. This is what Arab grammarians referred to as *تورية* *tawrīya* or *إيهام* *ihām*.¹³

Often *double entendres* serve as euphemisms.¹⁴ Consider the following Sumerian proverb.

[NU.UM.ME.D]A.NÁ AL.PEŠ₄.A
[EN?.E.Š]E NU.KÚ.DA.AN.NI
[A]L.KUR₄.RE.EN.E.ŠE

Can she be pregnant without having had sex?
Without having eaten
Can she be fat?

Here the verb for “eat” (KÚ) constitutes a sexual euphemism for sex.

See also the poem Ninmešarra, which describes the cessation of all lovemaking that resulted when the goddess Inanna forsook her city: “its (the city’s) woman no longer speaks of love with her husband. At night she does not ‘speak’ (AD NA.AN.DI.NI.IB.GI₄.GI₄) with him” (ll. 55–56). As Hallo and Van

12. Jastrow, p. 489.

13. *Tawrīya* is the use of a word with multiple meanings by an author in order to exploit its secondary (“hidden”) meaning. S. A. Bonebakker, “*Tawriya* (a.),” *EncIs* 10:395.

14. Though note the comment of Guglielmi, “Wortspiel,” col. 1289. “Ein amphibolischer Gebrauch als Euphemismus, etwa für ‘Tod’, ist selten.” On euphemisms in Egyptian generally, see Guglielmi, “Der Gebrauch rhetorischer Stilmittel in der ägyptischen Literatur,” 490–91. See also Antonio Loprieno, “Sprachtabu,” *LÄ* V (1984): cols. 1211–1214.

Dijk point out, the highlighted Sumerian can be read as referring to “speaking” or “intercourse.”¹⁵ Indeed, Sumerian is rich in sexual euphemisms.

A first millennium Mesopotamian incantation for increasing the prosperity of a tavern keeper offers several examples of the device. It prescribes a series of rituals and incantations that employ several types of polysemy and paronomasia in an effort to secure Ishtar’s aid. Addressing the goddess, the charm reads:

Come, enter our house! With you, may the sweet one, who sleeps with you, enter your seducer and your paramour. Let my lips be *lallaru*-syrup, let my hands be a sexual charm! Let the lip of my “ring” be a lip of date syrup. Like a snake, going out from a hole, and birds twittering over it. (ll. 28–33)¹⁶

Here the “ring” and “snake” constitute *double entendres* for “vulva” and “penis.” Moreover, at the end of one of the incantations, the tavern keeper is instructed to say “may the malt-baskets (*kuruppū*) become plentiful!” (l. 34). As Walter Farber informs us, the statement’s use of the rare noun *kuruppū* “malt-baskets” evokes the verb *qarābu* “draw near,” and thus, functions as a *double entendre* that is tantamount to a proposition for sex.¹⁷ Mesopotamian poets often employ rare words to make their devices effective (see 5.2.6).¹⁸

Egyptian texts too employ polysemy in order to create *double entendres*.¹⁹ In the Instructions of Ptahhotep one learns: *ir sk̄=k rd m šh.t dī st ntr wr m ʿ=k* “if you plow for plant(s) in the field, god will make it great in your hands (lit. ‘arm’)” (ll. 161–162). As in Near Eastern languages generally, the verb *sk̄* “plow” can mean “have sex.”²⁰ In fact, elsewhere this text teaches that a man should love his wife and treat her well, because *šh.t pw šh.t n nb=s* “she is a field of fertility for

15. William W. Hallo and J. J. A. van Dijk, *The Exaltation of Inanna*, YNER 3 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968), 22, and 53 n. 20. See also Markham J. Geller, “Discourse or Intercourse Revisited,” *NABU* (2005): 86–87.

16. Adopted with slight changes from Strahil V. Panayotov, “A Ritual for a Flourishing Bordello,” *BiOr* 70 (2013): 285–310, who also provides the text’s publication history.

17. See Farber, “Associative Magic,” 449.

18. See Cohen and Klein, “Akkadian *Hapax Legomena*.”

19. *Double entendres* are not restricted to *belles-lettres* in Egypt. See Steven Blake Shubert, “*Double Entendre* in the Stela of Suty and Hor,” in *Egypt, Israel, and the Ancient Mediterranean World: Studies in Honor of Donald B. Redford*, ed. Gary N. Knoppers and Antoine Hirsch, PÄ 20 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 143–65.

20. David Marcus, “A Famous Analogy of Rib-Haddi,” *JANES* 5 (1973): 281–86; Stefan Schorch, *Euphemismen in der Hebräischen Bibel*, OBC 12 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2000), 121–122; Shalom M. Paul, “‘Plowing with a Heifer’ in Judges 14:18—Tracing a Sexual Euphemism,” in *Sacred History, Sacred Literature: Essays on Ancient Israel, the Bible, and Religion in Honor of R. E. Friedman on His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Shawna Dolansky (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 163–67.

her lord” (l. 330).²¹ Note too that the scribe has written the noun “plant(s)” as $\equiv$ (i.e., *dr*) instead of $\equiv$ (i.e., *rd*). Scholars usually note this and add *sic!*, assuming it to be a textual error.²² However, as we have seen, non-normative orthography often draws attention to the presence of cleverness. In this case, it is particularly fitting that the hand-sign ($\equiv$) appear first, since the noun “hand” (i.e., *dr.t*), can serve as a euphemism for “penis.”²³

The Egyptian Tale of Setna I also employs a sexual euphemism as a *double entendre*. In the dialogue between Tabubu and Setna, Tabubu thrice repeats her promise that *iw=k r ph p3j=k 'wj p3 n.tj iw iw=k n-3m=f* “you will reach your house, the thing that you are in” (ll. 5.19, 5.23, 5.25). According to Ritner, the verb *ph* “reach” is rich in sexual connotation also meaning “to penetrate” and “attain orgasm.”²⁴ Steve Vinson observes that *'wj* means “house,” but that entering a woman’s house is a euphemism for sexual penetration. Moreover, as he notes, *'wj* paronomastically intimates *'wj* “two arms, two hands,” thus suggesting that Setne will reach orgasm only by masturbating.²⁵ Moreover, as Pieter Pestman has discussed, the nouns *mr* “love” and *sdm* “sleep” take a phallus determinative ($\equiv$) in the text, contrary to typical usage, thus nuancing said lexemes to mean “sexual desire” and “sleeping with a woman,” respectively.²⁶

21. Günter Burkard, *Textkritische Untersuchungen zu ägyptischen Weisheitslehren des Alten und Mittleren Reiches*, ÄgAbh 34 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1977), 250, treats this passage as a case of amphiboly.

22. Noted by Burkard, *Textkritische Untersuchungen zu ägyptischen Weisheits-lehren des Alten und Mittleren Reiches*, 250.

23. See already Siegfried Schott, *Altägyptische Liebeslieder: Mit Märchen und Liebesgeschichten* (Zürich: Artemis, 1950), 56. This also is the case in Hebrew and Akkadian. See conveniently in Schorch, *Euphemismen in der Hebräischen Bibel*, 127–30; Shalom M. Paul, “The ‘Plural of Ecstasy’ in Mesopotamian and Biblical Love Poetry,” in Zevit, Gitin, and Sokoloff, *Solving Riddles and Untying Knots*, 593 n. 30. The use of *dr.t* “hand” for “penis,” is also suggested in the *Memphite Theology* (Shabaka Stone, BM No. 498, l. 55): *psd.t=f m b3h=f m 3bh.w sp.t(i) mtw.t dr.tj 3tm.w* “his Ennead is before him as teeth and lips. They are the semen and hands of Atum” (but lit. “his Ennead is before him as teeth, semen, lips, two hands of Atum”). Note that the phrase *b3h=f* “before him” employs the sign $\equiv$, and that “hands” appears as $\equiv$. Teeth and semen are equated by reason of color and their connection to the skeleton, whereas the lips and hands are associated by their duality. The line implicitly connects “hands” with the “penis.” On the connection between semen and the skeleton, see Carleton T. Hodge, “Egyptian Beliefs about the Bull’s Spine: An Anatomical Origin for ANKH,” *AL* (1982): 445–79.

24. Robert K. Ritner, “The Romance of Setna Khaemuas and the Mummies (Setna 1),” in Simpson, *Literature of Ancient Egypt*, 464 n. 31. Noted also by Jay, *Orality and Literacy in the Demotic Tales*, 103.

25. Vinson, “Ten Notes on the First Tale of Setne Khaemwas,” 457–58, 460–61.

26. Pestman, “Jeux de déterminatifs en Démotique,” 27–28. Cited also by Jay, *Orality and Literacy in the Demotic Tales*, 103–4 n. 73.

At Ugarit we find a similar use of the word “hand” in El’s advance to Athirat: *hm yd ilmlk yḥssk aḥbt tr t’rrk* “does the ‘hand’ of El, the king, excite you, the love of the Bull arouse you” (CAT 1.4.iv.38–39)? The same usage appears in The Birth of the Gracious Gods in the narrator’s description of the god’s “prowess” (CAT 1.23, 33–35):

tirkm yd il kym

El’s “hand” grows long like the sea,

wyd il kmdb

Indeed, El’s “hand,” like the flood,

ark yd il kym

El’s “hand” is long like the sea,

wyd il kmdb

Indeed, El’s “hand,” like the flood.

El then lowers his *ḥt* “scepter” and is “generous with the ‘staff’ (*mṭ*) in his hand” (CAT 1.23, 37). After charming two maidens, they cry out: “O husband! Husband! Lowered is your ‘scepter,’ generous is the ‘staff’ in your hand” (CAT 1.23, 40). We then learn that “the pair became his wives, wives of El, his wives forever” (CAT 1.23, 48–49).

A *double entendre* in Hebrew occurs in the command of David to Uriah, whom he has just summoned from the battle field: רֵד לְבֵיתְךָ וְרַחֵץ רַגְלֶיךָ *rēḏ lə-bēitkā ū-rḥaṣ raḡlekā* “go down to your house and wash your feet” (2 Sam 11:8). Though one could read his command literally—after all Uriah had just come from the campaign—Uriah understands it to mean “go down to your house and have sex with your wife.”²⁷ This is clear by his reply the next morning. When David asks him why he did not return to his home, Uriah responds: וְאֲנִי אָבוֹא אֶל-בֵּיתִי וְאֶכֶל וְלִשְׁתּוֹת וְלִשְׁכַּב עִם-אִשְׁתִּי *wa-’ānī ’āḇō’ ’el-bēitī le-’ēkōl wə-li-štōt wə-li-škab ’im ’išṭī* “and I should go to my home to eat and drink and sleep with my wife!” (2 Sam 11:11).²⁸

27. Gary A. Rendsburg, “Wordplay in the Hebrew Bible: An Eclectic Collection,” in Noegel, *Puns and Pundits*, 152–53. On other euphemistic cases of *double entendre*, see S. H. Smith, “‘Heel’ and ‘Thigh’: The Concept of Sexuality in the Jacob-Esau Narratives,” *VT* 40 (1990): 464–73; Shalom M. Paul, “Polysemous Pivotal Punctuation: More Janus Double Entendres,” in *Texts, Temples, and Traditions: A Tribute to Menahem Haran*, ed. Michael V. Fox et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 369–74; Paul, “A Double Entendre in Job 15:32 in the Light of Akkadian,” in *Emanuel: Studies in Hebrew Bible, Septuagint and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honor of Emanuel Tov*, ed. Shalom M. Paul et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 755–57; Paul, “‘Plowing with a Heifer’ in Judges 14:18,” 163–67.

28. The pericope about Tamar and Amnon that follows this story is equally loaded with *double entendres*. See Pamela Tamarkin Reis, “Cupidity and Stupidity: Woman’s Agency and the ‘Rape’ of Tamar,” *JANES* 25 (1997): 43–60.

John Kselman has discovered a sophisticated *double entendre* in Ps 59:7 (repeated in 59:15): יָשׁוּבוּ לָעָרִב יִהְיוּ כְּכֶלֶב וְיִסּוּבּוּ עִיר *yašūbū lā-‘ereḥ yehēmū kak-kāleḥ wī-sōḥəḇū ‘īr*. As he has shown, one can interpret the Hebrew text as either “In the evening they return, they howl like dogs, they prowls about the city” or “by night they prove faithless, they roar like dogs, they surround the city.” The former refers to the national enemies of the king, while the latter refers to the “rebels who treacherously attack the city of their suzerain.”²⁹

A final case of *double entendre* occurs in Hebrew text of Ben Sira from Qumran (Sir 51:19, 11Q5 XXI, 17, Ms A):

ידי פתח[ה שער]יה
[וב] מערמיה אתבונן

ydy pth[h š ‘ryh]
[w-b]-m ‘rmyh ‘tbwnwn

My hand open[ed her gates],
[That] I could consider hidden things.

Here the nouns “hand,” “opened,” “gates,” and “hidden things” all function as sexual euphemisms. As Reymond put it: “The effect of this language is, in the context of Sir 15:13–30, an emphasis on the idea that Wisdom should be pursued with the enthusiasm one might (but perhaps should not) show in the pursuit of a human bride.”³⁰

Double entendres need not always be sexual in import. In the Phoenician inscription of Azitawadda (*KAI* 26), the king brags that he brought peace to the peoples under his rule by saying לִדְנִימִי לֵל בִּימִתִּי *l-dnnyṁ l l bymty* “As for the Danunians, there was no night in my days” (*KAI* 26B, 16–17). Rather than use the term for “evil,” the king elected to employ the word לֵל *ll* “night,” which creates a perfect fit for בִּימִתִּי *bymty* “my days,” which follows.

29. See also Kselman, “Double Entendre in Psalm 59,” 187. See also K. Fullerton, “Double Entendre in the First Speech of Eliphaz,” *JBL* 49 (1930): 320–74; Shalom M. Paul, “An Overlooked *Double Entendre* in Jonah 2:5,” in *The Honeycomb of the Word: Interpreting the Primary Testament with André LaCoque*, ed. W. Dow Edgerton (Chicago: Exploration Press, 2001), 155–57.

30. Eric D. Reymond, “Wordplay in the Hebrew to Ben Sira,” in *The Texts and Versions of the Book of Ben Sira: Transmission and Interpretation*, ed. Jean-Sébastien Rey and Jan Joosten, *JSJSup* 150 (Leiden: Brill 2011), 41. For additional *double entendres* see Reymond, “Sirach 51:13–30 and 11Q5 (=11QPs^a) 21.11–22.1,” *RdQ* 23 (2007): 207–31.

An example of a *double entendre* in Aramaic occurs in the description of Belshazzar’s fearful reaction to the mysterious writing on the wall.³¹ The narrator relates: “then the king’s color changed, and his thoughts alarmed him, his limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together” (Dan 5:6). Wolters has shown that the line “his limbs gave way” (מִשְׁתָּרִין חֲרָצָה וְקִטְרֵי wə-qīṭrē ḥarṣēh mištārāyīn) literally means “the knots of his loins were loosened (or untied),” and refers euphemistically to the king soiling himself as his sphincter muscle loosens out of fear. The tale recalls this event again when Daniel is said to have the power to מְשָׂרֵא קִטְרִין məšārē’ qīṭrīn “loosen the knots,” that is, “solve enigmas” or “break spells” (Dan 5:12).³²

The Proverbs of Ahiqar offer a case of *double entendre* in the form of a wisdom saying: “I have tasted (טעמת *t’mt*) even the bitter medlar, and have eaten endives, but there is nothing more bitter (מריר *mryr*) than poverty” (COS 1:89). The proverb hinges on the dual meaning of טעמת *t’mt*, both “taste” and “experience,” and מריר *mryr*, both “bitterness” and an “unpleasant experience.”³³

Double entendres offer gentler ways of conveying matters that otherwise might be too explicit, offensive, or discomfiting. They also permit poets an escape from potential censure should they cross the line between decorum and taboo. Accordingly, *double entendres* can be as subversive as they are elusive. Since they primarily serve as euphemisms, they often blur the boundary between polysemy and metaphor. While poets often convey the literal or surface meaning of *double entendres* with exquisite literary artistry, they do not encourage listeners/readers to focus upon that reading, but instead compel them to entertain the euphemistic or risqué meaning. Thus, *double entendres* differ from other forms of polysemy that prompt one to contemplate both meanings simultaneously. They operate aurally and visually.

4.1.3. ANTANACLASIS

Antanaclasses is the repetition of the same sign, word, or expression, each time with a different meaning.³⁴ It can be obtained by use of homonyms or by way of

31. For an example of *double entendre* from later Aramaic, see Matthew Morgenstern, “A Rather Risqué Pun in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic,” in Cohen, *Birkat Shalom*, 881–90, who discusses the use of פִּוּרְתָּא *pwrt* in a Yemenite midrashic text for “a little bit” and “a turd.”

32. On the latter meaning, see Shalom M. Paul, “Decoding a ‘Joint’ Expression in Daniel 5:6, 16,” *JANES* 22 (1993): 121–27.

33. Cf. the realization of the sailor in the Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor: *rš.wy sdd dp.t=n=f sn ḥ.t mr* “how happy is the man who relates what he has tasted after a bitter thing passes” (l. 124).

34. ἀντανάκλασις “antanaclasses” refers originally to a reflection of light or echo. It did not become a literary term until much later. Quintilian, uses “*contraria significatio*” in *Inst.*

signs, words, and expressions of a single etymological derivation, but with a wide enough semantic range to provide sufficiently different meanings. Therefore, while antanaclasis can have a paronomastic effect, it belongs more properly to the realm of polysemy. It differs from homonymic paronomasia in that the signs, words, and expressions employed do not merely sound alike, but appear identical (see 4.2.6).

Antanaclasis occurs in the Sumerian text known as the Self Praise of Shulgi (Shulgi D 216–218).

GAL.GAL.BI ŠU.GI₄.TA GA.ÀM.GI₄
 NU.MU.Û.GI₄.ÉŠ
 NU.MU.Û.DAĜAL.E.ŠA.A
 U₄ LA.BA.DA.AB.SUD.RÁ.AŠ
 LUGAL.ME.ÈN ŠU URU.ĜÁ GA.GÀM.GI₄

Its (the foreign land's) adults, I will kill in revenge.
 Those whom I will not kill,
 those whom I will not disperse,
 they will not live long!
 I, the king, will avenge my city.

As Klein and Sefati note, the scribe has used the sign GI₄ “return,” along with ŠU “hand,” to mean “kill in revenge” (= Akkadian *gimilla turru* “return vengeance”). However, in line 218, he used GI₄ to mean “smite (Akkadian *dāku*).”³⁵

A similar case occurs in The Return of Ninurta (ll. 94–97), as Cooper observes:

UR.SAĜ KUR SAĜ UM.MA.AB.GI₄.A.AŠ
 ZÀ.ZU A.A.ZU DIĜIR.DIŠ NU.UM.MA.ŠI.IN.GI₄.GI₄

Warrior, because you have smitten the mountains,
 Your father need send out no other god beside you.

In this passage, the sign GI₄ means “smite” in the first line, but reduplicated as GI₄.GI₄ in the second line, it means “send.”³⁶

An excellent demonstration of antanaclasis in Akkadian occurs in the Gilgamesh Epic 1.65–66, in which the poet exploits two meanings of the verb *tebû* in close succession: *ul t̃ši šāninamma tebû kakkūšu* (TUKUL.MEŠ) *ina pikkīšu tebû rū ūšu* “the attack of his weapons verily has no equal, on account of

9.3.68 (first century CE). The Greek term occurs in the Scholiast to Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica* 1.746 (fifteenth century CE).

35. Observed by Klein and Sefati, “Word Play in Sumerian Literature,” 31.

36. Cooper, *Return of Ninurta*, 72; Klein and Sefati, “Word Play in Sumerian Literature,” 31.

his ball (game) his companions are (constantly) aroused!"³⁷ The first occurrence of *tebû* means "attack," whereas the second means "arouse."³⁸

Enuma Elish also contains antanaclasis. In 1.14, the noun *mummu* means "creator": *mummu tiāmat muallidat gimrišun* "the creator Tiamat, who gave birth to them all." However, later it refers to "thunder": *mummu erpēti lištakšibamma* "may the cloud's thunder diminish" (7.121).³⁹

Given the polysemous values of Akkadian signs, it is not surprising that erudite scribes often obtained antanaclasis by exploiting the signs' multiple values within the same text. An excellent demonstration of this appears in the Descent of Ishtar, where the sign GAB occurs eighteen times, most often with the logographic reading ^{LÚ}*atû* "gatekeeper," where it is read as DU₈ (i.e., LÚ.Í.DU₈).⁴⁰ However, we first encounter it with the phonetic value *kap* in line 10 in the noun *kap-pi* "wings." In line 21, it possesses the value *qab* in *i-qab-bi* "he spoke" (repeated l. 66). In line 40, the same sign is again read logographically as DU₈, but this time in the name of the city of the underworld "Kutha" (i.e., GÚ.DU₈.A.KI). Ten lines later, the same sign appears logographically as GABA meaning *irtu* "breast" (ll. 50, 52, 122). The last time it occurs it is read as *gab* in *gab-bi-ša-ma* "all of her" (l. 75). There are numerous cases of this device in the Descent of Ishtar and other cuneiform masterpieces.

Since hieroglyphic Egyptian does not record vowels we cannot know whether examples of antanaclasis were pronounced the same way. Nevertheless, we can note cases of visual antanaclasis.⁴¹ An excellent example appears in the Tale of Wenamun (P.Moscow 120). In this text, the author has employed the verb *ḥḥ* "take" cleverly in multiple contexts in order to exploit its rather wide semantic range. We first hear it in 1.10 and 1.13 in reference to the thief who *ḥḥ* "stole" Wenamun's gold and silver. Soon afterwards, Wenamun asks the king of Byblos to *ḥḥ* "take" him back to Egypt (1.36). Two lines later we hear about a Byblian god who *ḥḥ* "possesses" a seer in the harbor (1.38). Then in 2.15, the prince rhetorically asks Wenamun to give him the sails and ropes he brought so that he

37. See Jacob Klein, "A New Look at the 'Oppression of Uruk' Episode in the Gilgamesh Epic," in Abusch, *Riches Hidden in Secret Places*, 187–201.

38. See CAD T, s.v. "*tebû*." Mesopotamian scribes were acutely aware of homonyms, as their lexical texts attest. For example, Miguel Civil, Margaret W. Green, and Wilfred G. Lambert, *Ea A = nāqu, Aa A = nāqu, with their Forerunners and Related Texts*, MSL 14 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1979), 194 (1.342–343), list two near homonyms for the Sumerian sign ŠŪ: *erēbu ša šamši* "entering of the sun (i.e., 'setting')" and *erēpu ša ūmi* "darkening of the day."

39. On the various meanings of *mummu*, see already Alexander Heidel, "The Meaning of *Mummu* in Akkadian Literature," *JNES* 7 (1948): 98–105; CAD M/2, s.v. "*mummu A*"; s.v. "*mummu B*"; s.v. "*mummu C*."

40. The title occurs in ll. 13, 14, 21, 25, 37, 39, 43, 46, 49, 52, 55, 58, 61.

41. Antanaclasis has been treated extensively with regard to the inscriptions in Hathor's temple by Richter, *Theology of Hathor of Dendera*.

might *ṭṭ* “move” (lit. “take”) his ships. We find the lexeme again in the prince’s words, “take (*ṭṭ*) him to see the tomb wherein they (previous merchants from Egypt) lie” (2.52). The verb *ṭṭ* appears yet again in 2.69, when the prince sends Wenamun an Egyptian singer and tells her to sing for him and not to let his heart be anxious (i.e., *ṭṭ ḥṣ.tṭ=fshr.w*, lit. “let his heart take plans”), which is repeated in 2.70 by the singer. Such visual antanaclasis lends the story greater coherence by providing a Leitwort.

Visual antanaclasis occurs in P.Westcar. The papyrus contains several pericopes concerning high-ranking priests who demonstrate their expertise in magic by performing miraculous acts. One of these involves the transformation of a wax crocodile made into a living one of seven cubits (*mḥ*) that promptly seizes (*mḥ*) a man from the shore (3.13–14). The text exploits the semantic range of the root *mḥ* for two different meanings.⁴² The relationship is underscored visually; the arm sign that comprises part of the word “cubit” (𓅓) grasps a stick in the verb “seize” (𓅓).⁴³ In addition, the same consonants resound in the nouns *msh* “crocodile” and *mnḥ* “wax” (3.13).⁴⁴

Another case of visual antanaclasis appears in the Pyramid Texts of Unas.⁴⁵ In Spell 217, §152a, we read: *ṭm.w ṭ ṭ n=k wnṣ pn ṣḥ.ṭ ṭḥm sk* “Atum says, he comes to you this Unas, an *akh*-spirit of the circumpolar stars.” Yet, a few lines later (§152d) the text lauds: *wbn=ṭn m ṣḥ.t m bw ṣḥ.n=ṭn ṭm* “you shine in the horizon in the place that is beneficial to you.” Observe how *ṣḥ* is first used for “*akh*-spirit” and then *ṣḥ* “shine.” It also resounds paronomastically in *ṣḥ.t* “horizon.” Moreover, all three words employ the *ṣḥ*-sign 𓅓.⁴⁶

The scribes of Ugarit employed antanaclasis in the Epic of Baal (CAT 1.5.i.7–15). In the persiflage between Mot and Baal, Mot first tells his messengers to tell

42. A cubit is the length of the elbow to the fingertip, thus its relationship to “seize.”

43. For antanaclasis in the Tale of the Eloquent Peasant, see the treatment of the noun *zp* (i.e., *sp*) “time,” “occasion,” “fortune,” “moment,” etc., discussed by Foster, “Wordplay in *The Eloquent Peasant*,” 67 (though Foster does not use the term “antanaclasis”).

44. Parys, *Le récit du Papyrus Westcar*, 30–31.

45. There are numerous cases of antanaclasis in the Pyramid Texts of Unas. So, for example, in Spell 217, §155b we read: *dwṣ ṣs ḥr.(ṭ) h(ṭ)p* “like the morning star above Hapi,” and in §155c: *dwṣ sw ṣḥ.w ṭm.w mw* “who, the spirits of the water worship,” where *dwṣ* “morning” appears as *dwṣ* “worship” in the next line; both words suggesting *dwṣ.t* “the Duat.” Similarly, in §160c *ḡ.t* occurs for both “yourself” and “forever” (i.e., *sḥ=k pw n ḡ.t=k n ḡ.t* “he is your [Ra-Atum] son, of yourself, forever”). In Spell 440, §815a (Pyramid Texts of Pepi I) we find: *ṭn mrṭ=k ṭḥ=k ḥr.w ḥr.(j)-tp m ṭḥ.t=f n.t mṣ'.t* “If you love life, O Horus, upon his staff of truth.” Note the use of *ṭḥ* “life” and *m ṭḥ.t* “staff,” also observed by Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973), 1:45 n. 1, as a “wordplay.”

46. In §153a, the text instructs Seth and Nephthys to proclaim the arrival of Unas to the gods of lower Egypt and their *ṣḥ.w* “spirits” (repeated §156a, §156d, §157a with Thoth to the gods of the West and also elsewhere with different gods and cardinal directions).

Baal the following: *lyrt bnpš bn ilm mt* “surely you will descend into the throat of the son of the gods, Mot” (6–7). Baal then responds by asking: *pnp [] š npš lbim thw* “Is my appetite the appetite of a lion in the wasteland?” (14–15). In Mot’s remark *npš* means “throat,” but in Baal’s response it means “appetite.”

Note too the goddess Anat’s threat to Aqhat in the Tale of Aqhat: *km qtr baph u ap mprh ank laḥwy* “like smoke from his nose, indeed, (in) his convulsing, I shall take his life” (*CAT* 1.18.iv.25–26). The passage is not without its difficulties,⁴⁷ but it is clear that it uses *ap* first as “nose” and then as the particle “indeed.”

A well-known example of antanaclasis in the Hebrew Bible noted by David Marcus appears in the prose narrative that reports the portended results of the dreams of Pharaoh’s chief cupbearer and chief baker (Gen 40). In this short pericope, we find three variations of the phrase *נָשָׂא רֹאשׁ nāšā’ ’eṭ rō’ š* “lift up the head of (+ noun/pronoun),” always with a different meaning.⁴⁸ In Gen 40:13, Joseph uses it to predict that Pharaoh will “lift up his (the cupbearer’s) head,” that is, pardon him. However, when interpreting the baker’s dream, Joseph employs the same idiom for his death by “beheading” or perhaps “impaling” (Gen 40:19). Finally, the narrator uses the expression in Gen 40:20 in reference to the exoneration of the cupbearer.

Gary Rendsburg has spotted a particularly clever example of antanaclasis in the prose account of the fifth plague *דִּבְרַר deḇer* “pestilence” (Exod 9:3, 9:15). As he observes, the story differs here with regard to the verb that Yahweh uses to address Moses. Instead of using the usual *וְאָמַרְתָּ wə-’āmartā* “and you shall say,” he uses *וְדִבְרַתָּ wə-dibbartā* “and you shall speak” (Exod 9:1).⁴⁹ In addition, the author employs the related form *הַדָּבָר had-dāḇār* “the thing (lit. ‘word’)” three times in the brief account (Exod 9:4, 9:5, 9:6), but nowhere else in the lengthy saga of the plagues.⁵⁰ Thus, the author has employed antanaclasis to connect Yahweh’s word with the fifth plague.

An example of antanaclasis in poetry occurs in Qoh 4:1.

47. Just how *qtr* “smoke” would come from a nose is unclear. The *u-aleph* also lacks explanation. Furthermore, the word *mprh* is difficult. I relate it to the Egyptian *npṣṣ* “convulsion,” with Richard M. Wright, “Egyptian *npṣṣ*: A Cognate for Ugaritic *mpr* ‘convulsion,’” *UF* 26 (1994): 539–41.

48. David Marcus, “‘Lifting up the Head’: On the Trail of a Word Play in Genesis 40,” *Prooftexts* 10 (1990): 17–27.

49. Rendsburg, “Alliteration in the Exodus Narrative,” 89–90.

50. The use of the same root for “speak” and “thing” derives from the ontological conception of language that informs the Israelite view of speaking and script (a general ancient Near Eastern view). See Isaac Rabinowitz, *A Witness Forever: Ancient Israel’s Perception of Literature and the Resultant Hebrew Bible* (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 1993).

וְהָיָה דִמְעַת הַשְּׁקִים וְאִין לָהֶם מְנַחֵם
וּמִיַּד עֲשֻׁקֵיהֶם כָּח וְאִין לָהֶם מְנַחֵם:

wə-hinnēh dim 'at hā- 'āšūqīm wə- 'ēn lā-hem mənahēm
ū-miy-yad 'ōšqēhem kōah wə- 'ēn lā-hem mənahēm

Behold the tears of the oppressed with no one to comfort them;
And the power of their oppressors with no one to avenge them.

As Sasson has pointed out, Qoheleth employs the same phrase twice: וְאִין לָהֶם מְנַחֵם *wə- 'ēn lā-hem mənahēm*. The first time it means “no one to comfort them,” but the second time we must translate “no one to avenge them.”⁵¹ This example of antanaclasis is in step with other uses of the device in this work.⁵²

A final, well-known demonstration of antanaclasis in the Bible occurs in 2 Sam 7, in which בַּיִת *bayit* is used for “palace” (7:2), “temple” (7:5–7), and “dynasty” (7:11–16)—a flexible semantic parameter attested also in the Aramaic stela of Panammuwa (ca. 730 BCE).⁵³

In the Hebrew text of Ben Sira from Qumran, we also find cases of antanaclasis. See, in particular, Sir 13:10 Ms A:

אל התקרב פן התרחק
ואל התרחק פן תשנא

'l htqrb pn htrhq
w- 'l htrhq pn tsn'

Do not bring yourself forward lest you become a stranger.
But do not keep far off, lest you are hated.

As Reymond observes, the verb רחק *rhq*, “in the *Hithpael* implies in its first occurrence a passive notion, ‘to be made far off,’ and in its second implies a reflexive notion, ‘to make oneself far off.’”⁵⁴ As such, Ben Sira demonstrates “that an utterance made in one context can have a different meaning or significance in

51. Sasson, “Word Play in the O.T.,” 970.

52. See A. R. Ceresko, “The Function of Antanaclasis (*mš*’ “to Find”// *mš*’ “to Reach, Overtake, Grasp”) in Hebrew Poetry, Especially in the Book of Qoheleth,” *CBQ* 44 (1982): 551–69; Scott B. Noegel, “‘Wordplay’ in Qoheleth,” *JHS* 7 (2007): 21–23. See also Michael Carasik, “Qoheleth’s Twists and Turns,” *JSOT* 28 (2003): 192–209.

53. See K. Lawson Younger, “Panammuwa and Bar-Rakib: Two Structural Analyses,” *JANES* 18 (1986): 91–103. It also occurs in 2 Kgs 22:7. I examine these in Scott B. Noegel, “The Women of Asherah: Weaving Wickedness in 2 Kgs 22:7,” *CBQ* 83 (2021): 208–19, and also treat the Panammuwa inscription.

54. Reymond, “Wordplay in the Hebrew to Ben Sira,” 43.

another context. That is, the same words uttered at two different times and/or by two different people can have two entirely different meanings and effects.”⁵⁵

Antanacalasis also appears in the eighth century BCE Phoenician stela of Prince Kilamuwa (*KAI* 24), which also exhibits a great deal of repetition and a complex literary structure.⁵⁶ In line 2, the prince informs us that מלך גבר על יאדי *mlk gbr 'l y'dy w-bl p 'l* “Gabbar ruled over Yaudi, but he did nothing.” At the end of this section of the inscription, he then describes the plight of the war-stricken Danunians: יתן בשר וגבר בסות *yt n bš w-gbr b-swt* “They gave a slave girl for a sheep, and a man for a garment.” The first use of גבר *gbr* is the personal name “Gabbar,” the second is the noun “man.”⁵⁷ Moreover, both uses contain בר *br* “son,” which recalls Kilamuwa [בר חי] *br hy'* “son of Haya,” immediately prior. The stela also employs בעל *b 'l* for the deity Baal (ll. 15, 16) and the noun “lord, owner” (ll. 11 [2x], 12 [3x], 16).⁵⁸ Abetting the antanacalasis is parasonance with the repeated negative particle בל *bl* (ll. 2, 3 [2x], 4, 5, 11 [2x], 12) and the verb פעל *p 'l* “make, do” (ll. 3 [2x], 4 [2x], 5).⁵⁹

The Aramaic text of Daniel contains several cases of antanacalasis. See, for example, the use of the verb שָׁרַח *šr'* for “dwell” (Dan 2:22), “loosen” (Dan 3:25), and “solve” (Dan 5:12, 5:16). Similarly exploited is the root טעם *t-ʿ-m* for “counsel” (Dan 2:14), “decree” (Dan 3:10, 3:29), “regard” (Dan 3:12), “eat, taste” (Dan 4:22, 4:29, 5:21), and “account” (Dan 6:3). The root גזר *g-z-r* occurs in Dan 4:4 for גִּזְרֵיָא *gāzrayyā* “astrologers,” but in Dan 4:14 for גְּזֵרָה *gəzērāh* “decree.” See also the use of שָׂפַר *špār* “pleased” to introduce Dan 6:2, and בִּשְׁפָרָא *bi-šparpārā* “in the morning” in Dan 6:20. The text also employs the verb בָּעָה *bā ʾāh* antanaclastically for “seek” to harm (Dan 6:5), “pray” (Dan 6:8, 6:14), and “make a petition” (Dan 6:12).⁶⁰

Since antanacalasis operates across text it generally invites comparison. When readers/listeners encounter it, they naturally place the two or more signs or lexemes in mental juxtaposition, which results in a differentiation of literary contexts. The comparison and contrast that ensues prompts readers/listeners to

55. Reymond, “Wisdom of Words in the Wisdom of Ben Sira,” 226.

56. See Collins, “Kilamuwa Inscription.” O'Connor, “Rhetoric of the Kilamuwa Inscription,” raises doubts concerning some of Collins' examples of alliteration, as they are more aptly considered cases of repetition. The devices illustrated here are of a different nature.

57. The personal name also occurs at the end of the inscription in l. 15.

58. Antanacalasis on this root appears also in the Bible (e.g., Hos 2:18–19).

59. The closeness between the phonemes /b/ and /p/ in the dialect of the stela is clear also in the repeated nouns נבש *nbš* “affection, life, appetite,” instead of the more usual נפש *npš* (l. 13 [2x]). The same form appears also in other Yaudi inscriptions and in the Aramaic inscriptions from Sefire. Noted by Avishur, *Phoenician Inscriptions and the Bible*, 168.

60. See Bill T. Arnold, “Wordplay and Narrative Technique in Daniel 5 and 6,” *JBL* 112 (1993): 483–84. For a general discussion of literary features in biblical Aramaic, see Stanislav Segert, “Aramaic Poetry in the Old Testament,” *ArOr* 70 (2002): 65–79.

draw mutual inferences concerning the literary figures, plots, and/or circumstances involved. The effect, therefore, is connective, referential, and contrastive, and it is both aural and visual.

4.1.4. UNIDIRECTIONAL POLYSEMY

Unidirectional polysemy occurs when a polyseme produces two meanings that both face a single direction, either back to a previous line or ahead to one that follows.

An early demonstration occurs in a Sumerian proverb, in which we find: UR.GI₇ MÁŠ.ĜI₆ MUD₅.ÀM “to a dog a dream means joy.” Klein and Sefati have shown that the signs MÁŠ.ĜI₆ can mean “dream” or “black goat.” In addition, the sign MUD₅ suggests by way of paronomasia the sign MUD (= Akkadian *gilittu*) “fright, terror.”⁶¹ The devices leave us with the following interpretations: “to a dog a black goat/dream means joy/fear.” Both polysemes face back to the dog.

The following Sumerian proverb takes advantage of the sign KUR, meaning “mountain” or “underworld”:

NÌ Û NU.GU₇ AM.KUR.RA.KA
NÌ A NU.NAĜ MAŠ.DÀ.KUR.RA.KA

That which does not eat food
is a wild bull of the mountain/underworld.

That which does not drink water
is a gazelle of the mountain/underworld.⁶²

When read as mountain or as underworld, the meanings face back to the animals of the liminal steppe that do not eat or drink.

For an Akkadian example, I refer to the case of contronymic polysemy I discussed above (4.1.1), in which a hymn to Shamash used the noun *arnu* for both “crime” and “punishment.” In that case, both meanings face backwards, the former to “fetters” and the latter to the description of bribery and injustice.

I demonstrate unidirectional polysemy in Egyptian by returning to P. Westcar. In that story the pharaoh’s son tells him about a chief priest named Djedi, who is great of “magic”: *ḥw=f rh.w rdḏ.t šm mḏ hr-s3=f f hr t3* “he knows how to make a lion walk behind him, its *f* upon the ground” (7.4–5). As for the bull, *šhr tp=f r t3* “its head was felled to the ground” (8.25), and yet *ḥ.n p3 ḥw3 ḥ.w*

61. Klein and Sefati, “Word Play in Sumerian Literature,” 30; Bendt Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer: The World’s Earliest Proverb Collections* (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 1997), 135.

62. Klein and Sefati, “Word Play in Sumerian Literature,” 28; Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer*, 12.

hr-s3=f φ *f hr r t3* “the bull stood up behind him, its φ fallen upon the ground” (8.26–9.1). The active polyseme in these lines is the untranslated hieroglyphic sign φ . We can read it either as *s3d* “rope,” which seems fitting, or as *sfh* “loosen, unleash,” in which case we must render the phrase φ *f hr r t3* “its restraint expelled.”⁶³ The scribe’s use of φ draws attention to the polysemy, because it is not the usual sign used for “rope” or “bind” (which is 𓏏). In its meaning “rope,” it points back to the similar statement about the lion. As “release” it also points back, but to the previous tale in which the priest Webaoner enchants a crocodile to release a man it had seized (3.24).⁶⁴ Moreover, the text contains an additional paronomastic reference back to the number *sfh* “seven,” used of the crocodile’s size (i.e., seven fingers [wax] and seven cubits [real], 2.22–23, 3.13) and the seven-day detention of the pharaoh (3.15).⁶⁵

Another case appears in the Tale of the Eloquent Peasant in the peasant’s charge: *mk tw m hwr.w n rht.j* ‘*wn-ib hr hq.t hnms*’ “look, you are a wretch of a washerman, an envious one who destroys a friend” (P.3023 + P.Amherst I, ll. 199–201). The determinative for *hq.t* is 𓏏 , suggesting that we translate it “destroy.” However, the existence of an unrelated word *hq.t* meaning “white linen,” allows us to entertain the reading: “envious of fine clothes.”⁶⁶ Both readings face backwards. As “white linen” the polyseme looks to the washerman, and as “destroy,” it faces *nh.t-hr* “violent” in the prior verse.

Another Egyptian example appears in the Admonitions of Ipuwer (P.Leiden 1.344), in Ipuwer’s pondering: *hw pr-hq r m.w m hm.t n b3k.w=f nfr is ib n.(i) nsw iw3 n=f m3’.t* “what is the treasury for, without its revenues? For the heart of the king is happy when truth comes to him” (recto 3.12). Here Ipuwer employs *m3’.t* both as “truth,” which faces back to *ib n nsw* “the heart of pharaoh,”⁶⁷ and as “tribute,” which faces back to *pr-hq* “the treasury.”⁶⁸

A particularly involved example occurs in the Demotic Chronicle. In 2/11 we read: *i’ h phr3 p3 mtre r p3 hry r ir t3 qyt (n) p3 t3 dr=f* “the moon *phr*’s the water; the ruler will make the circuit of the entire land.” As Johnson and Ritner conclude, the verb *phr* has three meanings in the text, each of which fits the context that

63. See Christopher J. Eyre, “Yet Again the Wax Crocodile: P. Westcar 3, 123ff.,” *JEA* 78 (1992): 281 n. 13; Parys, *Le récit du Papyrus Westcar*, 48–49, 106.

64. There is a lacuna here, but Eyre, “Yet Again the Wax Crocodile,” plausibly suggests that the verb for “release” here is *sfh*.

65. This same paronomasia occurs elsewhere in Egyptian. See Ramses Mostah, “Ära-Datierungen, Regierungsjahre und Zahlwortspiele,” *CdE* 39 (1964): 51, 54–57.

66. Even though the determinative that usually goes with *hq.t* “white linen” is 𓏏 .

67. The heart is naturally connected to *m3’.t*, because, according to Egyptian belief, *m3’.t* is weighed against the heart in the afterlife.

68. Noted also by Parkinson, *Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems, 1940–1640 BCE*, 192 n. 24.

follows.⁶⁹ The first is “circumambulate, surround,” which anticipates “make the circuit.” Yet, since the verb appears with the hand-to-mouth determinative (𐎧) and not the usual legs determinative (𐎡), one can interpret “enchant” and “control.” The former evokes water spells, while the later faces ahead to the ruler.

An example of unidirectional polysemy in Ugaritic appears in El’s dream speech to Kirtu (*CAT* 1.14.ii.45–46). Since I have discussed the dream in the previous chapter (3.8), suffice it to note here that the noun *zbl*, which is used ambiguously in El’s dream message, is understood first as a “sick man” conscripted into Kirtu’s military (*CAT* 1.14.iv.23–24). Yet, later we learn that *zbl* also could mean “ruler, prince,” when Kirtu finds himself on his death bed (*CAT* 1.16.vi.35–36). Since both realizations represent successive fulfillments of the divine dream, El’s statement constitutes a case of unidirectional polysemy.

I have had occasion to discuss Yahweh’s stilling/stirring of the sea in Job 26:12–13 twice in different contexts (2.4.5, 4.1.1). I add here that this form of homographic polysemy also constitutes a case of unidirectional polysemy. Whether read as “stilled” or “disturbed,” רָגַע *rāga* faces forward to both the calming of the heavens and the smashing of Rahab. An example of unidirectional polysemy, this time facing backwards, appears in the Song of the Sea (Exod 15:1–2):

אֲשִׁירָה לַיהוָה כִּי־נָאָה נָאָה סוּס וְרֹכֵב וְרָמָה בָּיָם:
עֲזִי וְזִמְרַת יְהוָה לִישׁוּעָה

’āšīrāh la-YHWH kī-gā’ōh gā’āh sūs wə-rōkbō rāmāh hay-yām
’ōzzī wə-zimrāt yāh wa-yəhī lī lī-yšū’āh

I will sing to Yahweh, for he has triumphed gloriously, horse and rider he hurled into the sea.

My strength *wə-zimrāt yāh*, he is my deliverance.

Here the phrase *wə-zimrāt yāh* can mean “and Yah(weh) is (my) might” (PS *dmr*) or “and Yah(weh) is (my) song” (PS *zmr*). As “Yah(weh) is (my) might” *wə-zimrāt yāh* faces back to עֲזִי *’ōzzī* “my strength.” As “Yah(weh) is (my) song” it looks back to אֲשִׁירָה *’āšīrāh* “I will sing.”

Unidirectional polysemy in Hebrew also occurs in Ps 2:9: תִּרְעֵם בְּשֶׁבֶט בָּרֶזֶל *tərō’ēm bə-šēḇeṭ barzel ki-kli yōšer tənappšēm* “you will break them with an iron staff, you will shatter them like pottery.” We can derive תִּרְעֵם *tərō’ēm*, from רָעַע *r-’-h*, which renders it “break them,” or we may derive it from the root רָעָה *r-’-h*, in which case it means “shepherd them.” The latter would require us to revocalize as תִּרְעֵם *tir’ēm*, but the pre-Masoretic text would be

69. Johnson and Ritner, “Multiple Meaning and Ambiguity in the ‘Demotic Chronicle,’” 498.

ambiguous. Both meanings face ahead, the former to תִּנְאַפְּסֵם *tənappṣēm* “you will shatter them,” and the latter to בַּשֶּׁבֶט *bə-šēbeṭ* “with a staff.”

Unidirectional polysemy is not limited to poetry. Jeremy Schipper has drawn attention to the polysemous nature of Mephibosheth’s self-debasing speeches to David (2 Sam 9:6–8, 19:25–31). For example, when David decrees that Mephibosheth and Ziba divide their inherited property, Mephibosheth declares: “Let him take it all, as long as my lord the king has come בְּשָׁלוֹם *bə-šālōm*. The Hebrew expression can mean “safely” or “in peace.” The former expresses concern for David, while the latter reveals his relief that the king has not come to kill him as a political opponent. As Schipper concludes:

The reader cannot easily discern whether or not he is loyal to David. He or she cannot be sure of Mephibosheth’s intentions based on his speech. Rather than clarifying his position, his exchanges with David only add to the ambiguity of the situation and the complexity of his character.⁷⁰

A final demonstration of unidirectional polysemy comes from the Hebrew text of Ben Sira from Qumran (Sir 6:22 Ms A).

כִּי הַמְסוּר כְּשִׁמְהָ כֵּן הוּא
וְלֹא לְרַבִּים הִיא נְכוּחָה

*ky hmswr k-šmh kn hw’
w-l’ l-rbym hy’ nkwhh*

For discipline, like its name, so it is.
It is not obvious to many.

The polysemy here relies on reading מוֹסֵר *mwsr* either as a noun derived from יָסַר *y-s-r* meaning “discipline,” or as the identically pronounced *hophal* participle from סָוַר *s-w-r* “withdrawn,” as Reymond describes:

Presented with only the first colon of 6:22, a reader might be forgiven for connecting מוֹסֵר (“discipline”) to the common verb יָסַר “to discipline,” and expecting in the next colon to read something about how it causes instruction (*meyasser*, the *Piel* participle) or how it causes someone to become a chastened person (*meyussar*, the *Pual* participle). But, in the second colon, the understanding of מוֹסֵר as discipline no longer seems entirely satisfactory, and the reader must search for another meaning. This disruption of sense and the reader’s expectation complements the message of the verse; reading the text demonstrates the dedication one must have in order to acquire wisdom.⁷¹

70. Jeremy Schipper, “‘Why Do You Still Speak of Your Affairs?’ Polyphony in Mephibosheth’s Exchanges with David in 2 Samuel,” *VT* 54 (2004): 351.

71. Reymond, “Wordplay in the Hebrew to Ben Sira,” 42.

Since both meanings of מוֹסֵר *mwsr* face forward to contents following the passage, this again is a case of unidirectional polysemy.

The effect of unidirectional polysemy upon the reader/listener is both aural and visual. It is one of discovery as well, though the means of discovery differs depending on whether it faces forwards or backwards. When facing backwards, one cannot discover the polysemy until one reaches the polyseme, whereas when facing forwards, one potentially could perceive it when first coming to the polyseme, but its multiple meanings would not be reified until afterwards. The difference may appear subtle, but it is meaningful, because it determines when one is capable of discerning polysemy. In the former case, the process is one of thinking back to the matching material that found realization in the polyseme; in the latter, it involves thinking back to the polyseme when reaching the matching text. Thus, the textual foci are different. Nevertheless, whether facing forwards or backwards the polysemy creates textual instability, since multiple meanings must be considered either way.

4.1.5. MULTIDIRECTIONAL POLYSEMY

Multidirectional polysemy, frequently called “Janus parallelism” or less often “pivotal polysemy,”⁷² is distinguished from unidirectional polysemy in that it

72. For “Janus parallelism,” see Gary A. Rendsburg, “Janus Parallelism in Gen. 49:26,” *JBL* 99 (1980): 291–93; Eduardo Zurro, “Disemia de *brḥ* y paralelismo bifronte en Job 9,25,” *Bib* 62 (1981): 546–47; Duane L. Christensen, “Anticipatory Paronomasia in Jonah 3:7–8 and Genesis 37:2,” *RB* 90 (1983): 261–63; David Toshio Tsumura, “Janus Parallelism in Nah 1:8,” *JBL* 102 (1983): 109–11; Shigeo Takeuchi, “The ‘*Kakekotoba*’ in Hebrew Poetry: Janus Parallelism” [Japanese], *BSNESJ* 31 (1988): 75–86; Amos Frisch, “וְעִנְיָתָם (I Reg 12,7): An Ambiguity and Its Function in the Context,” *ZAW* 103 (1991): 415–18; Shin’ichi Hisamatsu, “A Janus Parallelism in the Gilgamesh Flood Story,” *ASJ* 13 (1991): 419–21; Gary A. Rendsburg, “Notes on Genesis XV,” *VT* 42 (1992): 266–72; Kar-rar Husain, “An Asymmetrical Janus Parallelism in the Gilgamesh Flood Story,” *ASJ* 16 (1994): 307–8; Scott B. Noegel, “An Asymmetrical Janus Parallelism in the Gilgamesh Flood Story,” *ASJ* 16 (1994): 10–12; Noegel, “Janus Parallelism Clusters in Akkadian Literature,” *NABU* (1995): 33–34; W. Horowitz and Sh. Paul, “Two Proposed Janus Parallelisms in Akkadian Literature,” *NABU* (1995): 11–12; Ceresko, “Janus Parallelism in Amos’s ‘Oracles Against the Nations,’ (Amos 1:3–2:16);” Jun Ikeda, “Another Janus Parallelism in the Atrahasis Epic,” *ASJ* 17 (1995): 342–44; Ikeda, “A Possible Case of Janus Parallelism in the Epic of Gilgamesh XI, 130,” *ASJ* 17 (1995): 338–42; Scott B. Noegel, “Janus Parallelism in Job and Its Literary Significance,” *JBL* 115 (1996): 313–20; Noegel, *Janus Parallelism in the Book of Job*; Noegel, “Kirtu’s Allusive Dream”; Paul, “Polysemous Pivotal Punctuation”; Meir Malul, “Janus Parallelism in the Hebrew Bible: Two More Cases (Canticles 4,9,10),” *BZ* 41 (1997): 246–49; Shigeo Takeuchi, “A Polysemous Phrase (*kakekotoba*) in Psalm 100:3” [Japanese], *Exegetica* 10 (1999): 107–

exploits a single word that has two meanings, one of which faces back to a previous line, while the other faces forward to one that follows. Since the initial discovery of the device in the Hebrew Bible,⁷³ dozens more have been found in ancient Near Eastern texts. There are two types of multidirectional polysemy: symmetrical and asymmetrical.⁷⁴ The former obtains in three stichs of poetry while the second over one or two.

Illustrating the device in Sumerian is the following hymn to Inanna (ll. 14–17):

DIĠIR BURU₅.ME.EŠ
 ME.E MU.TIN.MÈN
 DIĠIR.A.NUN.NA DI.DA.ME.EŠ
 ME.E SÚN.ZI.MÈN
 SÚN.ZI A.A ^dEN.LÍL.LÁ.MÈN
 Û.SÚN.ZI SAĠ.ĠÁ DI.A.NI

The gods are mere sparrows,
 I, I am a falcon,
 The Anunna-gods merely wander about,
 I, I am a rampant/true wild cow
 I am the rampant/true wild cow of Enlil,
 His rampant/true wild cow, who leads the way.

Here we may derive the adjective ZI from ZI(G) “be high, rise” or ZI(D) “true, faithful.” As the former, it faces back to DI.DA.ME.EŠ “wander about,” and as the latter it looks ahead to SAĠ.ĠÁ DI.A.NI “leads the way.”⁷⁵ This is a symmetrical case.

An Akkadian example of symmetrical multidirectional polysemy occurs in *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* in a passage that describes the god Marduk.⁷⁶

13; John S. Kselman, “Janus Parallelism in Psalm 75:2,” *JBL* 121 (2002): 531–33; David Toshio Tsumura, “Janus Parallelism in Hab. III 4,” *VT* 54 (2004): 124–28; Herb Basser, “Did Rashi Notice a Janus Parallelism in Ezek 20:37?,” *JHS* 8 (2008): 2–4; Carasik, “Janus Parallelism in Job 1:20.”

The term *pivotal polysemy* is used by Daniel Grossberg, “Multiple Meaning: Part of a Compound Literary Device in the Hebrew Bible,” *EAJT* 4 (1986): 77–86; Grossberg, “Pivotal Polysemy in Jeremiah XXV 10–11a,” *VT* 36 (1986): 481–85; Paul, “Polysemous Pivotal Punctuation.”

73. Cyrus H. Gordon, “New Directions,” *BASP* 15 (1978): 59–66.

74. Cyrus H. Gordon, “Asymmetric Janus Parallelism,” *EI* 16 (1982): 80–81*.

75. Willem H. Ph. Römer, “Eine sumerische Hymne mit Selbstlob Inannas,” *Or* 38 (1969): 97–114; Klein and Sefati, “Word Play in Sumerian Literature,” 27–28, refer to this example as a *double entendre*. See similarly Zackary M. Wainer, “Janus Parallelism in Šulgi V,” *Bible Lands e-Review* (2013/S2): 1–7.

76. See D. J. Wiseman, “A New Text of the Babylonian Poem of the Righteous Sufferer,” *AnSt* 30 (1980): 101–7; Takayoshi Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers: Ludlul*

18. *ik-kar-ra[t]-ma za-mar-ma x x a-lit-tuš*
Yet quickly takes pity ... on the one who begets,
19. *id-du-ud-ma ri-ma-š[a] ú-kan-ni*
He acts quickly and assigns (bad fortune) on the one he loves,
20. *ù ki-i a-ra-aḥ bu-ú-ri it-ta-na-as-ḥa-ra EGIR-šú*
Yet, like a cow with a calf, he keeps turning back to him.

As Benjamin Foster has noted, *ri-ma-š[a]* in line 19 can be understood as if derived from *rāmu* “love,” but it also resonates *rīmu* “wild bull.” The former follows nicely upon *ikkarra[t]ma* “takes pity” and the latter anticipates *araḥ būri* “cow with a calf.”⁷⁷

An asymmetrical example, first discovered by Kilmer, occurs in the Atrahasis Epic 3.viii.9–17.

9. *ki-ma ni-iš-ku-nu [abūba]*
How we have brought about [the flood],
10. *a-wi-lum ib-lu-ṭu i-na [karašī]*
yet a man survived [the cataclysm].
11. *at-ta ma-li-ik i-li ra-bu-ti*
You, a counselor of the great gods,
12. *te-re-ti-iš-[ka]*
at [your] command,
13. *ú-ša-ab-ši [qabla]*
I caused the [destruction].
14. *ša-ni-it-ti-iš-ka*
For your praise,
15. *an-ni-a-am za-ma-ra*
this song
16. *li-iš-mu-ma ^dI-gi-gi*
let the Igigi-gods hear!
17. *li-iš-ši-ru na-ar-bi-ka*
Let them make famous your greatness!

The form *ša-ni-it-ti-iš* in line 14 can derive either from *šanittu*, in which case it means “praise,” or from *šanītu*, in which case we render it “hostility.” The former faces ahead to “song,” while the latter looks back to the “flood,” “cataclysm,” and “destruction.”⁷⁸

Bēl Nēmeqi and the Babylonian Theodicy, ORA 14 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 78–79.

77. Called a “word play” by Foster, *Before the Muses*, 311 n. 1.

78. The double meaning was espied by Anne D. Kilmer, “Fugal Features of Atrahasis: The Birth Theme,” in Vogelzang and Vanstiphout, *Mesopotamian Poetic Language*, 138, and then classified as a Janus parallelism by Scott B. Noegel, “Another Janus Parallelism in the Atrahasis Epic,” *ASJ* 17 (1995): 342–44.

Another asymmetrical form of multidirectional polysemy occurs in the Epic of Gilgamesh 11.14: *šakān abūbi ubla libbāšunu ilānī rabūti* “the great gods, their hearts wanted to bring about the deluge.” Polysemous here is *ubla* (from *wabālu*). It can mean “want, desire, yearn for,” or “carry off, sweep away” in the context of flooding. The former anticipates *libbāšunu* “their hearts,” whereas the latter relates back to *abūbu* “flood.”

For a symmetrical case in Egyptian, I turn to a love poem found in P.Chester Beatty I 2.10–3.1.

sw tḥj m mk=tw=f

It (my heart) has leapt from its place.

bw dī=f ḥj=i mss

It does not allow me to don a tunic.

bw wnḥ=i pḥj=i bhn

I cannot put on my over-garment.

Of note is the noun *mss* “tunic,” here written *ḥj* with the cloth determinative *ḥ*. The consonants *mss* are polysemous and also can be read “totter, leap.”⁷⁹ In addition, the semantic range of *ḥj* (here rendered “don”) includes “take, seize.” This allows us to render the line “it does not allow me to seize my tottering.” In its meaning “totter” *mss* faces back to *tḥj* “leap,” but as “tunic” it faces forward to *bhn* “over-garment.”

The Epic of Baal demonstrates the same device in Ugaritic (*CAT* 1.4.iv.14–18). I have examined this text above (2.4.4), but not as a case of multi-directional polysemy. Here I add that the causative verb *šb ʿr* can mean “shine (like a star)” or “leave.” The former anticipates *kbb* “star” and the latter reiterates the movement of the caravan just prior.⁸⁰

Another example from Ugaritic appears in the message of the god El to Kirtu in his dream (*CAT* 1.14.ii.23–27).⁸¹

23. *ša ydk*

Raise your hands

24. *šmm dbḥ l tr*

to heaven. Sacrifice to Bull,

24. *abk il šrd b l*

your father, El. Adore Baal

79. Though one expects the determinatives *ḥ* and *ḥ*, the consonants imply the connection.

80. Noegel, “Janus Parallelism in the Baal and ‘Anat Story.” The narrator’s use of ambiguity in the Ugaritic texts anticipates similar devices in Homer’s *Odyssey*. See Richardson, “Devious Narrator of the *Odyssey*.”

81. On the close relationship of polysemy to dreams and their interpretations, see Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*. However, the passage here is not included in that book.

25. *b dbḥk bn dgn*
with your sacrifice, the son of Dagan
26. *bm ṣdk w yrd*
with your offering. And let (Kirtu) descend
27. *krt l ggt*
from the rooftops.

Notable here is the lexeme *šrd* in line 24. We may derive it from the root *š-r-d* “adore” or take it as a causative of *y-r-d* “descend” and render the line “adore Baal with your sacrifice” or “cause Baal to descend to the sacrifice.” As the former, *šrd* faces back to “raise your hands,” and as the latter it faces forward to “let Kirtu descend.” The polysemy is likely strictly visual since the two presumably would be pronounced slightly differently (the former as *šarid* and the latter as *šārid*), though admittedly the sound difference appears negligible.⁸²

I offer one more demonstration from the Ugaritic Epic of Baal (*CAT* 1.4.vii.49–52). After Baal is enthroned, he boasts:

49. *aḥdy d ym*
I myself am the one who reigns
50. *lk 'l ilm l ymru*
over the gods, indeed, who commands
51. *ilm w nšm d yšb*
gods and men, who satisfies
52. ['] *hmlt arš*
the multitudes of earth.

In line 50, the verb *ymru* can mean “who commands” or “who fattens.”⁸³ As the former it parallels *ymlk* “who reigns,” and as the latter it faces ahead to *yšb* “who satisfies.”

A Hebrew example of symmetrical multidirectional polysemy was detected by Rendsburg in God’s promise to Abram in Gen 15:1.⁸⁴

אֶל־תִּירָא אַבְרָם
אֲנִכִּי מִגֹּן לָךְ
שְׂכָרְךָ הִרְבֵּה מֵאֵד:

'al-tūrā' 'abrām
'ānōkī māgēn lāk
šəḵarkā harbē mā'ōd

82. See Noegel, “Kirtu’s Allusive Dream,” 303–4.

83. Though only the nominal form *mru* “commander” is attested at Ugarit, the flexibility of the Semitic root system permits such derivations. Cf. the title *mru mlk* “commander of the king” cited in *DULAT*, 572.

84. Rendsburg, “Notes on Genesis XV,” 266–68.

Fear not, Abram!
 I am a מַגֵּן *māḡēn* to you.
 Your reward shall be very great!

The noun מַגֵּן *māḡēn* bears the meaning “shield” (if derived from the root גִּן *g-n-n*) or “gift” (if from the root מִגַּן *m-g-n*). As “shield” it faces back to God’s protective command to “fear not,” and as “giver, donor” it faces ahead to שְׂכָרְךָ *śəḵarkā* “your reward” (cf. Exod 2:9, 1 Kgs 5:30). The polysemy is highlighted for the reader, because Melchizedek had just blessed Abram in Gen 14:20 saying, “blessed is El Elyon who has given (מַגֵּן *miggēn*) your enemies into your hands.” This polysemy functions also like antanaclassis, though in this case the two Hebrew roots are not identical.⁸⁵

An example of an asymmetrical type in biblical Hebrew appears in Song 1:7.

הַגִּידָה לִי שְׂאֵהָבָה נַפְשִׁי אֵיכָה תִרְעָה
 אֵיכָה תִרְבִּיץ בַּצֹּהֲרַיִם

haggīdāh lī še-’āhāḇāh napšī ’ēkāh tīr’eh
’ēkāh tarbīṣ baš-ṣōḥārāyīm

Tell me, O whom my inner-being loves, where do you תִרְעָה *tīr’eh*?
 Where do you cause-(them)-to-lie-down at noon?

At first blush, the verb תִרְעָה *tīr’eh* appears to mean “pasture,” as if derived from the verb רָעָה *rā’ah* (PS *r-’-y*). This meaning anticipates the mention of reposing flocks at midday in the next line. However, the verb also may represent the Aramaic phonemic reflex /d/ > /’/, and thus serve as a dialectical equivalent of the Judahite Hebrew form רָצָה *rāṣāh* (PS *r-d-y*) “desire.” Read in this way, the lexeme follows nicely upon the mention of אֵהָבָה *’āhāḇāh* “loves.” The former reading finds support in Isa 27:10, where the roots רָעָה *r-’-h* “shepherd” and רָבַץ *r-b-ṣ* “lie down” constitute a word pair. Reinforcing the latter reading are the word

85. I add that the same roots create a multidirectional polysemy in Ps 18:35–36: “he trains my hands for battle, my arms can bend a bow of bronze. You give me your מַגֵּן *māḡēn* of victory, and your right hand sustains me; you stoop down to make me great.” As “shield,” מַגֵּן *māḡēn* goes with bow in the previous line. As “gift” it follows nicely the verb תַּתֵּן *titten* “you give” (cf. the related noun מַתָּן *mattān* “gift”) and goes with וְיִמְיִנְךָ תִּסְעָדֵנִי *wī-ymīnākā tīs’ādēnī* “your right hand sustains me.” Note that in Ugaritic, *mgn* means “entreat with gifts,” and that these gifts are often wine or food (in Ugaritic *yn* and *lhm*). Hence, the fitting parallel with *s’d* “sustain,” which essentially means “feed” (Gen 18:5, Judg 19:5). In Ps 104:15, the root סָעַד *s-’-d* is used of bread and wine.

pairs רצה *r-ṣ-h* “desire” and אהב *’-h-b* “love” in Prov 3:12.⁸⁶ As this polyseme operates within two poetic stichs, it constitutes an asymmetrical multidirectional parallelism.⁸⁷ The pronunciation of the two readings was likely identical.

This device was not lost on the Jewish exegetes of the Middle Ages, though they did not provide a term for it. In the previous chapter (3.8), I made reference to Job 7:6, in which תִּקְוָה *tiqwāh* was used for both “thread” and “hope,” the former facing the previous stich and the latter looking to the next. This observation was made already by Abraham ibn Ezra (1089–1164 CE). Note similarly Ps 33:9, in which וַיֵּעָמֵד *way-ya ’āmōd* “and it endured” can also mean “and it put to an end.” As Nahum Ben-Yehuda observes,⁸⁸ David Qimḥi (1160–1235 CE) already saw this as a case of multidirectional polysemy: “If you desire, you can interpret it according to the meaning of that which precedes: concerning the creation of the world. Or according to the meaning that comes after it: “the L(ord) destroys the plans of nations.”⁸⁹

Multidirectional polysemy operates both aurally and visually. It differs from unidirectional polysemy in that it allows one to realize the meanings of the polyseme only when reaching the supporting lines that follow it. The text that precedes the polyseme matches only one of its meanings, so unless listeners/readers catch the potential for a double meaning when coming to the polyseme, they cannot fully realize its second meaning until the lines that follow make it possible. It is only then that the full polysemy is achieved. The effect, then, is one of delayed comprehension, and unlike unidirectional polysemy, this device creates a false sense of textual stability until after the polyseme is realized. Therefore, the device encourages one reading, only to destabilize it afterwards. In essence, it is a form of retrospective patterning.⁹⁰

4.1.6. DOUBLE POLYSEMY

Double polysemy exploits two words in successive stichs, each of which projects multiple meanings.⁹¹ I have drawn attention to double polysemy in the Sumerian

86. Typically one prefers to find the polyseme in parallelism in each of its meanings with lexemes that precede and follow, or to have a word pair in common with them, but this is not always possible. Sometimes the context makes the connection obvious.

87. Noegel, *Janus Parallelism in the Book of Job*, 154–55.

88. I thank Nahum Ben-Yehuda for sharing this with me via personal communication on December 31, 2019.

89. The Hebrew reads: אם תרצה תפרש אותו על הענין שקדם: על בריאת העולם. או על הענין הבא אחריו: ה' הפיר עצת גוים *m trṣh tprš 'wtw 'l h'nyn šqdm: 'l bry't h'wlm. 'w 'l h'nyn hb' 'hryw: h' hpyr 'št gwym*. See similarly Bassor, “Did Rashi Notice a Janus Parallelism in Ezek 20:37?”

90. See Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 64.

91. Gary A. Rendsburg, “Double Polysemy in Genesis 49:6 and Job 3:6,” *CBQ* 44 (1982): 48–51; Rendsburg, “Double Polysemy in Proverbs 31:19,” in *Humanism, Culture, and*

poem Ninmešarra in the previous chapter, where it functioned to demonstrate the divine ineffability of Inanna (3.15.2).

To illustrate double polysemy in Akkadian, I turn to Ea’s command to Utnapištim in the Epic of Gilgamesh 11.25–27:

25. *muš-šir mešrām-ma* (NÍG.TUKU) *še’-i napšāti* (ZI.MEŠ)
Reject riches and seek life!
26. [*m*]a-ak-ku-ru ze-er-ma na-piš-ti bul-liṭ
Spurn property and save life.
27. [*š*]u-li-ma zēr nap-šá-a-ti ka-la-ma a-na lib-bi eleppi (MÁ)
Put the seed of all living creatures into the heart of the boat.

Elsewhere I have discussed the polysemous dimension of Ea’s secret warning.⁹² Specifically, I noted that the line “spurn property, keep living beings alive” employs two polysemes: *zērma* “spurn,” which can be read as *šērma* “construct”; and *makkūru* “property,” which suggests *makūru* “boat” (from Sumerian MÁ.GUR₈), thus reinforcing the two central messages of Ea’s instructions.⁹³ As “spurn property” the double polysemy faces backwards. As “construct a boat” it faces forward to the mention of the *elippu* “boat.” Therefore, this case of double polysemy is multidirectional as well.

Representative of double polysemy in Egyptian is a well-known love poem in P.Chester Beatty I (C 4.10–5.1), in which the lover extols his beloved as follows:

p3 nty s' nh3 ib=i 3h n=i sn.(t)=i r phr.wt nb.wt wr sw n=i r t3 dmd.jt p3j=i
wd3.(t) p3j=s(t) 'q.w n bnr ptr st k3 snb wn=s(t) ir.t(j)=s(t) rnpj h'.t=i

that is what will revive my heart, the spirit of me, my sister, more than any medicine. Greater is she to me, than the compendium.

The eye of Horus is her entering from the outside. Seeing her, then, is health. She opens her eyes, rejuvenating my body.

The polysemes in these two lines offer a veritable cornucopia of meanings. The noun *dmd.t* can mean “amulet” or a “compendium” of medical spells. The noun *wd3.(t)* is written simply as *ꜥ*, and is typically understood as the “eye of

Language in the Near East: Studies in Honor of Georg Krotkoff, ed. Asma Afsaruddin and A. H. Mathias Zahniser (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 267–74.

92. Scott B. Noegel, “A Janus Parallelism in the Gilgamesh Flood Story,” *ASJ* 13 (1991): 419–21.

93. The passage is also rich in paronomasia, especially in the repeated sounds /b/, /l/, and /m/, and the phrases *muššir mešrē* “abandon wealth,” *libbi elippi* “heart of the boat,” and the words *zērma* “spurn” and *zēr* “seed.”

Horus,” but it also can mean an “amulet” depicting the healing power of the eye of Horus. Thus, *dmdj.t* faces back to *phr.t* “medicines” and forward to *wḏj.(t)*, in both its senses; and *wḏj.(t)* looks back to *dmdj.t* in both its senses, but as an eye, it faces forward to the verb *ptr* “see.” The polysemes gain added reference in the last stich, when the lover states that “seeing her” is *snb* “health” and then describes the opening of her eyes (the verb with the determinative *ꜥ*) as having the power to rejuvenate his body.⁹⁴

For another demonstration of double polysemy in Egyptian, I point to the beginning of the later Book of Thoth (P.Vienna V01), which describes the *bas* of Ra, an esoteric metaphor for “sacred books”: *st n nb.[w ḏn]ḥ i-ir=w ḥl r pḥ rh ... mḥ pḥj pḥ sh nḥ=f ḏ[w.w ...] nḥ ḏm* “they are possessors of wings. They fly to the Wise-One (Thoth).... The document is a nest. The books are its/his young ones” (col. 3, l. 14–15).⁹⁵ Richard Jasnow has shown that the line contains two polysemes.⁹⁶ The first is *sh* (= *sš*), meaning both “nest” and “document,” and the second is *ḏm*, both “papyrus-roll” and “generation.”

A wonderful example of double polysemy in Ugaritic occurs in the Tale of Aqhat (*CAT* 1.19.i.36–42). In this pericope the hero Danel learns of his son Aqhat’s death and mourns by tearing his mantle (ll. 36–37). Afterwards, the narrator informs us that Danel:

- 39. *yšly 'rpt b*
Curses the clouds in the
- 40. *ḥm un yr 'rpt*
grievous heat, the (early) rain. “Let the clouds
- 41. *tmṯr b qz ṯl yll*
rain in the summer. Let the dew lay dew
- 42. *l ḡnbm*
upon the grapes.”

Here both *un* and *qz* are polysemous. The first we may understand as “grievous,” in the sense of a “grievous heat.” The context of the story is, after all, a drought. Yet at the same time, we may read it as a reference to Danel’s grief for

94. Noegel, *Janus Parallelism in the Book of Job*, 179–80.

95. The fragments of this Demotic text date to the first–second centuries CE. See Richard Jasnow and Karl-Th. Zauzich, *The Ancient Egyptian Book of Thoth: A Demotic Discourse on Knowledge and Pendant to the Classical Hermetica*, 2 vols. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005), 153–54, 158. On the *bas* of Ra, see Louis V. Žabkar, *A Study of the Ba Concept in Ancient Egyptian Texts*, SAOC 34 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 49.

96. Richard Jasnow, “‘Caught in the Web of Words’—Remarks on the Imagery of Writing and Hieroglyphs in the Book of Thoth,” *JARCE* 47 (2011): 300. He also notes that the same polysemes occur in the Nag Hammadi Coptic tractate, *The Discourse on the Eighth and the Ninth*.

his son, that is, “in the heat of (his) grief.” The former meaning points forward to the absence of Baal and the lack of rain (ll. 44–46), whereas the latter points back to Danel’s mourning ritual. In addition, *qz* can mean “summer” or “figs” (i.e., “summer fruit”). As the former, *qz* faces back to the *ḥm* “heat” in line 40, and as the latter, it faces forward to *ḡnbm* “grapes.” It is thus a case of multidirectional double polysemy.⁹⁷

Illustrating double polysemy in Hebrew is a ingenious case, spotted by Rendsburg, in the last testament of Jacob (Gen 49:6).⁹⁸

בְּסֹדֶם אֶל-תְּבֹא נַפְשִׁי
בְּקֹהֶלֶם אֶל-תִּהְדָּךְ כְּבָדִּי

bə-sōdām 'al-tāḇō' nap̄šī
bi-qhālām 'al-tēḥad kəḇōdī

Let not my person אֶתְבֹּא *tāḇō'* their council,
Let not my being אֶתְהָד *tēḥad* in their assembly.

Two polysemes are active here—the verbs תְּבֹא *tāḇō'* and תִּהְדָּךְ *tēḥad*. The former is vocalized as if it derives from the verb בּוֹא *bō'* meaning “enter.” However, we also can derive it from the verb אָבָה *'āḇāh* meaning “desire.” The verb תִּהְדָּךְ *tēḥad* is pointed as if it derives from the root יחד *y-h-d*, in which case it means “unite with, be one with.” However, it also could derive from the root חדה *ḥ-d-h*, meaning “rejoice.” Both verbs require revocalization to achieve their dual meanings. To read “desire,” we must point the verb as תְּבֹה *tōḇē'*, and to read “rejoice,” we must vocalize תִּהְדָּךְ *tīḥad* (a similar double polysemy appears in Job 3:6). Nevertheless, the earlier consonantal text would have been ambiguous.

Demonstrating the Israelites’ keenness for combining polysemous devices is Job 14:7, in which the poet achieves a double polysemy by way of two contronyms. The line reads: כִּי יֵשׁ לָעֵץ תִּקְוָה אִם-יִכָּרֵת וְעוֹד יַחֲלִיף וְיִנָּקֵתוּ לֹא תִחְדָּל *kī yēš lā-ēš tiqwāh 'im yikārēṭ wə-ōd yaḥālīṭ wə-yōnaqtō lō' tēhdāl* “at least there is hope for a tree. If it is cut down it will renew (itself), and its new shoots will not fail.” The verbs in question are יַחֲלִיף *yaḥālīṭ* and תִּחְדָּל *tēhdāl*. The former can mean “renew” or “pass away” and the latter “cease” or “survive.”⁹⁹ Thus, we can render the same line more pessimistically: “indeed, there is hope for a tree. If it is cut down it might pass away, and its new shoots might not survive” (cf. Ps 90:5–6).

97. I owe this discovery to my former student Katherine Burge.

98. Rendsburg, “Double Polysemy in Genesis 49:6 and Job 3:6,” 48–51.

99. On these meanings, see Gordis, “Studies in Hebrew Roots of Contrasted Meaning,” 38–41, 50–51.

Daniel's prayer of thanksgiving offers a fine case of double polysemy in Aramaic. After God discloses Nebuchadnezzar's dream to Daniel, the prophet proclaims, "he reveals the deep and secret things, he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him" (Dan 2:22). In Aramaic, the line rendered "light dwells with him" is **עֲמָה שָׂרָא [וְנִהֲרָא] ū-nhūrā' [ū-nhōrā']** 'immēh šārē'. It contains two polysemes. The first is **נִהֲרָא nāhūrā'** "light" or "insight." See, for example, **נִהֲרִי nāhīrū** in Dan 5:11, 5:14, which is identified with **וְשָׂכְלָתָנִי וְחִכְמָה wə-šōklātānū wə-hōkmāh** "understanding and wisdom," and is closer in form to the Kethib. The second is **שָׂרָא šārē'** "dwells," which also means "loosen, (dis)solve," as in knots or dreams (Dan 3:25, 5:12, 5:16). Moreover, the double polysemy here demonstrates multidirectional polysemy as well. As "the light dwells within him," the line looks back to "he knows what lies in darkness" in the previous stich. As "insight is solved with him," it faces forward to "you have given me wisdom and power" and "you have made known to us the matter of the king" in the next two lines. The multidirectional double polysemy combines God's ability to decode dreams and disclose deep things from darkness.

Double polysemy has a destabilizing effect on readers/listeners. In addition to forcing one to consider the multiple meanings of each polyseme, one must contemplate the relationship of one polyseme to the other. Consequently, double polysemy has a halting effect on the exegetical process. While it might be possible for readers to engage the text by pausing, focusing, and arriving at interpretive options, it is virtually impossible for a listener, especially in cases that require a change in vocalization. Double polysemy is a natural extension of unidirectional and multidirectional polysemy.

4.1.7. BILINGUAL POLYSEMY

Bilingual polysemy occurs when a word or signs may be read as reflecting more than one language in a single context. Such cases illustrate the multilingual environments of the ancient literati. Inherent in the writing of Akkadian is the use of Sumerian. Throughout the history of Akkadian, scribes retained a knowledge of Sumerian, even centuries after it had ceased to be a living language. Moreover, As Frahm explains:

Mesopotamian scholars regarded these two languages, in spite of their great differences, as closely related and, unlike other idioms, capable of conveying essential truths. These beliefs provide the foundation for their strategy to interpret individual elements of Akkadian words (as well as names and logograms) in the light of Sumerian.¹⁰⁰

100. Frahm, *Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries*, 72.

Therefore, it is not surprising that we should find examples of bilingual polysemy in Akkadian texts involving Sumerian. The thirty-third name that the gods bestow upon Marduk in *Enuma Elish* 7.83–84 demonstrates this well. Here we read: ^dA.GILIM.MA *šaḳû nāsīḫ agī āšir šalgi bānu KI-tim eliš* A.MEŠ *mukīn elāti* “^dA.GILIM.MA, the lofty, who drives out waves, who marshals snow. Creator of the earth above the waters, establisher of the on-high.” An ancient commentary to this text reads the Sumerian sign MA in the name ^dA.GILIM.MA as the equivalent of MÚ meaning *banû* “create, build,” and thus also phonetically as *mû*, that is, the Akkadian word for “water.” Moreover, the Sumerian A also means “water.” Thus the commentary sees the name ^dA.GILIM.MA as meaning *bānu eršetim eliš mē* “the creator of Earth on top of the waters.”¹⁰¹ As Lambert reminds us, “such explanations are often spoken of as folk etymology or word play in the modern world, but this may trivialize what was serious to the ancients. To understand their thought we must take these matters seriously.”¹⁰²

Less expected, yet attested, is a case of bilingual polysemy between Akkadian and Egyptian noted by Rykle Borger. In the annals of Sargon II, we find the following account in the campaign against rebel Syrians: ^MSIPA-’e ^{kī}LÚSIPA *ša šēnašu ḥabta ēdānuššu iparšidma* “SIPA fled alone like a SIPA whose flock has been stolen.” The Sumerogram SIPA appears twice in the passage. Typically it means *rē’û* “shepherd” in Akkadian, and certainly this is the sense it bears in the second instance. However, the first SIPA is different. The determinative informs us that it must be a name or title, and as Borger has shown,¹⁰³ it is a case of learned paronomasia that understands the Akkadian *rē’û* as the Egyptian name Ra (*r’*), the sungod pharaoh. This permits us to translate the line “Re fled alone like a shepherd (= *rē’û*) whose flock has been stolen.” Since the Egyptian pharaoh was regarded as the “shepherd” of his people, the barb is particularly apt. This case is effective both visually, since the scribe used the Sumerogram SIPA in both instances, and aurally, since the polysemy would be realized when recited in Akkadian.

A possible second case of Sumerian/Akkadian and Egyptian polysemy appears in a Late Assyrian commentary to the exorcist text known as Marduk’s Address to the Demons. In particular, Frahm has questioned whether the signs ^dMES used to designate Marduk reflect the Egyptian *msī* “give birth,” since the context is one of Marduk’s auto-creation.¹⁰⁴

101. Discussed by A. R. George, *Babylonian Topographical Texts*, OLA 40 (Leuven: Peeters, 1992), 387. For other forms of bilingual polysemy, see Michalowski, “Where’s Al?”

102. W. G. Lambert, “Etymology,” in *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Richard J. Coggin and Jamie Leslie Houlden (London: SCM Press, 1990), 215.

103. R. Borger, “Das Ende des Ägyptischen Feldherrn SIB’E = *st*,” *JNES* 19 (1960): 49–53.

104. Frahm, *Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries*, 358 n. 1708.

Egyptian texts have not yielded any evidence of bilingual polysemy. A likely reason for this is the Egyptians' relative early geographic isolation from the other cultures of the Near East. This isolation fostered a negative attitude toward non-Egyptian cultures and languages that also informed its cosmic borders. Indeed, Egypt's closest neighbors, the Libyans, Ethiopians, and Levantine Semites, are typically portrayed as subjugated enemies on pharaoh's footstool and are directly identified as embodiments of *ḥsf.t* "chaos," the opposite of *mꜣꜥ.t* "truth, justice."¹⁰⁵ Moreover, even in the fourteenth century BCE, when Egyptians at Amarna learned Akkadian, they did so with a select purpose, as Veldhuis observes: "The main and perhaps only use of cuneiform in this context was international correspondence—there was little virtue in collecting traditional cuneiform scholarly literature for its own sake."¹⁰⁶

Additional evidence for Egyptian knowledge of other languages appears in at least three texts that capture foreign tongues for the purpose of style switching. In each case, the language is Semitic. In the famous Merneptah ("Israel") stela, the king boasts: *nb.w ꜥḥd ḥr ḏd šꜣrm* "all the princes (of Syro-Canaan) lie prostrate saying, 'peace'" (l. 26). Here *šꜣrm* renders the Semitic *šalām* "peace" in Egyptian. The author chose to use this term, and not the ordinary Egyptian word *ḥtp* "peace," in order to capture the foreigners' pleas. The Tale of Sinuhe (P.Berlin 3022, l. 219) also makes reference to the *mkꜣ* of Qedem (or perhaps Qatna), which renders the Semitic noun *mlk* "king."¹⁰⁷ Similarly, in the satirical letter in P.Anastasi I, a scribe demonstrates his mastery of the scribal arts over his superior by describing numerous cities and other topographical features in the land of Syro-Canaan. At one point (17.7–17.8), he satirizes his opponent by addressing him as *ꜥwpꜣr ydꜥ*, the Egyptian reflection of Northwest Semitic *spr ydꜥ* "learned scribe."¹⁰⁸

105. Nevertheless, since the Amarna period, the Egyptians appeared to have developed a complex universalistic theological view concerning foreigners and their languages. See the comment of Serge Sauneron, "La différenciation des langages d'après la tradition égyptienne," *BIFAO* 60 (1960): 41: "Au delà de cette question 'technique' des langages, un point intéressant ressort aussi de cette recension. Dans un monde stable, les différences, comme les similitudes, ne sont pas des caractères fortuits, apparaissant à des moments donnés de l'histoire: elles sont éternelles, et prévues dès la création."

106. Veldhuis, *History of the Cuneiform Lexical Traditions*, 302. It appears that Hittites introduced Akkadian to the Amarna scribes, though the texts also show Mesopotamian influence. For additional evidence of knowledge of Semitic in the Bronze Age, see Ariel Shisha-Halevy, "An Early North-West Semitic Text in the Egyptian Hieratic Script," *Or* 47 (1978): 145–62; Richard C. Steiner, "Northwest Semitic Incantations in an Egyptian Medical Papyrus of the Fourteenth Century B.C.E.," *JNES* 51 (1992): 191–200.

107. See Thomas Schneider, "Sinuhes Notiz über die Könige: Syrisch-anatolische Herrschertitel in ägyptischer Überlieferung," *ÄL* 12 (2002): 261–63, who suggests that the text also refers to the Luwian term for "king" (*ḥntiwš* "Ḥantawattish").

108. See Hans-Werner Fischer-Elfert, *Die satirische Streitschrift des Papyrus Anastasi I: Übersetzung und Kommentar*, ÄgAbh 34 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1986), 152; Edward

Nevertheless, despite evidence that some Egyptians possessed a working knowledge of other languages,¹⁰⁹ we lack examples of bilingual polysemy.¹¹⁰

F. Wente, *Letters from Ancient Egypt*, WAW 1 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990), 110 n. 10. The Egyptian text employs the scribe and man determinatives (𓄀𓄁) after the first word, and the hand to mouth determinative (𓄂), after the second. The scribe also uses group writing to spell other Semitic words including *m'rk3bît* (= Semitic *mrkbt* “chariot,” 19.7; 26.1), *b3k3* “balsam tree” (= Semitic *b'k*, 23.7), and possibly *wšb* usually meaning “respond,” but here (20.4) for “dwell” (= Semitic *w/yšb*).

109. Additional evidence for knowledge of Semitic in Egypt includes a number of execration texts that transcribe Semitic proper names. See Kurt Sethe, *Die Ächtung feindlicher Fürsten, Völker und Dinge auf altägyptischen Tongefäßscherben des Mittleren Reiches: Nach den Originalen im Berliner Museum herausgegeben und erklärt, mit 33 Tafeln* (Berlin: Verlag der Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1926); Georges Posener, *Princes et pays d'Asie et de Nubie Textes hiératiques sur des figurines d'envoûtement du Moyen Empire, suivis de Remarques paléographiques sur les textes similaires de Berlin par B. can der Wall* (Bruxelles: Fondation égyptologique Reine Élisabeth, 1940). See also the papyrus discussed by Thomas Schneider, “Die semitischen und ägyptischen Namen der syrischen Sklaven des Papyrus Brooklyn 35.1446 verso,” *UF* 19 (1987): 255–82. In the New Kingdom, the Egyptian script also was used to write several words and phrases. See Shisha-Halevy, “Early North-West Semitic Text in the Egyptian Hieratic Script”; also P. Anastasi I, studied by Fischer-Elfert, *Die satirische Streitschrift des Papyrus Anastasi I*, 198–200; James E. Hoch, *Semitic Words in Egyptian Texts of the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Periods* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), no. 6; Thomas Schneider, “Mag.pHarris XII,1–5: Eine kanaanäische Beschwörung für die Löwenjagd?,” *GM* 112 (1989): 53–63.

110. In the Achaemenid period there is evidence that some elite Egyptian scribes had a working knowledge of Aramaic, and of course, still later, the PGM texts and several archives reveal that some scribes knew Greek as well. See Sven Peter Vleeming and J. W. Wesselius, “An Aramaic Hymn from the Fourth Century B.C.,” *BiOr* 39 (1982): 502–9; Richard C. Steiner and Charles F. Nims, “You Can’t Offer Your Sacrifice and Eat It Too: A Polemical Poem from the Aramaic Text in Demotic Script,” *JNES* 43 (1984): 89–114; Steiner and Nims, “Ashurbanipal and Shamash-shum-ukin: A Tale of Two Brothers from the Aramaic Text in Demotic Script,” *RB* 92 (1985): 60–81; Steiner, “The Aramaic Text in Demotic Script: The Liturgy of a New Year’s Festival Imported from Bethel to Syene by Exiles from Rash,” *JAOS* 111 (1991): 362–63; Steiner, “Papyrus Amherst 63: A New Source for the Language, Religion, and History of the Aramaeans,” in *Studia Aramaica: New Sources and New Approaches*, ed. M. J. Geller, J. C. Greenfield, and M. P. Weitzman, *JJSSup* 4 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 199–207; Steiner, “The Scorpion Spell from Wadi Hammamat: Another Aramaic Text in Demotic Script,” *JNES* 60 (2001): 259–68; Katelijn Vandorpe, *The Bilingual Family Archive of Dryton, His Wife Apollonia and Their Daughter Senmouthis (P. Dryton)*, CH 4 (Brussels: Peeters, 2002); Vandorpe and Sofie Waebens, *Reconstructing Pathyris’ Archives: A Multicultural Community in Hellenistic Egypt*, CH 3 (Brussels: Peeters, 2009); Joachim Friedrich Quack, “The Interaction of Egyptian and Aramaic Literature,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Achaemenid Age: Negotiating Identity in an International Context*, ed. Oded Lipschits,

Ugarit was an international port in which no less than seven different languages are attested, thus it should not surprise us to find cases of bilingual polysemy in Ugaritic texts.¹¹¹ A particularly adept example in the Tale of Kirtu also constitutes a case of double polysemy: *db akl l qryt ḥt l bt ḥbr* “prepare food for the city, wheat for the house of Khubur” (CAT 1.14.ii.27–29).¹¹² Here *qryt* means “city,”¹¹³ but also reflects the Akkadian *qarītu* “granary.”¹¹⁴ Similarly, *bt ḥbr* means “house of Khubur,” but also renders the Akkadian *bīt ḥubūri* “beer room,” that is, a room devoted to the storage and fermenting of grains.¹¹⁵ Thus, we have a case of double bilingual polysemy.¹¹⁶

Biblical scholars thus far have proposed the existence of Hebrew-Egyptian, Hebrew-Akkadian, Hebrew-Aramaic, Aramaic-Akkadian, and Hebrew-Greek bilingual polysemes. A Hebrew-Egyptian example appears in the insult of Pharaoh to Moses in Exod 10:10: רָאוּ כִּי רָעָה נֶגֶד פְּנֵיכֶם *rā’ ū kī rā’ āh neḡed pānēkem* “see, indeed evil is before you!” The noun rendered “evil” (i.e., רָעָה *rā’ āh*) also can be read as the name of the Egyptian solar god Ra, thus allowing us to translate the verse: “see, indeed Ra is against you!” The bilingual polysemy on Ra repeats in Exod 5:19, 32:12, and possibly occurs in Exod 32:22 and Num 11:1.¹¹⁷ Another Hebrew-Egyptian example is that of the name Moses, which we can derive from the Hebrew verb for “draw water” (מָשָׁה *māšāh*, PS *m-t-y*) or the Egyptian lexeme

Gary N. Knoppers, and Manfred Oeming (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 375–401; Marja Vierros, *Bilingual Notaries in Hellenistic Egypt: A Study of Greek as a Second Language*, CH 5 (Brussels: Peeters, 2012).

111. See Anne-Sophie Dalix, “Exemples de bilinguisme à Ougarit. Iloumilkou: La double identité d’un scribe,” in *Mosaïque de langues, mosaïque culturelle: Le bilinguisme dans le Proche Oriente ancien, Actes de la table ronde du 18 novembre 1995 organisée par l’URA 1062*, ed. Françoise Briquel-Chatonnet, AnS 1 (Paris: Librairie d’Amérique et d’Orient, 1996), 81–90. On the multilingual erudition of Ugarit’s scribes, see Ignacio Márquez-Rowe, “Scribes, Sages, and Seers in Ugarit and Syria,” in *Scribes, Sages, and Seers: The Sage in the Eastern Mediterranean World*, ed. Leo G. Perdue (Göttingen; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 95–108.

112. See Noegel, “Kirtu’s Allusive Dream,” 304–5.

113. *DULAT*, s.v. “*qryt*.”

114. *CAD Q*, s.v. “*qarītu*.”

115. *CAD H*, s.v. “*ḥubūru A*.”

116. The passage also constitutes unidirectional polysemy, since *qryt* as both “granary” and “city” points ahead to the next line, the former to *ḥt* “wheat” and *bt ḥbr* “beer room,” and the latter to *bt ḥbr* as “house of Khubur.”

117. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 72; Gary A. Rendsburg, “Bilingual Wordplay in the Bible,” *VT* 38 (1988): 357–62; Rendsburg, “The Egyptian Sun-God Ra in the Pentateuch,” *Henoch* 10 (1988): 3–15; Rendsburg, “Targum Onqelos to Exod 10:5, 10:15, Numb 22:5, 22:11,” *Henoch* 12 (1990): 15–17.

mss meaning "infant" (Exod 2:10).¹¹⁸ It also has been suggested that we read the name חָם *hām* "Ham" in Gen 9–10 bilingually as the Hebrew name and the Egyptian noun *hm* "servant." The latter underscores his role as the progenitor of the Egyptians (Gen 10:6) and it anticipates Noah's curse that Ham will become a עֶבֶד *ʿēbed* "servant" to his brothers (Gen 9:25).¹¹⁹ A final example of a Hebrew-Egyptian polyseme discovered by Christopher Hays occurs in Isa 14:19. Here the prophet describes the fallen king: "you are cast forth away from your grave, like a defiled נָצַר [*nēšer*]." As Hays shows, the Hebrew noun meaning "shoot," here also reflects the Egyptian *ntr* "divinized dead."¹²⁰ Hays also has suggested that we understand Isaiah's rebuke of Judah's covenant with מָוֶת *mawet* "death" (Isa 28:15) as a polysemous reference to the Egyptian goddess *mwt* "Mut," and therefore, as a reference to the Egyptian alliance.¹²¹

A Hebrew-Akkadian example of bilingual polysemy appears in Isa 10:8, which Machinist has shown, portrays the Assyrian king as rhetorically asking הֲלֹא מְלָכִים יַחֲדוּ שָׂרֵי *hā-lō' šāray yaḥdāw mēlākīm* "are not my commanders all kings?"¹²² The noun שָׂרֵי *šāray* "princes" is a bilingual polyseme that reflects the Akkadian *šarrū* "kings," even as the Hebrew מְלָכִים *mēlākīm* reflects the Assyrian *malkū* "foreign rulers."¹²³

118. The narrative of Moses's birth encourages one to connect the meaning of his name with the statement of pharaoh's daughter, מִן הַמַּיִם מָשִׁיתִהוּ *min ham-mayīm māšīṭihū* "I drew him from the water" (Exod 2:10). However, we then should expect the Hebrew form of his name to be מָשִׁי *māšīy* (masculine singular passive participle), meaning "he was drawn (from the water)." It is not until the events at the Reed Sea that the grammatical form of the name (singular masculine active participle) is realized, as he draws the Israelites through to dry land. Cherry, *Paronomasia and Proper Names in the Old Testament*, 41, sees no paronomasia in the passage, since the daughter's words "were not intended as a play on the name, but as an explanation of the name." Nevertheless, Cherry was unaware of the bilingual polysemy inherent in his name.

119. Rendsburg, "Wordplay in the Hebrew Bible," 144–45. On the Egyptian conception of peoples that underlies the portrayal of Ham's sons, see Abraham Malamat, "The Conception of Ham and His Sons in the Table of Nations (Gen 10:6–20)," in Knoppers and Hirsch, *Egypt, Israel, and the Ancient Mediterranean World*, 359–60.

120. He also reads נַצְרִים *nāšūrīm* in this way in Isa 65:4. See Christopher B. Hays, "An Egyptian Loanword in the Book of Isaiah and the Deir 'Alla Inscription: Hebr. *nšr*, Aram. *nqr*, and Eg. *ntr* as '[Divinized] Corpse,'" *JAEL* 4 (2012): 17–23.

121. Christopher B. Hays, "The Covenant with Mut: A New Interpretation of Isaiah 28:1–22," *VT* 60 (2010): 212–40.

122. Peter Machinist, "Assyria and Its Image in the First Isaiah," *JAOS* 103 (1983): 734–35.

123. William Morrow, "'To Set the Name' in the Deuteronomic Centralization Formula: A Case of Cultural Hybridity," *JSS* 55 (2010): 365–83, has proposed that the Deuteronomic expression לְשֵׁךְ שְׁמוֹ *lā-šakkēn šēmō* "to set the name" (Deut 12:11, 14:23, 16:2, 16:6, 16:11, 26:2) constitutes bilingual polysemy on the Akkadian phrase *šuma šakānu* "to set the name." A departure from the usual Hebrew expression לְשֵׁם שְׁמוֹ *lā-šūm šēmō* (Deut 12:21, 14:24), Morrow suggests that the polyseme has a subversive function: "In the very

More recently Shira Golani has advanced the proposal that the famous images of swords made into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks (or vice versa) found in Isa 2:4, Mic 4:3, Joel 4,10, constitute cases of bilingual Hebrew-Akkadian polysemy. In particular, she suggests that חַרְבוֹתָם *harbōtām* “swords” can be understood as “plows” or as a part of a plow (as in m. Kelim 21:2 and in Syriac), and that מְזַמְרוֹת *mazmērōt* “pruning hooks” echoes the Akkadian *azmarû* “spear, lance.” According to the taxonomy I offer here, one also can understand this as a case of double polysemy. Golani concludes that the device here “serves for more than just aesthetics, and is not a mere ‘play’ on words. Rather, it is a rhetoric device, enhancing the prophetic message, revolving around the theme of reversal of war and peace.”¹²⁴ I add that we also can understand it as performative in function. In the process of grasping the polysemy, the weapons are transformed.

An example of Hebrew-Aramaic polysemy appears in Eliphaz’s query (Job 4:2–3):

הַנִּסָּה דְּבַר אֱלֹיִךְ תִּלְאָה וְעָצָר בְּמִלִּין מִי יוֹכֵל:
הֲנֵה יִסְרְתָּ רַבִּים וְיָדִים רַפּוֹת תַּחֲזִיק:

hā-nissāh dābār ’ēlekā til’eh wa-’šōr bə-millīn mī yūkāl
hinnēh yissartā rabbīm wə-yādayim rāpōt təhazzēq

If one tries a word with you, will it be too much? But who can withhold words?
See, you have admonished many, you have strengthened weakened hands.

Of note in this passage is the verb יִסְרְתָּ *yissartā*. Typically, exegetes derive it from the Hebrew verb יָסַר *yāsar* and translate “you have admonished.” However, numerous Aramaic features in the book of Job (including מִלִּין *millīn* “words” in this passage), permit us to read it as if derived from the Aramaic verb יָסַר *yasar* meaning “bind, strengthen.” Supporting the reading is the parallel תַּחֲזִיק *təhazzēq* “you have strengthened,” and the fact that these two roots and meanings appear together elsewhere (Isa 8:11, Hos 7:15). Thus, the bilingual polyseme casts Eliphaz as offering an encouraging word that acknowledges Job’s

act of mimicking the dominating culture’s linguistic forms, there is an effort to make an ideological expression that serves the interests of the colonized, not the colonizer.... The expression *lškn šmw* simultaneously acknowledges the reality of Neo-Assyrian hegemony while also subverting it” (382). The difficulty in seeing the expression as a case of bilingual polysemy derives from the fact that the Hebrew root ש-כ-נ *š-k-n* “set, establish,” while indeed cognate with the Akkadian verb *šakānu*, is well attested in Hebrew. Therefore, while it might constitute an allusion to an Akkadian idiom, it cannot be considered polysemy, since the expression in Hebrew means the same as it does in Akkadian.

124. Shira J. Golani, “Swords that are Plowshares: Another Case of (Bilingual) Wordplay in Biblical Prophecy?,” *Bib* 98 (2017): 432–33.

prior support of others, while simultaneously suggesting that it is now his turn for chastisement.¹²⁵

Another case of Hebrew-Aramaic polysemy appears in Exod 16:15, where the Aramaic query מָן הוּא *mān hū* “what is it?” serves as an exegesis for the name of the מָן *mān* “manna” in Exod 16:33.¹²⁶

A third case of Hebrew-Aramaic polysemy appears in the story of Jacob and Laban when Jacob swears an oath to him by the פֶּחַד *paḥad* of Isaac” (Gen 31:53). Here one can read פֶּחַד *paḥad* as Hebrew for “terror,” and thus as an epithet of Yahweh, or as Aramaic for “flock,” “tribal clan,” or “thigh” (PS *phd*).¹²⁷ The polyseme would have operated solely on a visual level. It fits well the Aramaean setting of the story and draws attention to key elements in the cycle (cf. Gen 31:47).¹²⁸

Wolters has discovered a fascinating case of Hebrew-Greek polysemy in reference to Lady Wisdom in Prov 31:27.¹²⁹ There we hear that צוֹפִיָּה הַלִּיכוֹת בֵּיתָהּ *šōpīyyāh hālīkōt bēlāh* “she oversees the ways of her household.” Here צוֹפִיָּה *šōpīyyāh* can be understood as Hebrew for “she oversees” or as a bilingual reference to the Greek noun σοφία *sofia* “wisdom.”

An Aramaic-Akkadian bilingual polyseme appears in Dan 2:41, in reference to the feet of the statue in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, which Daniel describes as composed of פֶּחַר *peḥār* “clay.” When the king recounted his dream for Daniel he did not use this term, but rather the synonym חֲסָפָא *ḥaspā* “clay” (Dan 2:33–34). Daniel’s switch of lexemes provides him with the means for interpreting this part of his dream as portending a “divided kingdom” (Dan 2:41). The mantic interpretation is akin to Mesopotamian omen texts,¹³⁰ and rests on the reading of פֶּחַר *peḥār*, not as the Aramaic word for “clay,” but as the Akkadian *puḥru* “assembly (of nations).”¹³¹

The Aramaic Proverbs of Ahiqar also contain a fine example of bilingual Aramaic-Akkadian polysemy: אַרְיָה לֹא אִיתִי בִּימָא עַל כֵּן יִקְרְאוּן לְקַפָּא לְבָא *ʾryh l’ ʾyty b-ym’ l kn yqr’wn l-qp’ lb’* “there is no lion in the sea, therefore they call the *qp’*-fish a *lb’*” (C1 1:165). Here the name לְבָא *lb’* means both “lion” (in Aramaic

125. Noegel, *Janus Parallelism in the Book of Job*, 43–44.

126. Greenstein, “Wordplay, Hebrew,” 971.

127. The same bilingual polysemy may be active in Job 3:25, Job 4:14.

128. Noegel, “Drinking Feasts and Deceptive Feats,” 171.

129. Al Wolters, “*Šōpīyyā* (Prov 31:27) as a Hymnic Participle and Play on Sophia,” *JBL* 104 (1985): 577–87.

130. Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*.

131. Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 148–49.

and Akkadian) and also the mythological sea dragon *labbu* (in Akkadian).¹³² As James Lindenberger remarks, the bilingual polysemy

would indicate an original audience of quite erudite character, able to get the point of a rather arcane bilingual pun. The professional scholars of the Neo-Assyrian court (to whose number Ahiqar belonged, according to both the Aramaic narrative and Mesopotamian tradition) were just such a group, and it is plausible to attribute the saying to that milieu.¹³³

It is likely that additional examples of bilingual polysemy remain to be discovered in Near Eastern texts. The device certainly continued to be employed well after the Second Temple Period in rabbinic texts,¹³⁴ as well as in Greek and Latin literature.¹³⁵

Bilingual polysemy is a device of high learning and it can operate both aurally and visually depending on how it is achieved. It differs from other types of polysemy in that it inherently constitutes a cultural statement about the Other. Depending on the cultures involved, these statements can be very different. Polysemy between Akkadian and Sumerian represents the adoption of Sumerian learning and culture by Akkadian speakers. As Piotr Michalowski explains:

that for pedagogical purposes serious language play was a useful tool for instilling a sense of the living authority of Sumerian by means of the polyglottic simultaneous presence of the vernacular Akkadian embedded in the classical tongue. In some respects this would serve a didactic purpose, as it would rehearse once again, if on a more profound level, the lessons learned earlier in the study

132. See James M. Lindenberger, "Ahiqar," *OTP* 2:502 n. i; Bezalel Porten and Ada Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt*, vol. 1 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1986), C1.1: frag. 1, l. 3; recognized as a "bilingual play on words."

133. James M. Lindenberger, *The Aramaic Proverbs of Ahiqar* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 105, see also 247 n. 299.

134. Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 235–44; Hasan-Rokem, "'Spinning Threads of Sand,'" 109–24; Hasan-Rokem, "An Almost Invisible Presence: Multilingual Puns in Rabbinic Literature," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature*, ed. Martin S. Jaffee and Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 222–39.

135. See F. Cairns, "Horace's First Roman Ode (3.1)," *PLLS* 8 (1995): 91–142; Cairns, "M. Agrippa in Horace Odes 1.6," *Hermes* 123 (1995): 211–17; David Petrain, "Hylas and 'silva': Etymological Wordplay in Propertius 1.20," *HSCP* 100 (2000): 409–21; Philip Hardie, *Ovid's Poetics of Illusion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 253; Alessandro Barchiesi, ed., *Ovidio: Metamorfosi, Volume I (Libri I–II). Traduzione di Ludovica Koch* (Milan: Fondazione Lorenzo Valla/Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 2005), 221; John Moles, "Reconstructing Plancus (Horace, C. 1.7)," *JRS* 92 (2009): 99; Robert Cowan, "Alas, Poor Io! Bilingual Wordplay in Horace *Epode* 11," *Mnemosyne* 65 (2012): 753–63.

of lexical texts. However, we should not underestimate the use of interlingual puns and games as a means of developing a sense of Mesopotamian learned cultural identity and historical consciousness among the children of elites in Old Babylonian times, inscribing Akkadian and Sumerian into one another and thereby creating one scholarly world with an ancient pedigree.¹³⁶

On the other hand, when the text describing Sargon II's campaigns employs polysemy on the Egyptian title "shepherd," it does so to cast him in a pejorative light, as a shepherd in flight.

Ugaritic texts that polysemously reflect Akkadian appear as displays of erudition. Far from being disparaging, they represent the high esteem in which the scribes of Ugarit held Mesopotamian learning. In much the same way that Akkadian-speaking scribes demonstrated their learning of Sumerian by way of bilingual polysemy, the scribes of Ugarit employed the device to illustrate their mastery of Akkadian.

Hebrew texts represent the widest use of bilingual polysemy, because the Israelites lived in a geographical location that saw the pervasive influence of Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Aramaean, and later Greek cultures. Interestingly, the cases of bilingual polysemy that demonstrate knowledge of Akkadian and Egyptian occur in polemical contexts that rhetorically debase the dominant cultures. Whether one looks to Isaiah's sally that transforms Mesopotamian kings to counselors or Ham's name that makes of him an Egyptian servant, the contexts are derogatory. Even Moses's bilingual name finds true meaning later in the Exodus saga, when he draws the people through the Reed Sea, thus shedding any former association with Egyptian origins.

Quite a different situation obtains in cases of Hebrew polysemy on Aramaic. They represent neither a lauding nor a disdain for Aramaean culture, but rather the increasing influence of Aramaic as the *lingua franca* of the region. They demonstrate the partial or complete bilingualism of the authors and the cultural world in which they lived.

The sole case of Hebrew polysemy on the Greek word for "wisdom" may also serve a polemical end. It occurs in a literary context that describes proper behavior by reliance on the fear of Yahweh. Thus, one could see the device as reconfiguring Greek wisdom in an Israelite theological context.

The two cases in Aramaic texts of bilingual polysemy upon the Akkadian language are informative when brought into comparison. The one that occurs in the biblical story of Daniel takes place in a context that demonstrates the Israelite's mastery of mantic wisdom over and against the Babylonian king and his retinue of magicians, sorcerers, and astrologers. The polyseme here serves to interpret the king's dream, and thus seal his fate. However, the same device in the

136. Michałowski, "Where's Al?," 199.

Proverbs of Ahiqar aims to display Ahiqar's erudition as a member of the Assyrian court.

The combined evidence shows that both the absence and presence of bilingual polysemy reveal cultural attitudes toward other peoples and their languages. In the case of Egyptian texts, the absence of the device indicates the Egyptians' perceived superiority of their language and script and their low esteem for non-Egyptian cultures. Polysemes that evoke Sumerian in Akkadian texts, Akkadian in Ugaritic texts, and Akkadian in Aramaic texts, do the opposite. They reflect the perceived superiority of cultures to which the respective authors felt culturally indebted. The Akkadian text that contains Egyptian polysemy portrays the pharaoh, but not Egyptian culture, in a negative light. This case belongs more accurately to the boastful nature of military propaganda. All of the bilingual polysemes found in Hebrew serve polemical ends, with the exception of those on Aramaic, which signify the changing linguistic landscape of the authors. The polysemy involving Akkadian, Egyptian, and Greek manifests negative and/or polemical attitudes towards the dominant cultures that the Israelites found invasive and oppressive.

It is worth noting that, with the exception of Akkadian authors who created polysemes with Sumerian, the words selected in each case were common enough that a generally educated audience probably would know them (e.g., pharaoh, Ra, servant, king, assembly, wisdom). The authors did not select arcane terms in the target language, because they would have fallen on deaf ears. This speaks to the intended audience of the texts, which was likely urban and at least partially educated, and it contrasts with cases of polysemy in Akkadian based on Sumerian, which were produced in highly educated scribal environments for other erudite elites.

4.1.8. POLYSEMY CLUSTERS

When multiple polysemes appear in close proximity they constitute a polysemy cluster. I adopt the term *cluster* from Jonas Greenfield, who used it to describe the poetic strategy found at Ugarit and Israel of culling from the repertoire of word pairs and associations to create new meaningful contexts.¹³⁷ So, to use his examples, at Ugarit *špn* "Zaphon" is the name of Baal's sacred mountain, which poets sometimes modify with *mrym* "summit" or *šrrt* "remote parts." These lexemes are used by Hosea, but transformed, when he proclaims: "Ephraim's guilt is bound up (צָרֹרֶר *šārūr*), his sin stored away (שָׁפֹנָה *šāpūnāh*)" (Hos 13:12). Note how one hears the sounds of *šrrt* in *šārūr*, and those of *špn* in *šāpūnāh*. See similarly Ps 27:5: "He will hide me (יִסְפְּנֵנִי *yisṣpənēnī*) in his pavilion on an evil day, grant me the protection of his tent, raise me (יָרֹמְמֵנִי *yārōmēmēnī*) upon a

137. Jonas C. Greenfield, "The 'Cluster' in Biblical Poetry," *Maarav* 55–56 (1990): 159–68.

rock (צֶרֶךְ *šūr*).” In addition to hearing *špn* in *yisṣṣānēnī* and *mrym* in *yārōmāmēnī*, the noun *šūr* “rock” recalls Baal’s mountain by allusion to *šrrt* and in its Ugaritic cognate *gr* “mountain.” Such examples demonstrate that the Israelite bards were working with constellations of words and their associations that long had been in circulation (see 5.2.5, 5.2.6). They were picking from “clusters.” I find Greenfield’s label especially fitting for describing the general ancient Near Eastern poetic strategy of clustering several cases of the same literary device within a single work. In this section, I examine only polysemy clusters, but below I treat geminate clusters as well (4.2.12).¹³⁸

A classic illustration of a polysemy cluster in Sumerian is the Song of the Hoe.¹³⁹ Indeed, Michalowski has shown that the entire text is filled with homonymic polysemy on the noun ^{GIŠ}AL “hoe” and numerous uses of the sound /al/ (and /ar/). It is a polyglottal masterpiece that cannot be understood properly without knowledge of Akkadian. Just a few examples from many will demonstrate. In lines 26–27, we find only one AL sound, but many more lurk in the underlying Akkadian.

EREŠ EN Û.TU.DÈ LUGAL Û.TU.DÈ
 ♀NIN.MEN.NA.KE₄ TU.TU AL.ĜÁ.ĜÁ

The mistress, to create sovereigns, to create kings,
 Nin-mena established birthing.

In addition to the sound /al/ in AL.ĜÁ.ĜÁ “birthing,” we find TUD = Akkadian *walādu* “bear,” EREŠ = *bēltum* “mistress,” EN = *bēl* “sovereign,” and ♀NIN.MEN.NA = *Bēlet-ilī* “mistress of the gods.” In line 61, we find: URU EN.ŠÈ NU.ŠE.GA ŠU.ŠÈ AL.ĜÁ.ĜÁ “(Ninurta) subdues any city that is disobedient to its lord.” Not only do we find the sign AL, here as a prefix indicating habitualness, the sign URU, when read as Akkadian, is *ālum* “city.” Similarly, line 98 reads: ^{GIŠ}AL ^{GIŠ}TUBŠIK NÍĜ URU DÙ.DÙ.DAM “The hoe and corvée basket, those are for building cities.” Here ^{GIŠ}AL “hoe” is followed by URU = *ālum* “city.” Moreover, lines 83–84 constitute a latent “riddle.”

138. See Noegel, “Geminate Ballast and Clustering,” 1–18; Noegel, “Bodily Features as Literary Devices in the Hebrew Bible” [Hebrew], in *Studies in Bible and Exegesis Presented to Samuel Vargon*, ed. Moshe Garsiel et al., SBE 10 (Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2011), 509–31; Noegel, “More Geminate Ballast and Clustering,” in *History, Memory, and Hebrew Scriptures: Studies in Honor of Ehud Ben Zvi on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Ian Wilson and Diana Edelman (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 417–32; Noegel, “The Shame of Ba’al: The Mnemonics of Odium,” *JNSL* 41 (2015): 69–94.

139. See Michalowski, “Where’s Al?,” for the examples used here.

AN.ŠÈ AL.TI.RÍ.GU₇ MUŠEN DIĠIR.RA.ÀM
 KI.ŠÈ ^{GIŠ}AL.LÀM ĠIŠ.GI.A UR.RA TIR.RA UŠUMGAL.ÀM

As for the heavens—the wren is the divine bird.

As for the earth it is the hoe, it is a beast in the canebrake, a lion in the forest.

See how the text employs the sound /al/ in the name of the wren (ALTIRI), thus anticipating the ^{GIŠ}AL in the next line. Plus, the paronomasia between ALTIRI and DIĠIR = *ilum* “divine” explains its identification as a divine bird.¹⁴⁰ In turn, this encourages us to read the remainder of the passage as a riddle, which one might pose as follows: “if one finds /al/ in the heavens in the (name of the) divine wren, where does one find /al/ on earth?” The answer: in the UR = *kalbu* “dog, beast” and UŠUMGAL = *labbu* “lion, dragon.”

An excellent demonstration of a polysemy cluster in Akkadian is the Epic of Gilgamesh 11.43–47. In the previous chapter, I described how Ea instructed Utnapishtim to deceive the villagers by telling them that Ea: *eli kâšumu ušaznanakkunūši nuḥšamma ... [ina šer] kukkī ... ina lîlâti ušaznanakunūši šamûtu kibâti* “shall rain upon you abundance ... in the morning, cakes (*kukkû*), and in the evening, he shall rain down a pouring of wheat (*kibâtu*),” thus masking the coming of *kukkû* “darkness” and *kibittu* “heaviness.” However, equally polysemous in the passage are the verb *zanānu*, which can mean “provide with food” or “rain down,” and the noun *nuḥšû* “abundance,” which can refer to “agricultural yield” or “flood waters.”¹⁴¹ The result is a polysemy cluster.

Also representing polysemy clusters in Akkadian are the ends of Enuma Elish and Ludlul bēl nēmeqi, which list the fifty names of Marduk and the twelve gates of Babylon, respectively.¹⁴² Both texts offer erudite exegetical readings of the names, employing many of the various types of polysemy and paronomasia surveyed here. Since I already have commented on the fifty names, I limit my examples here to the gates in Ludlul.

According to Alan Lenzi, the gates through which the sufferer passes at tale’s end bear names that are exegetically reflected in the sufferer’s experience. Thus, in 5.49, we find: *ina bāb dalīli* (KÁ KA.TAR.RA) *ištāla pīya* “in the ‘Gate of Praise’ my mouth inquired.” Not only does the sign KÁ (= Akkadian *bāb* “gate”) also mean *pû* “mouth, but the sign KA (in Sumerian KA.TAR for Akkadian *dalīlu* “praise”) does the same by way of homophony on KÁ. In addition, the sign TAR

140. To Michalowski’s observations I add the paronomasia between ALTIRI “wren” and TIR “forest.”

141. Scott B. Noegel, “Raining Terror: Another Wordplay Cluster in Gilgamesh Tablet XI (Assyrian Version, ll. 45–47),” *NABU* (1997): 39–40.

142. See Bottéro, “Les noms de Marduk, l’écriture et la ‘logique’ en Mésopotamie ancienne”; Lenzi, “Scribal Hermeneutics and the Twelve Gates of *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*.”

can mean *šālu* "inquire, ask." Hence the line: *ištāla pīya* "my mouth inquired."¹⁴³ The listing of each of the gates in subsequent lines, each with a polysemous and/or paronomastic connection to what follows, constitutes a polysemy cluster.

As seen many times above, the Egyptian literati relished their abilities to create polysemous readings. Nevertheless, there does not appear to have been great interest in creating long, sustained polysemy clusters. Instead, Egyptians restricted the use of polysemes to one or two in sequence, and placed them prominently for particularly heightened effect, such as at the beginning and ends of lines. One exception to this is a sustained case of amphiboly in the Instructions of Ptahhotep that employs ambiguous grammatical structures. Since I discuss amphiboly below, I refer the reader to that section (4.1.14.1). Other rather pronounced exceptions to the dearth of polysemy clusters are the so-called "cross-word" inscriptions, which provide two entirely different readings when read vertically or horizontally. Since these belong properly to the category of acrostics, I direct the reader to that section (4.1.12). Suffice it to say here that the inscriptions are quite remarkable for their linguistic and scriptorial skill.¹⁴⁴

Though the scribes of Ugarit employed many kinds of polysemy, including a few cases of double polysemy (see 4.1.6 and 4.1.7), there is no evidence that they ever gathered them into sustained clusters, with the exception of idioms involving body parts, which I distinguish below (4.1.8.1). Even the polysemes that enhance El's speech to Kirtu in his dream do not follow closely upon each other.¹⁴⁵

A classic polysemy cluster in Hebrew appears in Jacob's last testament: בֶּן פֶּרֶת עֲלֵי־עֵץ בְּנוֹת צַעְדָּה עַל־יְשׁוּר *bēn pōrāt yōsēp bēn pōrāt 'ālē 'āyin bānōt šā 'ādāh 'ālē šūr* "Joseph is a fruitful son by a spring, daughters run over the wall" (Gen 49:22). There are multiple polysemes in this line. The first are בֶּן *bēn* and בְּנוֹת *bānōt*, which literally mean "son" and "daughters," respectively, but also can be used figuratively for offspring or the offshoots of plants. The noun פֶּרֶת *pōrāt* can mean "fruitful" or "wild ass." Thus, we also may translate the line "Joseph is a wild ass, a wild ass by a spring, wild colts on a hillside" or "Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a spring. Its branches run over a wall." When we also consider that we may render עֵץ *āyin* as "well" or "eye" and יְשׁוּר *šūr* as "wall" or "gaze,"¹⁴⁶ we can only be dazzled at the author's dexterity with words.

Equally adept is Isaiah's famous prophecy against the "drunkards of Ephraim" in Isa 28:13. After indicting them for their gluttony and drunkenness (28:1) and likening them to wilted flowers (28:1, 28:4), he castigates the priests and prophets as being so muddled by liquor that they mistake their hallucinations

143. Lenzi, "Scribal Hermeneutics and the Twelve Gates of *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*," 739.

144. See J. J. Clère, "Acrostiches et mots croisés des anciens égyptiens," *CdE* 13 (1938): 35–58; Stewart, "Crossword Hymn to Mut."

145. See Noegel, "Kirtu's Allusive Dream."

146. These meanings were noted already by Rashi.

for divine visions. They even have befouled their tables with vomit and excrement (28:8). He then rhetorically asks to whom might Yahweh offer instruction, suggesting perhaps an infant who has just stopped breast feeding (28:9). Thereupon follows one of the most enigmatic lines in the Bible (28:10–11).

כִּי צוֹ לְצוֹ צוֹ לְצוֹ קוֹ לְקוֹ קוֹ לְקוֹ זְעִיר שָׁם זְעִיר שָׁם:
כִּי בִלְעָגִי שָׁפָה וּבִלְשׁוֹן אֶחָדִית יִדְבֹּר אֶל־הֶעָם הַזֶּה:

kī šaw lā-šāw šaw lā-šāw qaw lā-qāw qaw lā-qāw zā 'ēr šām zā 'ēr šām
kī bā-la 'āḡē šāpāh u-b-lāšōn 'aḥereṭ yəḡabbēr 'el hā- 'ām haz-zeh

Scholars have proposed multiple interpretations for the polysemy cluster in verse 10.¹⁴⁷ These include reading צו *šaw* and קו *qaw* as (1) the babbling talk of drunkards; (2) the unintelligible sounds a baby might make; (3) abbreviations for צו *šāwāh* “command” and קו *qāwāh* “hope”;¹⁴⁸ (4) the names of the alphabetic letters צ *š* and ק *q* in proper sequence, and thus, as a school-master-like instructional rebuke that likens his targets to children;¹⁴⁹ (5) a sequence of imperatives in the Assyrian language that read *šī lūšī qī luqqi šeḥēru šēme* “Get out. Let him get out! Wait! Let him wait! Slave! Listen!”;¹⁵⁰ (6) an imitation of unintelligible Assyrian;¹⁵¹ (7) baby talk for excrement (צֹא *šō 'āh*) and vomit (קִיא)

147. Halpern, “Excremental Vision,” offers a convenient survey of previously proposed options.

148. Vincent Tanghe, “Dichtung und Ekel in Jesaja XXVIII 7–13,” *VT* 43 (1993): 235–60. Tanghe also observes that the LXX’s *ἐπι θλιψιν ἐπι θλιψιν* “affliction upon affliction” suggests that we render צו *šaw* as צַר *šār* “affliction.” He further proposes that צו *šaw* in v. 13 be rendered צור *šūr* “rock,” since a measuring line and stone are found elsewhere as a word pair (e.g., Isa 34:11, though there the word used is אֶבֶן *'ēḇen*).

149. See William W. Hallo, “Isaiah 28,9–13 and the Ugaritic Abecedaries,” *JBL* 77 (1958): 324–38.

150. The suggestion, which belongs to J. van Selms, “Isaiah 28, 9–13: An Attempt to Give a New Interpretation,” *ZAW* 85 (1973): 332–39, reads צו *šaw* as from the Assyrian verb *ašū* “go out,” קו *qaw* as from *qu'ūm* “wait,” the preposition ל *l* “to” as the precativ particle *lū*, זֶעִיר *zā 'ēr* “little” as *šuhru* “slave,” and *šām* “there” as an imperative of the verb *šemū* “hear.” The interpretation finds refrain with אֶחָדִית *lāšōn 'aḥereṭ* “foreign tongue” in 28:11 (cf. קִרְקוֹ *gōy qaw qāw* “the nation [i.e., Assyria] of gibberish” in Isa 18:2, 18:7). It is possible that קִרְקוֹ *qaw qāw* here means “power.” *HALOT*, s.v. “קִרְ” entertains both meanings but settles on gibberish.

151. Thus, Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 19 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 389, who sees the line as quoting the opposition by turning their own words against them. In effect they are presented with the sounds of another language: “such as the (to them) unintelligible Akkadian they are destined to hear in due course from their Assyrian conquerors.”

qī'),¹⁵² thus referring back to the tables of filth (28:8); and (8) an imitation of the chirping sounds that necromancers made when practicing their craft.¹⁵³ Adding additional food for thought in 28:17, is Yahweh's promise to apply judgment "as a plumbline [לְקוֹן *lə-qāw*]." Moreover, it remains debated whether the passage continues Yahweh's castigation of the city's elite or if it constitutes the words of Isaiah's detractors against him.

Choosing a single interpretation is made impossible by verse 11, which bolsters each of the options: "Indeed, with a stammering lip and in a foreign (lit. 'another') tongue, is one who speaks to this people." The difficulty of verse 10 has encouraged J. J. M. Roberts to translate the line: "Doo-doo to doo-doo, doo-doo to doo doo, Yuk-yuk to yuk-yuk, yuk-yuk to yuk-yuk."¹⁵⁴ It is no wonder that Isaiah states that the people cannot understand it (28:10). In fact, at least some members of the Qumran community as well as some early Christians understood the line as evidence of glossolalia.¹⁵⁵ As a polysemous cluster, the passage leaves us spinning in contemplation. We must consider multiple options while deciding upon none.

Another exquisite polysemy cluster occurs in Job 29:20–23.

כְּבוֹדִי חֲדָשׁ עֲמָדִי וְקִשְׁתִּי בְיָדִי תַחֲלִיף:
 לִישְׁמְעוּ וַיַּחֲלוּ וַיִּדְמוּ לְמוֹ עֲצָתִי:
 אַחֲרֵי דְבָרִי לֹא יִשְׁנֻ וְעֲלִימוּ תִשּׁוּף מִלִּתִּי:
 וַיַּחֲלוּ כַמָּטָר לִי וּפִיהֶם פָּעֲרוּ לְמִלְקוֹשׁ:

kəḇōdī ḥāḏāš 'immāḏī wə-qaštī bə-yāḏī taḥālīp
lī šām 'ū wə-yiḥēllū wə-yiddāmū ləmō 'āṣāṭī
'aḥārē dḇārī lō 'yišnū wə-'ālēmō tiṯṭōp millāṭī
wə-yiḥālū kam-māṭār lī ū-pīhem pā 'ārū lə-malqōš

My vigor refreshed, my bow תַּחֲלִיף *taḥālīp* in my hand.

Men would listen to me and וַיַּחֲלוּ *wə-yiḥēllū*. At my counsel they would וַיִּדְמוּ *wə-yiddāmū*.

152. J. A. Emerton, "Some Difficult Words in Isaiah 28:10 and 13," in *Biblical Hebrew, Biblical Texts: Essays in Memory of Michael P. Weitzman*, ed. Ada Rapoport-Albert and Gillian Greenberg, JSOTSup 333 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 51–54; see also Hays, "Covenant with Mut," 234. Note that 1QIsa^a reads צִי לִצִּי *sy l-sy* here and in Isa 28:13.

153. Karl van der Toorn, "Echoes of Judaeen Necromancy in Isaiah 28,7–22," *ZAW* 100 (1985): 199–217.

154. J. J. M. Roberts, *First Isaiah: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2015), 348.

155. See O. Betz, "Zungenreden und süßer Wein: Zur eschatologischen Exegese von Jesaja 28 in Qumran und im Neuen Testament," in *Bibel und Qumran: Beiträge zur Erforschung der Beziehungen zwischen Bibel- und Qumran-wissenschaft: Hans Bartke zum 22.9.1966*, ed. S. Wagner (Berlin: Evangelische Haupt-Bibelgesellschaft, 1968), 20–36.

After I spoke they did not יִשְׁנֹוּ *yīšnū*. My words תִּיִּתּוֹפֹ *tiṭṭōp* upon them.
They waited for me as for rain, for the late rain, their mouths open wide.

There are no less than five polysemes in this brief passage. The first, תְּחַלִּיף *taḥālīp*, we can render “renews” (חָלַף, PS *hlp*) or “made to pierce” (חָלַף, PS *hlp*). We may understand the second, וַיַּחֲלֹוּ *wə-yihēllū*, as “they awaited” (from יָחַל *yāḥal*) or “they pierced” (from חָלַל *hālal* and repointed as a *pi’el* יַחֲלִי *yəḥallū*).¹⁵⁶ The third polyseme, וַיִּדְמֻוּ *wə-yiddāmū*, means both “they waited” (from דָּמָה *dāmāh*) or “they were silent” (from דָּמָם *dāmam* and repointed as a *niph’al* וַיִּדְמֻוּ *wə-yidammū*), and the fourth, יִשְׁנֹוּ *yīšnū*, we can translate as “reply” (from שָׁנָה *šānāh*, PS *tny*) or “was sharpened” (from שָׁנָה *šānāh*, PS *šnn* and repointed as a *niph’al* יִשְׁנֹוּ *yīššannū* [cf. Isa 49:2]). Each of these polysemes is strictly visual. Capping off the polysemous cluster is the verb תִּיִּתּוֹפֹ *tiṭṭōp*, whose semantic range includes “prophesy, argue against” (Amos 7:16, Mic 2:6, cf. Deut 32:2) and “dew upon” (Job 36:27). The result is a concatenation of multiple meanings.

Representing the polysemy cluster in Aramaic is the famous “writing on the wall” that Belshazzar saw appear in his palace: מְנָא מְנָא תְּקֵל וּפְרָסִין *mənē’ mənē’ təqēl ū-ṣarsīn* (Dan 5:25). Each of the words bears multiple meanings that ancient and modern commentaries have multiplied.¹⁵⁷ The conventional interpretation reads each as a verb, and provides Daniel’s interpretation: “numbered, numbered, weighed, and divided,” though the last verb also paronomastically anticipates the פָּרָס *paras* “Persians” (5:26–28).¹⁵⁸ Yet, the cryptic writing also suggests units of currency: “a mina, a shekel, and two half minas.”¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, Wolters has pointed out additional examples of paronomasia and the relationship of the written cryptogram to the constellations of the zodiac.¹⁶⁰

Encountering a polysemy cluster has an even more dizzying effect on the reading/listening process than double polysemy, since it multiplies exponentially the text’s meanings and the relationships between the polysemes. The cluster

156. One of the publisher’s anonymous reviewers has suggested the possibility that the *dagesh* in the *lamed* might reflect the Masoretes’ attempt to preserve both meanings by creating an ungrammatical form. See similarly the remarks concerning Job 42:6 by Naphthali S. Meshel, “Dramatic Irony and Double Entendre in the Book of Job” [Hebrew], *Shnaton* 25 (2017): 134–35 and n. 80.

157. See Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 160–62; Marian Broida, “Textualizing Divination: The Writing on the Wall in Daniel 5:25,” *VT* 62 (2012): 1–13.

158. The root פָּרַס *p-r-s* also could reflect the Akkadian *parāsu* “interpret, render (divine) judgment.”

159. C. Clermont-Ganneau, “Mané, Thécel, Pharès, et le festin de Balthazar,” *JA* 8 (1886): 36–67.

160. Wolters, “Riddle of the Scales in Daniel 5”; Wolters, “An Allusion to Libra in Daniel 5,” in *Die Rolle der Astronomie in den Kulturen Mesopotamiens; Beiträge zum 3. Grazer Morgenländischen Symposium, 23.–27. September, 1991*, ed. Hannes D. Galter, GMS 3 (Graz: GrazKult, 1993), 291–306.

destabilizes the text to such a degree that it produces an enigma; hence its use in a divine missive to Utnapishtim and in Daniel for the cryptic writing on the wall. The clusters that produce the names of Marduk in *Enuma Elish* and gate names in *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* also constitute divine mysteries. The polysemy cluster in Job reflects well Job’s destabilized life and search for meaning. It is curious that Egyptian and Ugaritic texts have yielded no examples of the device, since they do contain cases of double polysemy. In the former, it may simply be that examples await discovery. In the latter, it may be that the device did not suit the extant corpus, which itself is rather small. In general, polysemy clusters can be effective aurally and/or visually.

4.1.8.1. POLYSEMY CLUSTERS OF BODY PARTS

A special type of polysemous cluster exploits the literal meanings of idioms containing body parts by using them in tandem with literal references to body parts as well as polysemes that suggest body parts.¹⁶¹ The result is an assembly of human features that provides a subtext that reinforces key themes.¹⁶²

In her study of a cuneiform oracular text from Ishchali, Maria de Jong Ellis observed a series of idiomatic and paronomastic references to different parts of the human body.¹⁶³ The oracle, which purports to transmit a promise of the goddess Kititum (Ishtar) to King Ibalpiel, reads as follows:

- 1–2 O King Ibalpiel! Thus the goddess Kititum!
- 3–4 The secrets [*niš-iš-re-tum*] of the gods are placed before me,
- 5–7 (and) because you even have the words [*zi-ik-ru-um*] of my name in
your mouth [*pi-ka*],
- 7–8 I continually reveal the secrets of the gods for you.
- 9–13 At the advice of the gods, (and) by the command [*ši-ip-ti*] of Anu, the
country is given you to rule
- 14–15 You will *loosen/ransom* [*ši-in ma-tim*] the *x* of the upper and lower
country
- 16–17 (and) you will *amass/ransom* the riches of the upper and lower country.
- 18 Your economy [*ma-ḫi-ir-ka*] will not diminish.

161. See Noegel, “Bodily Features as Literary Devices in the Hebrew Bible,” 509–31; Karolien Vermeulen, “Hands, Heads, and Feet: Body Parts as Poetic Devices in Judges 4–5,” *JBL* 136 (2017): 801–19.

162. For an outward use of body parts in a list, see the description of idols in Ps 115:4–8, where we hear of a mouth, eyes, ears, nose, hands, feet, and throat.

163. Maria de Jong Ellis, “The Goddess Kititum Speaks to King Ibalpiel: Oracle Texts from Ishchali,” *MARI* 5 (1987): 235–61. I adopt her transliteration and translation in what follows. I note that de Jong Ellis credits William Hallo with some of the observations (245 n. 47). The text is in the Free Library of Philadelphia (= FLP 1674).

- 19–21 Whenever in the land your hand [*qa-at-ka*] has laid hold, the “food of peace” will be secure (for you/for it) [or: will enjoy the “food of peace.”]
 22–24 (And) I, Kititum, will strengthen the foundation of your throne.
 24b–25 I have established a protective spirit for you.
 26 Be ready to hear me! (lit. “May your ear be available [*li-ib-ba-ši-a-am*] to me”!)

Though she did not discuss the feature in depth, de Jong Ellis drew attention to the oracle’s use of paronomasia as a means of cataloging body parts.¹⁶⁴ For example, the text employs the noun *šiptu* “command” in line 10, which echoes *šaptu* “lip” and constitutes an orthographic reflection on *šiptu* “incantation.”¹⁶⁵ In addition, the oracle mentions “your mouth” (*pīka*) in line 6, “your hand” (*qāṭka*) in line 19, and “your ear” (*uzunka*) in line 26. The phrase “loosen/ransom the land of” (*šēn mātim*) also contains a “(hidden) reference to ‘teeth’ on one and ‘food’ in the other, thus reinforcing the conceptual framework with concrete imagery.”¹⁶⁶ To these references I add several more: the seven-fold use of the syllabic sign *ka* (appearing four times as the pronominal suffix *-ka*), which itself is a Sumerogram (KA) meaning “mouth,” the allusion to *zikru* “penis” found in *zīkrūm* “words” in line 5, and the use of *libbu* “inner body, heart,” resounding in *libbašiam* “be available” (from *bašū*) in line 26.

The oracle is filled with orthographic and paronomastic devices that extend beyond the mention of body parts. For example, it treats *maḥīrka* in line 18 ambiguously as “your economy” or “your rival,”¹⁶⁷ and it offers an inclusio that connects by way of paronomasia *nīs-iš-re-tum* “secrets” (ll. 3, 7) and *na-še2-er-tam* “protective” (l. 25). In addition, the word for “secrets” in the phrase “secrets of the gods” employs a peculiar form (i.e., the arcane plural *nišrētu*) and non-normative orthography in order to draw attention to the polysemous readings of the signs used to write it. De Jong Ellis notes that by writing the noun with the cuneiform sign *nīs* = NE, the diviner also hints by way of allusion at the more common reading of *nīs* as *bi2*, thus suggesting *bišru* (“physician’s bag, commentary”), that is, “the tools (used in the activity) of the diviner.”¹⁶⁸ Indeed, throughout the oracle the diviner alludes to his craft.

It may be no accident that the person who composed the text chose to describe the source of the knowledge for the goddess’ message by a term which in meaning and in spelling can be thought to contain allusions to the arts of the diviner.¹⁶⁹

164. de Jong Ellis, “Goddess Kititum Speaks to King Ibalpiel,” 263.

165. de Jong Ellis, “Goddess Kititum Speaks to King Ibalpiel,” 245 n. 47.

166. de Jong Ellis, “Goddess Kititum Speaks to King Ibalpiel,” 245.

167. Noted by de Jong Ellis, “Goddess Kititum Speaks to King Ibalpiel,” 242.

168. de Jong Ellis, “Goddess Kititum Speaks to King Ibalpiel,” 242.

169. de Jong Ellis, “The Goddess Kititum Speaks to King Ibalpiel,” 243.

The inclusion of bodily features in Akkadian texts may be related to the Mesopotamian scribal practice of creating exhaustive lexical lists. Indeed, one such list, an Old Babylonian catalogue that lists parts of the human body, contains 270 entries.¹⁷⁰ This practice would provide a background for the oracle’s sophisticated referencing (see 5.2.6). As de Jong Ellis observes, the oracle “draws on a number of different aspects of Mesopotamian scholarship and textual tradition,” which serve “to validate the authenticity of the message itself.”¹⁷¹ The oracle’s hidden references to body parts, therefore, underscore the diviner’s erudition, and thus establish his credentials. Moreover, the goddess’ urging that the king make his ear available to her (i.e., listen closely to her words) in line 26 may draw attention to the presence of polysemy while establishing the rhetorical nature of her plea (see 2.1).¹⁷²

The Egyptian script makes wide use of body parts as consonants, ideographs, and determinatives. As a result it is difficult to know whether the clustering of body parts in Egypt is being manipulated for effect by the ancient scribes or simply the way a word or expression is naturally written. Nevertheless, some idiomatic clusters do appear deliberate. For example, in the Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor (l. 103), the sailor prefaces his remarks by saying *tp-‘ s3ḥ* “before we could reach (land).” One sees in the phrase, which is written , a head, an arm, toes, and legs. The clever use of signs reinforces the loss of bodies that the ship would experience, as the sailor recalls: “then the ship died. Of those on board, not one survived” (ll. 106–107).

Barbara Richter has observed a similar use of the leg sign  four times in the following line describing the king’s offering found in the temple at Dendera: *ḥnd=i ḥr=t m bs.t m stj ḥntš ḥb=t m wbn.t m w’r.t* “I greet you with what emerges from the leg (of Osiris). Your heart rejoices over what appears from the leg.”¹⁷³ Not only does the sign  serve as a determinative for *stj* and *w’r.t*, both “leg,” but the verb *bs.t* “emerge” is a combined ligature containing the legs sign  attached to the fish sign , and *ḥntš* “rejoice” is written with a sign that depicts the

170. Indeed some omen collections use bodily features as an organizing principle. This has been observed, for example, in CT 38.1, where “the arrangement of omens 13–16 is based on logographic writings for parts of the body: 13: KA, 14: IGI.MEŠ 15: SAĜ, 16: ŠU.SI.” Noted by Ann Guinan, “The Perils of High Living: Divinatory Rhetoric in *Summa Alu*,” in *DUMU-E2-DUB-BA-A: Studies in Honor of Ake W. Sjöberg*, ed. Hermann Behrens et al., OPSNKF 11 (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Museum, 1989), 234 n. 38.

171. de Jong Ellis, “Goddess Kititum Speaks to King Ibalpiel,” 241, 243.

172. Calls to listen closely often comprise clues to the presence of polysemy and paronomasia, because they are intimately tied to ancient Near Eastern conceptions of divine wisdom. This was first suggested by Cyrus H. Gordon, “New Light on the Hebrew Language,” *HebAbst* 15 (1974): 29. For a more complete discussion of the evidence, see Noegel, *Janus Parallelism in the Book of Job*, 136–39.

173. See Richter, *Theology of Hathor of Dendera*, 198.

foresection of a horse dangling its two legs (𐎗𐎟𐎠). Moreover, the leg of Osiris is associated with the inundation, which is alluded to further by the fish sign in *bs.t* and the lexeme *stj*, which paronomastically suggests *stl* “pour out.”¹⁷⁴

The Ugaritic corpus also contains examples of this device. In the Epic of Baal (*CAT* 1.16.i.41–42, 46–48), we read:

41. *qh apk b yd*
Take your nose in your hand,
42. *[b]rltk bm ymn*
Your gorge in your right hand ...
46. *apnk ġzr ilhu*
Thereupon, the hero Ilhu
47. *[m]rhh yihd b yd*
took his spear in his hands,
48. *[g]rgrh bm ymn*
his lance in his right-hand.

As Watson espied, following the ritual in which the deity touches his nose and throat are *mrh* “spear,” which suggests *rh* “nose,” and *grgr* “lance,” which also means “throat.”¹⁷⁵ To his observations, I add the clever use of *apnk* “thereupon,” which resounds *ap* “nose.” When considered in conjunction with the two-fold use of both *yd* “hand” and *ymn* “right hand,” the clustering of body parts becomes obvious.

The device also has been observed in the Hebrew Bible.¹⁷⁶ In the episode detailing Gideon’s campaign against the Midianites (Judg 7:1–25), one finds *ṭ yāḏ* “hand” used abundantly as a keyword.¹⁷⁷ In addition, the word “hand” constitutes a partial anagram with the name *מִדְיָן* *midyān* “Midian,” with which it comes into juxtaposition three times (Judg 7:7, 7:14, 7:15). The frequent idiomatic use of this body part heightens one’s awareness of others in the story including: “ears” (7:3), “tongue” (7:5), “knees” (7:5, 7:6), and “mouth” (7:6), as well as idioms that contain body parts, such as *הַיָּם שֵׁפַת הַיָּם* *šāpāt hay-yām* “lip of the sea” for “shore” (7:12), *רִאשֵׁים* *ra šīm* “heads” for “men” (7:16), *רֹאשׁ* *rō š* “head” for the “beginning” of the middle watch (7:19), *שֵׁפַת־אֶבֶל* *šāpāt ‘ābēl* “lip of the meadow” for “border” (7:22), and *רֹאשֵׁי־עֹרֵב* *ro š ‘ōrēb ū-z ‘ēb* “head(s) of Oreb and Ze’eb” for “leaders” (7:25). In turn, these are reinforced by polysemes that suggest body parts such as *וַיַּשְׁכֶּם* *way-yaškēm* “get up early” (7:1), which suggests *שֵׁכֶם* *šāḱēm* “shoulder,” *עֵין* *‘ēn* “spring” (7:1), which suggests *עַיִן* *‘ayīn* “eye,” and *צִדָּה* *šēdāh* “provisions” in 7.8, which reminds one of *צֶדֶד* *šad* “side”

174. See Richter, *Theology of Hathor of Dendera*, 174–75.

175. Watson, “Puns Ugaritic Newly Surveyed,” 124.

176. See Exod 4:1–17, Judg 3:12–30, 7:1–25, 1 Sam 5:1–6, Jon 2:3–10, Prov 6:1–35, and Prov 8:1–36, in Noegel, “Bodily Features as Literary Devices in the Hebrew Bible.”

177. It appears in Judg 7:2 (2x), 7:6, 7:7, 7:8, 7:9, 7:11, 7:14, 7:15, 7:16, 7:19, 7:20 (2x).

(7:8). The combined impact of the numerous body parts, and the audible connection between יָד *yād* “hand” and מִדְיָן *midyān* “Midian” intensifies the narrative’s central theme that Yahweh has promised Gideon that he would deliver the Midianites into his hand (7:7).

In Aramaic, polysemy clusters involving body parts are best represented by the court tale in Dan 5. The account provides the perfect literary context for assembling body parts as it centers around the appearance of a man’s hand that writes a mysterious cipher upon a wall. The first time the narrator introduces it as אֶצְבָּן דִּי יַד־אֲנָשׁ *’ešbā ān dī yaḏ ’ēnāš* “the fingers of the hand of a man” (5:5). Nevertheless, we are told that the king perceived it as יַד פַּס *pas yaḏāh* “the palm of the hand” (5:5). Later, it is again called פַּס יַד־אֲנָשׁ *passā’ dī yaḏā’* “the palm of the hand” (5:24). A close look at the pericope reveals a number of other body parts that set the stage for the polysemes. These include: קִרְצָה *qirṣāh* “joints of his loins” and אֲרֻבָּתָה *’arkubātēh* “his knees” (5:6), repeated mention of צַוְאֵרָה *šawwā’ rēh* “his neck” (5:7, 5:16, 5:29 [“your neck”]) and זִיּוּהִי *zīwōhī* “his face (lit. ‘countenance’)” (5:6, 5:9, 5:10), לִבָּה *libḥēh* “his heart” (5:20, 5:21, 5:22 [“your heart”]), and גִּשְׁמָה *gišmēh* “his body” (5:21). Building upon these are קִטְרִין *qitrīn* “knots, enigmas” (5:12, 5:16), which recalls the “joints,” לְשָׁנַיָּא *liššānāyyā* “languages” (lit. “tongues”) (5:19), and בִּידָה *bīdēh* “in his power” (lit. “hand”) (5:23). Note too how the verb שָׁנַיָּין *šānāyīn* “changed” in Dan 5:9 suggests “teeth” (cf. שִׁנַּיָּין *šināyīn* “teeth” in 7:7), and how the verb יִשְׁטַבַּע *yīṣṭaba* “wet” (5:21) recalls the noun “fingers.”¹⁷⁸ Given the concatenation of so many body parts and allusions to them, one cannot help but hear בִּידָיִן *bīdāyīn* “in hands” in the repeated introductory particle בְּאִדָּיִן *bē’ dāyīn* “then” in various forms (5:3, 5:6, 5:8, 5:9, 5:13, 5:17, 5:24, 5:29). In addition, there are two other Aramaic words in the story that evoke body parts in Hebrew. The first is the verb רָשִׁים *rāšīm* “writing” (5:24, 5:25), which resounds the noun ראָשִׁים *rā’ šīm* “heads.” The second is מֹאזְנָא *mo’zānā* “scales” (5:27), which echoes the Hebrew אוָזְנַיִם *’ōznayīm* “ears.”¹⁷⁹ Given the bilingual nature of the book, such interplay between Aramaic and Hebrew should not surprise us.¹⁸⁰ The use of so many body parts and allusions to them adds importance to, even as it embodies, the notion of a man’s hand writing hidden code.

The clustering of body parts differs from polysemy clusters in that it does not create an enigma. In fact, this kind of polysemy is unique in that only one of the meanings of each polyseme operates in the text, often as part of an idiom or metaphor, while the other, the literal meaning of the body part, is significant only as part of the collective. Thus, it is the cluster itself that is the most relevant

178. Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 158.

179. The Aramaic term for “ear” is אֶדְנָה *’ednāh* or אוָדְנָה *’ūdānā*.

180. See Bill T. Arnold, “The Use of Aramaic in the Hebrew Bible: Another Look at Bilingualism in Ezra and Daniel,” *JNSL* 22 (1996): 1–16. On bilingual Aramaic-Akkadian polysemy in Daniel, see 4.1.7.

feature. Since readers/listeners cannot perceive the cluster without moving through a pericope, recognition of polysemy is delayed. Nevertheless, the purpose of the device may differ depending on the text. In the Akkadian exemplar, the litany of body parts underscores the erudition and authority of the author. In the Egyptian, Ugaritic, and biblical texts, the device reinforces key themes, some of which focus on body parts or their actions. Of course, one cannot rule out the notion that these same texts also represent a display of literary skill. In general, the device is effective aurally and visually.

4.1.9. NUMERICAL POLYSEMY

Numerical polysemy occurs when the names of numbers are exploited for non-numerical meanings.¹⁸¹ Certainly, the scribes of antiquity were as adept with numbers as they were with letters, as cases of isopsephy illustrate (see 4.1.10), and in many of the writing systems covered in this study, signs or consonants had numerical values. Moreover, throughout the ancient Near East one finds a “literary” interest in numbers.¹⁸²

The Mesopotamian literati sometimes exploited the numerical value of cuneiform signs to encode and empower names (see 4.1.10). They also used numerals to write the names of some of the main gods in their pantheon. Thus, the number 10 = Adad, 15 = Ishtar, 20 = Shamash, 30 = Sin, 40 = Ea, 50 = Enlil, and 60 = Anu (also 21).¹⁸³ Arguably the most famous demonstration of the relationship between numbers and divine names is the tradition found in *Enuma Elish* that Marduk possessed fifty names, the last of which was *ḥanša* “Fifty” (7.143–144). Since the number fifty also represented the name Ea, Marduk’s name represents the subsuming of his nature and power. Thus, at the end of *Enuma Elish*, Ea proclaims: “let him (Marduk) control the sum of all my rites, let him administer all my decrees” (7.141–142). Aside from the numerical values of gods’ names, I know of no cases of numerical polysemy in Akkadian texts.

Egyptian scribes used specific signs for numbers one through ten, but for larger decimals they employed signs that also had phonetic and logographic values. Thus, the number one hundred (𐦩) also could be read as the consonant *w*, 1000 as 𐦩 *ḥ*𐦩 “lotus plant,” 10,000 as 𐦩 *ḏb* “finger,” 100,000 as 𐦩 *ḥfnr* “tadpole,” and 1,000,000 as 𐦩 *ḥh*, one of eight *ḥh*-gods who holds the sky aloft. Nevertheless, while the name of the number and the object used to represent it glyphically were

181. Moshe Garsiel, “Punning upon the Names of the Letters of the Alphabet in Biblical Acrostics” [Hebrew], *BM* 39 (1994): 326.

182. See, e.g., Yitzhak Avishur, *Comparative Studies in Biblical and Ugaritic Languages and Literatures* (Tel Aviv-Jaffa: Archaeological Center, 2007), 84–107.

183. On “One” as a name of God in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Deut 6:4, Zech 14:9, Job 23:13), see Cyrus H. Gordon, “His Name Is ‘One,’” *JNES* 29 (1970): 198–99; Gordon, “The Seventh Day,” *UF* 11 (1979): 299–301.

based on a similarity of sound, to my knowledge, authors did not have an interest in exploiting the numerical value of words or the logographic value of numbers.¹⁸⁴ On the other hand, they do show a great interest in numerical paronomasia, as I show below (4.2.7).¹⁸⁵

A textbook example of numerical polysemy in Ugaritic appears in the Epic of Baal (CAT 1.5.vi.18–20). When El first learns that Baal has died, the narrator describes his mourning ritual of self-mutilation:

18. *ydy psltm b y'r*
He cuts two incisions with a razor,
19. *yhdy lhm w dqn*
He cuts cheeks and beard.
20. *ytl qn dr'h*
He furrows the measure of his arm.

Here the poet follows the dual form *psltm* “two incisions” with two objects, *lhm w dqn* “cheeks and beard,” and then with the verb *ytl* “furrow,” which derives from the word *tl* “three.” Thus, he deftly combines numerical polysemy with graded numerical parallelism known from other Ugaritic and biblical texts (e.g., CAT 1.5.v.8–9, Hos 6:2).¹⁸⁶

An even more sustained demonstration occurs in the Ugaritic Epic of Kirtu.¹⁸⁷ Here again the device appears near numbers and/or numbered sequences, which creates a textual environment that the poet exploits for numerical polysemy. For instance, El commands Kirtu to make provisions that will last five (*lhmš*) or six (*tdt*) months (CAT 1.14.ii.30–31). He then describes Kirtu’s army as “soldiers beyond number, archers beyond count” (CAT 1.14.ii.37–38), who “march by the thousand [*alpm*] (like) a downpour, in myriads [*rbt*] like the early rains” (CAT 1.14.ii.39–40). Following the description is the counting of marchers: “after two

184. One possible exception to the former is the cryptographic writing of numerals on cubit rods that date to at least the New Kingdom. See G. Priskin, “Cryptic Numerals on Cubit Rods,” *GM* 192 (2003): 61–66. The number seven also appears to have been of cryptic interest to the Egyptians for unknown reasons. See Warren R. “Dawson, The Number ‘Seven’ in Egyptian Texts,” *Aegyptus* 8 (1927): 27–107.

185. See, e.g., the Prayer to Thoth for Skill in Writing (P.Anastasi V 9.2), which cleverly begins “Come to me, Thoth, noble ibis, the god who desires Hermopolis, the letter-scribe of the Ennead.” Here the site of Hermopolis, written as 8-*nw* (i.e., *lhmnw*), is followed by the Ennead (*psd.t*), which means “9,” thus providing a well-attested parallelism in which the B-line contains a larger number than the A-line. Hermopolis (lit. “Eight-town”) was named after the Ogdoad, a group of eight primordial deities whose cults were centered there. The Ennead was a group of nine primordial deities associated with Heliopolis. While this line exploits the numerical value of the Ennead, it does not constitute numerical polysemy.

186. On graded numerical parallelism, see Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 145.

187. Noegel, “Kirtu’s Allusive Dream,” 299–316.

[*tn*], two [*tn*] will march, after three [*tl̥l̥*], all of them” (CAT 1.14.ii.41–42). A numerical theme continues in column iii with the description of the march according to a seven day typology: “march a day, and then a second [*tn*], a third [*tl̥l̥*], and a fourth [*rb*’], a fifth day [*hmš*], and a sixth [*tdl̥*], then at sunrise on the seventh [*šb*’]” (CAT 1.14.iii.2–4). After attacking the environs of Udum, El then instructs Kirtu to “halt, a day and a second [*tn*], a third [*tl̥l̥*] day, and a fourth [*rb*’], a fifth [*hmš*] day, and a sixth [*tdl̥*] ... then (to proceed) at sunrise on the seventh [*šb*’]” (CAT 1.14.iii.10–12, 14–15).

The concatenation of so many numerical references within such a short pericope offers a rich context for numerical polysemy. Thus, in CAT 1.14.ii.2–3, Kirtu mentions a “charioteer [*tl̥l̥*, lit. ‘third’] with chariot horses,” a phrase that repeats twice more within the narrative frame (CAT 1.14.iii.24, 36). Note similarly the description of Kirtu’s army as containing *tl̥l̥ mat rbt* “a million charioteers” (CAT 1.14.ii.36). After describing the march of the soldiers, El tells Kirtu that “the sole survivor will lock his house,” using *yhd* (lit. “only”) for “sole survivor,” but when the narrator describes the fulfillment of this event (CAT 1.14.iv.21), he uses *aḥd* “one.” The archers are referred to as *tnm*, a noun that naturally evokes the number *tn* “two,” as the second man in the chariot. Note too the use of *tn* for “another man” (lit. “second”) in CAT 1.14.ii.48, which, as noted above, also serves a polysemous function. The use of numerical polysemy gives the orthographic impression that the text’s soldiers, like its numbers, are beyond count.

Numerical polysemy in Hebrew appears in Qoh 4:8–12.

יֵשׁ אֶחָד וְאֵין שְׁנֵי גַם בֶּן וְאָח אֵין לוֹ
וְאֵין קֵץ לְכָל־עֲמָלוֹ גַּם־עֲיָנָיו [עֵינָיו] לֹא־תִשְׁבַּע עֹשֶׁר
וְלָמִי | אֲנִי עָמַל וּמַחֲסֹר אֶת־נַפְשִׁי מִטּוֹבָה גַּם־זֶה הִבֵּל וְעֵנָן רַע הוּא:
טוֹבִים הַשְּׁנָיִם מִן־הָאֶחָד אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁלֹחֵם שָׂכָר טוֹב בְּעַמְלָם:
כִּי אִם־יִפְּלוּ הָאֶחָד יָקִים אֶת־חֲבֵרוֹ וְאֵילוּ הָאֶחָד שִׁיפּוֹל וְאֵין שְׁנֵי לְהַקִּימוֹ:
גַּם אִם־יִשְׁכְּבוּ שְׁנֵי וְחָם לָהֶם וּלְאֶחָד אֵיד יָחֵם:
וְאִם־יִתְקַפּוּ הָאֶחָד הַשְּׁנָיִם יַעֲמְדוּ נִגְדָּו וְהַחוּט הַמְשַׁלֵּשׁ לֹא בְּמַהֲרָה יִנָּתֵק:

yēš 'eḥād wə-'ēn šēnī gam bēn wā-'āḥ 'ēn lō
wə-'ēn qēš lā-kol 'āmālō gam 'ēnāw ['ēnō] lō' tīšba 'ōšer
ū-l-mī 'anī 'āmēl ū-mḥassēr 'et-napšī miṭ-tōbā gam-zeh hebel wə-'inyan rā' hū'
tōbīm haš-šənayīm min-hā-'eḥād 'āšer yēš lā-hem šākār tōb ba-'āmālām
kī 'im yippōlū hā-'eḥād yāqīm 'et ḥāḇērō wə-'lō hā-'eḥād šey-yippōl wə-'ēn šēnī
la-hāqīmō
gam 'im yiškābū šənayīm wə-ḥam lāhem ū-l' 'eḥād 'ēk yēḥām
wə-'im yiṯqāpō hā-'eḥād haš-šənayīm ya'amdū neḡdō wə-ha-hūṯ ha-məšullāš lō'
bi-mḥērāḥ yinnāṯēq

The case of one person [אֶחָד 'eḥād], with no companion [שְׁנֵי šēnī], who has neither son nor brother.

Yet he amasses wealth without limit, and his eye is never sated with riches [אֶל־לֹא־תִשְׂבַּע עֵשֶׁר *lō’ tišba’ ʿōšer*].

For whom, now, is he amassing it while denying himself enjoyment. That too is a futility and unhappy business.

The two [הַשְּׁנַיִם *haš-šəṇayīm*] are better off than the one [הָאֶחָד *hā-ʿehād*], in that they have greater benefit from their earnings.

For should they fall, the one [הָאֶחָד *hā-ʿehād*] can raise his friend; but woe to the one who is alone [הַיָּחִיד *hā-ʿehād*] and falls with no companion [שֶׁנִּי *šēnī*] to raise him!

Further, when two [הַשְּׁנַיִם *šəṇayīm*] lie together they are warm; but how can one alone [הָאֶחָד *ʿehād*] get warm?

Also, if the one [הָאֶחָד *hā-ʿehād*] attacks, the two [הַשְּׁנַיִם *haš-šəṇayīm*] can stand up to him. A three-fold [מִשְׁלָשׁ *ha-məšullāš*] cord is not easily broken!

Note how the number one (אֶחָד *ʿehād*) is used idiomatically for someone who is “alone” in lines 8, 9, 10 (2x), 11, and 12, and how the number “two” (הַשְּׁנַיִם *haš-šəṇayīm*) appears variously in lines 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12, often with the meaning “friend, companion.”¹⁸⁸ Moreover, in the consonantal text, the phrase לֹא־תִשְׂבַּע עֵשֶׁר *lō’ tišba’ ʿōšer* “never sated with riches,” resembles the numbers שֶׁבַע *šəḇa’* “seven” and עָשָׂר *ʿəšer* “ten.” The passage finishes by making reference to a “three-fold” (מִשְׁלָשׁ *məšullāš*) cord in line 12.¹⁸⁹ The numerical polysemy underscores Qoheleth’s point that it is best not to be alone.

The different uses of numerical polysemy depend upon the writing system employed. In Akkadian, cuneiform signs used for writing divine names also had numerical values, so that when one wrote a certain number one could evoke the name of a god. In Ugaritic and Hebrew, the device takes advantage of the names of numbers for nonnumerical meanings. In both, authors exploit literary contexts that contain literal references to numbers. In Akkadian, numerical polysemy is ensconced in a scribal tradition of secrecy and the knowledge of divine wisdom. Only informed readers could access the meaning of the device; listeners would only hear the name of the god when the text was recited. In Ugaritic and Hebrew, the effect on the reader and listener is the same—a sense of numerical abundance, as if the text is multiplying numbers as it unfolds. It is primarily a visual device.

188. Note similarly, Deut 32:30: אֵיכָה יִרְדּוּ אֶחָד אֲלֵף וּשְׁנַיִם יָנִיסוּ רַבָּבָה: *ʿekāh yirdop ʿehād ʿelep ū-šəṇayīm yānīsū rəbābāh* “how can one pursue a thousand, and two put a myriad to flight.”

189. Noegel, “‘Wordplay’ in Qoheleth,” 1–28.

4.1.10. ISOPSEPHY

Another form of polysemy that involves numbers is isopsephy (called *gematria* in early Jewish parlance).¹⁹⁰ Isopsephy involves reading the consonants that comprise a word for their numerical values (and in Greek and Latin, also the vowels). Nevertheless, some Akkadian signs doubled as numbers, and there is a great deal of interest among Mesopotamian scribes in line and tablet counts¹⁹¹—much like the Israelite סופרים *sōpārīm* “scribes” (lit. “counters”).¹⁹² Indeed, some Akkadian scribes encoded their names numerically in colophons.¹⁹³ For example, one text records the signs 21.35.35.26.44.A.21.11.20.42. This permits the following equations: 21 = *Anu*, 35.35 = *abu*, 26 = GUR (= *tāru*), and 44 = *ri*. In total, the numerical values constitute isopsephy for the name *Anu-abu-uttirri*.¹⁹⁴ Another case of isopsephy in an Akkadian colophon reads: NU.MUD. 21.33.20. LID.30. NAGAR. Decoded, the line reads NU = Akkadian *la*, MUD = *pāliḥ*, 21 = *Anu*, 33 = *zēru*, 20 = *šu*, LID.30.NAGAR = *liḥliq*, thus producing the reading: *la pāliḥ Anu zēršu liḥliq* “may Anu destroy the seed of the irreverent.”¹⁹⁵ These are just two examples from several that Erle Leichty has brought to our attention, and since his seminal publication additional examples of numerical cryptography

190. For the earliest uses of ἰσοψηφός “isopsephos,” see the epigrams of Leonidas of Tarentum (third century BCE), found in *Anthologia Graeca* 6.321. The term was later used in dream interpretation; see Artemidorus Daldianus, *Oneirocritica* 3.34, 4.24 (second century CE). The rabbinic term *gematria* derives from the Greek γεωμετρία “geometry,” and relates to the manipulation of numbers. See Franz Dornseiff, *Das Alphabet in Mystik und Magie* (Leipzig: Tübnner, 1925), 91–118; Shmuel Sambursky, “On the Origin and Significance of the Term *Gematria*,” *JJS* 29 (1978): 35–38.

191. Note similarly, the observation by Collins, “Kilamuwa Inscription,” 188, that the Phoenician inscription has a verse structure of twenty-two lines in accordance with number of letters in the alphabet. Also representative is the end of some of Sennacherib’s historical inscriptions, e.g., [1 UŠ 11.TA.ĀM] MU.DIDLI MU.SAR-e ITI.si-bu-ti li-mu MUATI-ZU LÚ.GAR.KUR URU.LÍMMU-DÍGIR “the line count of the inscription is [71] (lines). Sibūti, eponymy of Nabû-lē’i, governor of the city of Arbela.” See Grayson and Novotny, *Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib*, 47, l. 72.

192. Jacob Bazak, “Numerical Devices in Biblical Poetry,” *VT* 38 (1988): 333–37, offers several examples of biblical texts that exploit the number of words in a passage.

193. Leichty, “Colophon,” 152–53.

194. See, e.g., Leichty, “Colophon,” 152.

195. Leichty, “Colophon,” 152–53.

have come to light.¹⁹⁶ As Hermann Hunger remarks: “The preferred place for scribes to play around with the writing system is the colophon.”¹⁹⁷

Mesopotamian scribes did not restrict such devices to colophons. It is by way of isopsephy that Sargon II (727–707 BCE) could claim that he built the walls of the city of Khorsabad to reach 16,283 cubits so that its size corresponded to the numerical value of his name.¹⁹⁸ Moreover, isopsephy was employed as a hermeneutic in commentaries.¹⁹⁹

While Egyptian hieroglyphic signs had both alphabetic and logographic values, they did not do double duty to render numbers, and therefore, one does not find isopsephy in Egyptian texts. Similarly, there is no evidence that Ugaritic signs doubled as numbers. Hence, the lack of evidence for isopsephy in Ugaritic.

As discussed above, the alphabet and numbers were intimately connected in ancient Israel. Thus the first letter *aleph* = one, *bet* = two, and so on up to ten; subsequent numbers hold values of ten, that is, twenty, thirty, forty, et cetera, and then of hundreds after one-hundred. Yet, how ancient was this correlation? The earliest discussion of isopsephy in the Hebrew Bible occurs in rabbinic texts, where the device is called *gematria*. Consequently, scholars debate whether the proposed cases represent later eisegetical readings or exegetical traditions passed on from an earlier age. Evidence for the latter comes from Akkadian texts, like those I discussed above, that employ isopsephy as an exegetical tool.²⁰⁰ Additional evidence comes from some biblical acrostics, which appear to reflect an awareness of the consonants’ numerical values, in addition to an abecedy and

196. Kurt Jaritz, “Geheimschriftsysteme im alten Orient,” *AM* 8 (1966): 11–15; C. J. Gadd, “Omens Expressed in Numbers,” *JCS* 21 (1967): 52–63; Hermann Hunger, *Babylonische und assyrische Kolophone*, AOAT 2 (Kevelaer: Butzon u. Berker; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1968); Hunger, “Kryptographische astrologische Omina,” 133–45; Pearce, *Cuneiform Cryptography*; Andrew R. George, “Babylonian Texts from the Folios of Sidney Smith, Part Two: Prognostic and Diagnostic Omens, Tablet I,” *RA* 85 (1991): 137–67, esp. 147; Matthew T. Rutz, “Textual Transmission between Babylonia and Susa: A New Solar Omen Compendium,” *JCS* 58 (2006): 86; Jeremiah Peterson, “A New Source for Diri Tablet 7,” *NABU* (2007): 5–6.

197. Hermann Hunger, “Playful Writings in Cuneiform Colophons,” in *Haim M. I. Gevar-yahu: Memorial Volume*, ed. Joshua J. Adler, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: World Jewish Bible Center, 1990), 34.

198. Weidner, “Geheimschrift”; Andreas Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II. aus Khorsabad* (Göttingen: Cuvillier Verlag, 1993), 42:65, pp. 294–295: ŠĀR ŠĀR ŠĀR ŠĀR GĒŠ + u GĒŠ + u GĒŠ + u 1 UŠ 3 qa-ni 2 KÙŠ (*ammati*) nibīti šumīya mišīlīti dūrīšu aškunma eli aban šadē zaqri ušaršidma temmēnšu “I made the measure of its wall 16,283 cubits, (equaling) my name, and established the foundation platform upon the bedrock of the high mountain.”

199. Frahm, *Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries*, 76–79.

200. Lieberman, “A Mesopotamian Background for the So-Called Aggadic ‘Measures’ of Biblical Hermeneutics?”; Tigay, “Early Technique of Aggadic Exegesis.”

the names of the consonants (see the discussion of Prov 31:21 below [4.2.7]). Nevertheless, the acrostics do not offer definitive proof. Indeed, solid evidence for isopsephy does not exist in Israel until the start of the first century BCE, where it appears on coins.²⁰¹ During the monarchic period, evidence from ostraca shows that the Israelites used the Egyptian hieratic numeral system.²⁰² Later the Mesopotamian sexagesimal system was adopted. This has suggested to some that Hebrew isopsephy represents an adaptation of later Greek practice.²⁰³ P. R. Weiss suggested the existence of isopsephy in the War Scroll from Qumran,²⁰⁴ but his proposal has been held in reservation or rejected.²⁰⁵

On the other hand, it is possible that in early Israel isopsephy was purely an exegetical device employed in elite circles, and so perhaps we should not expect to find it on common objects.²⁰⁶ Indeed, the most ancient proposals for isopsephy in the Bible are exegetical in nature. Thus, b. Ned. 32a states that the 318 soldiers who battled with Abram against the kings of the east (Gen 14:14) is an isopsephy

201. See the coins of Alexander Jannaeus minted in the twenty-fifth (i.e., כה) year of his rule in paleo-Hebrew script.

202. Yohanan Aharoni, "The Use of Hieratic Numerals in Hebrew Ostraca and the Shekel Weights," *BASOR* 184 (1966): 13–19; Ivan Tracy Kaufman, "New Evidence for Hieratic Numerals on Hebrew Weights," *BASOR* 188 (1967): 39–41. There also is an ostrakon found in Israel that contains only Egyptian numerals and some hieratic logograms with Hebrew words, which suggests that the entire text was read in Hebrew. See Shemuel Yeivin, "Studies in Comparative Egypto-Semitic," *Kêmi* 6 (1969): 63–80.

203. See Georges Ifrah, *From One to Zero: A Universal History of Numbers* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1985), 267–70.

204. Pinkas R. Weis, "The Date of the Habakkuk Scroll," *JQR* 41 (1950): 149 n. 79. The proposal entails reading the three highlighted consonants in IQM IV, 3–4: חדל מעמד רשעים בגבורת *hdl m' md rš' ym bgbwrt* "ceased is the stand of the wicked by the might (of God)," as $8 + 40 + 2 = 50$, and thus as an isopsephy for the company of fifty that goes to war against the sons of darkness. However, isopsephy is typically not so selective with regard to which letters count across word boundaries but instead counts all the consonants of a single word. For additional suggestions of isopsephy in the texts from Qumran, see Driver, "Playing on Words," 127.

205. For reservations, see William H. Brownlee, "Biblical Interpretation among the Sectaries of the Dead Sea Scrolls," *BA* 14 (1951), 71 n. 44; Fishbane, "Qumran Peshar and Traits of Ancient Hermeneutics," 97–114. Rejections include: Shani I. Berrin, "Qumran Pesharim," in *Biblical Interpretation at Qumran*, ed. Matthias Henze (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 110–33; Daniel A. Machiela, "The Qumran Pesharim as Biblical Commentaries: Historical Context and Lines of Development," *DSD* 19 (2012): 313–62.

206. Note the observation of Abraham Winitzer, "Assyriology and Jewish Studies in Tel Aviv: Ezekiel among the Babylonian Literati," in *Encounters by the Rivers of Babylon: Scholarly Conversations between Jews, Iranians and Babylonians in Antiquity*, ed. Uri Gabbay and Shai Secunda, *TSAJ* 160 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 163–216, that the numerical value of the consonants in the expression ימי מצור *yamē mašūr* "days of siege" in Ezek 4:8 adds up to 390, the very figure appearing in Ezek 4:9.

for Abram's servant Eliezar, whose name equals 318.²⁰⁷ Another proposal has been the name Gad in Gen 46:16, because its numerical value is seven, and the name appears in a chapter replete with sevens (including the number of his sons) and multiples of sevens.²⁰⁸

In more recent times there have been additional proposals. Addison Wright has drawn our attention to a number of cases in Qoheleth,²⁰⁹ though they have been met with some skepticism.²¹⁰ Rüdiger Heinzerling has argued that "using a key layed down in the context and a number of statistical observations," one can decode the exaggerated census totals in Num 1 and 26 by isopsephy to produce the formula: "Yahweh is One," as well as the number forty, a reference to the years of Israel's wandering.²¹¹ Casper Labuschagne and Israel Knohl have suggested that some texts, particularly psalms, contain stanzas of twenty-six words (or fifty-two, its double) in order to reflect the name Yahweh (i.e., $Y+H+W+H = 10 + 5 + 6 + 5 = 26$).²¹²

Whether one sees isopsephy at work in the Hebrew Bible depends to a large extent on how one weighs the comparative evidence from Mesopotamia and the limited evidence from biblical acrostics, as well as to what degree one sees the practice in rabbinic texts as a continuance of older hermeneutic traditions.

Isopsephy in Aramaic is represented by the well-known proclamation in Rev 13:18 concerning the name of the beast (666, var. 616). Lying behind the New

207. Tigay, "Early Technique of Aggadic Exegesis," 179–80; Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, 464; Gideon Bohak, "Bereshit Reshit in Gematria: New Sources for the Study of the Jewish Esoteric Tradition in the Talmudic and Gaonic Periods" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 83 (2015): 513–29. The notion that 318 represents a similar case of isopsephy in the Epistle to Barnabas, has been refuted by Reidar Hvalvik, "Barnabas 9.7–9 and the Author's Supposed Use of *Gematria*," *NTS* 33 (1987): 276–82.

208. Sasson, "Word Play in the O.T.," 969.

209. For example, דִּבְרֵי *dibrē* "words of" has the numerical value of 216, the number of verses in the book, excluding the epilogue. For this and others, see Addison G. Wright, "The Riddle of the Sphinx: The Structure of the Book of Qoheleth," *CBQ* 30 (1968): 313–34; Wright, "The Riddle of the Sphinx Revisited: Numerical Patterns in the Book of Qoheleth," *CBQ* 42 (1980): 38–51; Wright, "Additional Numerical Patterns in Qoheleth," *CBQ* 45 (1983): 32–43.

210. See Choon Leong Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 18C (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 44.

211. Rüdiger Heinzerling, "Bileams Rätsel: Die Zählung der Wehrfähigen in Numeri 1 und 26," *ZAW* 111 (1999): 415. Cf. Ps 136, which contains twenty-six verses, thus totaling the numerical value of the name Yahweh.

212. Casper Labuschagne, "Significant Compositional Techniques in the Psalms: Evidence for the Use of Number as an Organizing Principle," *VT* 59 (2009): 583–605. See also Ronald Youngblood, "Divine Names in the Book of Psalms: Literary Structures and Number Patterns," *JANES* 19 (1989): 171–81; Israel Knohl, "Sacred Architecture: The Numerical Dimensions of Biblical Poems," *VT* 62 (2012): 189–97.

Testament passage is the Aramaic form of the name נרון קסר “Neron Caesar,” i.e., $50 + 200 + 6 + 50 + 100 + 60 + 200 = 666$ (var. נרו קסר “Nero Caesar,” i.e., $50 + 200 + 6 + 100 + 60 + 200 = 616$).²¹³ Isopsephy would live on as a hermeneutical practice and would continue to be adopted by later Jewish, Samaritan, and Christian exegetes, who would expand its applications.²¹⁴

Generally speaking, isopsephy is a visual, not an aural, device. One cannot readily unpack the numerical values of signs and words when a text is recited. Indeed, isopsephy is a learned device, hermeneutical and/or didactic in purpose, and at home in scholarly circles where such matters could be contemplated and discussed. It is essentially a form of cryptography.

4.1.11. *NOTARIQON*

Notariqon (also called acronymy or etymography) is the practice of explaining or deriving the meaning of a word by reading the first consonant of each word (or signs used to write the word) successively so that they spell out an entirely different word or sentence.²¹⁵ As Stefan Maul observes, one finds *notariqon* in Akkadian texts mainly as a hermeneutical tool, and often working across languages, that is, Akkadian and Sumerian.²¹⁶ Thus, one commentary interprets the Sumerian KISIM₅ “sour milk” (= Akkadian *kisimmu*) as meaning a “shepherd’s pen,” by breaking it up into the Sumerian signs KI “deep place” (=

213. The variant is derived by using the Hebrew/Aramaic alphabet to render the Latin form of his name. Josef Schmidt, “Die Rätselzahl 666 in Offb 13:18 Ein Lösungsversuch auf der Basis lateinischer Gematrie,” *NT* 44 (2002): 35–54, argues that the isopsephy here spells the name Claudius when based on the Latin numeral system.

214. See Dornseiff, *Das Alphabet in Mystik und Magie*, 91–118; Robert K. Johnston, *The Christian at Play* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983); Joel Kalvesmaki, *Formation of the Early Christian Theology of Arithmetic Number Symbolism in the Late Second Century and Early Third Century* (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 2006); David Derovan, et al., “Gematria,” *EncJud* 1:424–27; Mark Kiley, “Three More Fishes (John 21:11),” *JBL* 127 (2008): 529–31.

215. “*Notariqon*” derives from the word νοτάριος “shorthand writer, secretary,” which in turn derives from Latin *notarius* “notary.” See Athanasius, *Apologia ad Constantium imperatorem* 2035.011 (fourth century CE); Johannes Chrysostom, *Ad Innocentium papam* 2062.094 (fourth–fifth century CE). On the use of “etymography” see Assmann, “Etymographie,” 37–63; Frahm, *Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries*, 70.

216. See Stefan M. Maul, “Das Wort im Worte, Orthographie und Etymologie als hermeneutische Verfahren babylonischer Gelehrter,” in *Commentaries—Kommentare* ed. Glenn W. Most, AKSP 4 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 15–18; Illya Vorontsov, “Material und Wesen des Mittleren Himmels,” *NABU* (2008): 27, has discovered *notariqon* in *KAR* 307 in reference to the stone named *saggilmud*. The *notariqon* associates it with Middle Heaven.

Akkadian *tarbašu* “pen”) and SI (= Akkadian *rē’ûti*) “sheep.”²¹⁷ In another commentary, we find the following interpretation, again based on *noṭariqon*: *ḥur-da-ti*: *ḥur-ri da-di, da-du: ma-ra* “(the term) ‘Vulva’ (*ḥurdatu*) means ‘cavity of the loved-one’ (*ḥurri dādi*), where ‘loved-one’ (*dādu*) means ‘son’ (*māru*).”²¹⁸

In some cases, a Sumerian reading of a logogram was used to provide an Akkadian etymology. Thus, in a magico-medical commentary, we find:

SAḪAR : *eperi* : SAḪAR : *saḫar u saḫar ištēnma* “(the sign read as) SAḪAR (in Sumerian means) ‘dust’ (in Akkadian, but note also concerning) SAḪAR (that) *saḫar* and (the Akkadian) *saḫar* ‘small child’ are one.” (N11-T3)

Here the commentary uses the similarity in sound between the Sumerian reading of the logogram for “dust” (SAḪAR) and the Akkadian *saḫar* “small child” to suggest that dust played a role in bringing forth the baby.²¹⁹

Jiménez has pointed out that *noṭariqon* also is employed in Akkadian disputation poems, where: “decoding the origin of a word is not simply an exercise in etymology: inasmuch as the names are related to the inner nature of things, etymology is a true epistemological endeavor.”²²⁰ In this context, *noṭariqon* has an appellative function that also seeks to ascertain the true essence of a person, place, or thing.

In chapter 2, I presented a particularly striking case of *noṭariqon* in Egyptian (see 2.4.3). However, such cryptic writing was rather widespread, especially on monumental inscriptions of later periods. The Egyptian temple of Esna offers a number of fine examples, each of which offers a cryptographic reading of the name of a god, for example, Heka, Isis, Khnum, Menhyt, Nebetu, Neith, and Osiris. For example, the name of the god Khnum is written as 𓆎𓅓𓏏𓏏. On the surface, one may read the inscription as *ḥpr.w ntr mrj* “the beloved divine being.” However, if one reads just the first consonant of each of the logographic signs it yields *ḥ + n + m = ḥnm* “Khnum.”²²¹

To date, no examples of *noṭariqon* have been found in Ugaritic texts. Either examples await discovery or the device was not employed.

217. The commentary focuses on the forty-first *pirsu*-section of *Aa* (= *Ea* 8.3), ll. 3–4.

218. The commentary elaborates the meaning of the text entitled ËN MUNUS Û.TU.UD.DA.A.NI “Incantation for a Woman in Labor,” ll. 42–43. See now Gabbay, “Akkadian Commentaries from Ancient Mesopotamia and Their Relation to Early Hebrew Exegesis,” 287–89; discussed also by Frahm, *Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries*, 71.

219. Found in Frahm, *Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries*, 73.

220. Jiménez, “‘As Your Name Indicates,’” 88.

221. Cited in Jochen Hallof, “Esna,” in *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, ed. Willeke Wendrich (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA, 2011), 10. By this time, the phonemes *ḥ* and *h* had become interchangeable.

Notarikon in the Hebrew Bible has been proposed for Jeremiah's use of the phrase "temple of Yahweh," which he repeats verbatim three times followed by הֵמָּה *hēmmāh* "these" (Jer 7:4). The odd line has encouraged some to conclude that the three consonants that comprise הֵמָּה *hēmmāh* (i.e., *h* + *m* + *h*) are an acronym for הַיְּהוָה הַמְּקוֹם *[h]am-[m]āqōm [h]az-zeh* "this place."²²² Like isopsephy, *notarikon* is more common in later rabbinic texts and talismans, where it bears a performative and/or ritual function.²²³

Another example appears in Esther's statement to the Persian king: בּוֹא יְיָ הַיּוֹם וְהַמֶּלֶךְ הַגָּדוֹל *[y]ābō' [h]am-melek [w]ə-hāmān [h]ay-yōm* "let the king and Haman come today" (Esth 5:4). The initial consonants of each of these words (i.e., יהוה *yhw*) spell out the divine name Yahweh, which otherwise appears nowhere in the book.²²⁴

Some authors use *notarikon* for appellative purposes. Thus, Gen 16:11 combines שָׁמַע *šāma* "he heard" and יהוה "Yahweh" to name יִשְׁמָעֵל *yišmā'ēl* "Ishmael," Gen 17:4–5 reads אַבְרָהָם *'abrāhām* "Abraham" as the conjunction of אָב *āb* "father" and הַמָּוֶן *hāmōn* "many (nations)," Gen 31:48 explains the place name גַּלְעָד *gal'ēd* as if derived from הַגֵּל *hag-gal* "the heap" and עֵד *'ēd* "witness," and Judg 6:32 accounts for the name יְרֻבָּעַל *yəruba'al* "Jerubaal" by noting that the people said בּוֹ הַבַּעַל יִרָב *yāreb bō hab-ba'al* "let Baal contend against him."²²⁵

Notarikon continued in Aramaic as an exegetical tool. Thus, b. Shab. 77b explains the difficult Aramaic word מְתוּכִילְתָּא *mtwkylt'* by way of *notarikon*: דָּא יִמְתִּי תְכִילִי *'ymty tkly d'* "When will it end?" Elsewhere the rabbis use *notarikon* to render the Hebrew word אֵלִים *'illēm* "dumb" in Ps 38:14 into Aramaic: אִישְׁתְּקִיל מִלּוּלֵיהּ *yštqyl mylwlyh* "his speech has been removed" (b. Hag. 2b [= Git. 71a]).

In Akkadian and Egyptian texts, *notarikon* is primarily a visual device, because it operates on the level of the sign. Indeed, it constitutes a form of cryptography. However, in Hebrew and Aramaic texts, one can detect *notarikon* visually, but aurally as well, especially if one is attentive to the paronomastic rendering that derives from the device. This is because *notarikon* employed in these scripts operates on the level of the consonant. The visual and aural effect of *notarikon* generally is one of metonymization. Its function is primarily hermeneutic or perhaps didactic.

222. Sasson, "Word Play in the O.T."; though Alan D. Corré, "'elle, *hēmma* = *sic*," *Bib* 54 (1973): 263–64, argues that הֵמָּה *hēmmā* is an equivalent to *sic*.

223. See Lieberman, "Mesopotamian Background for the So-Called Aggadic 'Measures' of Biblical Hermeneutics?"; Tigay, "Early Technique of Aggadic Exegesis."

224. B. Beitzel, "Exodus 3:14 and the Divine Name: A Case of Biblical Paronomasia," *TrinJ* n.s. 1 (1980): 7–8.

225. These examples of *notarikon*, and many more from talmudic and midrashic texts, appear in Waldburg, *Methods of (Hermeneutical) Transformations*, article 4, section 1.

4.1.12. ACROSTICS (ALSO TELESTICHS, MESOSTICHS, AND MENOSTICHS)

An acrostic is a form of polysemy that works by reading vertically the initial letter or sign of the first word in successive lines.²²⁶ Since each of the lines also bears meanings horizontally, we may consider an acrostic a structural form of polysemy. A telestich is an acrostic that reads the final letters or signs of successive lines. A mesostich is an acrostic that reads the middle consonants of a word (on this form see below under Transposition 4.1.13). When an acrostic, telestich, or mesostich spells out a name, word, or sentence it is called a menostich. Though telestichs and menostichs are more frequently attested in Akkadian and Egyptian texts than in the Hebrew Bible,²²⁷ a few do appear. The examples illustrated here anticipate the long history that acrostics would have in later Greek and Latin literature.²²⁸

226. ἀκροστιχίς “acrostic” first occurs in Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. Rom.* 4.62 (first century BCE–first century CE). Cicero, *Div.* 2.54.111 (first century BCE), does not employ the word, but describes the device.

227. Clère, “Acrostiches et mots croisés des anciens égyptiens”; Stewart, “Crossword Hymn to Mut”; William Michael Soll, “Babylonian and Biblical Acrostics,” *Bib* 69 (1988): 305–22.

228. See, e.g., Ralph Marcus, “Alphabetic Acrostics in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods,” *JNES* 6 (1947): 109–15; Martin L. West, “Magnus and Marcellinus: Unnoticed Acrostics in *The Cyranides*,” *CQ* 32 (1982): 480–81; Don P. Fowler, “An Acrostic in Vergil (*Aeneid* 7.601–4)?,” *CQ* 33 (1983): 298; James J. Clauss, “An Acrostic in Vergil (*Eclogues* I 5–8): The Chance that Mimics Choice?,” *Aevum Antiquum* 10 (1997): 267–87; Clauss, “Theriaca: Nicander’s Poem of the Earth,” *SIFC* 4 (2006): 160–82; Denis C. Feeney and Damien Nelis, “Two Virgilian Acrostics: *Certissima Signa*?,” *CQ* 55 (2005): 644–46; Jeffrey Gore and Allan Kershaw, “An Unnoticed Acrostic in Apuleius *Metamorphoses* and Cicero *de Divinatione* 2.111–12,” *CQ* 58 (2008): 393–94; Alexei A. Grishin, “*Ludus in undis*: An Acrostic in *Eclogue* 9,” *HSCP* 104 (2008): 237–40; Grishin, *Acrostics in Virgil’s Poetry: The Problem of Authentication* (Master’s Thesis: Harvard University, 2009); Selina Stewart, “‘Apollo of the Shore’: Apollonius of Rhodes and the Acrostic Phenomenon,” *CQ* 60 (2010): 401–5; Ted Somerville, “Note on a Reversed Acrostic in Vergil *Georgics* 1.429–33,” *CP* 105 (2010): 202–9; Cristiano Castelletti, “A ‘Greek’ Acrostic in Valerius Flaccus (3.430–4),” *Mnemosyne* 65 (2012): 319–23; Robert Colborn, “Solving Problems with Acrostics: Manilius Dates Germanicus,” *CQ* 63 (2013): 450–52; Mathias Hanses, “The Pun and the Moon in the Sky: Aratus’ ΔΕΙΤΗ Acrostic,” *CQ* 64 (2014): 609–14; Jan Kwapisz, “Behaghel’s Club,” *CQ* 64 (2014): 615–22; E. Giusti, “Caesar Criss-Crossing the Rubicon: A Palindromic Acrostic in Lucan (1.218–22),” *CQ* 65 (2015): 892–94; Jerzy Danielewicz, “One Sign after Another: The Fifth ΔΕΙΤΗ in Aratus’ *Phaen.* 783–4?,” *CQ* 65 (2015): 387–90; Stephen M. Trzaskoma, “Further Possibilities Regarding the Acrostic at Aratus 783–7,” *CQ* 66 (2016): 785–90; Neil Adkin, “Valerius Flaccus’ *Laniabor*-Acrostic (*Argonautica* 4.177–84),” *CQ* 67 (2017): 327–28; Evelyn Patrick Rick, “Cicero Belts Aratus: The Bilingual Acrostic at *Aratea* 317–20,” *CQ*

Since Akkadian is a syllabic system, it lends itself well to these devices.²²⁹ Perhaps the most well-known acrostic in Akkadian occurs in the colophon to Ludlul bēl nēmeqi, wherein each of the twenty-seven stanzas begins with a different sign, which it repeats for eleven lines, before moving to a new sign. In total, the beginning signs of all the stanzas spell out *a-na-ku sa-ag-gi-il-ki-[i-na-am-u]b-bi-ib ma-áš-ma-šu ka-ri-bu ša i-li ú šar-ri* “I, Saggil-kīnam-ubbib, the exorcist, am adorant of the god and the king.”²³⁰

Two learned prayers from Khorsabad, one to Marduk and another to Nabu, also contain acrostics that read “Nabu-ušebši, the exorcist.”²³¹ Moreover, both prayers contain telestichs. The telestich in the prayer to Marduk reads: “the servant who proclaims your lordship.” The one in the prayer to Nabu records: “the suppliant servant who reveres you.”²³² Moreover, the author, presumably Nabu-ušebši, alerts the reader to the presence of the acrostic by noting that the *rēš miḫilti u qīt miḫilti ana šinīšu iššassū* “one can read the start and end of each line in two (directions).”²³³ Another lengthy acrostic in an Assyrian hymn to Marduk reads: “I am Assurbanipal, who has called out to you. Give me life, Marduk, and I will praise you.”²³⁴

An exorcistic prayer from the first millennium BCE contains thirty-six lines that are grouped into sections of four. Each of the sections begins and ends with the same sign, which allows one to read it vertically as spelling *ú-š-ab-du-du ma-ru-uš-tu* “I will cause him to pity the distress” on the left and right of the incantation.²³⁵ The imbedding of words and use of script is especially applicable to this text since it calls upon Nabu, the patron god of scribes.

69 (2019): 222–28; Matthew Robinson, “Looking Edgeways. Pursuing Acrostics in Ovid and Virgil,” *CQ* 69 (2019): 290–308.

229. See William W. Hallo, “New Viewpoints on Cuneiform Literature,” *IEJ* 12 (1962): 14–15. For a comparative look at acrostics, see Brug, “Biblical Acrostics and Their Relationship to Other Ancient Near Eastern Acrostics,” 283–304; Klaas Spronk, “Acrostics in the Book of Nahum,” *ZAW* 110 (1998): 209–22.

230. See Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, 63; Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 121–23.

231. W. G. Lambert, “Literary Style in First Millennium Mesopotamia,” *JAOS* 88 (1968): 131–32; R. F. G. Sweet, “A Pair of Double Acrostics in Akkadian,” *Or* 38 (1969): 459–60; Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 473–77.

232. For another acrostic hymn to Nabu, see S. A. Strong, “A Hymn of Nebuchadnezzar,” *PSBA* 20 (1898): 154–62.

233. As noted by Foster, *Before the Muses*, 620, but not by Lambert, “Literary Style in First Millennium Mesopotamia,” 130, who suggested it meant to recite the prayers twice.

234. A. Livingstone, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea*, SAA 3 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1989), 6–10.

235. Published with a number of similar acrostics and telestichs already by S. A. Strong, “On Some Babylonian and Assyrian Alliterative Texts-I,” *PSBA* 17 (1895): 131–51. See too the crossword-like inscriptions on two sixth century BCE Babylonian cylinders

Since many cuneiform signs have multiple values, authors may use them with one value to create the vertical reading of the acrostic, while exploiting them for a different phonetic value when read horizontally. Thus, for example, in the Babylonian Theodicy, we find:

140. *bi-it-bi-ti-iš lu-ter-ru-ba lu-nu-’i bu-bu-ti*
 From house to house I will go (lit. “enter”), I will drive
 away hunger.
141. *bi-ri-iš lu-ut-te-’e-lu-me su-le-e lu-ša-a-[a-ad]*
 I will roam around from one place to another/hungrily, I will
 pr[owl] the streets.²³⁶
142. *pi-is-nu-qiš ana qer-bi lu-t[er-ru-ba ...]*
 Wretchedly, I will en[ter] inside [...]

Note that when read vertically, the first sign in each line is read as *bi*, even though one must read it horizontally as *pi* in the third line. This occurs quite often in the poem,²³⁷ and it is a feature shared by lexical lists organized acrographically.²³⁸

Egyptian scribes often exploited their script for its ability to communicate in multiple directions, sometimes with stunning results. An astonishing hymn to the goddess Mut inscribed on a limestone stela bears two entirely different readings

discussed by Paul-Alain Beaulieu, “Divine Hymns as Royal Inscriptions,” *NABU* (1993): 69–71.

236. Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 141, reads *bīriš* as “side, ridge” rather than “hungrily.” This creates a case of unidirectional polysemy.

237. The acrostic in the third strophe (ll. 23–33) relies upon the reading *ku*, but l. 26 must be read *qú*. The fifth strophe (ll. 45–55) relies upon *ak*, but ll. 46 and 53 start with *aq*, and l. 50 with *ag*. The sixth strophe (ll. 56–66) relies upon *gi*, but ll. 61 and 65 must be read *ge*. The seventh strophe (ll. 78–88) relies upon the reading *ki*, but l. 83 starts with *qí*, and l. 87 with *qé*. The twelfth strophe (ll. 122–132) relies upon the reading *up*, but ll. 125, 127, 128, 130, and 132 must be read *ub*. The thirteenth strophe (ll. 133–143) relies upon *bi*, but ll. 135 and 142 start with *pi*, and ll. 136, 138, 139, and 143 start with *bé*. The fourteenth strophe (ll. 144–154) relies upon *ib*, but ll. 145 and 148 start with *ep* and l. 147 with *ip*. The twentieth strophe (ll. 210–220) relies upon the reading *ri*, but ll. 216, 218, and 220 start with *re*. The twenty-first strophe (ll. 221–231) relies upon the sign BU (= *bu* [first line is broken]), but ll. 224–228, 230 must be read *pu*. The twenty-fourth strophe (ll. 254–264) relies upon *le*, but ll. 255, 256, 258–262, and 264 start with *li*. The twenty-sixth strophe (ll. 276–286) relies upon *šar*, but ll. 280 and 285 read it as *sar*. The twenty-seventh strophe (ll. 287–297) relies upon the reading *re*, but ll. 288, 290, 292, and 295 must read it as *ri*. See Oshima, *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers*, 157, 358.

238. Thus, one lexical text lists successive entries that begin with same cuneiform sign, 𒬷AR, though one must read each with the following phonetic values: *hur*, *mur*, *ur*₅, *ara*₃, and *kin*₂. See Veldhuis, *History of the Cuneiform Lexical Traditions*, 166–68.

when read vertically or horizontally. Though partly damaged, the vertical reading runs eighty lines and the horizontal one extends to sixty-seven lines.²³⁹

The lack of vowels in the Egyptian script and existence of homophones in the language help to create the flexibility required for such linguistic feats. For example, in another Egyptian “cross-word,” the poet uses the sign  for *mwt* “mother,” when read horizontally, but as the goddess “Mut,” when read vertically. Similarly, when read in one direction, the signs  are understood as *ʾw* meaning “to be,” but when read in another, with the determinative , they are understood as *ʾ(ʿ)w* “adoration.” Such incredible creativity is much more difficult to achieve in purely phonetic scripts.²⁴⁰

The Ugaritic corpus has yielded no alphabetic acrostics, though the system for ordering the alphabet is known.²⁴¹ However, the texts do offer cases of what Watson has called “quasi-acrostics” or “anaphoric alliteration,” in which a poem begins successive lines and/or stichs with the same consonant.”²⁴² Thus, *CAT* 1.14.iv.19–22:²⁴³

19. *atr ʾn ʾn hlk*
After two, two went,
20. *atr ʾlt klhm*
After three, all of them.
21. *ahd bth ysgʾr*
A bachelor closed up his house.
22. *almnt škr tškr*
A widow became a mercenary.

Each successive line starts with an *a-aleph*. See similarly *CAT* 1.6.ii.30–35:

- tiḥd bn ilm mt*
She seizes divine Mot.
b ḥrb tbqʾnn
With a sword she splits him,

239. See Stewart, “Crossword Hymn to Mut.”

240. See similarly the bilingual Demotic and Greek inscription on the Stela of Moschion in Rachel Mairs, “‘Proclaiming It to Greeks and Natives, Along the Rows of the Chequer-board’: Readers and Viewers of Greek, Latin and Demotic Acrostich Inscriptions,” *CQ* 67 (2017): 228–46. For an image of the object, see Jeffrey Spier, Timothy Potts, and Sara E. Cole, eds., *Beyond the Nile: Egypt and the Classical World* (Los Angeles, CA: Paul Getty Museum, 2018), 151.

241. Aaron Demsky, “Abecedaries,” in *COS* 1:362–65.

242. W. G. E. Watson, “Quasi-Acrostics in Ugaritic Poetry,” *UF* 12 (1980): 445–47; Watson, *Traditional Techniques in Classical Hebrew Verse*, 89–91, 431–34; Yogeve and Yona, “Opening Alliteration in Biblical and Ugaritic Poetry,” 108–13.

243. Watson, *Traditional Techniques in Classical Hebrew Verse*, 432.

b ḥtr tdrynn
 With a sieve she winnows him,
b išt tšrpnn
 With fire she burns him,
b rḥm tḥnn
 With a millstone she grinds him,
b šd tdrʿnn
 In a field she sows him.

This stanza employs the preposition *b* at the start of each line after the first. Sometimes the device builds upon successive uses of the same verbal construction. This occurs in *CAT* 1.15.iv.14–16:²⁴⁴

14. *tšmʿ mṯt [ḥ]ry*
 The woman Hurray obeyed:
 15. *tḥḥ šmn [m]rih*
 She slew the fattest of her fatlings,
 16. *tḥḥ rḥbt yn*
 She opened flagons of wine.

Watson suggests that

it is probable that the quasi-acrostic, which is basically an extension of initial alliteration, was originally just a by-product of pervasive parallelism and that it was only made overt when the oral poetry of ancient times was committed to writing.²⁴⁵

Nevertheless, I suggest that at least four cases in Ugaritic constitute meaningful menostichs. The first occurs in the Tale of Kirtu (*CAT* 1.16.i.12–17):

ybkʷ wyšnn
 He cries, and gnashes his teeth,
ytḥ gh bkʷ
 He makes his voice heard while crying,
b ḥyk abn [n]šmḥ
 “In your life, our father, we delighted.
bl mtk ngln
 In your not-dying we rejoiced.
k klb b btk nʿtq
 Like a dog you pass into your (eternal) house,

244. Observed by Yogev and Yona, “Opening Alliteration in Biblical and Ugaritic Poetry,” 111.

245. Watson, *Traditional Techniques in Classical Hebrew Verse*, 434.

k inr a[p] ḥštk
Like a cur into your grave.”

Here the quasi-acrostic reads *y-y, b-b, k-k*, thus twice spelling *ybk* “he cries,” the central theme of the stanza and the very verb that chiastically starts and ends the first two lines.²⁴⁶ When the stanza is repeated in the third person feminine imperfect in apparent reference to Thitmanit, it fittingly spells *t-t, b-b, k-k*, that is, *tbk* “she cries” (*CAT* 1.16.ii.35–39).

A second possible acrostic appears in the *Epic of Baal* (*CAT* 1.1.iii.24–25):

ygly ḡd i[l w ybu]
He enters E[l]’s mountain [and comes]
[qrš mlk] ab šnm
[To the tent of the king], the Father of Years.
l [p ‘n il yhbr wql]
A[t El’s feet he bows down and falls].

Here the entrance of the god Kothar-wa-Ḥasis is marked by a partial acrostic that spells *yql* “he falls,” thus perfectly matching the subject matter. In fact, the same verb concludes the third line. The passage is repeated in *CAT* 1.2.iii.5–6, and again in 1.4.iv.23–25 and 1.6.i.34–36, where it refers to Anat, that is, *tml* “she falls.”

A third case occurs in the same text, in the mouth of Mot (*CAT* 1.6.vi.14–16):

ahym ytnt b ‘l spuy
“My brothers, O Baal, you gave as my food,
bnm umy klyy
My mother’s sons for my consumption!”

The brief acrostic spells *ab* “father,” in a context that employs the words “brothers,” “mother,” and “sons.”²⁴⁷

Immediately afterwards, we find yet another menostich in the description of the battle between Baal and Mot (*CAT* 1.6.vi.16–22):

yt ‘n k gmm
They eye each other like fighters,

246. Long after catching this acrostic, I came upon Yegorov and Yona, “Opening Alliteration in Biblical and Ugaritic Poetry,” 113 n. 16, who arrived at this observation independently. They do not note that it repeats in a different person later in the text.

247. Cf. Song 8:2 אָבִי אֶל־בֵּית אִמִּי אָבִי אֶל־בֵּית אִמִּי *‘ābī ‘ākā ‘el bēt ‘immī* “I would bring you into my mother’s house.” Here the phrase אָבִי אֶל־בֵּית אִמִּי *‘ābī ‘ākā* “I would bring you” suggests אָבִי *‘ābī* “my father.” Such devices evince a desire to cluster terms for family members.

mt ‘z b ‘l ‘z

Mot is fierce, Baal is fierce,

ynghn k rumm

They gore each other like aurochs,

mt ‘z b ‘l ‘z

Mot is fierce, Baal is fierce,

ynlkn k bnm

They bite each other like serpents,

mt ‘z b ‘l ‘z

Mot is fierce, Baal is fierce,

ymshn k lsmm

They drag each other like runners,

mt ql b ‘l ql

Mot falls, Baal falls.

When read acrostically, the passage offers a four-fold repetition of the name *y-m* “Yam.” The subtle integration of Yam into the battle with Mot forces us to recall Baal’s previous deathmatch with Yam, from which he emerged victorious (*CAT* 1.2.iv.15–27). The parallel fights and the nature of the conflicts reveal aspects of Baal’s character. Mark Smith explains:

Yamm and Mot are cosmic figures, and they show Baal’s heroism in equally cosmic stature and proportions. Furthermore, as Yamm represents the chaotic waters and Mot signifies death in its cosmic proportions, Baal embodies order and life in equal, if not greater, universal proportions.²⁴⁸

Most acrostics in the Hebrew Bible proceed alphabetically from the first letter (*aleph*) to the last (*taw*), but there are a variety of ways this is achieved.²⁴⁹ A new letter can commence with every line (Pss 25, 34, 145, Prov 31:10–31, Lam 1, 2, 4), couplet (Ps 37), or even every stich/half-line (Pss 111, 112).²⁵⁰ The acrostic in Lam 3 moves to a new alphabetic letter every fourth verse, repeating the acrostic

248. Mark S. Smith, *Introduction with Text, Translation and Commentary of KTU 1.1–1.2*, vol. 1 of *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 19.

249. See K. C. Hanson, *Alphabetic Acrostics: A Form Critical Study* (PhD diss., The Claremont Graduate School, 1984); David Noel N. Freedman, “Acrostic Poems in the Hebrew Bible: Alphabetic and Otherwise,” *CBQ* 48 (1986): 408–31; Freedman and David Miano, “Non-Acrostic Alphabetic Psalms,” in Flint and Miller, *Book of Psalms*, 87–96; N. M. Sarna, “Acrostics,” *EncJud* 1:368–69; Thomas Renz, “A Perfectly Broken Acrostic in Nahum 1?,” *JHS* 9 (2009): 2–26; Roland Meynet, *Les huit psaumes acrostiches alphabétiques* (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2015).

250. Paul W. Gabelein Jr., “Psalm 34 and Other Biblical Acrostics: Evidence from the Aleppo Codex,” in *Sopher Mahir: Northwest Semitic Studies Presented to Stanislav Segert*, ed. Edward M. Cook (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 127–43.

letter in each of the three successive verses.²⁵¹ The acrostic in Ps 119 starts with a new letter every ninth verse. Some broken or fragmentary alphabetic acrostics are also present in Nah 1:2–8,²⁵² Prov 24:1–22,²⁵³ and Prov 29:22–27.²⁵⁴ It is worth noting that while Israelite poets typically start the twenty-second verse of an acrostic with the letter ש *š*, they also could use a שׁ *š*, because the diacritic that distinguishes the two consonants was an invention of a later age (e.g., שׁשׁ *šš* “rejoice” in Lam 4:21, שׂרִים *šārīm* “princes” in Ps 119:161, שׂשׁ *šās* “rejoice” in Ps 119:162, שׁבַּרְתִּי *šibbartī* “I hope” in Ps 119:166, etc.). Nevertheless, this does suggest that the acrostic was primarily a visual device, since the two consonants were pronounced differently.

Various functions have been proposed for acrostics. Some might have been employed as mnemonics²⁵⁵ or to convey a sense of order.²⁵⁶ Those in Lamentations might have provided readers with a tool for interacting with their emotions through reason.²⁵⁷

Scholars have pointed out the presence of several menostichs as well, each of which is imbedded in an acrostic. After moving through the entire Hebrew alphabet, the poet of Ps 34 adds an extra line that begins: “Yahweh redeems the life of his servants.” The addition allows the poet to start the last verse with the verb פִּדְּהָ *pōdēh* “redeems,” and thus with the letter פ *pe*. This produces an inner acrostic and menostich in which the first, center, and final lines of the poem read acrostically as אָלַף *’ālāp* “learn.”²⁵⁸ A nearly identical menostich using the same verb appears in Ps 25. It also has been suggested that Ps 145 contains a reverse mini-acrostic in lines 11–13. Here the initial consonants of the first words (i.e., כְּבוֹד *kəbōd* “glory,” לֹהֹדִי *lə-hōdī* “to make known,” and מַלְכֻתְךָ *malḵūtḵā*

251. J. Renkema, “The Meaning of the Parallel Acrostics in Lamentations,” *VT* 45 (1995): 379–82. Mitchell First, “Using the *Pe–Ayin* Order of the Abecedaries of Ancient Israel to Date the Book of Psalms,” *JSOT* 38 (2014): 471–85, argues that the earlier order of the alphabet explains a number of acrostics including Lam 2–4, Prov 31 (LXX), and Pss 9–10, 25, 34, 37.

252. Duane L. Christensen, “The Acrostic of Nahum Once Again: A Prosodic Analysis of Nah 1, 1–10,” *ZAW* 99 (1987): 409–14; Spronk, “Acrostics in the Book of Nahum”; Aron Pinker, “Nahum 1: Acrostic and Authorship,” *JBQ* 34 (2006): 97–103.

253. Victor A. Hurowitz, “An Often Overlooked Alphabetic Acrostic in Proverbs 24:1–22,” *RB* 107 (2000): 526–40.

254. Victor A. Hurowitz, “Proverbs 29:22–27: Another Unnoticed Alphabetic Acrostic,” *JSOT* 92 (2001): 121–25.

255. Soll, “Babylonian and Biblical Acrostics.”

256. Hillers, *Lamentations*. O. Palmer Robertson, “The Alphabetic Acrostic in Book I of the Psalms: An Overlooked Element of Psalter Structure,” *JSOT* 40 (2015): 225–38, argues that the acrostics in Psalms organize the poems into smaller sections.

257. Assis, “Alphabetic Acrostic in the Book of Lamentations.”

258. Brug, “Biblical Acrostics and Their Relationship to Other Ancient Near Eastern Acrostics.”

“your kingdom”) in each verse offer a reverse spelling of מֶלֶךְ *melek* “king,” a keyword throughout the poem.²⁵⁹ Though the line starting with the letter נ *nun* is lacking in Ps 145, it appears in the version from Qumran (11QPs^a). When one reads the first two words of Lam 5:1–3 in conjunction with a half-line acrostic, the text yields the menostich: זַכְרִיָּהוּ הַנָּבִיא *zəḵaryāhū hān-nābī* “Zechariah the prophet.”²⁶⁰ Philippe Guillaume has suggested that this is followed in Lam 5:19–22 by an acrostic, telestich, and menostich that produces: מְלֹחֶקָה רַם מֶלֶךְ *’elōhekā rām mē[]ōd* “your God is exalted greatly.”²⁶¹ Other menostichs have been suggested, but with varied success (e.g., Ps 2,²⁶² Ps 9,²⁶³ Ps 10,²⁶⁴ and Lam 5:17–18²⁶⁵).

Israelite poets sometimes further enhance the art of Hebrew acrostics by matching the alphabetic letters comprising an acrostic with the names of those letters. In Prov 31:10–31, the lines beginning with the letters י *yod*, כ *kaph*, and פ *pe* use the words יָדַי *yādeyhā* “her hands,” כַּפַּי *kappāh* “her palms,” and פִּי *pīhā* “her mouth,” respectively. Another way to enhance an acrostic is to emphasize the acrostic letter in the verse. Thus, the *beth* verse in Prov 31:11 contains no less than four ב *beths*: לֵב בָּתָּח *bāṭaḥ* *bāh lēb ba* “the heart of her husband trusts in her.” The same can be said of the lines in this poem that begin with the letters ו *waw*, ל *lamed*, פ *pe*, and צ *sade*.²⁶⁶ In this way, some acrostics demonstrate what Ceresko has rightly called “alphabetic thinking.”²⁶⁷ As seen above (4.1.10), they also can demonstrate “numerical thinking.”

The quasi-acrostics known to Ugaritic texts also appear in the Hebrew Bible, and some of them show an awareness of alphabetical arrangement.²⁶⁸ Thus, Prov 22:2–3 reads:

259. Watson, “Reversed Rootplay in Ps. 145.”

260. Siegfried Bergler, “Threni V, Nur ein alphabetisierende Lied? Versuch Einer Deutung,” *VT* 27 (1977): 304–20; A. Rosenfeld, “An Acrostic in Lamentations 5” [Hebrew], *Sinai* 110 (1992): 96.

261. Philippe Guillaume, “Lamentations 5: The Seventh Acrostic,” *JHS* 9 (2009): 1–6.

262. Marco Treves, “Two Acrostic Poems,” *VT* 15 (1965): 81–90, refuted by Barnabas Lindars, “Is Psalm 2 and Acrostic Poem?,” *VT* 17 (1967): 60–67.

263. Patrick W. Skehan, “A Broken Acrostic and Psalm 9,” *CBQ* 27 (1965): 1–5.

264. Treves, “Two Acrostic Poems,” refuted by Lindars, “Is Psalm 2 and Acrostic Poem?”

265. Bergler, “Threni V, Nur ein alphabetisierende Lied?”; but supported in part by Guillaume, “Lamentations 5.”

266. See M. Garsiel, “Punning upon the Names of the Letters of the Alphabet in Biblical Acrostics” [Hebrew] *BM* 39 (1994): 313–34.

267. Anthoy R. Ceresko, “The ABCs of Wisdom in Psalm XXXIV,” *VT* 35 (1985): 99–104. See also Garsiel, *Story and History of David and His Kingdom*, 104–8, who finds the device at work in the lyrics reported in 1 Sam 18:7. See also Victor A. Hurowitz, “Additional Elements of Alphabetical Thinking in Psalm XXXIV,” *VT* 52 (2002): 326–33.

268. See Patrick W. Skehan, “Strophic Patterns in the Book of Job,” *CBQ* 23 (1961): 125–42.

The rich [עשיר *ʿāšīr*] and the poor meet together.
 The maker [עשה *ʿōśēh*] of them all is Yahweh.
 A prudent man [ערום *ʿarūm*] sees the evil and hides himself,
 But the fools [ופתאים *u-pṭāyīm*] pass on and are punished.

The first three lines begin with the consonant ע *ʿ* and the last with a פ *p*, the very next consonant in the Hebrew alphabet.²⁶⁹ See similarly Exod 15:11–13:

Who [מי *mī*] is like you, among the mighty, O Yahweh?
 Who [מי *mī*] is like you, glorious in holiness?
 Fearful [נורא *nōrā*] in praises, doing wonders?
 You stretched out [נתינת *nāṭīlā*] your right hand the earth swallowed them.
 You have led [נחית *nāḥīlā*] the people with your love whom you have redeemed,
 You have guided [נהלת *nēhaltā*] them with your strength to your holy habitation.

This passage repeats the consonant מ *m* at the start of the first two lines, and then the consonant נ *n* at the start of the next four. The latter consonant follows the former in alphabetical order.²⁷⁰

The Israelite writers' attention to the alphabet also appears in Zeph 3:8.

לְבֹן חֲבוּרֵי נְאֻם־יְהוָה לְיוֹם קוֹמִי לַעֲד
 כִּי מִשְׁפָּטִי לְאַסֹּף גּוֹיִם לְקַבְּצִי מִמְּלָכוֹת
 לְשַׁפֵּד עַל־יָהֳמֵם בָּל חָרוֹן אַפִּי
 כִּי בָאֵשׁ קִנְאַתִּי תֹאכַל כָּל־הָאָרֶץ

lākēn hakkū lī nāʿum YHWH la-yōm qūmī la-ʿad
kī mišpāṭī le-ʿēsōp gōyīm la-qōḇṣī mamlākōt
li-špōk ʾālēhem za ʿamī kōl ḥārōn ʾapī
kī bā-ʿēš qin ʾaṭī tē ʾākēl kōl hā-ʾāreṣ

Therefore, wait for me says Yahweh, for the day when I arise as a witness.
 For my decision is to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms,
 To pour out upon them my indignation, all the heat of my anger;
 For in the fire of my passion all the earth shall be consumed.

As noted in the Masora, this brief passage is one of twenty-six pangrams in the Hebrew Bible. A pangram is a passage that contains every letter of the alphabet.²⁷¹ However, this passage also includes the five *sophit* or “final” forms,

269. Found in Yogev and Yona, “Opening Alliteration in Biblical and Ugaritic Poetry,” 111.

270. Yogev and Yona, “Opening Alliteration in Biblical and Ugaritic Poetry,” 111, cite the passage, but do not observe the alphabetic order of the consonants.

271. The other passages include Exod 16:16, Deut 4:34, Josh 23:13, 2 Kgs 4:39, 6:32, 7:8, Isa 5:25, 66:17, Jer 22:3, 32:29, Ezek 17:9, 38:12, Amos 9:13, Hos 10:8, 13:2, Zech 6:11, Song 3:8, Dan 2:45, 3:22, 4:20, 7:19, Qoh 4:8, Esth 3:13, Ezr 7:28, 2 Chr 26:11. There are

and three of the six *begadkepat* letters (i.e., פ, ת, כ, ד, ג, ב, *b̄*, *ḡ*, *d̄*, *k̄*, *p̄*, *t̄*) that retain their aspirated and non-aspirated pronunciations (i.e., *beth*, *kaph*, and *taw*).

Elsewhere, Israelite authors appear to have delighted in including the same consonant in every word of a particular verse. Thus, each word in 2 Kgs 14:12 contains the consonant *yod*: [וַיִּנָּגְפוּ יְהוּדָה לְפָנָיו יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּנָּסוּ אִישׁ לְאָהָלָיו] *way-yinnāḡēp̄ yəhūdāh li-ṭnē(y) yiśrā'el way-yānusū 'īš ('yš) lə-'āhōlō* [*lə-'ohālāw*] “and Judah was struck before Israel; and they fled every man to his tent.” Though the *yod* in אִישׁ *'yš* and לְאָהָלָיו *lə-'ohālāyw* are not consonantal, they are visually present. Such devices, most of which the Masora records, appear to represent a display of erudition.²⁷²

The acrostic that concludes the Hebrew text of Ben Sira from Qumran (51:13–30 = 11QPs^a XXI, 11–17, XXII, 1) represents a continuation of earlier traditions.²⁷³ Though only a little more than the first ten verses remain, it stands as a fitting crown for a text that contains many other examples of polysemy and paronomasia in the name of wisdom.²⁷⁴

Acrostics also appear in Aramaic in late antiquity, and many are found imbedded in Targumic manuscripts.²⁷⁵ However, scholars debate whether they represent a continuation of practice in biblical times or the influence of a tradition

also three passages that contain every letter of the alphabet except the *ṣamekh*, which appears at the end of the verses as the abbreviation for the *setumah*: Isa 17:11, Dan 5:7, Neh 3:15.

272. Thus, the Mp to 2 Kgs 14:12 states that there are six other verses that contain seven words, each containing the consonant *yod*. Actually, there are ten others: 2 Sam 22:49, Ezek 14:1, 30:19, Hos 6:2, Ps 3:6, 68:2, Job 7:13, Song 1:2, 1 Chr 4:36, 2 Chr 25:22. I thank David Marcus for this information. In his Mm 729, Gerard Weil, ed., *Massorah Gedolah*, 2nd ed. (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2001), 88 lists eleven verses that start and end with the consonant *nun* (Lev 13:9; Num 32:32; Deut 18:15; Jer 50:8; Pss 46:5, 77:21, 78:12; Prov 7:17, 20:27; Song 4:11; 1 Chr 12:2). See also Israel Yeivin, *Introduction to the Tiberian Masorah*, trans. E. J. Revell (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1980), 73–74, for similar observations. At the same time, one must be cautious when counting letters and verses due to variations in the manuscript traditions. See the sobering study of Sheldon Epstein, Bernard Dickman, and Yonah Wilamowsky, “Symmetrically Designed Sifrei Torah: A Quantitative Analysis,” *Ḥakira: The Flatbush Journal of Jewish Law and Thought* 5 (2007): 171–225.

273. See Isaac Rabinowitz, “The Qumran Hebrew Original of Ben Sira’s Concluding Acrostic on Wisdom,” *HUCA* 42 (1971): 173–84.

274. See Reymond, “Wordplay in the Hebrew to Ben Sira.”

275. See Pereira, *Studies in Aramaic Poetry* (c. 100 B.C.E.–c. 600 C.E.), 58–109; Michael Sokoloff and Joseph Yahalom, eds., *Jewish Palestinian Aramaic Poetry from Late Antiquity* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1999); Yosef Ofer, “Acrostic Signatures in Masoretic Notes,” *VT* 65 (2015): 230–46.

that was more widespread during this period. Functions proposed for these acrostics range from the didactic and the liturgical to the mystical.²⁷⁶

Since an acrostic is an organizational form of polysemy, it is primarily a visual device. This is especially the case when a text is written on a scroll, for it is the acrostic that first meets the eye in the process of unscrolling.²⁷⁷ One also must view the Akkadian and Egyptian acrostics as visual devices, since they depend on polyvalent readings of individual signs. One cannot access these acrostics aurally without reading them aloud vertically. Whether this was done before or after reciting the text or at all, is impossible to know, but either way one cannot recite the text in both directions simultaneously. The same can be said of Hebrew pangrams, which one discovers only through study. On the other hand, Hebrew acrostics may have been as accessible to listeners as to readers, since they depend on the order of the Hebrew alphabet, which any literate Israelite would have committed to memory as a child. Moreover, some Hebrew acrostics also employ the name of the consonant or a paronomastic reflection of it in the line to which it belongs, thus offering clues to the letters of the acrostic. For both readers and listeners the effect that acrostics have is one of delayed fulfillment, or in the Akkadian and Egyptian texts, delayed comprehension. Israelite poets composing alphabetic acrostics structurally convey the notion that their poem is instructive, perhaps even successively pedagogical, since the alphabet is the foundation of education. Thus, one learns successive lessons from the poem as one learns consecutive letters of the alphabet. This differs from the Akkadian and Egyptian acrostics, which appear to be displays of piety and erudition.

4.1.13. TRANSPOSITION

Devices of transposition involve replacing one letter with another based upon a recognized standard of order or value. To demonstrate transposition in Akkadian, I turn to an inscription of Esarhaddon in which Marduk shortens the period of Babylon's abandonment from seventy to eleven years simply by reversing the cuneiform signs that comprise the numerals:

He had written seventy years as the number for its abandonment, but the compassionate Marduk quickly softened his heart and, reversing the order, pronounced eleven years (as the period) of its resettlement.²⁷⁸

276. See Pereira, *Studies in Aramaic Poetry* (c. 100 B.C.E.–c. 600 C.E.), 107–8.

277. I thank Julia Hejduk for this observation.

278. See R. Borger, *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons, Königs von Assyrien* (Graz: Weidner, 1956), 15, episode 10; Paul Beaulieu, "An Excerpt from a Menology with Reverse Writing," *ASJ* 17 (1995): 5.

The fate of the city was changed simply by reversing the ligature from (GÉŠ + U = 60 + 10) “seventy” to (U + DIŠ = 10 + 1) “eleven.” The cuneiform signs GÉŠ and DIŠ are identical, but read with different values when preceding or following the U sign.

Paul Beaulieu has pointed to a similar transposition of the numerical values of Akkadian signs that produces different results in a philological commentary that focuses on sacred numbers. Here the signs U + DIŠ (i.e., GÉŠ) “eleven,” which also may be read as the god “Nergal,” are reversed and multiplied to produce the equation GÉŠ x U (60 x 10) “six hundred.” In this way, the commentary is able to correlate the chthonic god Nergal with the six hundred denizens of the underworld known as the Anunakki.²⁷⁹

Since Egyptian distinguishes numerals from other signs, a reversal of the type known in cuneiform is impossible. Moreover, while there is some evidence for Egyptian abecedaries, it is incomplete, and there is no way to know if such an order was standardized across time and across all of Egypt. Thus, there is no way to know how the available Egyptian signs might have provided opportunities for learned readings when metathesized. Consequently, we cannot demonstrate the presence of transposition in Egyptian.

The Ugaritic corpus provides no evidence of alphabetic transposition, despite the existence of abecedaries that inform us as to how they ordered their alphabetic script.²⁸⁰

We are far better off in biblical Hebrew, since the order of the alphabet is well known. However, most of the proposed cases of transposition in the biblical corpus have come from periods long after the biblical texts were composed. Even the term for transposition in Hebrew, “atbash” (אֲתָבֶשׁ *’atbāš*), derives from a later period.²⁸¹ Still, the evidence for literary transposition is compelling.

In Hebrew, “atbash” operates by replacing the first letter of the alphabet with the last, the second with the penultimate, the third with the antepenultimate, and so on. Hence, the name “atbash,” which juxtaposes the first and last, and second and penultimate letters of the alphabet, that is, *aleph* (א), *taw* (ת), *bet* (ב), and *šin* (ש). Though some consider atbash an exegetical device of a later generation who imposed such readings on biblical texts, the clear use of atbash on a twelfth century BCE abecedarium from ‘Izbet-Šarṭa shows it to be in use well before the Israelite monarchy.²⁸² Moreover, scholars often treat atbash as if it functions as a

279. See Beaulieu, “Excerpt from a Menology with Reverse Writing,” 5.

280. Densky, “Abecedaries,” *COS* 1:362–65.

281. In later rabbinic circles, atbash was considered a form of *gematria*. See Derovan et al., “Gematria.”

282. Aaron Densky, “A Proto-Canaanite Abecedarium Dating from the Period of the Judges and Its Implications for the History of the Alphabet,” *Tel Aviv* 4 (1977): 19–20; M. Köszeghy, “Zur ששש-Frage,” *ZAW* 117 (2005): 616–20.

cipher,²⁸³ though there is limited evidence that it served such a purpose.²⁸⁴ I have argued elsewhere that atbash was employed as a performative device of illocutionary power.²⁸⁵

There are three types of transposition in the Hebrew Bible. The first employs a word that makes little sense unless it is transposed. In this group, I place Jer 25:26, 51:1, 51:41, and a possible fourth case spotted by Cyrus Gordon in 1 Kgs 9:1.²⁸⁶ The most famous of them appears in Jeremiah's prophecy that a number of nations will drink the wrath of Yahweh: "and last of all, the king of ששק *šēšaq* shall drink" (Jer 25:26). As the Targum translates and medieval Hebrew commentators observe, the consonants in the word ששק *šēšaq* are a transposition for בבל *bābel* "Babylon." Here the meaning Babylon is the only one that makes sense. Jeremiah encapsulated the destruction of Babylon by turning its name into a meaningless heap of letters.

A second type of transposition makes perfect sense both as it appears and when transposed. All of these occur in Jeremiah (Jer 18:2–4, 20:8, 22:10, 25:20–26, 25:30, 25:38; 34:14, 48:2).²⁸⁷ See, for example, Jer 48:2, where the prophet declares:

Moab's glory is no more.

In Heshbon they have planned evil against her (saying):

"Come, and let us cut her off [וְנַכְרִיתָנָהּ *wə-nakrītennāh*] as a nation!"

You too, Madmen, shall be silenced.

The sword is going [תֵּלֶק *tēlek*] after you.

When transposed, תֵּלֶק *tēlek* "going" becomes אָכַל *ākal* "devour," which also is used in reference to swords (e.g., Deut 32:42, 2 Sam 2:26). The devouring sword is anticipated nicely by putting the ironic statement וְנַכְרִיתָנָהּ *wə-nakrītennāh* "let us cut her off" into the Moabites' mouths. The device thus offers a linguistic tie that underscores the *lex talionis* inherent in the Moabites' punishment. Moreover, the end of this prophecy offers an inclusio of sorts by using אָכַל *ākal* "devour" again, this time to describe a fire that will destroy the Moabites (Jer 48:45).

283. See Mark Leuchter, "Jeremiah's Seventy-Year Prophecy and the ששק/לב קמי Atbash Codes," *Bib* 85 (2004): 503–22; Richard C. Steiner, "The Two Sons of Neriah and the Two Editions of Jeremiah in Light of the Two Atbash Code-Words for Babylon," *VT* 46 (1996): 83–84.

284. Marjo C. A. Korpel, "Kryptogramme in Ezechiel 19 und im 'Izbet-Šarṭa-Ostrakon,'" *ZAW* 121 (2009): 70–86.

285. See Noegel, "Ritual Use of Linguistic and Textual Violence in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East."

286. Noted in Sasson, "Word Play in the O.T.," 969.

287. Scott B. Noegel, "Atbash in Jeremiah and Its Literary Significance: Part 1," *JBQ* 24 (1996): 82–89; "Part 2," *JBQ* 24 (1996): 160–66; "Part 3," *JBQ* 24 (1996): 247–50.

A third type of transposition is even more sophisticated in that the consonants to be transposed appear vertically in the form of a mesostich. It is in such a light that Marjo Korpel suggests we read Ezek 19:1–5.²⁸⁸ Here the third consonant in the first word of each successive line produces the consonants תמעש *tm š*, which is a transposition for איזב *ʾyzb(l)* “Jezebel,” and thus it identifies the metaphorical lioness in line 1. The letter *lamed* needed to form the name Jezebel derives from hypothesizing that line 5 originally read מַחֲלָה בִּי וַתִּכָּא *wa-tikāʾ kī mahālāh* “but she was shaken when he remained ill (referring to Jezebel’s son Ahaziah),” and that Ezekiel changed it to נוֹחֲלָה בִּי וַתִּרָא *wa-tēreʾ kī nōhālāh* “when she saw she had despaired.” The third letter *kaph* in וַתִּכָּא *wa-tikāʾ* would thus be a *lamed* in transposed form.²⁸⁹

Aramaic forms of transposition appear in some of the incantation bowls from Late Antiquity, in which the consonants מן *mš* stand as a cipher for the sacred name יה *yh* “Yah.” Thus, we read: ובשום מן מן מן מן מן מן *w-b-šwm mš mš mš mš mš mš* “and in the name of Yah, Yah, Yah, Yah, Yah, Yah” (MS 2053/278, 9–10). It also appears in magical formulae in manuscripts from the Cairo Genizah: בשמיה דמן מן רבה גיברא ודחילא דאיתגלי למשה בסנה *b-šmyh dms mš rbh gybrʾ w-dhylʾ d-ʾygly l-mšh b-snh* “in the name of Yah, Yah, the great, mighty, and awesome, who appeared to Moses in the bush.”²⁹⁰

Transposition is a learned device that appears to have been performative in purpose, with the transposing of signs or consonants intending to manipulate a change or reversal in reality. Its use in magic texts, perhaps to conceal the divine name or to avoid saying it, would suggest the same. Since it is impossible to hear the polysemy inherent in transposition, we must consider it solely a visual device. Nonetheless, it is not readily accessible visually either, unless one contemplates it as a transposition. In many ways, transposition is a device of concealment that requires study to reveal its secrets.

288. Korpel, “Kryptogramme in Ezechiel 19 und im ‘Izbet-Šarṭa-Ostrakon.”

289. A later form of transposition involves substituting the letter ט *t* for ה *h*, and the letter א *a* for ב *b*, etc. It is known as atbaḥ or “the alphabet of Ḥiyya” (b. Sukk. 52b). Some of the later rabbis used it to explain the writing on the wall in Dan 5 (b. Sanh. 22a, cf. b. Shab. 104a). Since it represents a later development, it falls outside of this study. See Derovan et al., “Gematria”; Yakir Paz, “From Encoding to Decoding: The ATBḤ of R. Hiyya in Light of a Syriac, Greek and Coptic Cipher,” *JNES* 74 (2015): 45–65.

290. On atbash in both sets of texts, see Matthew Morgenstern and James Nathan Ford, “On Some Readings and Interpretations in the Aramaic Incantation Bowls and Related Texts,” *BSOAS* 80 (2017): 191–231.

4.1.14. AMPHIBOLY

Amphiboly (also called amphibology) is the employment of an ambiguous morphology or grammatical structure for polysemous effect.²⁹¹ There are three types of amphiboly in ancient Near Eastern texts. The first suggests multiple readings by combining two different morphologies into a single form, while at the same time making a clear reading of one or the other impossible. This type of amphiboly is sometimes referred to as *farrago*,²⁹² *forma mixta*, *portmanteau*, or a blend. A second type of amphiboly derives from nonnormative grammatical structures beyond the word level that can be read in multiple ways. A third type combines an infinitive absolute (sometimes called a tautological infinitive) derived from one root with a finite verb derived from another. The last type is found only in biblical Hebrew.

4.1.14.1. AMPHIBOLY: MIXED MORPHOLOGY

Demonstrating the first kind of amphiboly in Akkadian is the Hymn to Shamash, which states about Shamash: *šūt ikkamsā el-let-si-na ta-paṭ-ṭar* (l. 163). The phrase *el-let-si-na ta-paṭ-ṭar* is a conflation of *enneta paṭāru* “dispel the troops” and *illata paṭāru* “pardon the sins.”²⁹³ Consequently, we may read the line as “you (Shamash) dispel the troops for those who bow down” or “you (Shamash) pardon the sins of those who bow down,” while it does not quite say either. As Foster remarks, the amphiboly suggests that “the submissive are spared the discipline reserved for the others.”²⁹⁴

An example of this type of amphiboly in Egyptian appears in P.Harris, a delightful Ramesside love poem, in which the scribe cleverly applies a determinative that belongs with one word to another, thus suggesting both meanings, while grammatically providing neither. In the poem, the lover declares to her beloved: *g3b=k w3ḥ ḥr q3b.t=i pḥr n=k mrw.t=i* “your arm rests on my arm, for my love has surrounded you” (5.3–5.4). The noun *q3b.t* normally means “breast,” but here it takes the arm determinative (ⲙ). The determinative encourages us to read it as *g3b* “arm,” thus representing a coalescing of the phonemes /q/ > /g/ known to occur in this period. However, the use of *g3b* “arm” immediately prior make us think twice. Thus, the phrase suggests both “your arm

291. The term ἀμφιβολία “amphiboly” occurs first in Aristotle, *Poet.* 1461a25 (fourth century BCE).

292. Glück, “Paronomasia in Biblical Literature,” 70–72.

293. As observed in CAD K, s.v. “*kamāsu*.”

294. Foster, *Before the Muses*, 542 n. 3, adds “if intentional.”

rests on my arm” and “your arm rests on my breast,” but grammatically offers neither.²⁹⁵

Visual forms of this type of amphiboly occur in the temple of Hathor at Dendera. In fact, several inscriptions combine signs normally not found together in order to create new ideograms. In one case, the scribe has written *nb.t ḥwn.t* “the lady of Iunet (i.e., Dendera)” by replacing the head of the cobra sign  with the cow-head sign  in order to emphasize Hathor’s bovine and serpentine manifestations.²⁹⁶

A possible case of amphiboly of this type in Ugaritic occurs in the Epic of Baal (CAT 1.5.ii.6): *yraun alyn b l*. The form *yraun* contains two different *aleph* signs *a* and *u*. The odd orthography forces one to consider both *yra* “fear” and *un* “misfortune, grief.” As such it foreshadows CAT 1.5.vi.15, in which El descends from his seat in *un* “grief.”

The first type of amphiboly appears in Hebrew in Jotham’s parable, in which the Olive replies to the other trees that would make him king: “have I ceased yielding [יָהֲדַלְתִּי *he-ḥōdaltī*] my rich oil, by which God and men are honored, that I should go and wave above the trees?” (Judg 9:9). Here, the verb combines two different morphologies—either it is a first person singular perfect *hiph’il* of the verb “cease” or a first person singular perfect *qal* of the same root, preceded by an interrogative *he*. If the former, the vowel under the *het* should have been a *šewa* or *hateph-seghol*. If the latter, then we would expect to see a *qames* rather than a *hateph-qames* as the vowel marking the first syllable of the verb.²⁹⁷ While both readings are possible in the consonantal text, neither is possible in the vocalized text. Thus, the Masoretes pointed the verb so that it contains elements of both readings.

Ezekiel’s description of his vision while God afflicted Jerusalem also contains amphiboly of this type: “while they were smiting and I נָשָׂאָר *nē šā’ar*, I fell upon my face and I cried out” (Ezek 9:8). As seen already by Radaq, the form נָשָׂאָר *nē šā’ar* combines the *qal* conjugation (in the imperfect tense) and *niph’al* conjugation (in the past tense) of the verb נָשָׂאָר *šā’ar* “remain” into one form. As he explains, the device allows the prophet to express concisely the notion that he looked around and saw no one and the observation that he alone remained. Other proposed cases of amphiboly include וּלְדַת *wī-yoladət* in Gen 16:11 and Judg 13:5, 13:7 (combining וּלְדַת *wā-yoladət* and וּלְדַת *wā-yoledet*), נִגְּאֹל *nəḡo’ālū* in Isa 59:3 and Lam 4:14 (combining נִגְּאֹל *nig’ālū* and נִגְּאֹל *ḡo’ālū*), יָרַדְיָ

295. Fox, *Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs*, 22 n. b, suggests this reading is an aural error or “deliberate pun.”

296. Richter, *Theology of Hathor of Dendera*, 288–89, 430.

297. Jan Joosten, “*Hechadalti forma mixta?*,” *ZAW* 102 (1990): 96–97.

yiradōp in Ps 7:6 (combining ירדף *yirdōp* and ירדף *yaraddēp*), and כהנדף *kə-hindōp* in Ps 68:3 (combining כהנדף *kə-hinnādēp* and כנדף *ki-ndōp*).²⁹⁸

4.1.14.2. AMPHIBOLY: AMBIGUOUS GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURES

I know of no cases of amphiboly in Akkadian texts that rely upon deliberately ambiguous grammatical structures.²⁹⁹ However, in Egyptian we find this type of amphiboly in the fifth maxim of the Instructions of Ptahhotep (P.Prisse 6.3–6 [ll. 90–98]).³⁰⁰

90. *l̥w ḥsf=tw=s n swʔ ḥr ḥp.w=s*
He who transgresses its laws is punished,
91. *wʔ.t pw m ḥr ʿwn-ib*
it is what escapes the attention of the greedy.
92. *in ndj.t iṭ.t ḥ ʿ.w*
It is the small-minded that seizes riches,
93. *n pʔw d̥j.t m̥n̥l sp=s*
but crime never managed to land its rewards.
94. *l̥w=f ḡd=f šḥt=i r=i ḡs=i*
Who ever says, “I snare for myself,”
95. *n ḡd.n=f šḥt=i ḥr ḥn.t=i*
does not say “I snare for my needs.”

298. Cited by Joosten, “*Hechadalti forma mixta?*,” 97. The two sets of superimposed vowels (*pataḥ* and *qamaṣ*) on the word פני *pn̥y* in Exod 20:3 and Deut 5:7, and on מתחת *mtḥt* in Exod 20:4, represent different reading traditions that divide or join the verses, and not mixed forms. Beitzel, “Exodus 3:14 and the Divine Name,” 10, characterizes the line בן חשׁבׁל קהרׁ שׁללׁ מהרׁ *māḥēr šālāl ḥāś baz* “swift is (the) booty, speedy is (the) prey” (Isa 8:1) as a case of farrago. Nevertheless, strictly speaking, each of the words makes grammatical sense, even if the combined reading lends the line a helter-skelter, if not speedy, feel.

299. This type of amphiboly resembles the device known as *slesa* that first appears in Sanskrit poetry in the sixth century CE. See Yigal Bronner, *Extreme Poetry: The South Asian Movement of Simultaneous Narration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

300. R. J. Williams, “The Sages of Ancient Egypt in the Light of Recent Scholarship,” *JAOS* 101 (1981): 6, refers to this passage as an example of amphiboly, and in support he cites the works of Fecht, *Der Habgierige und die Maat in der Lehre des Ptahhotep*, 5. and 19. Maxime, and Burkard, *Textkritische Untersuchungen zu ägyptischen Weisheitslehren des Alten und Mittleren Reiches*. However, these scholars use the word *amphiboly* to refer to all sorts of lexical or semantic ambiguity (i.e., polysemy generally), not just to polysemy that derives from *portmanteau* or nonnormative morphology, grammar, or syntax. Nevertheless, this particular passage does exhibit some amphiboly in addition to polysemy. Fecht (p. 12) reads ʿwn-ib in l. 91 as ḥm-ih.t. Guglielmi, “Der Gebrauch rhetorischer Stilmittel in der ägyptischen Literatur,” 493–95, also uses *amphibolie* for various types of ambiguous devices.

96. *wn ph.wj mʕ.t wʕh=s*
The final part of what is right is its endurance,
97. *gdw s w iʕi=i pw*
of which a man says "that is my father."

As Gerhard Fecht has shown, several aspects of this pericope make it amphibolous. First, is the *s* in *hp.w=s* (l. 90). One cannot tell if it is a pronominal suffix attached to *hp.w* or if it is attached to *wʕ.t*, making it a causative, that is, *swʕ.t*.³⁰¹ The options are thus *hp.w* "the laws" or *hp.w=s* "its laws" (referring to Maat in l. 88) and *wʕ.t* "way" or *swʕ.t* "escape." The line may be read as "he who transgresses the law is punished" or "he who transgresses its (Maat's) law is punished."

Line 91 reads: "it is what escapes the attention of the greedy" or "it is a distant thing in the sight of the greedy." Enhancing the amphiboly are cases of polysemy. The verb *swʕ* (l. 90) can mean "happen, pass, escape, become distant" or "fell, chop off, strike." The preposition *hr* (i.e., ☉) "in the sight of, attention of" that follows also can be understood as the noun "face." This permits us to read *iw hsf=tw n swʕ hr hp.w* as "he who escapes the attention of the laws is punished" or "he who strikes the face of the law is punished." Underscoring the notion of striking is the determinative 𓆎, which appears after *hsf* "punish."

In line 92 the verb *iʕi* appears with the determinative 𓆎, suggesting it means "take" or "rob." However, the verb also means "bring forward" or "use." In addition, the noun *h'w* appears to mean "possessions, heaps, riches" since it carries the determinative 𓆎. However, in the context of mooring a boat, which immediately follows, it suggests its other meaning "landing, location, position." Moreover, *h'w* can mean "life." Thus, we may render the phrase *in ndj.t iʕi h'w* as "it is arrogance that robs possessions" or "it is arrogance that takes (its) landing," or "it is arrogance that uses (its) position," or even "it is arrogance that takes (one's) life." In line 93, it is *sp=s* that is polysemous. Indeed, *sp* possesses many varied meanings including "times, quality, choice, affair, thing, article, topic, point, nature, character, and measurement." The verb *mni* usually means "moor, land, dock," but it can be euphemistic for passing beyond death, in the sense of mooring in the afterlife.³⁰² Thus, we may translate *n pʕ dj.t mni sp=s* as "corruption has never brought its articles to harbor" or "corruption has never become immortal." The four lines that comprise this passage are an exquisite example of amphiboly. Moreover, adding to the nautical language of the passage is the mast sign 𓆎, which provides the triconsonantal value *h'w* in the word *h'w*.

301. Fecht, *Der Habgierige und die Maat in der Lehre des Ptahhotep*, 5. und 19. Maxime, 15–16.

302. See, e.g., the Tale of Sinuhe B 310. A similar use of nautical terminology has been proposed for the literary texts known as Menna's Lament. See Hans Goedicke, "Menna's Lament," *RdE* 38 (1987): 71.

Amphiboly also occurs in lines 95–96, where we can understand *šht* as “acquire” or *s* “man” + (*ī*)*h.t* “thing(s), possession(s), wealth.”³⁰³ Also amphibolous is line 97: *wn pḥ.wj mš'.t wšh=sj*. The orthography permits us to read the last word as *wšh=sj* or *wšh=s*. Thus, we may read the line: “in the end it is Maat that endures” or “the final part of what is just, is its endurance.”³⁰⁴

In Ugaritic, this type of amphiboly appears in El’s charge to Kirtu that he: *šrd b'l b dbḥk bn dgn bm šdk* (1.14.ii.24–26). I have discussed this passage above under multidirectional polysemy (4.1.5). Suffice it to add here that the grammar is ambiguous. One cannot tell whether *šrd* is an imperative (or perhaps jussive form) of the root *š-r-d* “serve, honor,” or if it is a *š*-causative form of the root *y-r-d* “cause to descend/set down.”³⁰⁵

For an example of this type of amphiboly in Hebrew, I turn first to Isa 6:13: וְעוֹד בָּהּ עֲשָׂרִיָּה וְשִׁבְעָה וְהִיתָה לְבַעַר בְּאֵלֶּה וּבְאֵלֶּזֶם אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁלְכֶת מִצִּבְתָּ בָּם יִרַע קֹדֶשׁ וּמִצִּבְתָּהּ *wā-ōd bāh 'āsirīyyāh wā-šābāh wā-hāyīāh lā-bā'ēr kā- 'ēlāh wā-kā-'allōn 'āšer bā-šallekeṭ maššeḇeṭ bām zera' qodeš maššaḇtāh*. J. A. Emerton has identified the passage as ambiguous, because we can divide it two different ways. The first permits us to translate: “and though a tenth remains there it will be destroyed again like a terebinth and like an oak, in which are stumps when they have been felled; holy seed is their stump.” The second parses the passage: “and though a tenth remains there, it will be destroyed again. Like a terebinth and like an oak, in which are stumps when they have been felled, (so) the holy seed is their stump.”³⁰⁶ Adding to the amphiboly is the verb בָּעַר *bā'ar*, which Torsten Uhlig notes, can mean “burn” or “destroy, plunder.” The former encourages the first reading, the latter the second.³⁰⁷

Paul Raabe has espied a number of examples of amphibolous passages in the Psalms.³⁰⁸ A brief example occurs in Ps 4:9: כִּי בִּיאָתָה יְהוָה לְבָדֵד לְבָדֵד לְבָטַח תּוֹשִׁיבִי *kī 'attāh YHWH lā-bāḏāḏ lā-beṭaḥ tōšibēnī*. The placement of בָּדֵד *bāḏāḏ* “alone” is

303. Fecht, *Der Habgierige und die Maat in der Lehre des Ptahhotep*, 5. und 19. Maxime, 22.

304. A less sustained example of amphiboly of this type occurs in an inscription in the temple of Hathor at Dendera. According to Richter, *Theology of Hathor of Dendera*, 36–38, each of the paronomastic words in the line *šh.t šh.tl m šh.w=s* permits multiple readings. The word *šh.t* may be understood as “divine eye,” “shining one,” “uraeus,” or “cow;” the verbal construction *šh.tl* as “is effective” or “is luminous;” and the phrase *m šh.w=s* as “in its elements” (i.e., the Divine Eye), “in her creative powers,” or “in her magical spells.” However, Richter does not employ the term amphiboly.

305. See Noegel, “Kirtu’s Allusive Dream.”

306. J. A. Emerton, “The Translation and Interpretation of Isaiah vi.13,” in *Interpreting the Hebrew Bible: Essays in Honor of E. I. J. Rosenthal*, ed. J. A. Emerton and S. C. Reif (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 85–118.

307. Torsten Uhlig, *The Theme of Hardening in the Book of Isaiah: An Analysis of Communicative Action*, FAT 2/39 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 81–82.

308. Raabe, “Deliberate Ambiguity in the Psalter.”

ambiguous. One may attach it to God or the believer and thus render: “for you alone, Yahweh, make me dwell in safety” or “for you, Yahweh, make me dwell alone in safety.” Some amphibolous passages in the Psalms employ indeterminate verbal subjects and pronouns to extend over several verses. Such is the case for Ps 7:12–17, about which Raabe states:

By the time one finishes reading the poem, one is not sure who does the repenting, whose weapons are prepared, and for whom! Upon reflection, the reader realizes all options are true. Unless God repents, the wicked will die. And unless the wicked repent, they will die by killing themselves. Here the ambiguity is caused by the unspecified verbal subjects and the indeterminate suffixal antecedents.³⁰⁹

Richard Steiner has pointed out another fine case of this type in Gen 49:10: *lō’ lā-ḥsūr šēḇet mī-yhūdāh ū-mḥōqēq mib-bēn raḡlāw ‘ad kī yāḥō’ šīloh* [šīlō] *wə-lō yiqqəḥat ‘ammīm* “the rod will not depart from Judah, nor the staff from between his legs, as long as men come from Shiloh, and unto him shall the obedience of the peoples be.”³¹⁰ The translation is only provisional, since there are different ways of understanding the sentence depending on how one understands the preposition *עַד* *‘ad*, here rendered “as long as.” One also can read it as “until,” “forever,” or even “not ever.” In fact, the entire passage is loaded with polysemy. As a *double entendre*, the passage alludes to the tradition reported in Gen 38 in which Judah gave Tamar his staff as collateral (with the staff between the legs providing added sexual euphemism). The first stich may be a curse, that is, “the rod (punishment) will not depart from Judah.” Or it may refer to the rulership not departing from Judah’s hand. Moreover, the word *שִׁלֹה* [šīloh] [šīlō] “Shilo” may be read as a dialectical reflex of the words *שֵׁי לֹה* *šāy lōh* “tribute belongs to him.”³¹¹

In Ps 17:14, the Psalmist advises: *וַיִּפְנֶיךָ וַיִּצְפוּנֶךָ תִּמְלֹא בִטְנִים יִשְׁבְּעוּ בָנִים וְהִנֵּחֻ: יִתְּרָם לְעוֹלָלֵיהֶם* *ū-spīnkā [ū-spūnkā] təmallē’ biṭnām yišbā’ ū bānīm wə-hinnīhū yitrām lə-’ōlālēhem* “As for your treasured ones, fill their bellies. Their sons shall be satisfied, and have something to leave over for their young.” Of interest here is the grammatical ambiguity posed by the words *יִשְׁבְּעוּ בָנִים* *yišbā’ ū bānīm*. One can read *בָּנִים* *bānīm* “sons” either as the subject or object of the verb, that is, their

309. Raabe, “Deliberate Ambiguity in the Psalter,” 225.

310. Richard C. Steiner, “Four Inner-Biblical Interpretations of Genesis 49:10: On the Lexical and Syntactic Ambiguities of *עַד* as Reflected in the Prophecies of Nathan, Ahijah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah,” *JBL* 132 (2013): 33–60.

311. Steiner, “Four Inner-Biblical Interpretations of Genesis 49:1”; Steiner, “Poetic Forms in the Masoretic Vocalization and Three Difficult Phrases in Jacob’s Blessing: *יִתְּרָם* (Gen 49:3), *יְצוּעֵי עֵלָה* (Gen 49:4), and *יָבֵא שִׁלֹה* (Gen 49:10),” *JBL* 129 (2010): 219–26.

sons shall be satisfied” or “they will be sated with sons.” As such, this case of amphiboly illustrates multidirectional polysemy as well. As the subject, “sons” parallels עֹלָלֵהֶם *ōlālēhem* “their young,” but as the object, it forces one to rethink בְּטָנָם *biṭnām* as “their issue, progeny”—the notion being here that one’s children also may be one’s sustenance.³¹²

A final demonstration of amphiboly appears in Ben Sira (4,21; Ms A): כִּי יֵשׁ וְחֵן *ky yš bš’t mš’t wn w-yš bšt kbwd w-hn* “for there is a shame that causes one to bear guilt, and a shame (that causes one to bear) honor and grace.” The syntax is ambiguous. Either the second stich reflects the ellipsis of the participle and can be rendered as above, or the second stich is in the construct state, which allows us to interpret it “there is a shame of honor and grace.” As Reymond remarks, “the juxtaposition of words that should be mutually exclusive is jarring and makes the reader pause and, subsequently, reflect on Ben Sira’s message that not all shame is bad.”³¹³ Note also that Ben Sira alerts us to the amphiboly by employing the odd orthography for “shame” (בְּשָׁתָּה *bš’t*) in the first stich, which is also visually striking immediately before מִשְׁתָּה *mš’t* (see above 2.5).

4.1.14.3. AMPHIBOLY: INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE AND FINITE VERBAL FORMS

A third type of amphiboly combines an infinitive absolute derived from one root with a finite verb derived from another. It appears only in biblical Hebrew, and only a handful of these exist (Isa 28:28, Jer 8:13, 42:10, 48:9, Zeph 1:2).³¹⁴ The prophecy against Judah in Jer 8:12–13 will demonstrate:

312. The masculine suffix on “bellies” should not deter us. Cf. בְּטֶנְךָ *biṭnākā* “your womb” in Ps 132:11. For other examples of amphiboly, see Jonathan Breuer, “Dissonance between Masoretic Accentuation and Vocalization in Verse Division (of the Biblical Text)” [Hebrew], in *Jubilee Book for Rabbi Mordechai Breuer*, ed. M. Bar-Asher (Jerusalem: Academon, 1992), 191–242.

313. Reymond, “Wisdom of Words in the Wisdom of Ben Sira,” 236.

314. Scott B. Noegel, “A Slip of the Reader and Not the Reed: (Infinitive Absolutes with Divergent Finite Forms). Part I,” *JBQ* 26 (1998): 12–19; “Part II,” *JBQ* 26 (1998): 93–100. On the existence of the infinitive absolute construction in other Semitic languages, see Yoo-Ki Kim, *The Function of the Tautological Infinitive in Classical Biblical Hebrew*, HSS 60 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009); Holger Gzella, “Emphasis or Assertion? Remarks on the Patronomastic Infinitive in Hebrew,” *BiOr* 67 (2010): 488–98. Though Targumic Aramaic employs an infinitive absolute construction when rendering the same in Hebrew texts, there is no case in which the translator employed different roots for the infinitive and finite forms. Even for the Hebrew cases I examine below, the Targumim render the infinitive absolute and finite forms from the same roots.

הַבְּשׁוּ כִּי תוֹעֲבָה עָשׂוּ
 גַּם-בוֹשׁ לֹא-יִבְשׁוּ וְהִכָּלָם לֹא יֵדְעוּ
 לָכֵן יִפְּלוּ בַּנְּפִלִים בְּעֵת פְּקֻדָּתָם יִכְשְׁלוּ אָמַר יְהוָה:
 אֲסֹף אֲסִיפֶם נְאֻם-יְהוָה אֲזִין עֲנָבִים בְּגִפֵּן
 וְאֲזִין תְּאֵנִים בְּתֵאנָה וְהָעֵלָה נָבֵל וְאֶתֵּן לָהֶם יַעֲבְרוּם:

hōḇšū kī tō 'ēḇāh 'āsū
gam bōš lō' yēḇōšū wā-hikkālēm lō' yāqā'ū
lākēn yippālū ḥan-nōplīm bā- 'ēl pəquḏātām yikkāšlū 'amar YHWH
'āsōp 'āsīpēm nā 'um-YHWH 'ēn 'anāḇīm bag-geḇen
wā- 'ēn tā 'ēnīm bat-tā 'ēnāh wā-he 'āleh nāḥēl wā- 'ettēn lāhem ya 'abrūm

Are they ashamed of the abomination they do?

Indeed, they are verily not ashamed, they do not even know to be humiliated.

Therefore, they will fall among the fallen, in the time of their punishment they shall stumble, says Yahweh.

אֲסִיפֶם אֲסֹף declares Yahweh.

No grapes on the vine, no figs on the fig tree, the leaves all withered, that which I gave them shall pass from them.

Amphibolous is Yahweh's proclamation: אֲסֹף אֲסִיפֶם *'āsōp 'āsīpēm*. The infinitive absolute derives from the root אסף *'s-p* “gather,” but the finite verb derives from the verb סוף *s-w-p* “make an end of.” In suggesting the meaning “gather,” the phrase anticipates the agricultural reference in the next line: “no grapes on the vine, no figs on the fig tree, the leaves all withered” (Jer 8:13).³¹⁵ In suggesting a violent “end,” the pronouncement follows Jeremiah's guarantee that the people of Judah “will fall among the fallen, in the time of their punishment they shall stumble” (Jer 8:12). The prophet has cleverly prepared the listener/reader for a similar verbal surprise just prior. Note how in 8:12, he employs an infinitive absolute form followed by the expected finite verb of the same root in בוש לא-יבשו *bōš lō' yēḇōšū* “they are verily not ashamed.” However, immediately following we hear the infinitival form והכלם *wā-hikkālēm* “to be humiliated,” which by parallelism would suggest that the finite form יִכָּלְמוּ *yikkalmū* “they are humiliated” would come next; but instead we hear ידעו לא *lō' yāqā'ū* “they do not even know,” which is derived from a wholly different verb.³¹⁶ This, then, prepares us for the amphiboly of אֲסֹף אֲסִיפֶם *'āsōp 'āsīpēm*, which functions like a multidirectional polysemy, but by combining different roots where a single root would be normative.

Amphiboly causes immediate confusion for readers/listeners, because it deliberately breaks the normative rules of morphology, grammar, and syntax. It produces polysemy by creating nonnormative forms and arrangements. As a

315. For אסף *'āsāp* in reference to agricultural yields, see Exod 23:10, Jer 40:10, Job 39:12.

316. I thank one of the publisher's anonymous reviewer for this observation.

result, when one comes upon a case of amphiboly, one's first reaction is to assume that the text is in error. It is not until one continues reading/listening that one realizes that the morphological and grammatical peculiarities represent polysemous neologisms. It is this rupture of language that makes amphiboly unique among the known types of polysemy. It operates both aurally and visually.

4.2. TYPES OF PARONOMASIA

Unlike polysemy, paronomasia operates across word divisions and is primarily a sound device, though all forms of paronomasia are effective visually as well in a consonantal system. There are twelve ways that ancient scribes could create paronomasia. These include: homoeopropheron, homoioteleuton, anastrophe, epanastrophe, parasonance, homonymic paronomasia, numerical paronomasia, bilingual paronomasia, anagrammatic paronomasia, hendiadic paronomasia, rhyme, and geminate parallelism and clustering. The sound effect produced in each case we may call alliterative.

4.2.1. HOMOEOPROPERON

Homoeopropheron is the repetition of the initial sounds of words.³¹⁷ Examples of homoeopropheron occur in Sumerian texts, though the writing system demands that we count the intervening vowel as well. See, for example, a prayer in the form of a poetic letter sent to Enki by one Sin-šamuḥ.³¹⁸

LÚ IN.NA SU.LUM.MAR.ŠÈ BA.KU₄.RE.EN
NAM.TAR.MU BA.KÚR.E.EN

The taunter has made me enter into shame,
estranged my fate.

Observe how the sounds /kur-en/ in KU₄.RE.EN “enter” paronomastically anticipate KÚR.E.EN “estrangle.” This example also represents a case of end rhyme (see 4.2.11).

See too the following proverb:

GUD SÚN GU₇.A.GIM
GIRI₆ (GÍR_xKÁR) GU₄.UD.DÈ.ZA

317. The term *ὁμοιοπρόφερων* “homoeopropheron” appears first in Martianus Capella, *Grammaticus Latinus* 5.167 (fifth century CE).

318. William W. Hallo, “Individual Prayer in Sumerian: The Continuity of a Tradition,” *JAOS* 88 (1968): 83; Klein and Sefati, “Word Play in Sumerian Literature,” 33.

Like an ox that has eaten malt,
is your jumping/dancing with your feet.

Here the sound of the noun GUD “ox” in the first stich finds paronomastic balance with GU₄.UD “jump” in the second stich.³¹⁹

Another pithy proverb exploits the similarity in sound between two biconsonantal signs:

[EN].GIM DÙ SAĜ.GIM DU
[S]AĜ.GIM DÙ EN.GIM DU
Build like a [lord], walk like a slave!
Build like a slave, walk like a lord!

In this case, the poet emphasizes the paronomasia between DÙ “build” and DU “walk” by placing the nouns they govern in chiasmus.³²⁰

One more Sumerian example from a bilingual Shuilla prayer of Nanna-Suen:

AMAR BÀN.DA SI GUR₄.GUR₄.RA
Á.ÚR ŠU.DU₇
SU₆ ZA.GÌN.NA SÙ.SÙ ȚI.LI
LA.LA MA.AL.LA.TA

Impetuous calf with sturdy horns,
Perfected limbs.
Adorned with a lapis lazuli beard,
Full of voluptuousness and allure.

Paronomasia in this passage occurs between SU₆ “beard” and SÙ.SÙ “adorn.”³²¹

Ludlul bēl nēmeqi demonstrates homoeopropheron in Akkadian. Near the end of the first tablet we read: *arḫu innamma inammera* ^d*šamši* (^dUTU) “the moon will change and the sun will shine.”³²² Here the initial consonants of the word *innamma* “will change” are repeated immediately afterwards in *inammera* “will shine.”³²³

319. Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer*, 63, 370; Klein and Sefati, “Word Play in Sumerian Literature,” 34.

320. Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer*, 71; Klein and Sefati, “Word Play in Sumerian Literature,” 33.

321. Ake W. Sjöberg, *Der Mondgott Nanna-Suen in der sumerischen Überlieferung* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1960), 166; Klein and Sefati, “Word Play in Sumerian Literature,” 34.

322. Line 120 of the third fragment published by Wiseman, “New Text of the Babylonian Poem of the Righteous Sufferer,” 107.

323. Noted as a “sound play” by Wiseman, “New Text of the Babylonian Poem of the Righteous Sufferer,” 107.

A particularly striking case of homoeopropheron occurs in the Atra-ḥasis Epic 1.93, in which the divine vizier Nusku rouses the god Enlil from his sleep by saying: *bēlī bīnū būnuka* “my lord, the sons are your nobility.”³²⁴ In addition to repeating the phoneme /b/ in each of the three words, the statement twice repeats the /n/.

The Epic of Gilgamesh also demonstrates the device. When the hunter brings a prostitute (Shamhat) to a watering hole that the wildman Enkidu frequents, he tells her to reveal her nakedness to Enkidu when she sees him. As he promises: *dādušu iḥabbubu eli* (UGU) *šēri* (EDIN)-*ki* “his love will caress and embrace you” (1.86). Shortly after this, the narrator tells us: *urtammi šamḥat dīdāša* “Shamhat untied her skirts” (1.18).³²⁵ The use of *dīdāša* “her skirts,” reminds us of *dādušu* “his love.”³²⁶ Afterwards we are informed: *ipussuma lullā šipir sinnište* “she treated the man to the work of a woman” (1.192), and *ultu išbū lalāša* “after he (Enkidu) was sated with her delights” (1.195). Homoeopropheron between *lullā* “man” and *lalāša* “her delights” connects the two statements.

A particularly sustained example of homoeopropheron in Akkadian appears in the Hymn to Shamash (ll. 178–181).

178. [m]u-šaḥ-lu-ú u₄-mu mu-še-rid an-qul-lu ana eršetim qab-lu u₄-me
Who makes the day to shine, who sends down scorching heat to the earth at
midday,
179. [m]u-šaḥ-miṭ ki-ma nab-li eršetim ra-pa-āš-tum
Who makes the broad earth glow like flame,
180. [m]u-kar-ru-ú u₄-me mu-ur-ri-ku mušāti
Who yet shortens the days and lengthens the nights,
181. [mu-šab-šu-]u ku-šu ḥal-pa-a šu-ri-pa šal-gi
[Who causes] cold, frost, ice, and snow.

324. W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, *Atra-ḥasis: The Babylonian Flood Story* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), 49, leave the word *būnu* untranslated. I take it to mean “nobility,” since the emphasis is on the gods’ relationship to Enlil. This emphasis continues in l. 94 with the query: *mārū ramānika minšu tādur* “why do you fear your own sons?” On the translation “nobility,” see CAD B, s.v. “*būnu* C.”

325. The use of the verb *ramū* “untie” here (i.e., in *urtammi*) is powerful in its subtlety. In l. 180, the hunter first had told the prostitute: *rummī kirimīki* “Release (lit. ‘untie’) your hold,” a statement that repeats the /r/, /m/, and /k/ sounds. Interestingly, when the event happens, we are not told that she “released” (i.e., *ramū*) her hold, but instead that she “untied” (i.e., *ramū*) her skirts. The audience is thus expecting to hear one paronomastic phrase, but instead is treated to another.

326. As caught by Benjamin R. Foster, “Gilgamesh: Sex, Love, and the Ascent of Knowledge,” in *Love and Death in the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of Marvin H. Pope*, ed. John H. Marks and Robert M. Good (Guilford, CT: Four Quarters Publishing Company, 1987), 24.

Homoeopropheron obtains both vertically, in that each of the successive lines starts with /mu/ (the first two with /mušaḥ/), and horizontally through the repetition of the /mu/ sound in *ūmu* "day" and *mušērid* "sends down" in line 178, *murriku* "who lengthens" and *mušāti* "nights" in line 180, and *mušabšū* in line 181. Here *eršetim* "land" (2x), *kīma* "like," and *rapaštum* "broad," and the two-fold appearance of *ume* "day," offer additional repetition of the sound /m/.

An Egyptian case of homoeopropheron appears in P. Westcar in a description of how the goddess Meskhenet approached newly born triplets of the royal house: *ḥ.n ms.n sj mshn.t r=f* "then Meskhenet approached him" (10.20).³²⁷ Here the consonants of the verb *ms* "approach" are repeated in the same order in the name *mshnt* "Meskhenet." This example also represents paronomasia for appellative purposes.

On the Stela of Neferabu (BM 589 verso, ll. 6–7), Neferabu states that the god Ptah made him *mī ḫwḫ.w n ḫwj.t ḫw=ī m ḏr.t=f* "like the dogs of the street, I being under his hand (i.e., power)." Here the consonants *ḫw* repeat four times: twice in the word *ḫwḫ.w* "dogs," once in *ḫwj.t* "street," and again in the copula *ḫw*.

Similarly, in the Hymn to Amun-Ra inscribed on the stela of Suty and Hor, Amun is praised as follows: *snhp=k r wbn ḏwḏ.w ḥḏḏw.t=k wbḏ=s ḫr.tj 'w.t* "you rouse to rise at dawn, your brightness, it opens the eyes of the flocks" (l. 7). Note how the first consonants in *wbn* "shine" repeat in *wbḏ* "opens."

The Prophecy of Neferti offers a similar example in line 51: *wr ḫp.t ḥḏl=tw=s m wbn [ḫw] r' ḫwd=f sw rmt [wb] n=f wn wnw.t* "it (the measure) is measured to overflowing. Ra will withdraw from humankind, his shine exists for but an hour." Here the phonemes /w/ and /b/ repeat in *wbn* "overflowing" and *wbn* "shine," and the /w/ and /n/ repeat in *wn* "exists" and *wnw.t* "hour."³²⁸

On the granite monolith inscribed with the Triumph Hymn of Thutmose III (CM 34010.9–10), we read: *ḫr=s ḫs-ḥḏq m nbd.w-qd ḫm=s ḫmj.w nb.w=s n m nsr.t=s* "she (Pharaoh's uraeus) made easy prey of the perverse-minded, she consumed those in their entirety, with her flame." Homoeopropheron here occurs between *nbd.w* "perverse" and *nb.w* "entirety."

A final demonstration in Egyptian was noted by Lawrence Stager.³²⁹ It appears near the end of the famous Merneptah Stela, and boasts that, due to the pharaoh's might, *ḥḏrw ḥpr.w ḥḏr.t* "Hurru has become a widow." The sounds /ḥ/ and /r/ repeat in all three words, and the sound /ḏ/ in the first and last. This case also serves an appellative function.

327. Parys, *Le récit du Papyrus Westcar*, 70–71.

328. The use of *wbn* "overflowing" and *wbn* as "shine" also constitutes homonymic paronomasia (see 4.2.6).

329. Lawrence E. Stager, "Merneptah, Israel, and the Sea Peoples: New Light on an Old Relief," *EI* 18 (1985): 56.

There are numerous cases of homoeopropheron in Ugaritic. See, for example the Rephaim Text (*CAT* 1.22.i.4–8):

4. *ṭm*
There
5. *ṭkm bm ṭkm aḥm qym il*
shoulder to shoulder, brothers, attendants of El.
6. *blsmt ṭm y[']bš šm il mtm*
There mortals ... the name of El,
7. *y'bš brkn šm il ḡzrm*
... heroes bless the name of El.
8. *ṭm ṭmq rpu b'l ...*
There Thumuqan (and) the shades of Baal ...

The passage presents some difficulties such as the unknown etymon *bš*. Nevertheless, the presence of homoeopropheron is clear in the thrice repeated particle *ṭm* “there” and the divine name *ṭmq* “Thumuqan.” Supporting the homoeopropheron is the two-fold use of *ṭkm* “shoulder.” In addition, line 17 makes reference to the mythological toponym *ṭmk* “Thamuku.”

See also the phrase *drkt dt drdrk* “the dominion of your eternity” in the words of the craftsman god Kothar-wa-Ḥasis to Baal (*CAT* 1.2.iv.10). Here the sounds /d/ and /r/ in *drkt* “dominion” resound in *drdr* “everlasting,” which the relative pronoun *dt* assists. The prominence that the poet gave this line also is evident in that he gave the stich its own line on the tablet.³³⁰

A Hebrew example of homoeopropheron occurs in the prophet Isaiah’s declaration that Yahweh will bring upon the people *פַּחַד וּפַחַת וּפָחַ* *pahad wā-ṭpahat wā-ṭpāh* “terror, pit, and a snare” (Isa 24:17), also found in Jer 48:43, and in partial form in Lam 3:47. Each of the nouns begins with the letters *pe* and *het* (and an *a*-vowel).

See similarly Isa 26:1, which begins: *עִיר עֲזֻלָּנוּ יְשׁוּעָה יִשִּׁית חֻמּוֹת וְחָל* *lānū yašū’āh yāšūt ḥōmōt wā-ḥēl* “we have a strong city, he (Yahweh) established salvation, walls, and a rampart.” The first two words begin with an *ayin* (ע), the second two with a *yod* and *šin* (יש), and the last two with a *het* (ח).

Hosea 10:10 offers a particularly fine example: *בְּאַחֲזִי וְאַסְרֵם וְאַסְפּוּ עֲלֵיהֶם* *bā-’awwātī wā-’essōrēm wā-’ussapū ‘ālēhem* [עֲנֹתָם] *‘ammīm bā-’ōsrām li-štē ‘ēnōtām* [’ōnōtām] “when it is my desire, I will chastise them, and the peoples shall be gathered against them, when they are tied to their two rings.” Here the prophet immediately follows the verb *אַסְרֵם* *’essōrēm* “I will chastise them” with *אַסְפּוּ* *’ussapū* “shall be gathered,” which repeats the first two phonemes /’/ and /s/. The use of *אַסְרֵם* *’ōsrām* “they are tied” does as well, and

330. See Jonathan Yogev, “Visual Poetry in the Ugaritic Tablet KTU 1.2,” *UF* 46 (2015): 447–53.

provides homonymic paronomasia with אֶסְרֵם 'essōrēm "I will chastise them."³³¹ See too Hosea's complaint that אֶפְרַיִם רֵעָה רוּחַ וְרִדָּף קָדִים 'ēprayīm rō 'eh rūaḥ wā-rōdēp qādīm "Ephraim shepherds the wind, and pursues the east wind" (Hos 12:2). Following the /r/ in Ephraim are three successive words beginning with the sound /r/.

The device also appears in Yahweh's description of Leviathan: לֹא יִבְרִיחוּנוּ בֶן־לֹקֶשׁ לֹקֶשׁ לֹקֶשׁ לֹקֶשׁ לֹקֶשׁ lō' yabrīhennū ben qāšeṭ lā-qaš nehpaḱū lō 'abnē qāla "an arrow (lit. 'son of a bow') does not make him flee, slingstones are turned into stubble" (Job 41:20).³³² The chiasitic arrangement allows for the juxtaposition of לֹקֶשׁ qāšeṭ "bow" and לֹקֶשׁ lā-qaš "into stubble," which lets the poet repeat the consonants ק qoph /q/ and שׁ šin /š/ in close succession.

Shalom Paul has drawn attention to another example of homoeopropheron in Amos' prophecy concerning Samaria's elite: וְסָר מִרְיוֹחַ סְרוּחֵיהֶם wā-sār mizraḥ sārūhīm "the revelry of those who stretch themselves shall pass" (Amos 6:7).³³³ The phonemes /s/ and /r/ in סָר sār "shall pass" are identical to the first two consonants in סְרוּחֵיהֶם sārūhīm "those who stretch themselves."

Proverbs 23:13 offers another demonstration: אַל-תִּמְנַע מִנְעַר מוֹסֵר בֶּן-יִתְנָנוּ al timna' min-na' ar mūsār kī takkennū baš-šēbāṭ lō' yāmūṭ "do not withhold correction from the child, for though you beat him with a rod, he will not die." In Hebrew, the words "withhold" and "from the child" are juxtaposed as מִנְעַר timna' min-na' ar. The very root of the verb resounds in the preposition מִ mi- "from" and noun נֶעַר na' ar "boy." The effect is achieved syntactically by placing the direct object after the indirect object.

The Moabite stela of King Mesha (ca. 840 BCE) also illustrates homoeopropheron. We hear the initial consonants קר /qr/ repeated several times when the king boasts that he built banks for the reservoir "inside the city [בְּקֶרֶב b-qrb h-qr], but there was no cistern inside the city at Qarho [בְּקֶרֶב הַקֶּרֶב b-qrb h-qr b-qrhḥ]" (Il. 23–24). The latter demonstrates an appellative function as well.

See also the boast of King Azitawadda in his Phoenician inscription (*KAI* 26A.6–7): w-ml' 'nk 'qrt p' r w-p' l' nk ss 'l ss "I filled the arsenals of Paar, and I added horse upon horse." Note how the verb פָּעַל p' l "added" (lit. "made") immediately follows upon the toponym פֶּעַר p' r "Paar," the two sharing their first two consonants. Later the king similarly promotes his success at making his subjects live בשֹׁבַע ובמִנְעָם ובשֹׁבַת נַעֲמָת b-šb' b-mnēam w-bšbt nēmat

331. Noted as a "pun" by Morris, *Prophecy, Poetry, and Hosea*, 87. The qere/kethib עֵינָתָם [עֲוֹנָתָם] 'ēnotām [ʿōnotām] raises the question of whether one should read "their two rings" or "their iniquities."

332. The words לֹא יִבְרִיחוּנוּ lō' yabrīhennū also can mean "do not penetrate, pass through" (cf. Exod 26:28, 36:33). I thank one of the publisher's anonymous reviewers for this observation.

333. Paul, *Amos*, 210.

w-b-mn 'm *w-b-šbt n* 'mt “in satedness, and in pleasantness, and in pleasant living” (B, ll. 12–13). Visual homoeopropheron occurs here between שבע *šb* “sated” and שבת *šbt* “living” (lit. “dwelling”). Assisting the device is the repeated preposition ב *b* “in” and the use of the root נעם *n-* ‘-m “pleasant” twice with different nuance.

The book of Daniel contains a number of cases of homoeopropheron in biblical Aramaic. In particular, observe the frequent use of the phrase דְּנִיָּאֵל *dānāh dāniyyē*’l “this Daniel” (Dan 2:24), which appears in various forms (Dan 6:4, 6:6, 6:29), as well as the phrase לְרַב־רַבְּנֵי *ləḥem rab lə-rabṛabānōhī* “a great feast for his nobles” (Dan 5:1). See also Dan 6:22: אֲדִין דְּנִיָּאֵל עִם־מַלְכָּא *’ēdayīn dāniyyē*’l *’im malkā*’ *mallīl malkā*’ *lā-’ālmīn ḥēyī* “then Daniel said to the king, O king, live forever!” There also are the repeated consonants *mem* and *lamed* (מל) in מַלְכָּא מַלְלֵ מַלְכָּא *malkā*’ *mallīl malkā*’ “said to the king, O king,” which are bolstered by their appearance in a different order in לְעַלְמִין *lā-’ālmīn* “forever” and the preposition עִם *’im* “to.” Another instance of homoeopropheron occurs in Daniel’s vision in which he sees a נְהַר דִּי־נֹר נִגְדַּד וְנִפְקַד *nəḥar dī nūr nāḡēd wə-nāpēq* “stream of fire issued and came forth” (Dan 7:10).³³⁴ Each of the primary words in the line begins with a *nun* (נ). See similarly the repeated initial *qaph* (ק) in [קִתְרוֹס] קִתְרוֹס מְשֻׁרְקִיתָא קִתְרוֹס *qāl qarnā*’ *mašrōqītā*’ *qītārōs* [*qatṛōs*] “the sound of the horn, pipe, harp” (Dan 3:5, 3:7, 3:10, 3:15). Adding to the device is anagrammatic paronomasia between קִתְרוֹס מְשֻׁרְקִיתָא *mašrōqītā*’ *qītārōs*, which exploits the sounds /q/, /t/, and /r/. The repeated listing of these instruments, along with זְמָרָא וְנִי וְזָמָרָא *sabkā*’ *pasantērīn sūmponyāh wə-kōl zənē zāmārā* “trigon, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music,” also represents onomatopoeia by replicating the sounds of musical instruments.³³⁵

Like most cases of paronomasia, homoeopropheron is primarily an aural device, though one also can appreciate it visually. Since it involves the repetition of the initial sounds of words, it is tied to syllable formation, and so we may deem its effect accentual or emphatic. In Hebrew and Aramaic, where the accent tends to fall on final syllables, it perhaps serves as a counter-accent or paronomastic

334. A brief case of homoeopropheron also introduces Daniel’s vision in 7:2: וְאַרְבַּע *wa-’ārū*’ *’arba*’ “behold the four (winds of heaven).”

335. The dulcimer does not appear in Dan 3:7. Homoeopropheron with the *zayin* (ז) also obtains in the phrase זְמָרָא וְנִי וְזָמָרָא *zənē zāmārā*’ “kinds of music,” as does anagrammatic paronomasia between the words זְמָרָא וְנִי וְזָמָרָא *pasantērīn sūmponyāh*, which repeat the sounds /p/, /s/, and /n/ in a different order. A similar case involving onomatopoeia appears in the Egyptian text Neferkare and the General (P.Chassinat I, X + 2/x + 7-x + 13), as noted by Jay, *Orality and Literacy in the Demotic Tales*, 103: *īs* [*rf spr*] *n mn-nfr spr r* [...] [...] = *f m ḥs ḥs.w m šm*’ *šm*’ *w m tš tš* [*š.w m g*] *wš mšw* [*š.w r*] *pr spr n mn-nfr* [...] “now the [pleader] of Memphis had reached [...] He was [prevented (?)] by the singing of the sin[gers, the music] of the musicians, the acclamations of the a[cc]laimers, and the w[h]istling of the whist[lers, until] the pleader of Memphis went forth [...].”

prelude to the accent. In poetry it is likely that it contributed to the rhythm or meter of musical accompaniment. Homoeopropheron lends cohesiveness to a text. Often it encourages one to form meaningful relationships between the words involved, to see them as embodying a transformation from one thing to another, or to connect action to consequence.

4.2.2. HOMOIOTELEUTON

Homoioteleuton is the repetition of the final sounds of words.³³⁶ An example of this device occurs in the Sumerian tale of the Return of Ninurta to Nippur (ll. 92–93).³³⁷

LUGAL ^{GI}ŠRAB AN.NA GÚ.GAL DIĜIR.RE.EE
KIŠIB.LÁ ^{EN}LÍL.LÁ ZI.ŠÁ.ĜÁL É.KUR.RA

O sovereign shackle of An, foremost among the gods,
Seal-bearer of Enlil, inspired by Ekur.

As Cooper has shown, the poet has repeated the final sound /gal/ in the words LUGAL “sovereign,” GÚ.GAL “foremost,” and ZI.ŠÁ.ĜÁL “inspired.”

In Akkadian, we find homoioteleuton in Ludlul bēl nēmeqi, in which the erudite sufferer laments: *šarru šīr ilī ^dšamši ša nišīšu* “the king, flesh of the gods, who is the sun of his people” (1.55). Note how both ^d*šamši* “sun” and *nišīšu* “his people” repeat the syllable /ši/. Reinforcing the homoioteleuton is homoeopropheron between *šarru* “king” and *šīr* “flesh,” the relative pronoun *ša* “who,” and the suffixed pronoun *šu* “his.”

Assonantal homoioteleuton also occurs in the Hymn to Shamash, which records the people praising the sun god: *šinama palḥaka [i]štammara zikirka* “they in their reverence of you, laud the mention of you” (l. 165). Observe how each of the four words in this line ends with /a/. Reinforcing the homoioteleuton is the repeated *a*-vowel in the syllables /na/, /pal/, /ḥa/, /tam/, and /ma/.

The Instructions of Amenemope (P.BM 10474) demonstrate homoioteleuton in Egyptian. I refer to Amenemope’s advice in 16.1–5:

m ṛj ṛj mt n mdw.t n ʿḏ
Do not brush aside with false words,

336. We first find the term *ῥομοιοτέλευτον* “homoioteleuton” in Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1410b1 (fourth century BCE); Demetrius Phalereus, *Demetrius on Style* 26 (fourth century BCE). In Quintilian’s day (9.3.77), rhetors usually employed homoioteleuton at the end of stichs in a tricolon.

337. See Cooper, *Return of Ninurta to Nippur*, 72–73, 162, who lists it in an appendix labeled “rhyme, alliteration, and assonance.”

mtw=k rmnî kj m ns.t=k

So as to brush aside a man by your tongue.

m îrj îrj ḥsb tî nkt mtw=k s 'd̥j p̥jw=k 'r

Do not assess a man who has nothing, and thus falsify your stylus.

îr gmi=k wḡj 'î.t n nmḥ

If you find a large debt against a poor man ...

Here the final consonants in *'d̥j* “false,” resound in the realted verb *s 'd̥j* “falsify,” and *wḡj* “debt.”

Homoioteleuton also appears on the stela of Suty and Hor. Note in particular line 10, which characterizes Amun-Ra as *ḥnm.w îmn ḥnmm.t* “a Khnum and Amun for humanity.” The three words repeat the final consonants *n* and *m*, in one case anagrammatically.

A pronounced case of homoioteleuton appears in an Ugaritic incantation for sexual potency (*CAT* 1.169.1). The exorcist uses the line *tgḥtk r[ḥt] b 'l* “may the hand of Baal cast you out” at the beginning of the incantation (*tgḥtk* appears again in l. 2). The final consonants *ḥt* in *tgḥtk* repeat in the verb *gḥt* “cast out” and the noun *r[ḥt]* “hand.” Paronomasia on these same consonants recurs in line 5: *ḥt nqḥ uqrb ḥt ṯḥta l gbbk* “he has prepared the staff, he has brought the staff near, that it may harm your body.” In particular, note the euphemistic use of *ḥt* “staff (i.e., penis)” and the verb *ḥta* “harm.”

Homoioteleuton also occurs in an Ugaritic incantation against the evil eye (*CAT* 1.96.5–13).

5. *tpnn 'n*

The eye of

6. *bṯy 'n bṯt tpnn*

the wizard distorts, the eye of the witch distorts.

7. *'n mḥr 'n pḥr*

(As for) the eye of the tax collector, the eye of the potter,

8. *'n ṯgr 'n ṯgr*

(and) the eye of the gatekeeper: The eye of the gatekeeper,

9. *l ṯgr ṯḫb 'n pḥr*

will revert to the gatekeeper, the eye of the potter,

10. *l pḥr ṯḫb 'n mḥr*

will revert to the potter, the eye of the tax collector,

11. *l mḥr ṯḫb 'n bṯy*

will revert to the tax collector, the eye of the wizard,

12. *l bṯy ṯḫb 'n [bṯt]*

will revert to the wizard, the eye of the witch,

13. *l bṯt t[ḫb ...]*

will revert to the witch ...

Observe how the final phonemes /ḥ/ and /r/ repeat in *mḥr* “tax collector” and *pḥr* “potter.” Additional paronomasia appears between *bṯy* “wizard” (and the

female form *btt* “witch”) and *tṭb* “revert,” which in themselves represent a reversal, and thus likely were intended to contribute to the efficacy of the spell. Moreover, both /t/ and /r/ further resound in the repeated noun *tṭr* “gatekeeper.”

A concise example of homoioteleuton in Ugaritic appears in the Epic of Baal (CAT 1.2.iii.15–16): *šm m’ [tṭr yṭ]ir tṭr il abk* “hear now, O Athtar, Bull El, your father, will avenge.” Note how the final consonants of *šm* “hear” repeat in *m* “O.” The homoioteleuton is strengthened by repetition of the sounds /t/ and /r/ in *tṭr* “Athtar,” *yṭir* “he will avenge,” and *tṭr* “bull.”

Homoioteleuton appears in the Hebrew Bible in the prophecy of Nahum: *בִּזְמָה וּבְלִקָּה וּבְמִבּוֹקָה וּבְמִבּוֹקָה וּבְמִבּוֹקָה* *būqāh ū-mbūqāh ū-mbullāqāh wə-lēb nāmēs ū-ṭīq birkayīm* “Desolation, devastation, and destruction! Heart(s) melt, knees buckle” (Nah 2:11). Observe how the prophet ends each of the first two nouns with the syllables /būqāh/ and the third with /bullāqāh/.

See also Prov 12:25: “anxiety in a man’s heart depresses him [יִשְׁחָנָה] *yašḥennāh*], but a kind word cheers him up [יִשְׂמְחָנָה] *yāsamməḥennāh*].” The verbs for “depress” and “cheer up” share a *ḥet* (ח) as their final consonant. The poet has used these verbs in conjunction with identical suffixes in order to repeat the sound /hennāh/ at the end of each stich.

Lady Wisdom employs homoioteleuton in Prov 9:4: “‘whoever is simple turn [יָסַר] *yāsūr*’ here,” to those who lack [חָסַר] *ḥāsār*] judgment she says it.” The highlighted words share the same two final consonants ס *samech* /s/ and ר *resh* /r/. Enhancing the visual impact of the device is the defective spelling of יָסַר *yāsūr*. Homoioteleuton continues in 9:7 with יָסַר *yōsēr* “he who chastises.”

We also find homoioteleuton at work in Job 28:16: “it (wisdom) cannot be purchased with the gold of Ophir [אֹפִיר] *’ōpīr*], with precious onyx or sapphire [סַפִּיר] *sappīr*]. Here the sound /pīr/ occurs at the end of the words “Ophir” and “sapphire.” See also Job’s complaint about God: *עָלַי רָץ עַל-פְּגִיפָרָץ יִרְץ עַל-פְּגִיפָרָץ* *yiprāṣēnī pēreṣ ’al pānē pāreṣ yāruṣ ’ālay kə-ḡibbōr* “he breaches upon me breach upon breach, he runs upon me like a warrior” (Job 16:14).³³⁸ The final two consonants of the verb “breaches” (i.e., רץ *rṣ*) repeat in the two cognate nominal forms *pēreṣ* “breach,” and in the first verb of the second stich *yāruṣ* “he runs.” As Seow observes, the impact is visual as well:

The repeated bilabial *p* opens to a glide, *y*, thus graphically (and phonologically) representing the eventual breach that spells the end of Job.... The conservative spelling of יִרְץ (as opposed to ירוץ) enhances the poetry.³³⁹

In Aramaic, we find homoioteleuton in the description of Nebuchadnezzar’s transformation, during which *טִפְרוֹהִי כְּצִפְרִין* *ṭiprōhī kə-ṣiprīn* “his nails (became)

338. If the fricativization of the פ *p*/ did not yet take place, then the repeated consonant would have been even more pronounced.

339. Seow, “Orthography, Textual Criticism, and the Poetry of Job,” 80.

like birds' (talons)" (Dan 4:30). Here the last two consonants of both roots are identical (פר *pr*). See also Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, which includes a kingdom that will never be תִּשְׁתַּבֵּק תִּדִּיק *tištəbīq tadīq* "left over, but it shall break" (Dan 2:44). Both verbs end with the consonant ק /q/, supported by a preceding /i/ vowel.

The late antique Aramaic double acrostic and astrological poem known as The Moon Was Chosen also illustrates homoioteleuton. In lines 21–22, we find: "if it (the light) is abundant like snow [תִּלְגָּהּ *tālgāh*] in the middle of Elul, know then that it will be struck with snow [תִּלְגָּהּ *tālgāh*]. There will be great strife [פְּלָגוּ *p̄lagū*] in the world."³⁴⁰ Here the last two consonants of the root for "snow" (ל /l/ and ג /g/) repeat in the verb for "strife" (פְּלָגוּ *p̄lagū*).

Homoioteleuton is primarily an aural device, though like homoeopropheron, it works visually as well. Its effect on the listener/reader is similar to that of homoeopropheron, as it creates cohesion and encourages meaningful connections. However, since it relies on the repetition of final sounds, the paronomastic inflection differs. In Hebrew and Aramaic, where the accent typically falls on the final syllable, homoioteleuton provides added emphasis. As with homoeopropheron, it may have played an accentual role in poetry with regard to the musical rhythm or melody that supported it.

4.2.3. ANASTROPHE

Anastrophe is the use of nonnormative syntax (also considered a type of hyperbaton) for paronomastic effect.³⁴¹ An excellent demonstration in Akkadian occurs in the Epic of Gilgamesh 1.37–39.

340. Pereira, *Studies in Aramaic Poetry* (c. 100 B.C.E.–c. 600 C.E.), 86, 313.

341. The word ἀναστροφή dates as least to Athenaeus of Naucratis, *Deipnosophistae* 11.493d (third century CE). Hyberbaton is a more general term for the employment of nonnormative syntax for effect. Another type of hyperbaton is *hysteron proteron*, which involves the use of nonnormative syntax that displaces the normative temporal sequence. Unlike *hysteron proteron*, anastrophe has no temporal consequence. An example of *hysteron proteron* in the Hebrew Bible appears in Job 14:10: וַתָּבֵר יָמֹתַי וַתֵּלֶךְ *wə-ḡeber yāmūtī way-yehēlās* "a man dies and grows weak." Here becoming weak should precede the mention of dying. For *hysteron proteron* in Ugaritic see Oswald Loretz, "Die Figur *Hysteron Proteron* in KTU 1.14 I 28–30," *UF* 33 (2001): 299–302. For the device in Akkadian see Kai Alexander Metzler, "Perfekta im jungbabylonischen Weltschöpfungsepos," in *Ex Mesopotamia et Syria Lux. Festschrift für Manfred Dietrich zu seinem 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Oswald Loretz, Kai Alexander Metzler, and Hanspeter Schaudig, AOAT 281 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2002), 474–77. On the equation of *hysteron proteron* and the early rabbinic usage of אֵין מוֹקְדָם וְמֵאוּחָר *ʿēn mūqdām ū-mə'ūhār* "there is no early or late," see Steiner, "Muqdam u-Me'uhār and Muqaddam wa-Mu'ahhar." As Steiner notes, the rabbinic treatment of anastrophe, under the expression

37. *ši-i-ḥu* ^dGIŠ-*gim-maš gít-ma-lu ra-šub-bu*
 So tall, Gilgamesh, perfect, awesome,
 38. *pe-tu-ú né-re-bé-e-ti ša ḥur-sa-an-ni*
 Who opened passes in the mountains,
 39. *ḥe-ru-ú bu-ú-ri šá kišād* (GÚ) *šadī* (KUR)
 Who dug wells on the hills.

Here the text fronts the adjective *šiḥu* “tall” in line 37, rather than placing it after the name Gilgamesh where one would expect it syntactically. While the syntax emphasizes the king’s height,³⁴² it also has a paronomastic effect in that it allows the poet to start three consecutive stichs with a word ending in /u/. Buttressing the anastrophe is repetition of the sounds /b/ and /r/ in the words *rašubbu* “awesome,” *nērebeti* “passes,” and *būrū* “wells.”³⁴³

Anastrophe in Egyptian occurs in the Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor, in the sailor’s reports about a fearful moment when a wave struck the ship, ripping it apart:

šl.t tšw lřj=f whmj.t nwj.t im=f n.t mḥ ḥmn in ḥt ḥ(w)ḥ n=i s(y) ‘ḥ’.n dp.t
m(w)t=t(ḥ) n.tj.w im=s nī spī w’ im ḥr-ḥ.w=i mk wī r gs=k

the wind blew repeatedly, a wave over it of eight cubits. Only the mast, it (the wave?) broke it for me. Then the ship died. Of those on board, not one survived, except me, and see I am beside you. (ll. 103–108)

Here the broken syntax in the line *in ḥt ḥ(w)ḥ n=i s(y)* “only the mast, it (the wave?) broke it for me,” conveys the fear and confusion of the moment,³⁴⁴ while also providing an opportunity to repeat the sound /ḥ/, found in *ḥmn* “eight” and *ḥ.w* “except,” and the consonant *ḥ*, found in *whmj.t* “repeat,” *mḥ* “cubit,” *ḥ’* “then,” and *ḥr* “upon.” Adding to the striking image is the prosopopoeial death of the ship and the employment of a number of hieroglyphs with nautical significance, including the sail (𓏏) in the noun *tšw* “wind,” the mast (𓏏) in *ḥ’*

מִקְרָא מִקְרָא *miqrā’ māsōrās* “inverted verse,” differs in that it represents clauses that are out of temporal order. Over time, it became synonymous with *hysteron proteron*.

342. George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, 783, suggests the inversion may be for emphasis.

343. The effect continues with the first two words of l. 40: *ēbir ayabba* “he crossed the ocean.” Note also in l. 37 the repetition of the phonemes /g/, /l/, and /m/ in ^dGIŠ-*gim-maš gitmālu* “Gilgamesh, perfect” (i.e., ^dGIŠ is a logogram that was read as *gilga*). See George, *Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, 84. The line also appears in ll. 1.35, 211, 218.

344. On the use of confused syntax to express excitement here, see Rendsburg, “Literary Devices in the Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor,” 22.

“then,” and the harpoon (𐤊) in *w*’ “one,” in addition to the expected boat determinative (𐤍) in *dp.t* “ship.”³⁴⁵

I am aware of no cases of anastrophe in Ugaritic texts. Given that it appears in so many other Near Eastern texts, it may be just an accident of discovery. Perhaps future researchers will change this state of affairs.

An example of anastrophe in Hebrew occurs in Reuben’s statement after returning to the pit and finding Joseph gone.³⁴⁶ In a panic he asks his brothers אֵינִי יָדָעְתִּי וְאַיִן אָנֹכִי *hay-yeled ’ēnennū wa-’ānī ’ānāh ’ānī bā* “the child is not, and I, to where shall I come?” (Gen 37:30). The awkward syntax conveys Reuben’s anxiety and creates a paronomastic relationship between the consonants *aleph*, *yod*, and *nun* in the two-fold use of אֵינִי *’ānī* “I,” and in אֵינִי *’ēnennū* “is not” and אָנֹכִי *’ānāh* “where.” Abetting the anastrophe (and homoeopropheron) is the repeated *a*-vowel.

Anastrophe occurs in conjunction with antanaclasis in Daniel 5. The court tale relates how the king commanded his servants הַנְּפִיקוּ *hanpēq* “to bring out” the sacred vessels that once belonged to the temple of Yahweh (Dan 5:2). We then are told that הַנְּפִיקוּ *hanpiqū* “they brought” them so that the king and his entourage could drink wine from them (Dan 5:3), when suddenly, the fingers of a man’s hand נִפְקָה *nəpāqū* [*nəpāqāh*] “appeared” (Dan 5:5). Arnold observes that the antanaclastic change in meaning of the verb נִפְקָה from “bring” to “appear” presents a *pe’al* form in an atypical usage, and that the sudden switch in syntax from verb-subject, as opposed to subject-verb in lines 2, 3, and 6, serves “to dramatize divine retribution against human sin.”³⁴⁷ Combined with the antanaclasis, the anastrophe “demonstrates God’s response both to Belshazzar’s mindless sacrilege and to Nebuchadnezzar’s former arrogance in ‘bringing forth’ the vessels from God’s temple.”³⁴⁸

Much like amphiboly, anastrophe initially causes confusion for listeners/readers. It encourages them to think the text is in error, because it relies on nonnormative syntax. The paronomasia in anastrophe contributes to the confusion by lending the line a tongue-twister type quality. In direct discourse, it often conveys emotional excitement or fear by creating anacoluthons. In narration, it can communicate speed, confusion, and mayhem. It is effective aurally and visually.

345. For similar cases of prosopopoeia involving ships, see Isa 23:1, Jon 1:4.

346. Gary A. Rendsburg, “Confused Language as a Deliberate Literary Device in Biblical Hebrew Narrative,” *JHS* 2 (1998–1999): 6–8.

347. Arnold, “Wordplay and Narrative Technique in Daniel 5 and 6,” 481; David M. Valeta, “Polyglossia and Parody: Language in Daniel 1–6,” in *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies*, ed. Roland Boer (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 91–108.

348. Arnold, “Wordplay and Narrative Technique in Daniel 5 and 6,” 481–82.

4.2.4. EPANASTROPHE

Epanastrophe occurs when the author repeats the final syllable of one word or line in the first syllable of the next.³⁴⁹ It is not common in Akkadian, but it does exist. See, for instance, two examples from the Hymn to Shamash (ll. 36–37):³⁵⁰

36. šá ^di-gì-gì la i-du-ú qí-rib lib-bi-šá
 37. ^dšamaš (UTU) bir-bir-u-ka ina ap-si-i ú-ri-du

The depth of which the Igigi know not.
 Shamash, your glare reaches down to the Apsû.

Here the last syllable of the first stich /ša/ resounds in the first word of the second stich, ^dšamaš, even though the latter is written logographically. Witness also lines 136–137, in which the sound /ka/ ends the first line and starts the second:³⁵¹

- [ina] šu-ru-bat šēri (EDIN) re- 'ú i-maḥ-ḥar-ka
 [ka]-par-ri ina te-še-e na-qí-du ina ^{LÚ}nakri (KÚR)

The shepherd [amid] the terror of the steppe confronts you,
 The herdsman in warfare, the keeper of sheep among enemies.

A particularly sustained example of epanastrophe appears in Enuma Elish 4.13–16, in which each of the successive verses begins with the same syllable that ends the previous line (i.e., /ni/, /ti/, and /ka/).³⁵²

13. ^dmarūtuk at-ta-ma mu-tir-ru gi-mil-li-ni
 14. ni-id-din-ka šar-ru-tu₄ kiš-šat kal gim-re-e-ti
 15. ti-šab-ma i-na puḥri lu-ú ša-qá-ta a-mat-ka
 16. ^{GIŠ}kakkī (TUKUL)-ka a-a ip-pal-ṭu-ú li-ra-i-su ma-ki-ri-ka

You are Marduk, our avenger,
 We have given you kingship over the sum of the whole universe.
 Take your seat in the assembly, let your word be exalted,
 Let your weapons not miss the mark, but may they slay your enemies.

See also the clever use of the device in Enuma Elish 6.7–8.³⁵³

349. The word ἐπαναστροφή “epanastrophe” appears first in Hermogenes of Tarsus, *Peri Ideon* 1.12 (second century CE).

350. See Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, 128–29.

351. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, 134–35.

352. W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths*, MC 16 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 86–87.

353. Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths*, 110–11.

7. *lu-ub-ni-ma lullâ* (LÚ-U₁₈-LU-*a*) *a-me-lu*
 8. *lu-ú en-du dul-lu ilānī-ma šu-nu lu-ú pa-áš-ḥu*

I will create Lullû-man.

On whom the toil of the gods verily will be laid that they may rest.

Not only does epanastrophe connect the two lines with the syllable /lu/, but the sound /lu/ is morphemically meaningful to the passage, as it suggests the creation of the first man *lullâ* (LÚ-U₁₈-LU-*a*). In fact, the sound /lu/ also starts the first line as a precatative particle in “I will create” (*lubnima*), and it appears in “man” (*amēlu*), “toil” (*dullu*), and “verily” (*lū*). It also is supported by the sound /la/ in *lullâ* “Lullû-man” and *ilānī* “gods.” Moreover, LÚ means “man” in Sumerian.

A fine example of epanastrophe in Egyptian appears in the Pyramid Texts of King Unas (Spell 273, §519): *fꜥw wnꜥs nsb=f sbš.w im.ḥw dšr.t* “Unas detests licking the coils of the red (crown).” Here the /s/ and /b/ of *nsb* “licking” repeat in *sbš.w* “coils.”

Epanastrophe in Ugaritic texts occurs visually, but not aurally, in the Epic of Baal:

thtš[b] bn qrytm
tmḥš lim ḥp y[m]

(Anat) battl[es] between the two towns,
 She fought the peoples of the se[a] shore (*CAT* 1.3.ii.6–7)

Though the consonants *tm* end the first line and start the second, they would not have sounded the same. The last word in the first line would have been vocalized *qiryatēmi* and the first word in the second line as *timḥaṣu*.

There also are a few cases of near epanastrophe, again effective only visually. In the Epic of Baal (*CAT* 1.4.vi.4–5), the divine craftsman Kothar-wa-Ḥasis implores Baal:

šm ' m ' l al[i]yn b ' l
bl ašt ur[bt] b bhtm

Please listen, O mi[ght]iest Baal,
 Shall I not install a win[dow] in the house?

Note how the name *b ' l* “Baal” at the end of the first stich is resounded in the negative particle *bl* “not” in the second. The first would have been pronounced *ba ' lu* and the second *bal*.

See similarly in the same text (*CAT* 1.4.vii.49–51):

aḥdy d ymlk 'l ilm
l ymrū ilm w nšm

It is I alone who reign over the gods,
 Indeed who fattens gods and men.

Again, we have a case of near visual epanastrophe between *ilm* “gods” (pronounced *'ilīma*) and *lymrū* “indeed who fattens” (pronounced *la-yimra'u*).

We can appreciate epanastrophe in Hebrew in Qoheleth’s contention that God tests humankind לָהֶם הֵמָּה לְרֵאשִׁית שְׁהֵם-בְּהֵמָה הֵמָּה לָהֶם *wə-li-r'ōt šə-hem bəhēmāh hēmāh lāhem* “so that they can see for themselves they are like animal(s)” (Qoh 3:18). The end of בְּהֵמָה *bəhēmāh* “animal(s)” produces the same sound as the start of the next word הֵמָּה *hēmāh* “they.” Assisting the epanastrophe is additional repetition of third person masculine pronoun in שְׁהֵם *šə-hem* “that they” and לָהֶם *lāhem* “for themselves.”³⁵⁴

Visual epanastrophe appears in the line פָּרַשׁ רֶשֶׁת לִרְגְלִי *pāraš rešet lə-rəḡlay* “he has spread a net for my feet” (Lam 1:13). The first word ends with the sounds /rś/ and the second begins with /rš/. Though the letters *śin* and *šin* are distinguished in speech, they are visually identical in the pre-Masoretic consonantal text.

An Aramaic case of epanastrophe occurs in Daniel’s vision of a fourth beast that will כֹּל-אֶרֶץ תֹּאכַל *lē'kul kōl 'ar'ā* “devour the entire earth” (Dan 7:23). Note how the last syllable of the first word and the first two consonants of the next are both כֹּל /kl/. A more sustained use of epanastrophe occurs in the artful repetition (with slight variation) of the introductory formula בְּדַנְיָאֵל *bē-'dayīn dānīyyē'l* “then Daniel” (Dan 2:14, 2:17, 2:19 [2x], 4:16, 5:13, 6:22). In Dan 6:4, it is strengthened by the addition of the demonstrative pronoun: אֲדִין דְּנִיָּאֵל דְּנָה *'ēdayīn dānīyyē'l dānāh* “then this Daniel.” This phrase also demonstrates homoeoproheron as noted above (4.2.1).

Epanastrophe is certainly an aural device, but its reliance on juxtaposition also makes it a visual one. Epanastrophe lends the text a reduplicating, stuttering effect that naturally compels one to connect the words involved, almost as if they are one. In the Akkadian and Ugaritic examples, epanastrophe joins one line to the next. Thus, it also can serve a structural purpose.

4.2.5. PARASONANCE

Parasonance occurs when two or more roots are employed that contain the exact same radicals, and in the same order, except one.³⁵⁵ Demonstrating parasonance

354. Beitzel, “Exodus 3:14 and the Divine Name,” 8.

355. Sasson, “Word Play in the O.T.”; cf. Glück, “Paronomasia in Biblical Literature.” *Parasonance* and *anagrammatic paronomasia* are more specific terms for what Isaac Kalimi calls *metathesis*. See I. Kalimi, *Metathesis in the Hebrew Bible: Wordplay as a*

in Akkadian is the narrator's report in the Epic of Gilgamesh about the hunter complaining to his father about the wildman Enkidu:

130. [um-tal-li bu]-ú-ri šá ú-ḥar-ru-ú [ana-ku]
[He has filled in the] pits that I dug.
131. [ut-ta-as-si-iḥ n]u-bal-li-ia šá uš-n[i-lu]
[He has uprooted] my traps that I laid.
132. [uš-te-li ina qātī-ia] bu-lam nam-maš-ša-a šá še[ri]
(EDIN)]
[He has set free from my hand] the herd, the animals of
the steppe.

Parasonance obtains here between *būru* “pits” (l. 130) and *būlu* “herd” (l. 132), and also between *būlu* “herd” (l. 132) and *nuballīya* “my traps” (l. 131).

Parasonance also appears in the Egyptian stories found in P.Westcar. While describing the amazing feats of a magician who could transform a wax crocodile into a living one, the narrator relates: *wn=in=f m ḏr.t=f mšḥ n mnḥ* “in his hand it was a crocodile of wax” (4.2–3).³⁵⁶ The nouns *mšḥ* “crocodile” and *mnḥ* “wax” share two of their three consonants. The device continues in the next two verses: “Then the chief lector priest Ubainer reported (*whm*) the thing that the commoner had been doing in his house with his wife (*hm.t*) to the majesty (*hm*) of the king of Upper and Lower Egypt, justified” (4.4–5). Each of the highlighted words contains the consonants *h* and *m*, found in *mšḥ* “crocodile” and *mnḥ* “wax.”

See also the love poem in P.Harris 500 (2.2–2.3): “my heart is not lenient with your love, my wolf cub [*wnš*]! Your liquor is your lovemaking. I will not abandon it until blows drive (me) away to the land of Hurru to spend my days [*wrš*] in the marshes.” Here *wnš* “wolfcub” and *wrš* “spend the day” differ in only one root consonant.

In the Tale of the Eloquent Peasant, the peasant tells the overseer: *īr ḥj=k r šī n mš'.t sqd=k im=f m mš'.w* “if you go down to the Lake of Truth, you shall sail in it with a breeze” (P.3023 + P.Amherst I, ll. 85–86). The noun *mš'.t* “truth” differs in only one consonant from *mš'.w* “breeze.”³⁵⁷

Literary and Exegetical Device (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2018). See similarly N. H. Tur-Sinai, “Metathesis in the Biblical Text” [Hebrew], in vol. 2 of *The Language and the Book* (Jerusalem: Mosad Byalik, 1948–1955), 106–49.

356. Parys, *Le récit du Papyrus Westcar*, 32–33.

357. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 1:183 n. 10, refers to this as a “wordplay.” The same lexemes are used similarly in the Harper Song inscribed on a pillar in the hall of the tomb of Paser (TT 106). Line 7 of that text reads: *tw=k ḥr mš'.w ṯw nfr mš'.t* “you sail with the good wind of righteousness.” Espied also by Lichtheim, “Songs of the Harpers,” 203 n. j, who notes that the sail determinative 𓂏 does double duty for both (inscription on pl. III).

Similar parasonance on these consonants appears in the Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor, in which the storyteller describes the sailors of his mission: *m33=sn p.t m33=sn t3 m'k3 ib=sn r m3.w* “they see the sky, they see the land, fiercer their hearts than lions” (ll. 28–30). The repeated verb *m33* “see” reverberates in *m'k3* “fierce” and *m3.w* “lions.”

In Ugaritic, we find parasonance in the Tale of Aqhat (*CAT* 1.17.vi.30–32):

k b' l k yḥwy
Like Baal, when he revives,
y'šr
He prepares a banquet,
ḥwy y'šr
Prepares a banquet for the revived,
w yšqnyh
And he offers him drink,
ybd w yšr 'lh
Intones and sings over him,
n 'm[n wy] 'hynn...
with pleasant (sound) he choruses ...

Parasonance exists between the repeated form *y'šr* “he prepares a banquet” and *yšr* “he sings” (i.e., /y/, /š/, and /r/) and between *n 'mn* “pleasant (sound)” and *y 'hynn* “he choruses” (i.e., /n/ and /'/).

An exquisite case of parasonance occurs in the performative speech of Kothar-wa-Ḥasis to Baal in the Epic of Baal (*CAT* 1.2.iv.8–10).

8. *ht ibk*
Now your enemy
9. *b'lm ht ibk tmḥš ht tšmt šrtk*
Baal, now strike your enemy, now vanquish your foe!
10. *tqḥ mlk 'lmk drkt dt drdrk*
Take your eternal kingship, your everlasting dominion!

Note in particular the parasonance between *tmḥš* “strike,” *tšmt* “vanquish,” and *šrtk* “your foe” (i.e., the first two share the phonemes /m/ and /š/, the latter two share /š/ and /t/). Additional parasonance occurs between *mlk* “kingship” and *'lmk* “your eternal” (/m/, /l/, and /k/) and between *drkt* “dominion” and *drdrk* “your everlasting” (/d/, /r/, and /k/), cited above as a demonstration of homoeopropheron. The latter is supported by the relative pronoun *dt*, which repeats two consonants in *drkt* “dominion.”

In the Hebrew Bible, we find the device in the story of how Yahweh punished “Babel” (בָּבֶל *bāḇel*) by “confusing” (בָּלָל *bālal*) the language of its people (Gen

11:9). The two roots involved differ in only one radical letter, each of which the other possesses.³⁵⁸

The famous cry of Isaiah works similarly: וַיִּקְוֶה לְמִשְׁפָּט וְהִנֵּה מִשְׁפַּח לְצַדִּיקָהּ wa-yaqaw lə-mišpāt wə-hinnēh mišpāh li-šdāqāh wə-hinnēh šə ‘āqāh “he (Yahweh) hoped for justice, but behold bloodshed, for righteousness, but behold a cry” (Isa 5:7). Technically speaking, only צַדִּיקָהּ šəḏāqāh “righteousness” and צַעֲקָה šə ‘āqāh “a cry” constitute parasonance, since they differ in only one radical. Nevertheless, the parasonance is strengthened by the repetition of the consonants *mem*, *pe*, and *šin* in מִשְׁפָּט mišpāt “justice” and the *mem*, *pe*, and *šin* in מִשְׁפַּח mišpāh “violence.” Of course, in the pre-Masoretic text, the two words would be visually parasonantic, because the *šin* and *šin* would both appear as ש.

Jeremiah’s pronouncement against Judah offers a dazzling case: וְהִנֵּה כִּי הִנְנִי מְשַׁלְּחִים בְּכֶם נָחָשִׁים צִפְעָנִים אֲשֶׁר אֵין לָהֶם לֶחֶשׁ וְנִשְׁכּוּ אֶתְכֶם נָאִם יְהוָה kī hinənī məšallēah bākem nəḥāšīm šip’ōnīm ‘āšer ‘ēn lāhem lāhaš wə-niššākū ‘etkēm nə’um YHWH “Lo, I will send serpents against you, adders that cannot be charmed, and they will bite you, declares Yahweh” (Jer 8:17). Parasonant here are מְשַׁלְּחִים məšallēah “send,” נָחָשִׁים nəḥāšīm “serpents,” לֶחֶשׁ lāhaš “charmed.” Note too that נִשְׁכּוּ niššākū “bite” is parasonant with נָחָשִׁים nəḥāšīm “serpents.”³⁵⁹ Moreover, the parasonance onomatopoeically resounds the hissing of a snake (see 3.2).

Consider the following two case of parasonance from the Hebrew text of Ben Sira from Qumran. The first occurs in Sir 40:13 MS B: חוֹל אֶל חוֹל כְּנַחַל אֵיתָן hwl ‘l hwl k-nhl ‘ytn “From sand to sand like an eternal wadi.” This brief line repeats the noun חוֹל hwl “sand” before the noun נַחַל nhl “wadi” with which it shares two consonants.³⁶⁰ The shared consonants bespeak a shared essence that the simile invites us to compare.

The second case appears in Sir 4:9 MS A.

הוֹשַׁע מוֹצֵק מִמְצִיקוֹ
וְאֵל תְּקוּץ רוּחַךְ בַּמִּשְׁפָּט יוֹשֵׁר

hwš ‘ mwšq m-mšyqyw
w-’l tqwš rwḥk b-mšpt ywšr

358. Noegel, “Ritual Use of Linguistic and Textual Violence in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East.” Jonathan Grossman, “The Double Etymology of Babel in Genesis 11,” *ZAW* 129 (2017): 362–75, argues that Gen 11:9 also reflects a derivation of the name Babel from the Akkadian verb *babālu*, meaning “sweep away (of people or animals), carry off with water.” On double etymologies, see also Yair Zakovitch, “A Study of Precise and Partial Derivations in Biblical Etymology,” *JSOT* 15 (1980): 31–50; Zakovitch, “Explicit and Implicit Name-Derivations.”

359. See the discussion by Rüdiger Schmitt, *Magie im Alten Testament*, AOAT 313 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2004), 110–12.

360. Reymond, “Wordplay in the Hebrew to Ben Sira,” 51.

Deliver the oppressed from their oppressors,
let your spirit not dread just judgment.

Note how מוצק *mwsq* “oppressed” and מציקו *mšyq* “oppressors,” share two of their three consonants with תקוץ *twš* “dread.” Reymond observes that implicit in the verse is the notion “that oppression survives due to the fear or trepidation of those responsible for applying justice.”³⁶¹

Several cases of parasonance in Aramaic appear in Daniel’s description of Nebuchadnezzar’s transformation into a wild man:

וּמִן־בְּנֵי אָנָשָׁא טְרִיד וְלִבָּבָה עִס־חִיתָא שְׁוִי [שויו] וְעַם־עַרְדִּיא מְדוּרָה עֲשָׁבָא כְתוּרִין
יִטְעֻמוּנָהּ וּמִטְל שְׁמַיָּא נִשְׁמָה יִצְטַבַּע עַד דִּי־יִדַּע דִּי־שְׁלִיט אֱלֹהָא עָלֶיהָ [עלָהָה] בְּמַלְכוּת
אָנָשָׁא וּלְמַוְדִּי יִצְבָּה יְהֻקִּים עָלֶיהָ [עָלָה]

*ū-min benē ’anāšā’ ṭerīd we-liḥābēh ’im ḥēwīā’ šewī [šawwīyāw] we-’im
’ārādayyā’ meḏōrēh ’iśbā’ ḫeīōrīn yeṭa ’āmūnnēh ū-miṭṭal šemayyā’ gišmēh
yiṣṭaba’ aḏ dī yeṭa’ dī šallīṭ ’ēlāhā’ ’illāyā’ [’illā’āh] be-malkūt ’anāšā’ ū-
l-man dī yiṣbēh yehāqēm ’ālayēh [’ālah]*

He was driven from the sons of men, his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the onagers; he was fed grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, until he knew that God Most High ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he appoints over it whomever he desires. (Dan 5:21)

Note in particular טְרִיד *ṭerīd* “driven,” מְדוּרָה *meḏōrēh* “his dwelling,” and עַרְדִּיא *’ārādayyā* “onagers,” which share the consonants ד *d* and ר *r*. See also עֲשָׁבָא *’iśbā* “grass,” יִצְטַבַּע *yiṣṭaba* “wet,” and יִצְבָּה *yiṣbēh* “desires,” the first two of which share ע ‘ and ב *b*, and the latter two, צ *ṣ* and ב *b*.

Parasonance also occurs in the Proverbs of Ahiqar: עֲבַק הִי יְקִדָּה הִי עֲבַק *pqyd lk ’št yqdh hy ’bq bdt[y]* “(when a royal word) is commanded to you, it is a burning fire, hurry, do it!” (C1 1:87). Here עֲבַק *pqyd* and יְקִדָּה *yqdh* share the phonemes /q/ and /d/. The verbs עֲבַק *’bq* “hurry” and עֲבַדְתָּ [י] *’bdt[y]* “do it” share /‘/ and /b/, though this also constitutes homoeopropheron.³⁶²

A pronounced case of parasonance in Old Aramaic occurs in the Sefire Treaty Inscription (3.A.4–6) of the eighth century BCE. There we read:

361. Reymond, “Wordplay in the Hebrew to Ben Sira,” 44. On parasonance in the scrolls from Qumran, see James E. Harding, “The Wordplay between the Roots כשל and שכל in the Literature of the Yahad,” *RdQ* 19 (1999): 69–82.

362. The *Aramaic Levi Document* contains at least one case of parasonance in 13:11. וּמְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה *w-ynsbwn nksy m’t w-mdynh* “and they will seize the possessions of land and country.” Note the repetition of the sounds /n/ and /s/ in the first two words. See Greenfield, Stone, and Eshel, *Aramaic Levi Document*, 111–12.

If a fugitive flees from me [ירקרק מני קרק] *yrqrq mny qrq*,

Pacify them [רקה תרקהם] *rqh trqhm* and restore them to me.

And if they do not [dwell] in your land [ארקד] *'rqk*,

Pacify [רקן] *rqw* (them) there.

Here the consonants ר /r/ and ק /q/, which form the start of the root קרק *q-r-q* “flee,” also appear in the root רקה *r-q-h* “pacify,” and again in ארק *'r-q* “land.”³⁶³

Parasonance continued to have a long life in Jewish literature, as demonstrated by b. 'Erub. 65b: “a person can be identified by three things: his drinking habits (בכוסו *b-kwsw*), his spending habits (ובכיסו *w-b-kysw*), and the way he behaves when he is angry (ובכעסו *w-b-k 'sw*).”³⁶⁴ All of the highlighted words share the sounds /k/ and /s/, plus the preposition /b/.

Since parasonance involves the exact repetition of two of the three consonants in a Semitic root, it comes the closest to repeating the entire lexeme. Consequently, parasonance forces listeners/readers to differentiate between the two words. A differing first radical is the easiest to catch; others can be harder to distinguish. In Egyptian, parasonance is primarily an aural device, whereas in the consonantal scripts, like Ugaritic, Hebrew, and Aramaic, it is both aural and visual. In some texts, it encourages one to think that the words involved are related, or that one should contemplate a relationship between them.

4.2.6. HOMONYMIC PARONOMASIA

Homonymic paronomasia exploits words that sound alike, but have different derivations.³⁶⁵ It differs from polysemy in that the device operates between words,

363. Noted by Bezael Porten, “The Root Pair ישב–שוב in Jeremiah,” in *Hamlet on a Hill: Semitic and Greek Studies Presented to Professor T. Muraoka on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. M. F. J. Baasten and W. Th. van Peursen, OLA 118 (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 381.

364. Observed by Yona, “Rhetorical Features in Talmudic Literature,” 84, along with other examples.

365. The earliest attestation of the word ὁμωνυμία “homonymy” appears in Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1404b (fourth century BCE). Alejandro Diez-Macho, “La Homonimia o Paronomasia = *al-muyanasa* = *lašon nofel 'al lašon*,” *Sefarad* 8 (1948): 293–321; “La Homonimia o Paronomasia = *al-muyanasa* = *lašon nofel 'al lašon*,” *Sefarad* 9 (1948): 269–309. On the difficulty of differentiating polysemy and homonymy, see G. R. Driver, “Confused Hebrew Roots,” in *Occident and Orient, Being Studies in Semitic Philology and Literature, Jewish History and Philosophy and Folklore in the Widest Sense, in Honour of Haham Dr. M. Gaster's Eightieth Birthday*, ed. B. Schindler (London: Taylor's Foreign Press, 1936), 73–82; Joshua Blau, “Über Homonyme und Angeblich Homonyme Wurzeln,” *VT* 6 (1956): 242–48; Moshe Held, “Studies in Biblical Homonyms in the Light of Akkadian,” *JANES* 3 (1970–1971): 46–55; Hospers, “Polysemy and Homophony”; Adina Moshavi, “On Distinguishing Polysemy from Generality in the Biblical Hebrew Verb: An Analysis of the

not within a single word. Moreover, the relationship between words is paronomastic, and thus not exact. This distinguishes it from antanaclassis (see 4.1.3). Homonymic paronomasia may involve homographs, but this is not always the case, because words do not need to look identical to sound alike (cf. English *air* and *heir*). Also, in the case of Egyptian, which does not record vowels, homonymic paronomasia is based entirely on consonants.

Two excellent examples of homonymic paronomasia in Sumerian occur in the poem *Ninmešarra*. The first, in line 16, reads: BILUDA GAL.GAL.LA NĪĜ.ZU A.BA MU.UN.ZU “the rites are yours, who else could know their meaning?” Here the first sign ZU means “yours,” whereas the second ZU means “know.”³⁶⁶ In line 27, we find: NIN.ĜU₁₀ Ā NI.ZA ^{NA4}ZÚ ZÚ Ĭ.GU₇.E “my lady, through your own power, the tooth grinds (even) flint.” As Zgoll notes, the first sign ^{NA}ZÚ means “flint,” whereas the second ZÚ, a homonym of the former, means “tooth.”³⁶⁷ Though in each case the signs appear visually identical, they would have been pronounced differently.

Illustrating homonymic paronomasia in Akkadian is the Legend of Sargon, King of Battle (ll. 16–17), where we read: “We have invoked [Sargo]n, king of the universe [*kiššati*] ‘Come down to us, that we may receive strength [*kiššūti*], for we are no warriors.” Here the noun *kiššatu* “universe” echoes in *kiššūtu* “strength” in the next line.³⁶⁸ Though the two sound similar, they are etymologically unrelated; the former derives from *kašāšu* and the latter from *kašādu*.

Egyptian writers also made use of homonymic paronomasia. Indeed, we find it in all types of texts and in all periods of Egyptian history. One of the most extensive displays appears in the *Contendings of Horus and Seth* (P.Chester Beatty I, recto). I discussed this text in the previous chapter with regard to its use of paronomasia in deceptive speech and literary contexts involving trickery (3.7). Suffice it to add here that the use of *ḥw.t* for both “flock, herd” and “office” represents homonymic paronomasia.

Verb בִּקֵּשׁ [Hebrew], *Leshonenu* 67 (2004): 31–48; Mehaheh Zevi Kadari, “Homonymy and Polysemy in the New Modern Hebrew Lexicon of the Hebrew Bible,” in *Biblical Hebrew in Its Northwest Semitic Setting*, ed. Steven E. Fassberg and Avi Hurvitz (Jerusalem: Magnes Press; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 149–53.

366. Zgoll, *Der Rechtsfall der En-hedu-Ana im Lied nin-me-šara*, 2–3, 173.

367. Zgoll, *Der Rechtsfall der En-hedu-Ana im Lied nin-me-šara*, 4–5, 173; cited by Klein and Sefati, “Word Play in Sumerian Literature,” 33.

368. Foster, *Before the Muses*, 252, refers to this as a “word play.” A similar case occurs in Sennacherib’s *Annals* II 1–2: UN.MEŠ KUR.KUR *ki-šit-ti* ŠU.MIN-ia INA ŠĀ ú-še-šib UN.MEŠ KUR ^{LÚ}kaš-ši-i ú KUR ^{LÚ}ya-su-bi-gal-la-a-a “I populated the land with those that I had conquered. The people of the land of the Kassites and the land of the Yasubigallai.” Here *kišitti* “I conquered” (from *kašādu*) is echoed in *kašši* “Kassites” (from *kaššū*). The paronomasia is reinforced by the word order of the two verses, which both begin with UN.MEŠ KUR = *nišī māt* (*mātāti* for KUR.KUR).

Another, more concise, example appears in the tomb of Qenamun in a song about a garden festival. The text in question reads: *šsp 'nh n qsr ntr=k hr 'nh wšs n hr=k mrī.tī* “receive a bouquet, that your god has sanctified, bringing life and prosperity to your dear face” (11). The song employs the homonyms *'nh* “bouquet” and *'nh* “life.”

The Tale of Two Brothers (P.D'Orbiney, BM 10183) contains a number of cases of homonymic paronomasia. In particular, it adopts the same homonymic paronomasia that occurs in Contendings of Horus and Seth, just discussed, in which *īw.t* appears for “flock, herd” and “office” (1.2). As such, the device fits well the political interpretation of the story.³⁶⁹ It occurs again when Anubis's wife takes a piece of *qšw* “fat” to make it look like she had been beaten *qš.w* “unjustly” (4.6). In 4.8, the narrator says that her husband returned home to find her seemingly sick (lit. *qš.w* “falsely” sick). The device appears yet again, first when the sea *š* “calls” to the *š* “pine tree” (10.7), and it is enhanced again when the woman coaxes the pharaoh to *š'd* “cut down” the *š* “pine tree” (12.4); paronomasia that repeats in 12.6 and 12.7–8. We find it one last time when Anubis's beer and wine *hwš* “ferment” (12:10). The lexeme recalls Bata's reference to Anubis's wife's *kš.t tš hw.t* “vagina that is rotting” (7.8), and the *hwš.t* “sore” heart of the washerman grieved by his quarrels with pharaoh (11.1).

The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant (P.3023 + P.Amherst I, ll. 253–254) employs homonymic paronomasia in the peasant's plea to the overseer: *šhtm.w m rdj htm=tw* “Destroyer, let not perish!” The entreaty employs two homonymic verbs. The first is a causative conjugation of *htm* “provide.” The second *htm* is an unrelated verb that means “perish.”³⁷⁰ The peasant's eloquence brings into focus the overseer's maltreatment of the peasant, by suggesting that the overseer is doing the opposite of what is expected of him.

In a statement reminiscent of Yahweh's punishment on Babylon (Gen 11:7–9), Ramesses III's Poem of Victory states: *šqm.w mdw.t rmt hr šms nsw īrī=f stwhī mdw.t=sn pn[']=f ns=w* “they (the captives) heard the (Egyptian) language in serving the king. He (Ramesses) banished their language, he changed their tongue” (ll. 3–4). The passage connects the *nsw* “king” with the people's *ns=w* “tongue” (lit. “their tongue”) by way of homonymic paronomasia.

In the Admonitions of Ipuwer (P.Leiden I 344, r.12.5–6), Ipuwer laments: *n(n) ī š-n.(ī)-hš.t m wnw.t=sn ... n ī š.n=tw n=k m šwī 3d r=s* “there are no pilots on duty ... no one can call upon you, being one free of aggression against it.” The

369. See Thomas Schneider, “Innovation in Literature on Behalf of Politics: The Tale of the Two Brothers, Ugarit, and 19th Dynasty History,” *Ägypten und Levante* 17 (2008): 315–26.

370. Noted by Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 1:183 n. 22, who simply calls it a “wordplay.”

poet here exploits the compound noun *l š-n.(i)-ḥ.t* “pilot” for its relationship to the verb *l š.n* “call” (with the marker of the perfect).³⁷¹

To demonstrate homonymic paronomasia in Ugaritic, I turn to the Tale of Kirtu (*CAT* 1.16.v.24–25), in which the god El asks his royal sons seven times which of them can remove a *zbl* “sickness.” Though the column is fragmentary, the frequent repetition of *zbl* “sickness” is clear (12, 15, 18, 21, 25, 28, 50). When none of the sons steps forward, El quips:

24. *tb bny l mṭbtkm*
Stay seated on your seats,
25. *l kḥt zblk[m...]*
On your princely thrones.

El employs *zbl* “princely” as a not-so-subtle indictment of the noble’s ineffectuality. The use of *zbl* first for “sickness” before using it for *zbl* “princely” constitutes homonymic paronomasia. This example also represents antanaclasis (see 4.1.3).

The Hebrew Bible contains numerous examples of homonymic paronomasia. Qohelet 7:6 illustrates it well: *כִּי כְקוֹל הַסִּירִים תַּחַת הַסִּיר בֶּן שָׁחַק הַבָּסִיל* *kī kə-qōl ḥas-sīrīm taḥaṭ ḥas-sīr kēn šəḥōq hak-kāsīl* “like the crackling of the thorns under the cooking-pot, such is the laughter of a fool.” Qoheleth exploits the homonymy of *הַסִּירִים* *ḥas-sīrīm* “the thorns” and *הַסִּיר* *ḥas-sīr* “the cooking-pot.” The connection between the thorns and the fool is strengthened by repetition of the phonemes /s/ and /l/ in *הַבָּסִיל* *hak-kāsīl* “the fool,” and the liquid *lamed* /l/, which shares alliterative space with the rolled liquid *reš* /r/.³⁷² It is emphasized further by the phrase *כִּי שָׁחַק הַבָּסִיל* *šəḥōq hak-kāsīl* “laughter of the fool,” which imitates the sound of crackling thorns (see 3.2).

Demonstrating homonymic paronomasia in Aramaic is Daniel’s interpretation of the writing on the wall: *פָּרַס פְּרִיסַת מַלְכוּתָךְ וַיְהִיבַת לְמַדֵּי וּפָרַס* *pārēs pārīsaṭ malkūtāk wī-yhibat la-māday ū-pārās* “Peres—your kingdom is assessed, and it is given to the Medes and Persians” (Dan 5:28). Here Daniel decodes the enigmatic *פָּרַס* *pārēs* via paronomasia that identifies it with *פְּרִיסַת* *pārīsaṭ* “assessed” and the homonym *פָּרַס* *pārās* “Persia.”³⁷³

371. Parkinson, *Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems, 1940–1640 BCE*, 197 n. 97, refers to this as a “wordplay.”

372. See Noegel, “‘Wordplay’ in Qoheleth.”

373. The meaning “assessed” is in accordance with the divinatory use of Akkadian *parāsu* “render legal (divine) verdict.” Of course, it also means “cut off,” so multiple meanings are possible. See *CAD* P, s.v. “*parāsu*.”

The plaster wall inscription from Deir ‘Alla (eighth century BCE) also exhibits the device.³⁷⁴ The text, which records the visions of Balaam, son of Beor, the seer vilified in Num 22–24, describes a topsy turvy world that operates contrary to nature: **כי ססעגר חרפת נשר וקל רחמן יענה ח[סד] בני נחץ וצרה עפרחי** *ky ss ‘gr hrpt nšr w-ql rḥmn y ‘nh ḥsd bny nḥš w-šrh ‘prḥy ‘nph drr nšrt* “Indeed the swift reproached the raptor, and the voice of vultures cried out. The st[ork has] the young of the *nḥš*-bird, and tore up the chicks of the heron” (Combination I, ll. 7–8). Here the consonants in **נשר** *nšr* “raptor” echo soon afterwards in the verb **נשרת** *nšrt* “tore up.”

In the Aramaic Sefire inscription, we also find an excellent visual case amidst the stela’s curses (1.A.22–23).

ושבע ססיה יהינקן על ואל ישבע
ושבע שורה יהינקן עגל ואל ישבע
ושבע שאן יהינקן אמר ואל ישבע

w-šb ‘ssyh yḥynqn ‘l w-‘l yšb ‘
w-šb ‘šwrh yḥynqn ‘gl w-‘l yšb ‘
w-šb ‘š ‘n yḥynqn ‘mr w-‘l yšb ‘

May seven mares suckle a colt, but may it not be satisfied.

May seven cows suckle a calf, but may it not be satisfied.

May seven ewes suckle a lamb, but may it not be satisfied.

Each of the three curses starts with the number **שבע** *šb* “seven” and ends with the verb **שבע** *šb* “satisfy.” The homonymic paronomasia is visually striking, constitutes homoioteleuton, and creates an inclusio.³⁷⁵

Even more than parasonance, homonymic paronomasia forces readers/listeners to differentiate the lexemes involved. At the same time, one

374. The language in which the inscription is recorded is debated. Gary A. Rendsburg, “The Dialect of the Deir ‘Alla Inscription,” *BiOr* 50 (1993): 309–29, argues that it is Israelian Hebrew, a dialect of northern Israel. Dennis Pardee, “The Linguistic Classification of the Deir ‘Allā Text Written on Plaster,” in *The Balaam Text from Deir ‘Alla Re-Evaluated: Proceedings of the International Symposium Held at Leiden 21–24 August 1989*, ed. I. Hoftijzer and G. van der Kooij (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 100–105, posits that it is Aramaic. Edward Lipiński, *Studies in Aramaic Inscriptions and Onomastics II*, OLA 57 (Leuven: Peeters, 1994), 168–70, opines that it represents a North Arabian linguistic substratum or possibly a dialect that has borrowed some words from a pre-Islamic Arabian dialect.

375. The paronomasia here is discussed by Melissa Dianne Ramos, *Spoken Word and Ritual Performance: The Oath and the Curse in Deuteronomy 27–28* (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2015), 89, 93, who also ties it to the oral performance and mnemonics of the texts. The second curse also appears in Sefire 1.A.22–23. For stylistic parallels in Ugaritic and biblical texts, see Greenfield, “Stylistic Aspects of the Sefire Treaty Inscriptions,” 12–15.

cannot help but link them. In Sumerian and Akkadian texts that employ homographs for homophones, the device is effective aurally and visually. However, in Akkadian and Egyptian texts that use different signs for the same sounds, it is primarily an aural device. In Ugaritic, Hebrew, and Aramaic, it operates both aurally and visually. Ancient authors exploit it generally to highlight words’ interconnectedness, to underscore an irony, or to promote the notion of a causal or transformative relationship between them.

4.2.7. NUMERICAL PARONOMASIA

Numerical paronomasia occurs when words are used that suggest or relate to numbers, but cannot be read as numbers themselves. While Mesopotamian scribes show a great deal of interest in the numerical values of their cuneiform signs (see above 4.1.9, 4.1.10), to date scholars have discovered no cases of paronomasia on the names of numbers, even in contexts where numbers are plentiful.

However, in ancient Egypt, numerical paronomasia abounds. In fact, Baudouin van de Walle has suggested an affinity between Egyptian numerical paronomasia and Hebrew and Greek acrostics, because the consonants in Hebrew and Greek double as numbers.³⁷⁶ Yet the Egyptian signs for numbers are not employed, and so I treat the phenomenon separately. A wonderful demonstration in Egyptian occurs in Spell 99 of the Book of the Dead, in which the celestial ferryman tells the deceased, here called a *hḳꜣj* “magician,” that if he cannot count his fingers, he will not receive transport. Kurt Sethe long ago observed that the deceased’s response, which constitutes the oldest form of “this little piggy went to market,” evokes the numbers one through nine in paronomastic ways: “I know how to count [my fingers]: take one [*wꜣ.t*], take the second alone [*sntj wꜣ.tj*], quench [*ḥm*] it, remove it, give [*dī*] it to me. You have wiped [*fd*] at it, be friendly [*snsn.t*] towards me; do not let go [*sḫḫ*] of it; have no pity [*ḥꜣtb*] on it; make the Eye bright [*shd*]; give the Eye to me.”³⁷⁷ The highlighted terms evoke the numbers *wꜣ* “one,” *sn* “two,” *hmt* “three,” *fd* “four,” *dw* “five,” *srs* or *sīs* “six,” *sḫ* “seven,” *hmn* “eight,” and *psd* “nine.” Far from being a whimsical demonstration of the deceased’s ability to count, the vignette demonstrates a performative ritual to evoke the Eye of Horus.³⁷⁸

376. Baudouin van de Walle, “Formules et poèmes numériques dans la littérature égyptienne,” *CdE* 60 (1985): 371–78.

377. Kurt Sethe, “Ein altägyptischer Fingerzählreim,” *ZÄS* 54 (1918): 16–39.

378. See Sethe, “Ein altägyptischer Fingerzählreim,” 27–28, who draws attention to a similar device in the Pyramid Texts, Spell 670, §1978: *fd.n=f dw.t ḫr.t NN m fd-nw=f hrw ḥm.n=f ḫr.t ḫr=f m ḥmn.nw=f hrw* “he has wiped away [*fd*] the evil, which was NN, on his fourth [*fd-nw*] day. He has canceled [*ḥm*] what has been done against him on his eighth [*ḥmn.nw*] day.” He also highlights a ritual to Amun (p. 18 n. 1): *ḫ.n=k psd.t m d.t.wy=k m ntr 10 tnw m dbꜣ.w=k m ntr 10 tnw pꜣ m sꜣḫ=k* “you have gathered the gods (lit. ‘Ennead’)

A love poem found in P.Chester Beatty I also illustrates numerical paronomasia. Each of its stanzas is numbered, and the opening words of each stanza contain lexemes that remind one of that number. Thus, *hw.t mh.t sn.nw.t* “the second full stanza” begins with *sn=i* “my brother,” *hw.t mh.t hmt* “the third full stanza” begins *hmt.n ib=i* “my heart expected,”³⁷⁹ the *hw.t mh.t fdw.t* “fourth full stanza” starts with *ifd sw ib=i* “a flee it is, my heart,” and the *hw.t mh.t diw.t* “fifth full stanza” opens with *dw3=i nb.t* “I will praise the Golden-One” (i.e., Hathor).³⁸⁰

In the Hymn to Amun, one finds numerical paronomasia between the number of the stanza and its introductory verse, which proceeds by digits to tens and then hundreds to the perfect number one thousand.³⁸¹

Sixth full stanza [*hw.t mh.t-ssw*]:

Each region [*sw3*] succumbs to the fear of you,
its inhabitants are curbed at your glory ...

Seventh full stanza [*hw.t mh.t-sfh*]:

Misery is dissolved [*sfh*] in Thebes, city of Ra, Mistress of cities, which conquers
whatever is useful to the Universal Lord ...

Ninth full stanza [*hw.t mh.t-psd*]:

The Nine gods [*psd*] who came out of the Ocean
gather to worship you, great of awe ...

Tenth full stanza [*hw.t mh.t-mdw*]:

Thebes is more famous [*mti*] than any city,
water and earth were here in the First Time ...

Twentieth full stanza [*hw.t mh.t-dwti*]:

How pleasantly you ferry [*d3.wi tw*], O Harakhte,
in performing your eternal duty every day ...

Thirtieth full stanza [*hw.t mh.t-m'b3*]:

The harpoon [*m'b3*] is in the Evildoer,
who has fallen by its blade ...

Fortieth full stanza [*hw.t mh.t-hmw*]:

The One who crafted [*hmw*] himself,
whose shapes are unknown ...

with your two hands as ten gods, counted on your fingers, as ten gods, counted on your toes” (P.Berlin 3055, l. 15, 2/3); as well as a line from the tomb inscription of Harhotep (ll. 414–415): ‘*q.n=i m db' s3h n isir*’ “I have entered in a finger and toe of Osiris.”

379. The fifth stanza also contains the paronomastic line *hm.t ib=i* “my heart was ignorant.”

380. The words “first full stanza” do not appear, but the first line of the poem (and the last!) is *w't* “one, unique-one.” The *hw.t mh.t srs* “sixth full stanza” is less paronomastic as it starts with *sw3l.n=f* “he passed by.” The seventh and final stanza simply repeats the number *sfh* “seven” by opening with “for seven days” and concluding with “seven days.”

381. Jan Zandee, *De Hymnen aan Amon van Papyrus Leiden I 350*, OudMed 28 (Leiden: Rijksmuseum van Oudheiden, 1947); passage cited from Loprieno, “Puns and Word Play in Ancient Egyptian,” 14.

In the Admonitions of Ipuwer (P.Leiden I 344, r.12.13–14), we read: *mk kj hr wdł.(t) r kj snł=tw r wd.(t).n=k lr šmł s 3 hr w3.t gmm=tw m s 2* “look, one person sets (himself) against another, one transgresses what you commanded. If three men go on a road, two are found.” The brilliance of this line rests in the use of *snł* “transgress,” which echoes *sn* “two,” thus anticipating the numbers three and two in the next line.³⁸²

The Tale of Sinuhe (P.Berlin 3022, ll. 110–112) too exhibits numerical paronomasia. There the hero recounts: *pr.j pw nn sn.nw=f dr.n=f s(j) r-dr=s dd.n=f h3=f hn ‘=i hmt.n=f hwt(f)=f wı* “a champion was this one without a double. He drove out the whole of it. He said he would fight with me. He thought to rob me.” The noun *sn.nw* “double” reminds us of *snw* “two,” while *hmt* “thought” recalls *hmt* “three.” Moreover, the larger number naturally follows the smaller.

As demonstrated above (4.1.9), Ugaritic scribes were adept at spicing literary contexts filled with numbers with numerical polysemy. They also did so with numerical paronomasia. Thus, in the Kirtu Epic, El’s two-fold reference to “Udum of the rains” (*rbm*) in *CAT* 1.14.iii.4, 29, recalls the *rbt* “myriads” of soldiers (*CAT* ii.40), while the lowing of the *alp* “ox” during the siege (*CAT* 1.14.iii.18), recalls the “marches by the thousand (*alpm*)” (*CAT* 1.14.ii.39).

An example of numerical paronomasia in Hebrew appears in the account of the Chronicler: *וַאֲמָצְיָהּ הַתְּחָזֵק וַיִּהְיֶה אֶת-עָמּוֹ וַיִּלְךָ גִּיא הַמֶּלֶח וַיֵּד אֶת-בְּנֵי-שֵׁעִיר עֶשְׂרֵת אֲלָפִים* *wa-’āmašyāhū hiṭḥazzaq way-yinḥag ‘et ‘ammō way-yēlek gē’ ham-melaḥ way-yak ‘et bənē šē’ir ‘āseret ‘ālāpīm* “then Amaziah grew strong and led his people, and he went to the Valley of Salt and smote the Children of Seir, ten thousand” (2 Chr 25:11 = 2 Kgs 14:7). As espied by Kalimi, the name *שֵׁעִיר šē’ir* “Seir” paronomastically anticipates the number *עֶשְׂרֵת ‘āseret* “ten.”³⁸³ In fact, this example is also anagrammatic in nature.

Vermeulen has examined a literary strategy which employs linguistic devices of doubling in biblical narratives that reference twins. In particular, she demonstrated that Israelite authors employed several devices, including dual forms, gemination, doubled vocabulary, polysemy, and paronomasia on the number two, in order to match form to content. With regard to numerical paronomasia she pointed to the narrator’s description of the births of Perez and Zerah: “and it came to pass, when she travailed, he put out a hand, and the midwife took and bound upon his hand some scarlet [שָׁנִי *šānīy*], saying: ‘This one came

382. This is followed in 13.1 by an allusion to the number one in the statement *n(i) mrw.t lš pw w* “one is beloved.”

383. I. Kalimi, *An Ancient Historian: Studies in the Chronicler, His Time, Place and Writing*, SSN 46 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2005), 72. On paronomasia in the Chronicles generally see Kalimi, “Paronomasia in the Book of Chronicles,” 27–41; Kalimi, “Paronomasie im Buch der Chronik: Ein Beitrag zur literarischen Forschung an der Arbeitsweise des Chronisten,” *BZ* 41 (1997): 78–88; and Weiss, “Derivation of Names in the Book of Chronicles.”

out first רִשְׁוֹנָה *ri šonāh*” (Gen 38:28). The noun שָׁנִי *šānīy* “scarlet” suggests שְׁנִי *šēnīy* “second,”³⁸⁴ thus perfectly (and also paronomastically!) anticipating רִשְׁוֹנָה *ri šonāh* “first.”³⁸⁵ I add to her observations that the inversion of numbers, here second before first, reinforces the pattern of ultimogeniture that pervades the Genesis patriarchal narratives (e.g., Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Judah over Reuben). Vermeulen also points to Song 4:2: “your teeth [שִׁנַּיִךְ *šinnayīk*] are like a flock of shorn-ones, who come up from the washing; all of whom are twinned [מְתַאֲיָמֹת *maṭ’imōṭ*].” This time the noun שִׁנַּיִם *šinnayīm* “teeth” (here with suffix) paronomastically evokes שְׁנַיִם *šənayīm* “two” in the context of twinning.

384. See similarly שָׁנִים *šanīm* in Prov 31:21; Victor A. Hurowitz, *Proverbs: Introduction and Commentary* [Hebrew], vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2012), 601.

Numerical paronomasia has differing effects on listeners/readers depending on how it is used. The Egyptian examples show it to be a structural device that organizes text into discrete units. On the other hand, it also creates expectation and alertness. Once one realizes the device is present, one not only expects other numbers to follow in sequence, but for paronomasia to follow those numbers. Thus, the device is anticipatory and primarily aural in effect. In Ugaritic and Hebrew, it is both aurally and visually effective. Numerical paronomasia generally suggests connections and relationships and/or gives the impression that numbers are multiplying in the text. In Hebrew, it reinforces the very real interconnectedness between consonants and numbers.

4.2.8. BILINGUAL PARONOMASIA

Bilingual paronomasia involves homonyms or near-homonyms that operate across languages. As noted above, many, if not most peoples of the ancient Near East were multilingual, and elite scribes in major urban centers often were trained in multiple languages and scripts.

As with cases of bilingual polysemy, Akkadian examples of bilingual paronomasia are achieved by way of Sumerian. One of the most sophisticated examples appears in the god Anu’s description of his newborn son Marduk in *Enuma Elish* 1.101–102:

101. *ma-ri-ú-tu ma-ri-ú-tu*
 “The son Utu, the son Utu,
 102. *ma-ri* ^dUTU-*ši* ^dUTU-*ši* *ša* DĠIR.DĠIR
 The son, the sun, the sunlight of the gods!”

The statement understands the Sumerian signs AMAR.UD, normally used to write “Marduk,” as a combination of the Akkadian noun *māru* “son” and the Sumerian UTU “sun.” What makes Anu’s statement especially effective is the description of Marduk given in the previous line: *meš-re-tu-šu šu-ut-tu-ḫa i-lit-ta šu-tur* “his limbs were gigantic, he was surpassing at birth” (l. 100). The line anticipates Anu’s statement visually. Note how the sign *re* in *meš-re-tu-šu* “his limbs” occurs three times as *ri* in *ma-ri* “son,” and the sign *ut* in *šu-ut-tu-ḫa* “gigantic” appears logographically in the quotation twice as UTU. The sign *lit* in *i-lit-ta* also is very close to AMAR, the first component in Marduk’s name.³⁸⁸ *Enuma Elish* is replete with bilingual Sumerian-Akkadian devices.³⁸⁹

388. The sign differs only by lacking two Winkelhaken at the right end of each of its two horizontal wedges.

389. This is especially the case in the list of Marduk’s fifty names at the end of the epic. See Bottéro, “Les noms de Marduk, l’écriture et la ‘logique’ en Mésopotamie ancienne.”

Another Akkadian-Sumerian case of bilingual paronomasia occurs in the Song of Erra, in which Marduk asks: “where is the *mēsu*-tree, the flesh of the gods, the ornament of the king of the universe? That pure tree, that august youngster (*eṭlu*) suited to supremacy” (1.150–152)? Here the Akkadian *mēsu*-tree evokes the Sumerian MES meaning “youngster,” thus anticipating the Akkadian *eṭlu* “youngster” shortly thereafter.³⁹⁰

Ottervanger espied another case of bilingual paronomasia in the Tale of the Poor Man of Nippur.³⁹¹ In particular, he observed the interplay between the Akkadian infinitive *šum’ud* “to increase” and the Sumerian signs ŠUM (= *tabāḫū* “slaughter”) and UDU (= *immeru* “sheep”) in line 92: NU.BĀN.DA *ana šum-’u-ud ma-ka-li-šú* ŠUM-*uḫ* UDU.AS4.[LUM] “The chief slaughtered a *pasil*[*lu*] sheep to in[cre]ase his meal.”

We lack strong evidence for the existence of bilingual paronomasia in Egyptian texts. As discussed in conjunction with bilingual polysemy, this state of affairs is likely to be attributed to a negative attitude toward foreigners.³⁹² Nevertheless, a possible case of paronomasia between Egyptian and Semitic occurs in the Poem on the King’s Chariot.³⁹³ The pertinent passages read:

6. The handgrip [*t*] of your chariot [*mrkb.t* (Semitic)],
7. takes away [*bt=s*] the troops’ courage and pride, whereas the side panels [*bt.w* (Semitic?)]
8. of your chariot are Bata [*bt*] lord of
9. Saka [*sk*] who is in the arms of Bastet [*bṣ.t*],
10. sent out against all foreign countries. The weapons [*ḫmṯ.t*] of your (chariot)
11. are the steering oars [*ḫmṯ.t*] behind the foreign lands. The javelin [*nṯ*] of your chariot—
12. the terror of you [*nṯw=k*] enters into them (i.e., the foreigners).

390. First observed by Luigi Cagni, *The Poem of Erra*, SANE 1.3 (Malibu, CA: Undena Publications, 1977), 35 n. 45. Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 314 n. 22, notes that the same paronomasia appears in the late third millennium poem Shulgi King of Abundance, and cites Klein, *Royal Hymns of Shulgi, King of Ur*, 11. Moreover the sign MES occurs again in the very next line in “its foundation” (*i-šid-su*), but there the sign is read phonetically as *šid*. Moreover, the MES sign is suggestive of ^dMES, which stands for Marduk, who speaks these lines to Erra. On polysemy and paronomasia in this poem, see Noegel, “‘Word Play’ in the Song of Erra.”

391. Ottervanger, *Tale of the Poor Man of Nippur*, 36.

392. Even as late as the Ptolemaic era, dream interpreters preferred to translate dreams in Egyptian rather than Greek. See Stephen Kidd, “Dreams in Bilingual Papyri from the Ptolemaic Period,” *BASP* 48 (2011): 113–30. On the central role of polysemy and paronomasia in Egyptian dream interpretation, see Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*.

393. Cited in Loprieno, “Puns and Word Play in Ancient Egyptian,” 19; W. R. Dawson and T. E. Peet, “The So-Called Poem on the King’s Chariot,” *JEA* 19 (1933): 167–74; Alan R. Schulman, “The So-Called Poem on the King’s Chariot Revisited. Part I,” *JSSEA* 16 (1986): 19–49; Guglielmi, “Zu einigen literarischen Funktionen des Wortspiels,” 495–96.

13. The sword [*hrp* (Semitic)] of your chariot
14. terrifies [*hri=f*] those who are in your hand ... Recto 6–14

1. The knife [*sf:t*] of your
2. chariot—when your right arm smites [*sf:t*], the hills
3. collapse ...

14. As for the thong [*mhʕ*]
15. of your chariot, it
16. binds [*mhʕi=f*] those who are evil. Verso 1–3, 14–16

In addition to the paronomasia between Egyptian words (mostly homonymic or examples of homoeopropheron), there are two, or perhaps three, cases of paronomasia between languages. The Semitic noun *mrkb.t* "chariot" resounds in the *bt.w* "panels" (perhaps a Semitic word itself), and in *bt* "Bata" and *bʕs.tt* "Bastet." The Semitic noun *hrp* "sword" finds balance in the Egyptian *hri=f* "terrifies" (lit. "he is terrified"). Since this text appears only on school ostraca, we can say that such devices were passed on in the scribal academies, the Egyptian Houses of Life. Nevertheless, it is possible that the Semitic words employed in the text already had become part of the Egyptian language.

Though Ugaritic texts have produced evidence for bilingual polysemy, thus far no cases of bilingual paronomasia have been discovered.

In Hebrew, we find an excellent example of bilingual paronomasia in Jon 3:7, in which we are told that the "decree [*טַעַם* *ta'am*] of the king and his great ones" is to "let them not taste [*יִטְעֲמוּ* *yit'āmū*] a thing." The noun *טַעַם* *ta'am* means "taste" in Hebrew, but "decree" in Aramaic.³⁹⁴ In addition, the Hebrew *טַעַם* *ta'am* also means "sense, judgment," which calls into question the ridiculousness of the king's decree that animals should fast, pray, and wear sackcloth.³⁹⁵ This example also constitutes a form of antanaclassesis.

Berrin has suggested the possibility that the Pesher to Nahum (3–4 I, 4–6) from Qumran interprets the Hebrew noun *טֶרֶף* *tōrēp* "prey" in Nah 2:13 with the verb *נָכַח* *nāḵāh* "smite," because the root *טֶרֶף* *t-r-p* in Palestinian Aramaic also bears the meaning "hit, throw down."³⁹⁶ If this is the case, we have yet another example of bilingual paronomasia.

394. Rendsburg, "Wordplay in the Hebrew Bible," 142.

395. I thank one of the publisher's anonymous reviewers for this observation. The reviewer also suggested that *מִטְעַם* *mit-ta'am* in Jon 3:6 paronomastically suggests the Aramaic *מִדְעַם* *mid-da'am* "anything," which is the semantic equivalent of Hebrew *מְאֻמָּה* *mə'ūmāh* "anything" near the end of the passage. However, I have been more restrictive in positing which consonants have paronomastic relationships, and I do not see *ט* *t* and *ד* *d* as an alliterative pair.

396. Berrin, *Pesher Nahum Scroll from Qumran*, 147 n. 55.

An Aramaic example of bilingual paronomasia occurs in the narrator's description of Nebuchadnezzar's transformation during which *גִּשְׁמֵהּ יִשְׁטָבָה* *ū-miṭṭal šamayyā' gišmēh yiṣṭaba* "his body was wet from the dew of heaven" (Dan 5:21). The Aramaic noun *גִּשְׁמָה* *gešem* "body" is homonymous with Hebrew *גֶּשֶׁם* *gešem* "rain." While *גִּשְׁמָה* *gišmēh* only can be read as "his body" in this context, the bilingual paronomasia is strengthened by the fact that his body became "wet" with the "dew of heaven."³⁹⁷ Indeed, "dew" and "rain" constitute a well-known word pair (e.g., Deut 32:2, 2 Sam 1:21, 1 Kgs 17:1, Job 38:28, and in Ugaritic).

Bilingual paronomasia is a display of erudition. In Akkadian and Egyptian, it is primarily an aural device, whereas in the consonantal scripts it is effective both aurally and visually. As with bilingual polysemy, it demonstrates cultural attitudes toward the target language involved. Thus, Akkadian texts that employ paronomasia on Sumerian reflect the high esteem in which Sumerian culture and learning were held. If the Egyptian example truly reflects the deliberate use of Semitic words, it is telling that the objects that the words represent are appropriated in the poem and also culturally as the weapons of pharaoh. In essence, like the horse-drawn chariot itself, it has become thoroughly Egyptian. Paronomasia between Hebrew and Aramaic reflects the growing influence of Aramaic as the *lingua franca*.

4.2.9. ANAGRAMMATIC PARONOMASIA

An anagram is a word that contains the same consonants as another word, but in a different sequence.³⁹⁸ Anagrams function on both visual and aural registers. Nevertheless, the inherent repetition of consonants across words qualifies anagrams as forms of paronomasia.

A case of anagrammatic paronomasia in Akkadian occurs in the Tale of the Poor Man of Nippur, in which the poor man approaches the mayor with a *šulman* "gift" in his *šumēlišu* "left hand" (ll. 29, 35). Here the consonants *m* and *l* are reversed.

Enuma Elish 4.57 describes the armor of the god Marduk thusly: *naḥlapta apluḥti pulḥāti ḥalipma* "he was garbed in a ghastly armored garment."³⁹⁹ The sounds /ḥ/, /l/, and /p/ appear in each of the four words, but in a different order.

Note similarly the Hymn to Shamash, which says of the sungod: *[m]ukarrū ume mūrriku mušāti* "he shortens the days and lengthens the nights" (l. 180). Note that *[m]ūkarru* "shortens" and *mūrriku* "lengthens" are consonantal anagrams of

397. Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 158.

398. The noun "anagram" derives from the verbs *ἀναγραμματίζειν* and *ἀναγραμματισμός* first attested in Artemidorus Daldianus, *Oneirocriticus* 4.23 (second century CE); *PGM* 13.107 (fourth century CE).

399. The alliterative rendering is that of Foster, *Before the Muses*, 374.

each other, though the former derives from *karû* and the latter from *arîku*. Moreover, [m]ukarrû and mûrriku reverse the length of each other; the former ends with a long *û* vowel, while the latter starts with one.

Another particularly apt demonstration of anagrammatic paronomasia in Akkadian comes from the Atra-ḫasis Epic 1.39–40, in which the narrator describes the actions of the primordial Igigi gods:

39. [i-da-bu]-bu-ma i-ik-ka-lu ka-ar-ši
They [were complaining], backbiting,
40. [ut-ta-az]-za-mu i-na ka-la-ak-ki
Grumbling in the excavation.

The verb *ikkalû* “backbiting” (from *akālu* lit. “eat”) anticipates the anagrammatic *kalakku* “excavation.” Assisting the anagram is additional repetition of the phoneme /k/ in the noun *karšu* “calumny.” Moreover, the repetition of the sounds /k/ and /l/ suggests a word not present in the text, namely *ikkillu* “clamor, din, cry.” Indeed, we are soon told (1.76–77) that the gods became so angry that they set fire to their tools and raised a “loud noise” (here the noun is *rigmu*). Fittingly, as if to remind us of the anagrammatic paronomasia in this passage, the text states that the noise disturbed the god ⁴*kal-kal* “Kalkal” (1.74–76). Moreover, the next time the noun *kalakku* “excavation” appears (1.147), it again is reinforced with paronomasia on the same consonants. Thus, when the chief god asks why the Igigi gods have declared war, they say:

146. ku-ul-la-a[t ka-la i-li-ma ni-ig-ra-am tu-qû-um-ta]m
Every single [one of us gods has declared] war.
147. ni-iš-ku-u[n x x-ni i-na ka-la-ak-ki
We have ... our [...] in the [excavation].

Observe how *kullat kala* “every single one” anticipates *kalakki* “excavation.”⁴⁰⁰

Anagrammatic paronomasia appears in Egyptian as well. In the Tale of the Eloquent Peasant, the peasant tells the overseer: *ḥꜣt ꜥꜣ wdn.w ḥmw m sbn sꜣw m gsꜣ ḥꜣt m ḥrj nwd.w* “Plumline supporting the weight. Rudder, do not drift. Beam, do not tilt. Plumline, do not misdirect” (P.3023 + P.Amherst I, ll. 122–123). Consonantly, *wdn.w* “weight” and *nwd.w* “misdirect” are anagrams of each other.

See also the Pyramid Texts of King Unas, on the east wall of the antechamber: *wnꜥs pꜣ wnm rmtꜣ nḥ m ntr.w nb in.w ḥꜣꜣ wp.wt in ḥꜣmꜣ wp.wt im.ḥ khꜣ.w sph sn n wnꜥs* “Unas is he who eats humans and lives on all gods, lord of messengers who dispatches instructions. It is horn-grasper in Kehau who lassoes them for Unas” (Spell 273, §509). Two paronomastic relationships exist here between *wp.wt*

400. This line repeats in 1.159–161.

“instructions” and *wp.wt* “horns,” and between *kh̄ḫ.w* “Kehau” and *hk̄ḫ.w* “magic” (in §506). The latter is anagrammatic. The consonants *wp* occur again: *wpw.tl̄ pw h̄ḫb.w=f r h̄ḫsf* “he is the messenger who is sent to punish” (§511).

The Tale of Sinuhe (P.Berlin 3022, ll. 24–25) exhibits anagrammatic paronomasia in Sinuhe’s statement: *sd̄m.n=i hrw nmī n mnmn.t* “I heard the sound of the bleating of goats.” Here *nmī* “bleating” and *mnmn.t* “goats” are partial anagrams.⁴⁰¹

In the Admonitions of Ipuwer (P.Leiden I 344, r.14.14–15.1), Ipuwer proclaims: *md̄ḫj.w nd̄m.w hn̄ km.t ml̄-m ḫr=f s nb hr sm̄mw sn=f ḫm̄.w t̄sl̄=n n=n h̄pr.w m p̄d.t(i)* “the Medjay are sweet toward Egypt; how, when every man slays his brother, and the youth whom we raised for ourselves have become bowmen (having fallen to destroying).”⁴⁰² Note in particular the anagrammatic relationship between *md̄ḫj.w* “Medjay” and *ḫm̄.w* “youth,” which finds support from partially anagrammatic paronomasia with *nd̄m.w* “sweet.”

There also is the case of the magical *rn* “name,” found on two ostraca with a divine determinative, whose consonants are metathesized to produce *nr*, thus suggesting “terror” (from *nr̄i*) and “protection” (from *nr̄i*).⁴⁰³

An Ugaritic case of anagrammatic paronomasia occurs in the Epic of Baal in reference to Baal’s servant who prepares his meal (*CAT* 1.3.i.4–7):

4. *qm yṯr*
He arises, prepares
5. *w yšlḥmn̄h*
and he feeds him.
6. *ybrd ḫd lpnwḥ*
Slices a breast before him
7. *b ḫrb mlḥt*
with a salted knife.

The anagrams in this passage are *yšlḥmn̄h* “feeds him” (from the root *l-ḫ-m*) and *mlḥt* “salted” (from *m-l-ḫ*).

A clever example from Hebrew enhances Job’s cry that he would have rather been stillborn, like infants who *רָאוּ אֹר* *rā’ū ’ōr* “never saw light” (Job 3:16). The two words are anagrams of each other. Elihu’s statement about God also employs the device: *יָחַץ עָנִי בְעֵנָיו וַיִּגַּל בְּלִחְתּוֹ אֲזָנָם* *yəḥallēs ’ānī ḫə-’ōnyō wə-yiḡel bal-*

401. The usual translation for *mnmn.t* is “cattle,” but the determinative in B is *𐎎* (not *𐎎*). Indeed, goats are what one expects to see in the Lavant, not cattle. The same word and determinative appears in B 84, 103, 112, 144, 147, 240 and for *w.wt ḫḫs.wt* “wild goats” in B 89.

402. In 14.2 of the same text we also find the anagrammatic phrase *wrs.w n.w sr.w* “headrests of officials.”

403. Georges Posener, “Le mot égyptien pour désigner le ‘nom magique,’” *RdE* 6 (1964): 214.

laḥaṣ ’ōznām “he delivers the afflicted from his affliction, and opens their ears through distress” (Job 36:15). The verb *ḥālaṣ* “deliver” is an anagram of the noun *laḥaṣ* “distress.”⁴⁰⁴ Seow suggests that the visual component of the anagram conveys additional meaning: “Visually the first two radicals mirror each other. The point is that suffering may, ironically, be the mirror image of rescue.”⁴⁰⁵

Wilhelm Rudolph observed an anagrammatic turn of phrase in Hosea’s prophecy to Judah and Ephraim.⁴⁰⁶ Here Yahweh follows his plea בָּאֵלֶיךָ תָּשׁוּב *bē-’lōheḱā tāšūb* “and you must return to your God” (Hos 12:7) with the promise בְּאֶהְלִים אוֹשִׁיכָּךְ *’ōšīḱā ḥā-’ōhālīm* “I will cause you to dwell in tents” (Hos 12:10), which both reverses the order of the verb and object and rearranges the consonants in “God” to form “tents.” As Morris notes, the preposition *beth* for “to” here is not normative, but still deliberate, as the “spelling was altered to make a wordplay more evident.”⁴⁰⁷

Proverbs 14:19–20 offers another example: שָׁחוּ רָעִים לִפְנֵי טוֹבִים וְרָשָׁעִים עַל-: יִשְׁנָא רֵשׁ וְאֶהְבִּי עָשִׁיר רְבִים: *śaḥū rā ’īm li-ṭōbīm ū-ršā ’īm ‘al ša ‘ārē ṣadīq gam lā-rē ‘ēhū yīśśānē’ rāš wə-’ōhāḥē ‘āšīr rabīm* “the evil bow before the good, and the wicked at the gates of the righteous. The poor man is hated even of his neighbor, but the rich has many friends.” As Rendsburg has shown, the passage offers a clever manipulation of consonants, specifically between the words רָשָׁעִים *rāšā ’īm* “wicked,” שַׁעַר *ša ‘ārē* “gates,” and עָשִׁיר *‘āšīr* “rich.” Each word is an anagram of the other. Bolstering the paronomasia is רֵשׁ *rāš* “poor,” and homoeopropheron between רָעִים *rā ’īm* “evil” and רֵעֵהוּ *rē ‘ēhū* “his neighbor.”⁴⁰⁸

The Mesha stela from Moab also illustrates the device. When describing the spoils he took during the campaign against Nebo, King Mesha brags:

I killed the entire population: seven thousand men and male foreigners, and women and female foreigners, and servant women [רַחֲמַת *rhmt*]. For I had put it to a ban [הַרְמַתְהוּ *hḫrmth*] for Ashtar Kemosh. (KAI 181.17)

404. Noegel, *Janus Parallelism in the Book of Job*, 144; adopted by Seow, “Orthography, Textual Criticism, and the Poetry of Job,” 84.

405. Seow, “Orthography, Textual Criticism, and the Poetry of Job,” 84.

406. Wilhelm Rudolph, “Eigentümlichkeiten der Sprache Hoseas,” in *Studia Biblica et Semitica: Theodoro Christiano Vriezen qui munere professoris theologiae per XXV annos functus est, ab amicis, collegis, discipulis dedicata*, ed. W. C. van Unnik and A. S. van der Woude (Wageningen: Veenman, 1966), 317.

407. Morris, *Prophecy, Poetry, and Hosea*, 88 n. 59.

408. Rendsburg, “Literary and Linguistic Matters in the Book of Proverbs,” 114, categorizes these examples simply as alliteration. However, one may taxonomize each of the examples offered in this fine article more specifically if one recognizes that alliteration is not a device, but rather the aural effect of many different devices.

Here *rhmt* רחמת “servant women” and *hhrmth* החרמתה “put it to a ban” are anagrams.

A fine case of anagrammatic paronomasia in Aramaic occurs in Daniel’s prophesy that Nebuchadnezzar will become like a wild beast: “seven times [עֲדָנִין] *‘idānīn*] will pass over you until you know [תִּדְעַת] *tinda*’] that the Most High rules the kingdom of men” (Dan 4:29).

We also find the device in the visions of Balaam inscribed at Deir ‘Alla (Combination II, l. 10). In a rather fragmentary portion of the text we read: הַן תִּשְׁנֶה אֶת־יָשָׁר *hn tšn’ n y’ nš* “If you are unkind to him (lit. ‘hate him’), he will be weak.” The two verbs here are visual anagrams of each other, the first from the root *š-n-*’ and the second from *’-n-š*.

4.2.9.1. PALINDROME

A palindrome is a specific form of anagram in which the consonants of one word are read the same way forwards or backwards or appear in another word in reverse order. Uri Gabbay and Claus Wilcke spotted a Sumerian palindrome in a bilingual inscription of Gudea (iii.8’–9’). The pertinent passage and its Akkadian and English translations read:

KUR E.ĤUL^{ĤU-LU-ŪĤ} // *ma-as-sú-nu ú-{x}-pár-ri-dam*
And frightening the foreign land // and frightened their land.

As the editors remark:

ĤŪL’ĤŪL’ (with one vertical in the end instead of the broken one) is unorthographical for LUĤ.LUĤ and LUĤ, to be read *huluḥ*, and agrees with *parādu*... LUĤ looks like an intentional palindrome.... It is interesting to note that this palindrome works on the level of logograms, not on those of phonemes or syllabograms.⁴⁰⁹

An Akkadian palindrome appears in the Tale of the Poor Man of Nippur: *ana iriš širi u šikāri rēšti lummunu zīmūšu* “due to his craving for meat and beer, his face was disfigured” (l. 8).⁴¹⁰ Note how *irīš* “craving” mirrors *širi* “meat.” The same palindrome appears in the Poem of Erra III A: “in vain will the sick man be

409. Uri Gabbay and Claus Wilcke, “The Bilingual Gudea Inscriptions CUSAS 17, 22: New Readings and Interpretations,” *NABU* (2012): 99 n. 18. They cite Manfred Krebernik, “Zur Entwicklung des Sprachbewusstseins im Alten Orient,” in *Das geistige Erfassen der Welt im Alten Orient: Sprache, Religion, Kultur und Gesellschaft*, ed. Claus Wilcke (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2007), 48.

410. The name of the sungod Šamaš, like its Sumerian counterpart UTU, also constitutes a palindrome, though I know of nowhere in Akkadian literature that this aspect of the name is exploited.

craving [*irrišma*] after some roast meat [*šīri*] for his voluntary offering [*bibil libbišu*]” (l. 24). However here, *bibil* “offering” and *libbi* “voluntary” (lit. “heart”) also are virtual palindromes.⁴¹¹

An Egyptian example of palindromic paronomasia is the name of the famous sage *pth-htp* “Ptahhotep,” whose teachings represent the wisdom of ancient Egypt. Whether read forwards or backwards the name reads the same. That this was recognized by the Egyptians is clear from the cryptographic use *htp* “peace” for *pth* “Ptah” in other texts.⁴¹²

Another example, examined by Stefan Bojowald, is the phrase *wbn m nbw* “arise in gold,” said of Amun, Hathor, Ra, Horus, Isis, Ra-Horakhty, and Mut in their solar aspects.⁴¹³ Though we do not know what the vowels are, its consonants read the same way in either direction.

Reverse ligatures appear to possess performative functions in Egyptian texts. Hence, the Pyramid Texts, Spell 236 (§ 240) in the tomb of Unas, which records *kbbhjttjbjtjśs* as a cypher for *sš tj-bjtj jtj hb bjk* “the scribe, Thoth, the king, sovereign, the ibis, the falcon.” The text conveys the notion that the one before Osiris is none other than the deceased king who stands before him [*hft* lit. “face to face”] to serve as his scribe.⁴¹⁴ Elsewhere we find palindromes as cryptographs: *gn* for *ng* “bull of sacrifice,”⁴¹⁵ *nr* for *rn* “name,”⁴¹⁶ and *n-m-jw* for *imn* “Amun.”⁴¹⁷

An Ugaritic example of palindromic paronomasia occurs in an incantation against the evil eye (*CAT* 1.96.12–13). I have examined this spell in relation to homoioteleuton (4.2.2), but it also contains an anagram.

411. The phrase *bibil libbi* is a common idiom for “voluntary offering.” Note too that there is additional polysemy here involving *lummun*, which in this line means “disfigured,” but in l. 2 was used to describe Gimil-Ninurta as a *lummunu amēlu* “poor man.” Noted by Dietrich, “Armer Mann von Nippur,” 342.

412. See Friedrich Junge, *Elephantine XI. Funde und Bauteile*, DAIK Archäologische Veröffentlichungen 49 (Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 1987), pl. 47g, pp. 76–77.

413. Stefan Bojowald, “A Wordplay between the Egyptian Words *WBN* ‘Arise’ and *NBW* ‘Gold?,’” *AOASH* 64 (2011): 357–62, characterizes the phrase as a “wordplay” but does not describe it as a palindrome.

414. Bernard Matthieu, “Les formules conjuratoires dans les pyramides à textes: quelques réflexions,” in *La magie en Égypte: à la recherche d’une définition. Actes du colloque organisée par le musée du Louvre les 29 et 30 Septembre 2000*, ed. Yvan Koenig (Paris: Musée du Louvre, 2002), 191, 203, fig. 4.

415. Pierre Montet, *Scènes de la vie privée dans les tombeaux égyptiens de L’ancien Empire* (Paris: Strasbourg University, 1925), 138–39.

416. Posener, “Le mot égyptien pour désigner le ‘nom magique,’” 214.

417. Bernard van Rinsveld, “Un cryptogramme d’Amon,” in *Individu, société et spiritualité dans l’Égypte pharaonique et copte: Mélanges égyptologiques offerts au Professeur Aristide Théodoridès*, ed. Christian Cannuyer and Jean-Marie Kruchten (Ath-Brüssel-Mons: Illustra, 1993), 263–68.

12. *l bty ttb 'n [btt]*
will revert to the wizard, the eye of the witch,
13. *l btt t[tb ...]*
will revert to the witch.

Note specifically the verb *ttb* “will revert” and *btt* “witch,” which are palindromes of each other. Such linguistic reversal fits with the overall structure, theme, and aim of the text to reverse the harm that has been done to the victim and revert it to the one who cast it. We may thus attribute a performative function to this case of anagrammatic paronomasia.⁴¹⁸

An example of palindromic paronomasia appears in Hebrew in the incipit of the oracle of Agur: נָאֻם הַגִּבֹּר לְאִיתִיָּאֵל לְאִיתִיָּאֵל וְאֶכָּל *na'um hag-geber la- 'ittī 'el la- 'ittī 'el wə- 'ukāl* “thus says the warrior to Ithiel, even to Ithiel and to Ukal” (Prov 30:1). The name לְאִיתִיָּאֵל *la- 'ittī 'el* reads the same way forwards and backwards. By repeating it twice verbatim, the oracle draws attention to the device.

A palindrome appears in Job’s rhetorical query to his friends: הַיָּאֵכֶל תִּפֹּל חֲלָמוֹת מְבִלִּי-מֶלַח אִם-יִשְׁטַעַם בְּרִיר חֲלָמוֹת *hā-yē'ākēl tāpēl mi-bālī melah 'im yēš ta'am bārīr ḥallāmūt* “is tasteless food eaten without salt, or is there flavor in the juice of a pursain-plant?” (Job 6:6). The nouns מֶלַח *melah* “salt” and חֲלָמוֹת *ḥallāmūt* “pursain-plant” are palindromes of each another.

In Gen 38:7, we find: וַיְהִי עֵר בְּכוֹר יְהוּדָה רַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה *wa-yāhī 'ēr bākōr yəhūdāh ra' bə- 'enē YHWH* “and Er, Judah’s firstborn, was evil in eyes of Yahweh.” Here עֵר *'ēr* “Er” and רַע *ra'* “evil” are palindromes. The device here draws attention to the man and his deeds.

Aelred Cody has suggested an even more elaborate palindrome in Isa 40:4: וְהָיָה הָעֵקֶב לְמִישׁוֹר וְהָרָקְסִים לְבָקָה *wə-hāyāh hē- 'āqōb la-mišōr wə-hārḳāsīm la-biq 'āh* “the rugged land shall be made a plain, the impassable-country a broad vale.” In particular, he suggests, that if one emends the difficult *hapax legomenon* וְהָרָקְסִים *wə-hārḳāsīm* to a presumed original רוֹשֵׁים *rōšīm* “mountain tops” (a later attested spelling for רָאשִׁים *rā 'šīm*), the four nouns following the initial verb constitute a perfect palindrome. If the emendation is accepted, the effect is both aural and visual and embodies the theme of reversal in the poem.⁴¹⁹

An implicit palindrome also occurs in Gen 6:8–9. As Sasson pointed out, the entire passage is craftily constructed so that it ends with the fronted predicate: וַיֵּלֶךְ הָאֱלֹהִים הַתְּהִלָּה-נֶחַח *'el hā- 'ēlohīm hiṭhalleḳ nōāh* “with God walked Noah.”

It is rather obvious that this inversion was purposely made in order to take advantage of a sentence which thus began and ended in the name of Noah.

418. See James Nathan Ford, “Ninety-Nine by the Evil Eye and One from Natural Causes”: KTU² 1.196 in Its Near Eastern Context,” *UF* 30 (1998): 252 n. 171.

419. Aelred Cody, “A Palindrome in Isaiah 40:4b: Allowing Restoration of an Original Reading,” *CBQ* 66 (2004): 551–60.

Additionally this sequence of ten words no doubt underscored the fact that Noah formed the tenth generation since creation.⁴²⁰

Sasson adds that the inverted syntax allowed the author to end the verse with the consonants כ-נ-ח *k-n-h*, which are a palindrome for the name of his illustrious ancestor הַנּוֹחַ *hānōḥ* "Enoch," who also "walked with God" (Gen 5:22, 5:24).

Anagrammatic paronomasia differs from parasonance in that it involves all three of the consonants of a Semitic root, instead of just two, and in a shuffled sequence, rather than in the same order. Therefore, it is more difficult to achieve given that it restricts the lexical repertoire. Creating palindromes limits the repertoire even more. While anagrammatic paronomasia comes even closer than parasonance to repeating the entire lexeme, the jumbled sequence of its consonants resists easy identification while listening/reading. Nevertheless, the alliterative effect of the device invites comparison and contrast. Anagrammatic paronomasia often appears to be performative in function enacting reversals, inversions, overturnings, and the like through the transposing of signs and consonants. In Egyptian, anagrammatic paronomasia, along with its palindromic subset, is primarily an aural device, whereas in Akkadian, and in the consonantal scripts, like Ugaritic, Hebrew, and Aramaic, it can operate on both visual and aural registers.

4.2.10. HENDIADIC PARONOMASIA

A hendiadys is an idiom that combines two words to convey a single idea or action.⁴²¹ Some cases of hendiadys also possess a paronomastic effect. There also are forms that employ three words, called hendiatis.⁴²² According to the Arab grammarians, this device usually fell under the heading اِتْبَاع *itbāʿ*.⁴²³ Numerous examples of hendiadic paronomasia exist in English, for example, fiddle-faddle,

420. Jack M. Sasson, "Word-Play in Genesis 6:8–9," *CBQ* 37 (1975): 165. The passage reads: נֹחַ אִישׁ צַדִּיק תָּמִים הָיָה בְּדֹרֵתוֹ אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים הֵתְהַלָּךְ־נֹחַ *nōaḥ ʾiṣ ṣaddīq tāmīm hāyāh bə-dorōtāw ʾet hā-ʾēlōhīm hiṭhalleḵ nōaḥ* "Noah was a righteous man, he was blameless in his age; Noah walked with God."

421. See E. Z. Melamed, "Hendiadys (EN DIA ΔYOIN) in the Bible" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 16 (1945): 173–89.

422. An extraordinary case of five verbs joined (with one following a pause) appears in Gen 25:34: וַיֵּשֶׁתְּ וַיֹּאכַל וַיִּקַּם וַיֵּלֶךְ וַיִּבֶז עֵשָׂו אֶת־הַבְּכֹרָה *way-yō ʾkal way-yēšt way-yāqām way-yēlaḵ way-yībez ʾēsāw ʾet hab-bəḵōrāh* "he ate and he drank, and he got up, and he left, and Esau despised the birthright." However, this passage does not constitute paronomasia.

423. Joseph Reider, "*Itbaʿ* in Hebrew and Aramaic," *JQR* 24 (1934): 321–30. The term also was used periodically for cases of parasonance.

flim-flam, higgledy-piggledy, hocus-pocus, hodge-podge, hub-bub, jibber-jabber, and topsy-turvy.⁴²⁴

I know of only one case of hendiadic paronomasia in Sumerian, the exclamation Ú.LUM A.LAM, which essentially means “hurry scurry.”⁴²⁵

Both nominal and verbal hendiadys appear in Akkadian texts, the latter mostly in hymns.⁴²⁶ Nevertheless, only a few of them appear to be paronomastic. One might suggest as exceptions *liqemma alkam* “I shall proceed” (lit. ‘let me take and I come’), found in Old Babylonian letters,⁴²⁷ and the rare hendiatic example in the Cuthah Legend (l. 121): *arkīšunu ardud aḥmuṭ urriḥ* “after them I harried, I hurried, I hied.”⁴²⁸

An excellent example of hendiadic paronomasia in Egyptian is the relatively common idiom *‘d wḏḥ* “safe and sound.”⁴²⁹ It also appears in the Admonitions of Ipuwer (P.Leiden I 344, r.12.13), in which Ipuwer prophesies the coming of *ḥrw ḥnnw* “noise and tumult.” The equally paronomastic *rw.tj-wr.tj* “double gate” occurs in the Tale of Sinuhe (P.Berlin 3022, l. 189).

Another case of hendiadic paronomasia appears in the inscription detailing Hatshepsut’s expedition to Punt.⁴³⁰ There we hear how she opened the road to Punt and obtained access to *ḥtj.w-‘nt.jw* “myrrh-terraces” (49.6–7, 52.9).⁴³¹

An example in Ugaritic occurs in the Tale of Aqhat, when Anat laments the death of Aqhat, crying: *abky w aqbrnh* “I shall weep and I shall bury him” (*CAT* 1.19.iii.5, 20, 34). A case of hendiatic paronomasia occurs in Baal’s urgent message to the goddess Anat in the Epic of Baal: *ḥšk ‘šk ‘bšk* “hasten, hurry, rush!” (*CAT* 1.3.iv.11). The repetition of the /š/ and /k/ phonemes reinforce the singularity of action.⁴³²

424. Cf. the German *Kuddelmuddel* meaning “mess, muddle, mix up.”

425. Klein and Sefati, “Word Play in Sumerian Literature,” 41–44.

426. See the important study by Wasserman, *Style and Poetry in Old-Babylonian Literary Texts*, 5–28.

427. Discussed by Sergey Loesov, “Marginalia on the Akkadian Votive,” in *Babel und Bibel: Annual of Ancient Near Eastern, Old Testament, and Semitic Studies*, ed. Leonid Kogan, OC 3 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 110.

428. Noted by Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 235, but as an onomatopoeia.

429. For example, the idiom occurs with some variation in a Middle Kingdom letter, an inscription of Thutmose I, and another belonging to a high priest of Osiris under Thutmose III. See Francis L. Griffith, *The Petrie Papyri: Hieratic Papyri from Kahun and Gurob* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1898), 32.12; Kurt Sethe, *Urkunden der 18. Dynastie*, vol. 4.1 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1906), 56.16, 209.14.

430. The numeration here follows that of Adriaan De Buck, *Egyptian Readingbook* (Chicago, IL: Ares Publishers, 1948).

431. In 50:6, we encounter the expanded form *ḥtjw n.w ‘ntjw*.

432. The line appears also in *CAT* 1.1.ii.1, 21–22, iii.10, 1.3.iii.18.

The Hebrew Bible contains a number of examples of hendiadic paronomasia.⁴³³ Such include: נָע וְנָד *na' wə-nāḏ* "perpetual wanderer" (Gen 4:12), בְּמָצוֹר וּבְמָצוֹר *bə-māšōr ū-b-māšōq* "in dire siege" (Deut 28:53), פֶּלְנִי אֶלְמִנִי *pəlōnī 'almoni* "someone" (1 Sam 21:3), פֶּתָא פִּי'וֹם *peta' pi'om* "suddenly" (Isa 29:5), הֹד וְהָדָר *hōḏ wə-hādār* "glory and splendor" (Ps 21:6), וַתִּגַּעַשׁ וַתִּרְעַשׁ *wa-tiḡ'as' wa-tir'as'* "rocked and quaked" (Ps 18:8),⁴³⁴ חֵל וְחֹמָה *hēl wə-hōmāh* "wall and rampart" (Lam 2:8, cf. Isa 26:1), אוֹיֵב וְאֶרֶב *'ōyēb wə-'ōrēb* "enemy and ambusher" (Ezra 8:31), and וַיַּכּוּם וַיִּכְתּוּם *way-yakūm way-yaktūm* "they smote and defeated them" (Num 14:45). Martin Noth also once proposed that the names אֶלְדָּד וּמֶדָּד *'eldād ū-mēdād* "Eldad and Medad" (Num 11:26–27) were fictitious, because of their inherent paronomasia.⁴³⁵

An example of hendiadic paronomasia in Aramaic occurs in Dan 2:14 in the phrase עֲטָא וְעִמָּא *'ēṭā ū-ī'ēm* "counsel and discretion" used to describe Daniel's response to the captain of the king's guard. For a paronomastic hendiadris, see אֲמַיָּא וְלִשָּׁנַיָּא *'amāyā' ū-līšānāyā' wə-li-ššānāyā'* "peoples, nations, and languages" (Dan 3:4, 3:7, 3:31, 5:19, 6:26, and 7:14). Dan 7:23 also provides an example: וַתִּדְּשֵׁנָה וַתִּדְּקֵנָה *ū-tidūšinnah wə-tadqinnah* "and trample it, and break it."

Given that hendiadic paronomasia involves juxtaposition, syndetic or asyndetic, it naturally operates aurally and visually. It is its juxtaposition that distinguishes it from other forms of paronomasia. It reinforces what the paronomasia also achieves—a union of forms or motions. Like polysemy, it combines two meanings into one, but without the elegance of singularity. In texts that preserve vowels, the device also is assonantal. The sing-song effect perhaps contributed to making some examples of hendiadys common sayings. When combining nouns, hendiadic paronomasia can be metonymic (e.g., "noise and tumult" = "chaos," "wall and rampart" = "defense system"), whereas when combining verbs, it can give the perception of totality or combined force and speed (e.g., "smote and defeated" = "destroyed," "I harried, I hurried, I hied" = "I sped").

433. Most cases in Hebrew are syndetic, whereas in Arabic, most are asyndetic. See Reider, "Itba' in Hebrew and Aramaic," 323, who offers a number of additional examples from the Hebrew Bible. The breaking up of a hendiadys also is a device in the Hebrew Bible. See E. Z. Melamed, "Break-Up of Stereotyped Phrases as an Artistic Device in Biblical Poetry," in *Studies in the Bible*, ed. Chaim Rabin, *ScrHier* 8 (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961), 115–53.

434. The pair in Ps 18:8 also constitutes a case of homoioteleuton.

435. Martin Noth, *Numbers: A Commentary*, trans. James D. Martin (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1968), 90; cited also by Cherry, *Paronomasia and Proper Names in the Old Testament*, 122. Cf. b. Hul 19a: אֲנָא לֹא חִילָק דִּיעָנָא וְלֹא בִילָק דִּיעָנָא *'n l' hylq yd 'n' w-l' bylq yd 'n* "I know neither Hillak nor Billak" (i.e., "I know no authoritative opinions").

4.2.11. RHYME

Rhyme is rare in ancient Near Eastern texts, but it is attested in small portions.⁴³⁶ An example of end rhyme from Sumerian occurs in the Gudea cylinder B 12.26–13.2:

AN.KÙ.GE ZI.DÈ.ÉŠ MU.ĜAR
 4EN.LÍL.E SAĜ.BA GUR BÍ.DAR
 4NIN.ĤUR.SAĜ.KE4 IGI.ZI BA.ŠI.BAR

Holy Anu established (the temple) properly,
 Enlil wound the turban round its head.
 Ninhursag looked at it favorably.

Here the signs GAR, DAR, and BAR provide the rhyme.⁴³⁷ End rhyme also occurs in the first five verses of the poem Ninmešarra, each of which concludes with the sound /a/.⁴³⁸

NIN ME ŠAR.RA U4 DALLA È.A
 MUNUS ZI ME.LI9 GÛR.RU KI.ĀĜ AN URAŠ.A
 NU.GIG AN.NA SUĤ.KÉŠE GAL.GAL.A
 AGA ZI.DÈ KI.ĀĜ NAM.EN.NA TÚM.MA
 ME INIM.BÉ ŠU SÁ DU11.GA

Queen of all the Mes, too many to count, rising as a brilliant light.
 Woman, most energetic, clothed in terrifying brightness, beloved of Anu and Uras.
 Anu's hierodule, you are above all the *suĥkeše*-pectorals,
 You, who love the right *aga*-crown, who is fitting for the en-priesthood,
 Empowered with all of its seven Mes.

436. P. Schmalzl, "Der Reim in Hebräischen Texte des Ezechiel," *TQ* 79 (1897): 127–133; C. F. Burney, "Rhyming in the Song of Songs," *JTS* 10 (1908–1909): 554–57; Glück, "Assonance in Ancient Hebrew Poetry," 71–84; Stanislav Segert, "Assonance and Rhyme in Hebrew Poetry," *Maarav* 8 (1992): 171–80; Jeremy Corley, "Rhyme in the Hebrew Prophets and Wisdom Poetry," *BN* 132 (2007): 55–69.

437. Klein and Sefati, "Word Play in Sumerian Literature," 24 n. 4. For other, perhaps less convincing, attempts to establish rhyme in Sumerian, see Raymond-Rieck Jestin, "La rime sumérienne," *BiOr* 24 (1967): 9–12; Jestin, "La rime interne en sumérien," *RA* 63 (1969): 115–20; Claus Wilcke, "Formale Gesichtspunkte in der sumerischen Literatur," in *Sumerological Studies in Honor of Thorkild Jacobsen on His Seventieth Birthday, June 7, 1974*, ed. Stephen J. Lieberman, AS 20 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 205–316.

438. Zgoll, *Der Rechtsfall der En-ĥedu-Ana im Lied nin-me-šara*, 2–3, 173.

In Akkadian, one finds rhyming couplets (also called homoioteleutic couplets), especially in incantations, doxologies, and exclamations.⁴³⁹ See, for example, an incantation against Wardat-lilīm (YOS 11, 92).⁴⁴⁰

28. [b]īt errubu
The house I enter,
29. [l]ā terrubīma
you shall never enter!
30. [ēma] rutī addu
[Wherever] I spit,
31. [lā ta]lappatīma
[you shall not] touch.

Note how the first and third lines end in /u/ and the second and fourth in /īma/. This kind of “grammatical rhyming” in incantations appears to have served a performative function while also, according to Wasserman, “signaling the transitional point between the *recitanda* and the *agenda* sections of the magical procedure.”⁴⁴¹

A sustained example of rhyme in Akkadian occurs in the Song of Erra III D 5–7:⁴⁴²

5. tam-tam-ma dal-ḥa-ta šad-de-ma gam-ra-ta
The oceans you convulse, the mountains you finish off.
6. UN.MEŠ (nišī)-ma re-da-ta bu-lam-ma re’a-a-ta
Men you govern, the herds, you shepherd.
7. é-šar-ra-ma pa-nu-uk-ka é-engur-ra-ma qa-tuk-ka
Esharrama is before your face, Engurrama is in your hands.

Note how every word ends in /a/, with every other word (starting with the first) in the entire passage ending in /ma/, every other word (starting with the second) in the first two lines ending in /ata/, and every other word in the final line ending with /ukka/.⁴⁴³

The Egyptian script records no vowels, making it impossible to identify cases of rhyme. It is possible that some cases of rhyme existed, but without knowing the vowels, one only can speculate.

439. See Wasserman, *Style and Form in Old Babylonian Literary Texts*, 157–73.

440. Offered in Wasserman, *Style and Form in Old Babylonian Literary Texts*, 162.

441. Wasserman, *Style and Form in Old Babylonian Literary Texts*, 168.

442. Observed by Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 230. On the use of rhyming couplets in Akkadian, see also Wasserman, *Style and Form in Old Babylonian Literary Texts*, 157–73. See especially p. 168, where he characterizes the function of rhyming couplets as performative speech acts.

443. See Noegel, “‘Word Play’ in the Song of Erra.”

Since Ugaritic does not record vowels, proposing the existence of rhyme depends on reconstructing the text.⁴⁴⁴ With this in mind, Watson suggested that the poet has created end rhyme in the Epic of Baal (*CAT* 1.2.i.36–37) by repeating the enclitic particle *mā*. I cite the text below with the vocalization reconstructed in parentheses:⁴⁴⁵

'bdk b 'l yymm (ya-yammu-mā)
'bdk b 'l [nhr]m (naharu-mā)
bn dgn asrkm ('asiruka-mā)

Baal is your slave, O Yamm,
 Baal is your slave, O River,
 Dagan's son, your prisoner.

See also in the same text (*CAT* 1.2.iv.10) (also with vocalization reconstructed):⁴⁴⁶

tiqqahu mulka 'ālamikā
darkat dīt dār dārikā

Assume your eternal kingship,
 Your everlasting dominion.

Biblical Hebrew offers a handful of examples of rhyming, though not all proposals have been convincing.⁴⁴⁷ The lament of Jeremiah offers one of the more profound examples: *מְבִלְגִּיתִי עָלַי וְגֹן עָלַי לִבִּי דָוִי* *mabliḡīṭī 'ālē yāḡōn 'ālay libbī ḡawwāy* “when in grief I would seek comfort, my heart is sick within me” (Jer 8:18). Strengthening the repetition of the consonants *beth*, *gimmel*, *lamed*, and *mem* is assonance of the short and long *a*- and *i*-vowels. See also Isaiah's prophecy of *יּוֹם מְהוּמָה וּמְבוֹסָה וּמְבוֹכָה* *yōm mahūmāh ū-mḥūsāh ū-mḥūkāh* “a day of tumult, trampling, and terror” (Isa 22:5). The same vocalic structure (/ū/ >/ā/) repeats three times and finds reinforcement in the repetition of the *beth* and *mem*.

444. As discussed in the introduction, the Ugaritic script has three different ways of writing the consonant *aleph* depending on whether it takes an *a*, *i*, or *u* vowel, but this is the only exception.

445. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 230, records the enclitic particle as *mī*, based on a reconstruction by Frank Moore Cross, “The Song of the Sea and Canaanite Myth,” *JThC* 5 (1968): 3 n. 8. I opt for an enclitic particle as found in Akkadian.

446. Also suggested by Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 230 n. 29.

447. See, for example, the early effort of Burney, “Rhyming in the Song of Songs.” Corely, “Rhyme in the Hebrew Prophets and Wisdom Poetry,” 56, argues that “rhyme can have a decorative role, contributing to the euphony of the poetry.” He also suggests it can intensify expressiveness and aid memory. Most of the examples cited in this work rely on the repetition of gender matched nouns and verbal and pronominal suffixes.

Rhyme appears, though not frequently, in later Aramaic texts too, such as the Targum Jonathan to 2 Sam 22, and the acrostic poems A Dispute Arose and O Have Mercy on Us, though often these involve repeated suffixes.⁴⁴⁸

Some cases of hendiadic paronomasia also constitute miniature rhymes, as seen above. I add the following: *בְּשֵׁפֶרֶת קֶשֶׁפֶת* *bə-šēšep̄ qešep̄* “in a torrent of anger” (Isa 54:8), *לֹדְהוּ וָבֹדְהוּ* *lōdhū wā-bōdhū* “formless and void” (Gen 1:2), and the Aramaic idiom *עַמֵּי אֱמֵי* *‘aməmayyā’ ‘umayyā* “peoples (and) nations” (Dan 3:4, 3:7, 3:31, 5:19, 6:26, and 7:14).

Rhyme is primarily an aural device, one that also depends on repetitive vowel sequences. It is closely tied to the accents and rhythms of a text, and thus, it provides emphasis and focus. Most cases occur at the ends of lines and words, and thus usually involve pronouns. Nevertheless, rhyme is also structural in that the repeated sounds lend continuity and cohesiveness. The patterns that rhyme creates contribute to the lines’ perceived similarity. Rhyme also may be connected to the musical accompaniment of some texts.

4.2.12. GEMINATE PARALLELISM AND CLUSTERING

Geminate clusters have as their primary characteristic the clustering of geminate forms in close proximity, often, but not always in parallelism. Geminate here is not restricted to the grammatical geminate forms, that is, those forms derived from Semitic roots whose second and third radicals are identical, but includes any verb or noun derived from roots that contain any two identical root consonants, whether second and third, first and third, or more rarely, first and second. Since reduplicated and some quadriliteral forms also constitute gemination of this sort, they are included as well. The aim of a geminate cluster is a general sense of ballast, and unlike word pairs, which bards employed as parallels of sense or meaning, geminate clusters belong generally to the realm of sound devices, and serve to balance one stich’s use of gemination with gemination in another.⁴⁴⁹ Thus, geminate clusters draw connections not between particular consonants or vowels, but between geminating forms, each of which is naturally alliterative.

Geminate parallelism occurs in Sumerian texts, but it is important to keep in mind that reduplication in Sumerian is not restricted to verbs, but can express pluralization in nouns and intensification in adjectives. Nevertheless, the aural effect functions similarly to that in the other languages examined here. A fine example occurs in the Lugalbanda Epic (2.87):

PIRIĜ.KUR.RA TĒŠ.BI DU₇.DU₇.GIM
SU.ZI HĒ.EM.DU₈.DU₈

448. See Pereira, *Studies in Aramaic Poetry* (c. 100 B.C.E.–c. 600 C.E.), 38–39, 41–42, 67.

449. Noegel, “Geminate Ballast and Clustering”; Noegel, “More Geminate Ballast and Clustering.”

Like mountain lions that attack each other,
It (the net of the Anzu bird) is filled with terror.

Note how DU₇.DU₇ “attack, gore” in the first stich parallels DU₈.DU₈ “fill” in the second.⁴⁵⁰ This example also constitutes homonymic paronomasia.

A second example, also paronomastic in nature, occurs in a proverb:

NĪ.MAḤ KÚ.KÚ.E
Ù NU.UM.ŠI.KU.KU

He who eats too much,
cannot sleep.

Here KÚ.KÚ “eat” finds a parallel with KU.KU “sleep.”⁴⁵¹

There are numerous examples of geminate parallelism and clustering in Akkadian. At times they operate over short distances. Thus, in the Epic of Gilgamesh, the great monster of the Cedar Forest is described as: ^d*humbaba rigmašu abūbu* “Humbaba, his voice is the Deluge” (2.122). The geminate *abūbu* “Deluge” resounds the geminated name ^d*humbaba* “Humbaba.”

Other examples are carried over multiple lines. So, in Ludlul bēl nēmeqi 3.7–8, we find:⁴⁵²

7. [u]r-ra u mu-šú iš-ten-iš a-na-a[s-su-us]

Day and night alike I groan,

8. MAŠ.GE₆ (*šuttu*) mu-na-at-tú mal-ma-liš šu-um-r[u-ša-ku]

In dream and waking moments I am equally wretched.

In this passage the geminate form *anassus* (from the verb *nasāsu*) in the A line has inspired the use of the reduplicate *malmališ* in the B line.

See similarly the Contest between the Tamarisk and the Palm, in which the Tamarisk gloats:⁴⁵³

5. ... [iš-p]a-ra-ak-ma qé a-ma-ḥa-aš ú-la-ba-a; um-ma-nam-ma

... I am a weaver and beat up the threads. I clothe the troops.

6. [... m]a-aš-ma-ša-ak-ma bi-it i-li-im ú-la-al

[...] I am the exorcist and purify the temple.

450. Klein and Sefati, “Word Play in Sumerian Literature,” 33.

451. Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer*, 24; Klein and Sefati, “Word Play in Sumerian Literature,” 34.

452. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, 48–49.

453. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, 156–57.

The A line’s *ummanamma* “troops” finds ballast in the B line’s use of the reduplicated noun *mašmaššu* “exorcist” and in the geminate verb *elēlu/ullulu* “purify.”

See also Enuma Elish 1.42–43:

42. *i-zu-uz-ma il-ta-si e-li ḥar-mi-ša*

She was furious and screamed at her lover,

43. *mar-ši-iš ug-gu-gat e-diš-ši-ša*

Delirious, she was beside herself with rage.

The geminate verb *ezēzu* “be furious” in the A line finds a match in the B line’s *uggugat* “rage,” and also in the imitation geminate form *ēdiššiša* “herself” (lit. “alone herself”), from *ēdiššī* plus the suffix *ša*. As this and other examples demonstrate, the device does not constitute gemination in the service of alliteration, but rather the repetition of consonants in the service of gemination. The alliterative effect here thus aims to mimic or amplify other geminates.

There is a good deal of evidence for geminate parallels and clustering in Egyptian texts as well. See, for example, the following line in the Prophecy of Neferti (P.St. Petersburg 1116 B): *jw sbi.w n.w dndn=f ḥ3k.w-ib n.w ššf.t=f* “the rebels to his wrath. The disaffected to his awe” (ll. 64–65). Here *dndn* “wrath” provides a geminate parallel for the reduplicate *ššf.t* “awe.”

Similarly, in the Tale of Wenamun (P.Moscow 120), the Tjekker people, in search of Wenamun, respond to the question of why they have come to Byblos by saying: *irī.n=n ij m-s3 n3 b3r.w qnqn sp 2 nt.j tw=k wḏi=w r km.t m n3j=n ir.īw n tttt.w* “we have come after the damaged ships, we have come after the damaged ships that you are sending to Egypt with the one with whom we have a quarrel” (2.72). Here *qnqn* “damaged” (2x) is followed by *tttt.w* “quarrel.”

Egyptian love poetry also exhibits the device. In P.Turin 1996, we read: *n3j=i k3m.w ršrš ‘d‘d n p3 m33=i* “your gardeners are joyful, they exult at the sight of me” (2.8). The short line contains three geminates: *ršrš* “joyful,” *‘d‘d* “exult,” and *m33* “sight.” Moreover, other lines in this stanza often end in geminated forms (e.g., *bsbs* “fennel” [2.5], *sqbb* “make cool” [2.6], *grg* “equipment” [2.10], *šbb* “kneaded-bread” [2.10], *swtwt* “journey” and *m33* “see” [2.14]). Finally, I note that the geminate *thth* “totter,” in *ḫ .t-ḥnq.t thth m th* “the place of drinking totters with drunkenness” (2.13), adds to the gemination cluster and paronomastically anticipates *th* “drunkenness.”

The Instructions of Amenemope (P.BM 10474) gives ample evidence of the device. For example, as Amenemope instructs: *m irj nḥb tttt r‘-m‘ p3 t3-r‘ mtw=k dbdb=f n mdw.(t)* “do not cause a quarrel with a hot mouth. Do not strike him with words” (5.10). Here *tttt* “quarrel” is followed by *dbdb* “strike.” Later he adds: *m jrī snsn.ti n=k p3 šmm mtw=k ḥnhn=f r sḏd* “do not fraternize with a hothead nor approach him for a conversation” (11.13), which employs *snsn* “fraternize,” *šmm* “hothead,” and *ḥnhn* “approach.” These lines are then followed by a veritable

I have had occasion to reference the sophistication of P. Westcar several times. Not surprisingly, the device examined here features in one of its passages. Specifically, it is employed in a statement concerning the magical reattachment of a goose's head: *ḥ' .n ḏd.n ḏdḯ ḏd.t=f m ḥk3.w wn.ḥn p3 smn ḥ' ḥr ḥb3b3 ḏ3ḏ3=f m-mḯ.tt ḥr-m-ḥt spr=f w' r w' ḥ' .n p3 smn ḥ' ḥr g3g3* “then Djedi said his spell of magic and the goose stood up, waddling, its head likewise. After one had reached near and behind the other, the goose stood up, cackling” (8.20–23).⁴⁵⁴ The brief statement is loaded with gemination. Its three reduplicated forms (*ḥb3b3* “waddling,” *ḏ3ḏ3* “head,” and the onomatopoeic *g3g3* “cackling”) are supported by the name *ḏdḯ* “Djedi,” the verb *ḏd* “speak,” and the noun *ḏd.t* “spell.” As such, the text creates “imitation geminates” to support true geminate forms. Note also the natural gemination in the expression *w' r w'* “the one ... the other.” Also suggestive of gemination is *ḥr-m-ḥt* “near and behind.” The entire passage about the *smn* “goose” () is visually enhanced by the frequent use of the legs and feet determinative *ḏ* used of movement. We see it repeated four times in the verb *ḥ'* (twice for “stood up” and twice modally for “then”) and in *ḥb3b3* “waddling,” *spr* “reached,” and *ḥr-m-ḥt* “near and behind.” Moreover, the verb *ḥb3b3* “waddling” is spelled , which provides two more feet (the phonetic letter *ḏ* = b) and contains and echoes the *ba*-bird , which is used for a “revived spirit.” The reader is thus presented with a flurry of feet and bird images that accent the goose's magical revival.

Egyptian monumental inscriptions give evidence of the device as well. In the Annals of Thutmose III inscribed at Karnak, we read of the king's battle at Megiddo (ll. 86–87):⁴⁵⁵

*İw=sn hr ifd m gbgb [...] mkt m hr.w n snđ h3.n=sn ssm.wt=sn wr.r.wt=sn n.w nb
hr hđ ith=tw st m tbtb m hbs=sn r dmi n İst htm n n3 n rmİ dmi pn hr [sh3=sn] r
İbtb str hr r dmi pn İts h3 nn İr mŞ‘ n ħm=f rdİ.t İb=sn r h3q n3 n ħ.t n n3 n ħr.w
İw=[sn hr h3q] mkt m t3 3.t*

455. Kurt Sethe, *Urkunden der 18. Dynastie*, vol. 4.3 (Leipzig: Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1905), 658.

They (army of Megiddo) fled, falling headlong [toward] Megiddo with fearful faces, they having abandoned their horses and chariots of gold and silver in order that they be dragged and hoisted by their clothes into this city. Now because the people had sealed this city against th[em, they let down] their garments in order to hoist them up into the city. Now only if the army of his majesty had not set their minds to looting the possessions of those enemies, th[ey] would have [taken] Megiddo at that time.

This short pericope contains four geminate (here reduplicate) forms. In l. 86, we find *gbgb* “flee” and *tbtb* “hoist,” and in line 87, and the variant *tbtb* “hoist.”

The device occurs several times in the Poetical Stela of Thutmose III (CM 34010). The paean to victory comprises ten stanzas that begin *ỉỉ.n=ỉ dỉ=ỉ tỉtỉ=k X* “I (Amun) have come, I have caused to trample down X,” where X is another people or region. The gemination in *ỉỉ* “come” and *tỉtỉ* “trample down” inspires gemination in the very next verses in these stanzas in several places. In line 4, Amun declares: *s'ʒj=ỉ ʃʃʃf=k m Ỉt nb.(w)t dỉ=ỉ hmhm.t Ỉm=k Ỉt pđ.wt psđ.t* “I magnified your charisma in every body. I caused that your majesty’s war-cry reach the nine bows.” Note the presence of *ʃʃʃf* “charisma” and *hmhm.t* “war-cry,” and the pseudo-gemination caused by *pđ.wt psđ.t* “nine bows.” This occurs again in slightly different form in line 8: *m nỈt m wsr wđ.n=ỉ n=k sđm=sn hmhm.t=k 'q.(w) m bʒbʒ.w* “in might and strength that I ordained for you, they heard your war-cry and entered holes.” Here *hmhm.t* “war-cry” occurs with *bʒbʒ.w* “holes,” the latter perhaps suggestive of pharaoh’s *bʒ* “power.” Another geminate variation occurs in line 18: *dỉ=ỉ tỉtỉ=k ỉm.jw ỉw.w Ỉr.jw ỉb wʒđ-wr Ỉr hmhm.t=k* “I let you trample the islanders, those from the heart of the Great Green beneath your war-cry.” Here *tỉtỉ* “trample” occurs with *hmhm.t* “war-cry.” The gemination reaches a climax in line 20: *dỉ=ỉ tỉtỉ=k pỈ.w tʒ.w ʃnn.t ʃn wr 'rf(w) m Ỉf=k dỉ=ỉ mʒ=sn Ỉm=k m nb dmʒ.t Ỉt m dggt=f r mrr=f* “let you trample the ends of lands; what Ocean circles is enfolded in your fist. Let them see your majesty as falcon-winged (lit. “lord of the wing”) who takes what he espies as he desires.” Here we find *tỉtỉ* “trample,” *ʃnn.t* “encircle,” *mʒ* “see,” *dggt* “espy” (written defectively with *g* twice just for the effect), and *mrr* “desire.”⁴⁵⁶ This is followed in lines 23–24 with:

456. This might be a hitherto unrecognized poetic feature of monumental texts. See, e.g., the victory stela of Ramesses II at Abu Simbel (C. 20), where we find *ỈʒỈ* “swift” (l. 16), *ỈỈỈ* “seek” (l. 16), *ss* “ash” (l. 20), *sksk* “destroy” (l. 20), *nʒỈ* “terrible,” instead of the expected *nỈ* (l. 21), *ỈỈỈ* “flourish” (l. 28), *mʒ* “see” (l. 28), *Ỉ* “rejoice” (l. 28), and *b* “boast” (l. 28). The Poem of Victory of Ramesses III also demonstrates an interest in geminated forms in its use of *ỈbỈb* “traverse” (l. 5), followed by *pỈt* “trample” (l. 8), and *sksk* “destruction” (l. 10). See too the Triumph of Sheshonq I inscribed at Karnak (l. 9): *ỉw=k m wwn Ỉr Ỉft.jw=k tỉtỉ.n=k sbỉ.w r=k* “you circle (like Horus) over your enemies. You have crushed who rebel against you.” Here *wnwn* “circle” parallels *tỉtỉ* “crush.”

*wt̄t.n=i m [h'w]-ntr ḏḥw.tj-ms 'nh̄.(w) ḏ.t ʾr n=i mrr.t nb.t k̄=i s'h' .n=k ʾwnn=i
m k̄.t nh̄ḥ s̄w swsh̄ r p̄.t ḥpr*

Whom I begot from the divine flesh: Thuthmosis (III), living forever, who has done for me all that my *ka*-spirit desired. You erected my sanctuary in eternal work(manship), made longer and wider than ever before.

Note here the use of the geminates *wt̄t* “begot,” *mrr.t* “desired,” *s'h'* “erected,” *ʾwnn* “sanctuary,” *nh̄ḥ* “eternal,” and *swsh̄* “made wider,” in such a brief passage.

The device also was known to the bards of Ugarit as the Epic of Baal demonstrates (*CAT* 1.4.iv.14–18):

14. *yš̄tn aṭrt l bmt 'r*
He sets Asherah on the back of an ass,
15. *l ysmsmt bmt phl*
On the beautiful back of a donkey.
16. *qdš yuḥdm šb 'r*
Qadish seizes, he leads.
17. *amrr k kbkb l pnm*
Even Amrar like a star before him,
18. *aṭr bilt 'nt*
Marches the Virgin Anat.

This passage clusters several reduplicated forms. Note, for example, *smsmt* in line 15, as well as *amrr* and *k kbkb* in line 17. Here again, the poet’s word choice appears to have been influenced by a desire for reduplicated forms. Also of note is that one of the geminate forms exploited by the bard is a personal name, specifically the god Amrar.

Geminate ballast is achieved a bit later again (*CAT* 1.4.v.54–55):

54. *ḥš trmmn hk[lm]*
Quickly you shall erect a palace
55. *b tk šrrt špn*
In the midst of the summit of Saphan.

Earlier in the Baal cycle, Baal’s mountain is called *gry il* “my holy mountain” (*CAT* 1.3.iii.29) and *mrym špn* the “heights of Saphan” (*CAT* 1.3.iv.r.1, 1.4.iv.1, 1.4.v.23, 1.5.i.11), but here the phrase used is *šrrt špn* “summit of Saphan.” The geminate *šrrt* was employed in order to match the geminate form *trmmn* “you shall erect” in the previous stich.

See similarly the reference to the Kirta’s son Ilḥu (*CAT* 1.16.i.48–49):

48. *grgrh bm ymn*
His lance in his right hand,

49. *wyqrb trzzh*
And sets out on his march.

Here the passage balances the appearance of the reduplicated noun *grgr* “lance” in the first line with the quadriliteral form *trzz* “march.”

Elsewhere in the Epic of Baal, we find yet another geminate cluster (*CAT* 1.4.vii.45–49):

45. *dll al ilak lbn*
I will send a delegation to the son of the gods, Mot,
46. *ilm mt 'dd lydd*
A herald to the beloved
47. *il ġzr yqra mt*
of El, the hero. He will call Mot
48. *bnpšh ystrn ydd*
with his throat, instruct the beloved
49. *bgngnh aḥdy dym*
with his insides, I alone reign.

Several geminates create the cluster in this passage including *dll* “delegation” (l. 45), ‘*dd* “herald” (l. 46), *ydd* “beloved” (ll. 46, 48), and the reduplicate form *gngn* “insides” (l. 49).

A final example in Ugaritic appears in the Tale of Aqhat (*CAT* 1.17.ii.30–45), in which the following passage repeats four times: *yšlhm ktrt w yššq bnt hl[l] snnt* “he dines the Katharat, and wines the radiant daughters of the moon” (ll. 30–31). Here we find the geminates *hll* “moon” and *snnt* “radiant,” as well as the pseudo-geminate *yššq* “wines” (i.e., a causative form of the verb *šqy*). The repetition of the verse to mark the passage of seven days allows the narrator to employ the geminate ordinals *tl̥t* “third” (l. 34) and *td̥t* “sixth” (l. 37), and to reference the seventh (of the) *ymm* “days” (l. 39). When the seventh day arrives, we then are told: *tb b bth ktrt bnt hll snnt* “the Katharat leave his house, the radiant daughters of the moon” (ll. 39–40). This permits the poet to repeat the geminates *hll* “moon” and *snnt* “radiant,” and to double the /b/ sound in *b bth* “from his house.” The column becomes fragmentary after this, but it is clear that line 42 contains the geminate forms *ysmsmt* “delights” and *hl̥lt* “childbirth.”⁴⁵⁷

An impressive example of geminate parallelism and clustering in Hebrew occurs in Ps 74:13–14.

אַתָּה פִּזְרַת בְּעֶזְךָ יָם שִׁבְרַת רָאשֵׁי תַנִּינִים עַל-הַמַּיִם:
אַתָּה רִעַצְתָּ רָאשֵׁי לִוְיָתָן תִּתְּנֶנּוּ מֵאֵכֶל לְעַם לְצִיִּים:

457. Other examples of geminate clustering that appear in *CAT* 1.18.iv include *qdqd* “pate” (l. 22) and *tl̥id* “thrice” (l. 23).

'attāh pōrartā bə-'ozzəḵā yām šibbartā rā 'šē tannīnīm 'al ham-māyīm
'attāh riššaštā rā 'šē liwyātān tittənnū ma 'āḵāl lə-'ām lə-šīyīm

You parted the sea by your strength;
you broke the heads of the Tannin in the waters.
You crushed the heads of Leviathan,
and you gave him for food to the people of the wilderness.

The passage parallels four geminate forms. Three are true geminates forms: פָּרַר *pārār* “break,” תַּנִּין *tānan* “Tannin,” and רָצַץ *rāṣaṣ* “crush.” The fourth is the first- and third-radical geminate verb נָתַן *nāṭan* “give” (in תִּתְנֶנּוּ *tittənnū* “you gave him”). By placing the latter verb in the second person and adding a suffix, the poet was able to geminate both the *taw* (ת) and the *nun* (נ) as well, creating an imitation geminate. This allowed for additional paronomasia with תַּנִּינִים *tannīnīm* “Tannin” and לִי־וְיָתָן *liwyātān* “Leviathan.” Adding to the cluster is שִׁיִּים *šīyīm* “wilderness,” which geminates the letter *yod* (י). As these stichs demonstrate, the use of one geminate form inspired the use of others in the same passage.

A shorter example occurs in Isa 29:9: וְהִטְמַחְמָהּ וְהִטְמַחְמָהּ וְהִטְמַחְמָהּ וְהִטְמַחְמָהּ *hiṭmahmāhū ū-tīmāhū hišta 'aš 'ū wā-šo 'ū* “stupefy yourselves, and be astonished! Blind yourselves, and be blind!”⁴⁵⁸ The parallel between the geminate roots מַחַח *m-h-h* and שַׁעַע *š- - 'a* is bolstered by homoeopropheron with the verbs תָּמַח *tāmah* and a *qal* form of the verb שָׁעַע *šā 'a*.

An example in prose can be found in 2 Sam 6:16: וַתִּרְאֵהוּ אֶת־הַמֶּלֶךְ דָּוִד מְפַזֵּז וַתִּבְזֶה לוֹ בְּלִבָּהּ *wa-tēre 'et ham-melek dāwīd māpazzēz ū-mḵarkēr li-ḵnē YHWH wa-tibēz lō bə-libbāh* “when she (Michal) saw the king, David, leaping and laughing before Yahweh, she despised him in her heart” (2 Sam 6:16). Two geminates appear side by side in this passage; the verb מְפַזֵּז *māpazzēz* “leaping” (from the root פִּזַּז *p-z-z*) and מְכַרְכֵּר *mḵarkēr* “laughing” (from the root כִּרַּר *k-r-r*).⁴⁵⁹ The gemination is enhanced by paronomasia between the *zayin*, *mem*, and *pe* in מְפַזֵּז *māpazzēz* “leaping” and the *zayin* and *bet* in תִּבְזֶה *tibēz* “she despised.” Moreover, these geminate forms recall two reduplicate forms in 2 Sam 6:5, where David dances to the sounds of וְשִׁלְשִׁלִּים וְבָצְצָלִים *bi-mna 'nə 'īm ū-b-šelšelīm* “sistrums and cymbals.” Both cases also represent types of hendiadys.

Sustained cases of geminate clusters in Aramaic occur in the prose and poetry sections of Dan 4 and 7.⁴⁶⁰ The former chapter gives an account of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. It includes the following forms: וְרַעְנָן *wə-ra 'nan*

458. Glück, “Assonance in Ancient Hebrew Poetry,” 82, treats the passage as assonance.

459. On the meaning of this verb as “laugh” or “to play with the fingers of one’s hand or hands,” see Avishur, *Comparative Studies in Biblical and Ugaritic Languages and Literatures*, 9–13. Note that the parallel passage in 1 Chr 15:29 replaces the phrase with וְמִשְׁחָק וְמִרְקָד *məraqqəd ū-mšahēq* “dancing and laughing.”

460. The Aramaic cases do not appear in Noegel, “More Geminate Ballast and Clustering,” as I restricted that piece to Hebrew examples.

"flourishing" (Dan 4:1), הַרְהוֹרִין *harhorîn* "imaginings" (Dan 4:2), [עָלִין] *ālālîn* "came" (Dan 4:4), תָּטַלְל *taṭlāl* "took shade" (Dan 4:9), קָצַצוּ *qasṣiṣū* "and cut off" (Dan 4:11), שָׁרְשׁוּהִי *šōršōhī* "its root" (Dan 4:12, 4:20, 4:23), לִבְבָּהּ *libbāhēh* "its heart" and וּלְבָב *ulbāb* "and the heart" (Dan 4:13), חַיָּיָא *hayyayyā* "the living" (Dan 4:14), אֶשְׁתּוֹמַם *ēštōmam* "appalled" (Dan 4:16), תַּחְתּוּהִי *tahōtōhī* "under it" and יִשְׁכָּנָן *yiškānān* "dwelled" (Dan 4:18), רַבְרַבָּנַי *rabrābānay* "my lords" (Dan 4:33), וּמְרֹמֵם *ū-mrōmēm* "and extol" (Dan 4:34), and the pseudo-geminate forms יִתְנַנֵּה *yitninnāh* "he gives it" (Dan 4:14, 4:22, 4:29) and דָּר וְדָר *dār wā-dār* "generation to generation" (Dan 4:31).⁴⁶¹

The geminate cluster forms in Dan 7 include: לַיְלָא *lēlyā* "the night" (Dan 7:2), רַבְרַבָּן *rabrābān* "great" (Dan 7:3), וּלְבָב *ulbāb* "and the heart" (Dan 7:4), תִּנְיָנָה *tinyānāh* "second" and עֲלֵינ *il'in* "fangs" (Dan 7:5),⁴⁶² לַיְלָא *lēlyā* "the night," שִׁנְיָיִן *šinnayīn* "teeth," and רַבְרַבָּן *rabrābān* "great" (Dan 7:7), מְמַלִּיל *məmallil* *rabrābān* "speaking great things" (Dan 7:8), שְׂבִיבִין *šəbībīn* "flames" and גַּלְגִּילוֹהִי *galgillōhī* "its wheels" (Dan 7:9), יַשְׁמְשׁוּנָה *yəšamməšūnnēh* "ministered (to) him" and וְרִבּוֹ רַבָּן *wə-ribō rabwān* [*riḇābān*] "a myriad times a myriad" (Dan 7:10), רַבְרַבְתָּא *rabrābātā* "great" and מְמַלִּילָהּ *məmallilēh* "spoke" (Dan 7:11), לַיְלָא *lēlyā* "the night" and עֲנָנִי *ānānē* "clouds" (Dan 7:13), עַמְמָיָא *amamayyā* "the peoples" (Dan 7:14), רַבְרַבְתָּא *rabrābātā* "great" (Dan 7:17), מְמַלִּיל *məmallil* *rabrābān* "speaking great things" (Dan 7:20), and יַמְלִיל *yəmallil* "speak" (Dan 7:25).

The device appears in some texts from Qumran. The Aramaic Levi Document displays it in 4QLevi^a XIII, 2: "Listen to the word of your father Levi, and pay attention to the instructions of God's friend [יָדִיד *ydyd*]. I instruct you, my sons, and reveal the truth to you, my beloved [חֲבִיבִי *hbyby*]." ⁴⁶³ See also the Genesis Apocryphon: "how splen[di]d and beautiful is the image of her face, how [] and [f]ne [רִקִּי *rqyq*] is the hair of her head. How lovely are her eyes, and how desirable [רִגְגִּי *rgg*] is her nose ... how lovely [יָאָא *yāā*] are her breasts ... entirely [כִּלְיָא *klyā*]" (1QApGen XX, 1–3).⁴⁶⁴

Since geminated and reduplicated nominal and verbal forms appear far less frequently in Near Eastern languages than their standard counterparts, they draw attention to themselves. When clustered, geminate forms punctuate a text with a percussive feel, one that is often not tied to the strictures of parallelism. In essence they are a form of repetition, as can be seen in that they often appear in poetic texts with repeated verbs and nouns, and while each geminated word constitutes

461. Anticipating the geminate cluster in Dan 4 are two more geminate forms at the end of Dan 3: עַמְמָיָא *amamayyā* (Dan 3:31) and רַבְרַבִּין *rabrābīn* (Dan 3:33).

462. I render "fangs" with Richard M. Frank, "The Description of the Bear in Dn. 7,5," *CBQ* 21 (1959): 505–7. To his observation, I add עֲלֵי תַנִּין *ʿl'y tyn* "fangs of the dragon" in the Proverbs of Ahiqar (C1 1.90).

463. See Greenfield, Stone, and Eshel, *Aramaic Levi Document*, 102–3.

464. See Pereira, *Studies in Aramaic Poetry* (c. 100 B.C.E.–c. 600 C.E.), 24.

its own contained form of paronomasia, as a cluster they are not necessarily in a paronomastic relationship to each other. Thus, while they are visually obvious, geminate clusters are primarily aural devices, possibly tied to the musical accompaniment as rhythmic accents.

4.3. COMPLEXITIES

A testament to the genius of the ancient literati is the fact that often one finds several types of paronomasia and polysemy employed in tandem. Indeed, the virtuosity of the ancients appears to have known no bounds. See, for example, the rhetorical question of Ereškigal to her gatekeeper in the Akkadian Descent of Ishtar, when she learns that her sister Ištar has demanded entrance to her kingdom: *annītume anāku itti* ^d*Anunakki mē ašatti* “this one, now, even I, should I drink water with the Anunakki?” (l. 32). The anacoluthon both captures the queen’s fear while permitting the interplay of a number of devices that are more easily appreciated by looking at the line in transliteration: *an-ni-tu-me-e a-na-ku it-ti* ^d*a-nun-na-ki* A.MEŠ *a-šat-ti*. Note first how the emphatic particle *me* (normally *ma*) paronomastically anticipates *mē* “water” (written logographically as A.MEŠ). Homoeopropheron obtains by way of the repeated sound /an/ in *annītu* “this,” *anāku* “I,” and ^d*Anunakki*. Observe as well how the cuneiform *a-* sign in both *a-na-ku* and ^d*a-nun-na-ki* (themselves a case of homoioteleuton) and *a-šat-ti*, envelope the logographic reading of the same sign in A.MEŠ “water.” The words *itti* “with” and *ašatti* “I shall drink” also constitute homoioteleuton. Moreover, the *an-* sign in *annītu* is identical to the divine determinative ^d that classifies the Anunakki. Indeed, the brief line is veritably awash with the water of divinity. Moreover, the erudite author managed to integrate into this densely packed verse the signs *an* (2x), *ki*, and *šat*, which, when understood for their logographic values, evoke AN “heaven,” KI “earth,” and KUR “underworld,” the very cosmological boundaries that Ištar seeks to breach.

The combining of devices also occurs in Lam 1:20:

רָאָה יְהוָה כִּי־צָר־לִי הַמָּרְמָר
נֶהְפֶּךְ לִבִּי בְּקִרְבִּי כִּי מָרוּ מְרִיתִי

rā'ēh YHWH kī šar lī mē'ay ḥāmarmārū
nehpaḳ libbī bə-qirbī kī mārō mārīṭī

See O Yahweh, for I am in distress, my innards burn,
My heart is turned within me, for I have grievously rebelled.

The lament contains a number of devices. Parasonance obtains between הַמָּרְמָר *ḥāmarmārū* (from חָמַר *ḥamar*) and מָרוּ מְרִיתִי *mārō mārīṭī* (from מָרָה *mārāh*). The repetition of the consonants מ *m* and ר *r* also creates a geminate (and pseudo-

geminate) parallel. In addition, since prior to the passage we have heard of weeping and tears (Lam 1:16), it is difficult not to hear “bitterness” (from מָרַר *mārār*), in the use of the verb מָרָה *mārāh* “rebel.” See, for example, אָמַרְר בְּבִכִּי *’āmārēr bab-beḳī* “I will show bitterness while weeping” in Isa 22:4.

A final demonstration of the brilliance of ancient poets to combine devices appears in Jer 8:18: מְבִלִּיגִי עָלַי יָגֹן עָלַי לִבִּי דָוִי *mablīgīyī ‘ālē yāgōn ‘ālay libbī dawwāy* “when in grief I would seek comfort, my heart is sick within me.” I already have discussed this line above in the context of rhyme (4.2.11). However, the passage is far more complex. Of special note is the *hapax legomenon* מְבִלִּיגִי *mablīgīyī*, which Robin Baker has recently shown to be a phrase that simultaneously constitutes bilingual paronomasia and contronymic polysemy. It also contributes to a mesostich that offers a cryptic anagram.⁴⁶⁵ The phrase offers bilingual paronomasia, because the poet here draws on the Akkadian *balag* “lamentation.” It is contronymic, because the Hebrew root בִּלַּג *b-l-g* means “shine, flash, smile.” Since this hardly fits the context, some commentators have rendered the word *ad sensum*. It contributes to a mesostich, because the second consonant in each of the words in the verse spells out בִּלַּג לְבֹ *blg lbw* “the *balag*-lamentation of his heart.” In turn, this is an anagram for גָּלוּ בָּבֶל *glw bbl* “they go in exile to Babylon.” As Baker concludes, “The encryption of an anagram and an acrostic to provide esoteric commentary on the surface text that we find in our passage is characteristic of the Babylonian and Assyrian scholarly tradition.”⁴⁶⁶

465. Robin Baker, “Jeremiah and the *Balag*-Lament? Jeremiah 8:18–23 Reconsidered,” *JBL* 138 (2019): 587–604.

466. Baker, “Jeremiah and the *Balag*-Lament?,” 603.

CONCLUSIONS

Since all of the ancient Near Eastern polysemous and paronomastic devices examined in this study are remarkably consistent in form and usage over such a long period of time, and across languages and geographic boundaries that were in nearly constant cultural exchange, we may safely regard their use as deliberate. In Mesopotamia and Egypt, the divinatory and priestly literati transmitted these learned conventions along with other elements of their wisdom in their scribal academies and Houses of Life. At Ugarit, the diviner-scribes, who were multilingual and steeped in Mesopotamian learning, integrated as many of the devices into their own works as their writing system allowed. As Mesopotamian learning was held in high regard, it is likely that the scribes' adoption of its devices aimed to emulate the prestigious craft of their dominant neighbor.¹ We know less about scribal education in Israel, but as I have argued elsewhere, it was likely in priestly and prophetic circles that such literary devices circulated.² In any event, there can be no doubt that Israelite scribal culture experienced influence from both of its superpower neighbors.³ Indeed, one of the most important findings of this book is that it demonstrates that, with few exceptions, most of the devices were in use throughout the long history of the Near East, and so they must have been learned conventions that were transmitted from culture to culture, likely from the dominant powers of Mesopotamia and Egypt to the Levant.

Throughout the Near East, polysemy and paronomasia generally did not have restrictions of genre, whether in poetry or prose. They occur in psalms, laments,

1. Perhaps, most obviously, see Andrew R. George, "The Gilgamesh Epic at Ugarit," *AuOr* 25 (2007): 237–54; However, it is Egyptian influence that one finds in Ugarit's artistic remains.

2. Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*, 177–82.

3. See Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart*, 47–61, 84–90; Michael Fox, "Gauging Egyptian Influences on Biblical Literature," in Zevit, *Subtle Citation, Allusion, and Translation in the Hebrew Bible*, 228–41. Gary A. Rendsburg, *How the Bible Is Written* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2019), 464–65, argues that Egyptian prose narratives influenced the development of Israelite literature.

love songs, parables, riddles, magical and divinatory texts, prophecies, epics, chronicles, and even historical inscriptions and some letters.⁴ We also find them in direct and indirect discourse. Yet, not every device appears in every genre or discourse, nor is every type attested in every Near Eastern language (see figs. 2–3). Moreover, not all devices serve every purpose. Of course, one must be cautious in drawing sweeping conclusions from the distribution of the devices, because the textual corpora we have are not commensurate across languages. There are far fewer texts in Hebrew, Ugaritic, and Aramaic than in Akkadian and Egyptian. In addition, the study of these devices still has a long way to go, so many gaps in our knowledge remain. Such limits notwithstanding, some preliminary observations are possible.

5.1. PREFERENCES AND DISTRIBUTION

Common to Akkadian, Egyptian, Ugaritic, Hebrew, and Aramaic are the following polysemous devices: *double entendre*, antanaclasis, unidirectional polysemy, multidirectional polysemy, double polysemy, polysemy clusters (of the body parts type), acrostics, and the following paronomastic devices: homoeopropheron, homoioteleuton, epanastrophe, parasonance, homonymic paronomasia, anagrammatic paronomasia, hendiadic paronomasia, and geminate parallelism and clustering. Anastrophe occurs in all of these languages except for Ugaritic, and amphiboly (of the mixed morphology type) occurs in all except for Aramaic.⁵ I omit here any discussion of Sumerian unless to remark on the antiquity of some of the devices, because there are far too few formal studies on these devices in that language to allow for even a cursory analysis.

The distribution shows that the cultures examined here shared a fundamental belief in the utility of employing these devices in their compositions and in passing them down to future bards from generation to generation over many centuries. It is their long and venerated history that legitimated their use; their sheer antiquity lent compositions authority. To what extent they were employed in each language depends on many factors. In some cases, one can attribute the lack of a device to the fact that an exhaustive search for it has not been undertaken in each language, or to the relatively small corpora of Northwest Semitic texts as opposed to Mesopotamian and Egyptian texts. In other cases, one may cite restraints in the language and writing system or the cosmological worldview informing that system.

An examination of the rarest devices bears this out. Amphiboly of the infinitive absolute type appears only in biblical Hebrew, and thus, we must consider it an Israelite innovation. Numerical polysemy appears only in Akkadian,

4. Only economic texts appear devoid of such devices.

5. The lack of attestation of the latter two features in Ugaritic and Aramaic, respectively, likely relates to the small corpora of literary texts written in these languages.

Ugaritic, and Hebrew. Isopsephy occurs only in Akkadian, Hebrew, and Aramaic. Neither device appears in Egyptian, because the Egyptian writing system did not use numerical signs polysemously as consonants or words.⁶ The lack of contronymic polysemy in Egyptian is a reflection of the lack of contronyms generally in the language.⁷ It is possible that the lack of contronymic polysemy in Ugaritic is an accident of discovery due to the small lexical inventory, since we do find it in Hebrew and Aramaic. Indeed, Northwest Semitic generally has more contronyms. One may attribute the complete absence of bilingual polysemy and paronomasia in Egyptian texts to a cultural attitude concerning the superiority of the Egyptian language over the tongues of Egypt's neighbors.

Those devices shared by Akkadian and Northwest Semitic, but not Egyptian, include bilingual polysemy and numerical polysemy (possibly also rhyme). In Mesopotamia and Syro-Canaan, bilingualism was normative, and even embraced, so naturally we find cases of bilingual polysemy in Akkadian, Ugaritic, Hebrew, and Aramaic, and bilingual paronomasia in Akkadian, Hebrew, and Aramaic. This was not the case in Egypt. In Akkadian, numerical polysemy was grounded in the polyvalency of cuneiform signs and a long tradition of learning in mathematics, whereas in the Egyptian script it was impossible. Its use in Ugaritic and Hebrew probably represents a natural extension of a scribal interest in polysemy and the script's ability to achieve the device.⁸ Perhaps ultimately it also reflects Mesopotamian influence. As for rhyme, the Egyptian writing system records no vowels, so we cannot know for certain if poets employed rhyme. Its use in Ugaritic has been postulated based on our knowledge of comparative Semitics. Nevertheless, even its appearance in Sumerian, Akkadian, Hebrew, and Aramaic is very limited.

Only two devices occur in Egyptian and Northwest Semitic, but not Akkadian: amphiboly (of the ambiguous grammar type) and numerical paronomasia. A lack of the former in Akkadian is likely due to a scarcity of research on the topic, since examples of anastrophe do appear. One might infer, from the Mesopotamians' interest in mathematics and their use of isopsephy and numerical polysemy, that they would have employed numerical paronomasia, but as far as I am aware, no cases have come to light. If they did not employ it, perhaps this registers a conceptual distinction between numerals and words. Cuneiform

6. In Egyptian, the signs for 1, 10, 100, 1000, 10,000, 100,000, and 1,000,000 do possess non-numerical values, but to my knowledge they are not used polysemously. In Ugaritic, most numbers are written phonetically. Some numbers are written logographically in administrative texts, but the signs that also hold consonantal value, e.g., 1 (*g*), 2 (*ṣ*), 3 (*l*), and 6 (*y*) are used unambiguously.

7. It is impossible to know why the Egyptian language possesses no contronyms, but perhaps it relates to the Egyptian cosmological worldview in which opposites, like *m3't* "order" and *isf.t* "chaos," cannot share equal time or space.

8. I attribute the lack of attestation in Aramaic again to the small literary corpus.

signs simultaneously could possess syllabic, logographic, and numerical values, whereas numerals, when spelled out, only had mathematical values. Alternatively, the use of numerical paronomasia in Ugaritic and Hebrew might reflect Egyptian influence, since the device is more common in that language.⁹

A statistical analysis of the distribution of devices in each of the languages can only be basic and approximate, but even so, the broad patterns that emerge from the data are by no means arbitrary. For instance, the data reveals that all of the polysemous and paronomastic devices appear in Hebrew (see figs. 2–3). After Hebrew, Akkadian contains the largest number of them: fifteen of the seventeen polysemous devices and twelve of the thirteen paronomastic types. Ugaritic is next containing eleven of the seventeen polysemic types and eleven of the thirteen paronomastic kind. Egyptian has the least: ten of seventeen polysemous devices and eleven of the thirteen paronomastic ones. That Hebrew contains all of the devices should not surprise us, since throughout its history, Israel negotiated the cultural influences of its dominant neighbors both to the east and south (as well as native Canaanite influence). Thus, it contains those found in Akkadian, but not Egyptian, and vice versa.

Many of the devices are attested in both Egyptian and Mesopotamian texts, so it is difficult to speak of their place of origin. Nevertheless, that Egyptian texts contain the least number of devices is a likely testament to the influence of Mesopotamia over the Northwest Semitic world. This is further borne out in that when a device is absent in Ugaritic, it is never lacking in Akkadian, though in five cases it is lacking in Egyptian; whereas when a device is absent in Egyptian, it can be lacking in Ugaritic, but never in Akkadian or Hebrew.¹⁰

Thirteen of the devices enjoyed such a long and pervasive usage that they eventually made their way west, where they were labeled in Greek and/or Latin (fig. 4). At that time, many of them were employed as tools in dream divination and magic, or in the art of public speaking, otherwise known as rhetoric. Of course, one can find some of the other devices in Greek texts too, even though we do not possess Greek (or Latin) terms for them.

With regard to which devices are most frequently attested, I can offer an assessment based only on the examples that I have collected from published works on the subject. Though not an exact science, general tendencies are relatively clear. Among the most common devices of polysemy are *double entendres*, antanaclasis, unidirectional polysemy, multidirectional polysemy, and *notariqon*. Acrostics appear with relative frequency in Hebrew and later Aramaic, though they are far more rare in Akkadian, Egyptian, and Ugaritic.

9. I would expect Aramaic to contain examples of the device, but none have come to light as of yet.

10. When a device is lacking only in Ugaritic, e.g., *notariqon*, polysemous clustering, and anastrophe, I opine that it is due to the small corpora of Ugaritic texts, since I find it unlikely that such devices were known in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Israel, but not in the wider Levant.

We may account for the general frequency of some devices, like *double entendres*, by pointing to their social utility. The need to mask offensive or socially uncomfortable topics in softer language would appear to be high universal. We should expect to see it employed from Sumerian to Aramaic, and well beyond. Postulating reasons for the frequency of the other devices is more difficult. One reason may be ease of production. For example, it certainly is easier to create cases of antanaclasses than bilingual polysemy. It also is possible that some devices were considered especially effective, meaningful, or learned. They could have been understood as evidence of the exceptional abilities and authority of the author. Still others, like acrostics, might have represented the vogue of their day.

The most frequently attested paronomastic devices overall are homoeopropheron, parasonance, anagrammatic paronomasia, hendiadic paronomasia, and geminate parallelism and clustering. Numerical paronomasia is more frequently found in Egyptian, and less so in Hebrew. Again ease of employment likely played a factor, in the same way that difficulty must have contributed to a device's rarity. Cases of hendiadic paronomasia likely were produced by common usage, and thus remained in wider and more sustained circulation. If I am correct in positing the connection of some cases of geminate parallelism and clustering to needs produced by musical accompaniment, then the influence of musical tastes, which tended to be conservative in the Near East generally until the modern age, also might account for a device's use.¹¹ The high frequency with which geminate parallelism and clustering appears in Egyptian texts, as opposed to Akkadian texts, suggests the possibility that its use in Ugaritic and Hebrew reflects Egyptian influence. Accordingly, it perhaps also represents the influence of Egyptian musical tastes in the Levant.¹²

The following devices appear first in Sumerian: contronymic polysemy, *double entendre*, antanaclasses, unidirectional polysemy, multidirectional polysemy, double polysemy, bilingual polysemy, polysemy clusters, *notariqon*, homoeopropheron, homoioteleuton, homonymic paronomasia, bilingual paronomasia, palindrome, hendiadic paronomasia, rhyme, and geminate parallelism and clustering. Since some of them, like *double entendre*, could be the result of parallel development, and because many of the others appear in Sumerian texts composed by Akkadian speakers, it is impossible to make definitive claims of origins. Nevertheless, one can say that they are among the most ancient compositional devices in the Near East.

11. One also sees a connection between music and literature in the frequent references to musical sounds as a focus device in biblical narratives. See I. Kalimi, "Human and Musical Sounds and Their Hearing Elsewhere as a Literary Device in the Biblical Narratives," *VT* 60 (2010): 565–70.

12. Some evidence for such influence appears in the Tale of Wenamun (2,69), in which we find Egyptian songstressess in the service of a Byblian prince.

In general, the aforementioned paronomastic devices occur more often than those involving polysemy. This too, we can explain by recognizing that it is far easier to repeat consonants than to find words with multiple meanings. Indeed, it is far more difficult in most languages to find homonyms or words with wide semantic parameters than words that share one or two consonants. Nevertheless, it is possible that many polysemous devices were primarily intended for erudite readers, since they cannot be recited without pause and discussion. On the other hand, paronomastic devices, while also visually effective, primarily aimed to reach listeners, who may or may not have been literate.

Once we obtain a more complete picture of how pervasively the scribes of each culture employed each device, we will be able to determine whether certain types occur only in certain textual genres or if some are attested more frequently at certain periods. Perhaps then we will be able to say more about the relationship between these textual devices and cultural attitudes concerning script and language.

5.2. FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES AND STRATEGIES

Despite the wide array of types of polysemy and paronomasia and the many kinds of functions proposed for them, a few fundamental principles and strategies appear to inform most of them. These include ambiguity, repetition and variation, delayed comprehension, metaphor and metonymy, clustering, rare words, and the regarding or disregarding of certain phonemes and morphemes.

5.2.1. AMBIGUITY

One of the fundamental principles informing all types of polysemy is ambiguity. It is important to emphasize that ambiguous signs, words, and lines do not leave a text impenetrable to understanding, and thus *incapable of conveying* meaning. Rather, they pack the text with interpretive options, contingencies, and points of view—they *overload* their contexts with meanings.¹³ When we encounter them

13. A useful starting point for understanding literary ambiguity, and one often cited by biblical scholars, is William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity: A Study of Its Effects on English Verse* (New York: New Directions, 1966). Empson distinguishes his seven kinds of ambiguity by placing them on a scale of effectiveness from the coherent to the confusing and contradictory. Though offering many insights, Empson’s focus on Western literature means that he contextualizes the latter part of the scale in negative terms—as inarticulate, incongruous, nonsensical, even accidental. Yet, as this study has shown, even the most enigmatic cases of ambiguity in Near Eastern texts, e.g., polysemy clusters, are deliberately formed to create enigmas that imbue a text with divine wonder. In addition, the social means of textual production that inform his corpus are not informed by the ontology of the spoken and written word. Moreover, Empson treats ambiguity generally as a major component of poetic language that provides readers with pleasure. Therefore, his

we find ourselves in a kind of thought loop that forces us to focus, rethink, and contemplate each alternative possibility. The engine that powers the looping process is the exegetical assumption that a text must have a single meaning and that proper training will compel a text to yield that meaning to the exegete's tools and skills. Even for some modern scholars, resigning themselves to the notion that ancient bards intended some of their signs, words, and passages to be polyvalent, may feel contrary to their training and the exegetical enterprise generally. Or they may even be unsettling, especially when perceived as the agenda of skeptics steeped in postmodern methodologies. Yet, at this point, the evidence for polysemy in ancient Near Eastern texts is beyond doubt. Indeed, while the existence of such devices remained too slippery to grasp for many scholars of earlier generations, contemporary scholarship increasingly has come to grips with it. Moreover, if we factor into our understanding of ancient polysemy and paronomasia the ancients' perceived ontology of the spoken language and written script, such cases of ambiguity take on added import, for they multiply the agency, effect, and perceived power of the living word or sign.

5.2.2. REPETITION AND VARIATION

Another principle informing cases of paronomasia and polysemy is that of repetition and variation. This is well in keeping on a larger scale with its appearance as a staple feature of ancient Near Eastern narrative and visual art. Robert Alter's observations with regard to the effect of repetition and variation in narrative are applicable here: they can "serve the purposes of commentary, analysis, foreshadowing, thematic assertion, with a wonderful combination of subtle understatement and dramatic force."¹⁴ Moreover, the repetition of signs, consonants, and similar sounding words represents an extension of the verbatim repetition of signs and lexemes (e.g., *ploce*, *anaphora*) and the repetition of the

classification of ambiguity is of limited help for understanding ancient Near Eastern texts. For a more recent attempt to refine our understanding of ambiguity in biblical texts, see David H. Aaron, *Biblical Ambiguities: Metaphor, Semantics and Divine Imagery*, BRLAJ 4 (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

14. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 91. On repetition and variation in biblical lists, see Meir Paran, *Forms of the Priestly Style in the Pentateuch: Patterns, Linguistic Usages, Syntactic Structures* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1989), 179–237, who refers to this as "concluding deviation." See also Stanley Gevirtz, "Evidence of Conjugational Variation in the Parallelization of Selfsame Verbs in the Amarna Letters," *JNES* 32 (1973): 99–104; Gevirtz, "On Canaanite Rhetoric: The Evidence of the Amarna Letters from Tyre," *Or* 42 (1973): 162–77. See also Gary A. Rendsburg, "Variation in Biblical Hebrew Prose and Poetry," in *Built by Wisdom, Established by Understanding: Essays on Biblical and Near Eastern Literature in Honor of Adele Berlin*, ed. Maxine L. Grossman (Bethesda, MD: University of Maryland Press, 2013), 197–226.

same root in different verbal and nominal formations (e.g., metaphony, polyptoton, polyprosopon), devices not under consideration here.¹⁵ The repetition creates a rhythm of expectations that variation subverts. Together they produce contrast.

A few cases from Hebrew and Aramaic texts are especially instructive in this regard. Hosea’s prophecy against Israel is an excellent starting point: כָּרַבָּם בֵּן קָלֹן אֲמִיר *kā-rubām kēn ḥāt’ū lī kāḥōdām bē-qālōn ‘āmīr* “as they increased, the more they sinned against me; I shall turn their honor into shame” (Hos 4:7). The use of the proposition כָּ *kā* “as” before רָבָם *rubām* “they increased” encourages one to think at first that the same consonant starting the very next stich (i.e., in בֹּדֵם *kāḥōdām*) might also be the same preposition, especially because assonance abets the comparison between כָּרַבָּם *kā-rubām* and בֹּדֵם *kāḥōdām*. However, the reader/listener soon realizes that the consonant is part of the noun “honor.”¹⁶

Verbs also can play the trickster. Psalm 79:5 reads: עַד־מָה יְהוָה תִּאֲנַף לְנֶצַח תִּבְעַר כְּמוֹ־אֵשׁ קִנְיָתְךָ *‘ad-māh YHWH tē’ēnāp lā-neṣaḥ tib’ar kāmō-’ēš qin’ātākā* “How long, O Yahweh, will you be angry forever, will your jealousy burn like fire?” Since the first verb one encounters occurs in the second person masculine singular (i.e., תִּאֲנַף *tē’ēnāp* “you will be angry”), one is encouraged by way of parallelism and grammatical form to hear the second verb, תִּבְעַר *tib’ar* as a second person masculine form, that is, “you will burn.” However, it is not until one hears the final words קִנְיָתְךָ *qin’ātākā* “your jealousy,” that one realizes that it alone is the third person feminine singular subject of the verb “burn” (the second person masculine and third person feminine forms are identical in this conjugation).

A more sustained case involving prepositions occurs in Isa 24:2, a prophecy of doom that proceeds in merisms:

וְהָיָה כַעַם כְּכֶהֱן כַּעֲבָד כַּאֲדֹנָיו כְּשֹׁפְחָה כְּגִבְרָתָהּ כְּקוֹנָה כְּמוֹכָר כְּמַלְוֶה כְּלוֹה כְּנֹשֶׂה כְּאֶשֶׁר
נִשְׂא בּוֹ

15. On the strict repetition of roots, see already Israel Eitan, “La répétition de la racine en hébreu,” *JPOS* 1 (1920): 171–86. On anaphora in Ugaritic, see Yogev and Yona, “Visual Poetry in the Ugaritic Tablet KTU 1.4.” See also Shamir Yona, “A Type of Expanded Repetition in Biblical Parallelism,” *ZAW* 119 (2007): 586–601. See also the comment of Klein and Sefati, “Word Play in Sumerian Literature,” 24: “The most important formal characteristic of Sumerian poetic language is the verbal repetition of one or more words, phrases, or whole sentences (i.e., poetic lines)—mostly in continuous lines, occasionally in alternate lines—to demarcate or emphasize a stanza or part of a poem.” A representative example of this approach in Egyptology is Richter, *Theology of Hathor of Dendera*.

16. I thank my graduate student Corinna Nichols for this astute observation and for discovering another example in Deut 32:11: “As a vulture [כְּנֶשֶׁר *kā-nešer*] stirs up his nest, hovers over his chicks, spreads his wings [כְּנַפָּיו *kānāpāw*], takes them, carries them on his pinions.” I suggest that it might be fruitful to look for the same device using other prepositions as well.

wə-hāyāh k̄ā- 'ām kak-kōhēn ka- 'ēḇeḏ ka- 'dōnaw kaš-šīḫāh kag-gəḇīrtāh kaq-qōneh kam-mōkēr kam-malweh kal-lōweh kan-nōšeh ka 'āšer nōše' ḇō

It shall be, as with the people, so with the priest, as with the servant, so with his master, as with the maid, so with her mistress, as with the buyer, so with the seller, as with the lender, so with the borrower, as when the creditor becomes the debtor.

In this passage, we hear twelve successive repetitions of the consonant *kaph* (כ, both as *k* and *k̄*). We must read the first eleven as the preposition “as, like” attached to nouns.¹⁷ When one arrives at the twelfth, one naturally expects a similar use. However, this time one encounters the compound relative pronoun “which, when.” The repetition and variation catches readers/listeners off guard, forcing them to pause and contemplate the change. The pause allows one to realize that the last merism involves contronyms—the terms for נֹשֶׁה *nōše* “creditor” and “debtor” are identical. In effect, the variation underscores the prophet’s point that the fates of those in opposite social positions will be the same.

Repetition and variation lie at the very heart of paronomasia. At times they can support poetic themes. In the hymn to Sarai’s beauty in the Genesis Apocryphon from Qumran (1QApGen XX, 2–8a), we find כ *k/* and ל *l/* repeated in every bicolon and tricolon, save for 4a, 8b, and 10b.¹⁸

- 1a. How [כמה *kmh*] splen[di]d and beautiful is the image of her [לה צלם *lh šlm*] face,
- 1b. How [כמה *km*] [] and [fi]ne is [לה *lh*] the hair of her head.
- 2a. How [כמה *km*] lovely are [להן *lhwn lh*] her eyes,
- 2b. And how desirable is [לה *lh*] her nose,
- 2c. All [כול *kwl*] the radiance of her face [].
- 3a. How [כמה *km*] fair is [לה *lh*] her breast,
- 3b. And how [וכמה *wkm*] beautiful is all her [לה כול *lh kwl*] whiteness.
- 4a. Her arms how beautiful,
- 4b. And her hands how [כמה *km*] perfect [כלילין *klylyn*],
- 4c. And [] is all [כול *kwl*] the appearance of her hands.
- 5a. How [כמה *km*] lovely are her palms [כפיהא *kpyh*],
- 5b. And how long [אריכן *'rykn*] and delicate
- 5c. Are all [כול *kwl*] the fingers of her hands.

17. The repetition, but not the variation, was noted by Glück, “Assonance in Ancient Hebrew Poetry,” 78.

18. I adopt the transcription and translation of Peter Y. Lee, *Aramaic Poetry in Qumran* (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 2011), 451–52. James C. VanderKam, “The Poetry of 1QApGen. XX, 2–8a,” *RevQum* 10 (1979): 57–66, observes the repetition of the root עלה *-l-y* in 7–9, and the juxtaposition of the repeated root שפר *š-p-r*, but not the repeated כ *k/* and ל *l/*. See also Pereira, *Studies in Aramaic Poetry* (c. 100 B.C.E.–c. 600 C.E.), 22–26.

- 6a. Her feet [רגליהא *rglyh*] how [כמא *km*] beautiful,
 6b. And how [וכמא *wkm*] perfect [שלמה להן לה *šlmh lhn lh*] are her legs.
 7a. And every [כל *kl*] virgin [בתולין *btwln*] and bride [כלאן *kl'n*]
 7b. Who enters into a bridal-chamber [לגנון *lgnwn*]
 7c. Is not [לא *l*] more beautiful than she.
 8a. And above all [ועל כול *w'l kwl*] (other) women
 8b. Her beauty is beautifulness.
 9a. And her beautifulness is the highest [ועליא *w'ly*],
 9b. Higher [לעלא *l'l*] than all of them [כולהן *kwllhn*].
 10a. And along with all [כול *kwl*] this beauty,
 10b. Much wisdom is with her,
 10c. And her handiwork [דל *dl*] is lovely.

The concatenation of the repeated consonants lends the poem cohesiveness while reinforcing its central theme of the כול *kwl* “totality” of כלילין *klylyn* “perfection.” Russell Cherry describes well the literary effect of the strategy.

When extended throughout an entire pericope or beyond, the use of repetition can achieve even more significant effects upon the literary unit. In such examples, the repeated words become structurally meaningful and serve to integrate the thought and direction of the passage. This integration creates continuity over a much broader spectrum, and causes the reader or hearer to look both backwards and forwards, and consequently to rethink previous perceptions and interpretations.¹⁹

5.2.3. DELAYED COMPREHENSION

Closely related to repetition and variation is the principle of delayed comprehension. Poets employing it create linguistic expectations that they later manipulate, exploit, or subvert, but they do so without relying on repetition. We have seen this already in divinatory texts and narratives that report omens that receive interpretations later.²⁰ However, this also occurs generally with polysemy in poems and narratives. Illustrating this is the Egyptian Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor, which twice employs the particle  *mk* “behold” (ll. 2, 10), but then soon uses the same signs for *m* *k* “in your hand” (l. 16). Then, in line 29, one encounters the adjective *m* *k* “fierce,” spelled   . Thus the author has twice set up the reader to see the words “in your hand” and “fierce” as “behold.”

Ellen Davis has shown that Isaiah similarly manipulates expectations in a prophecy concerning Judah: הֵן גֹּר יָגוֹר אֶפֶס מְאוֹתַי מִי־גָר אֶתְּךָ עֲלֶיךָ יְפוֹל *hēn gōr*

19. Cherry, *Paronomasia and Proper Names in the Old Testament*, 130.

20. See 3.13.1, and Noegel, *Nocturnal Ciphers*; Noegel, “Kirtu’s Allusive Dream.”

yāḡūr 'ēpēs mē- 'ōtī mī ḡār 'ittāk 'ālayik *yippōl* (Isa 54:15).²¹ The strategy involves three homophonous verbs: גָּוַר *gūr* I “dwell”, גָּוַר II “quarrel, gather together,” and גָּוַר III “fear.”²² The use of these verbs is the “means by which the poet deliberately impedes understanding, causing the reader to reconsider phrases for which the intended meaning is not the only or the most obvious one.”²³ The context of Judah’s future freedom from fear just prior to the verse encourages one to understand the start of the pronouncement as “if anyone fears, it is not from me.”²⁴ Yet, one also can read it: “there is nothing at all to fear apart from me.” Equally ambiguous are the phrases מִי־גָּוַר אֶתְּךָ *mī ḡār 'ittāk*, which can mean “whoever quarrels with you” or “whoever dwells with you,” and אֶלֶיְךָ יִפְּלוּ *'ālayik yippōl*, which can mean “will fall on account of you” or “will defect to you” (cf. 2 Kgs 25:11, Jer 21:9). The latter could imply the conversion of resident aliens or opponents in warfare. Nevertheless, the passages that follow promise an Israelite victory over violent contenders, thus forcing one to realize that מִי־גָּוַר אֶתְּךָ *mī ḡār 'ittāk* must mean “whoever quarrels with you.” Davis concludes that the prophet’s use of polysemy:

delays the audience’s comprehension, giving them pause to recall the promises and the power of Israel’s God. Grappling to resolve the ambiguities resident in the verbal phrases, they are forced to set this divine word in the fuller context of the prophet’s message, so that the injunction against fear echoes even through the warning of further conflict (liv 15a), and the assurance of vindication before their enemies (liv 15b) carries with it a reminder of the charge to draw into the sphere of God’s salvation even the strangers among whom they now dwell. Through this strategy of delayed comprehension, the prophetic word provides for those who will attend to it a hedge against the opposite dangers of capitulation and vindictiveness.²⁵

James Roberts espied another example in Isa 5:11.²⁶ The passage reads: הוּי מְשִׁכִּימֵי בַבְּקָר שָׁכָר יִרְדְּפוּ מֵאַחֲרֵי בִנְשׁוֹף יוֹ יְדִלְיָקָם *hōy maškīmē bab-bōqer šēkār yirdōpū mē- 'aḥārē ḥan-nešep yayīn yadliqēm* “woe to those who rise early in the morning that they may chase strong drink; who tarry late into the evening that

21. Davis, “Strategy of Delayed Comprehension.” Cf. David Toshio Tsumura, “Statement-Development-Twist-Denouement: The AA'XB Pattern in Biblical Hebrew Poetry,” in *Prince of the Orient: Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Memory of H. I. H. Prince Takahito Mikasa*, ed. Ichiro Nakata et al., Orient Supplement 1 (Tokyo: The Society for Near Eastern Studies in Japan, 2019), 269–72, who cites several biblical poetic passages in which third line shifts expectations by dramatically altering the context.

22. HALOT, s.v. “גָּוַר I, II, III.”

23. Davis, “Strategy of Delayed Comprehension,” 218–19.

24. With Rashi.

25. Davis, “Strategy of Delayed Comprehension,” 220.

26. Roberts, “Double Entendre in First Isaiah,” 41–43.

they may pursue wine!” Here the prophet manipulates one’s expectations by way of artful syntax that creates a surprise twist at the end of the verse. When one encounters the plural suffix at the end ׁ-*em*, instead of the third person plural verbal ending ׁ-*ū*, one is forced to reconsider the line’s syntax. It is at that moment that one realizes that “wine” cannot be the direct object, like “strong drink” in the previous stich, but rather it is the subject. To wit, the drinkers pursue strong drink in the first stich, but the wine now chases them in the second. It is not until the end of the line that we realize we must translate the second stich as “who tarry late into the evening so that wine pursues them!” Moreover, the verb דָּלַק *dālaq* is polysemous meaning both “pursue” and “inflamm.”²⁷

Authors also can employ a strategy of delayed comprehension across narrative units. Duane Christensen’s example from Jonah is representative.²⁸ As he informs us, Jonah’s proclamation that humans and animals אֶל-יִרְעוּ *al yir’ū* “shall not feed” (Jon 3:7), fits its immediate context of fasting, but it also suggests “shall not be evil,” anticipating the references to turning from evil and the eventual repentance of the Ninevites (Jon 3:8, 3:10, 4:1, 4:2); a connection reinforced by the chiasmic structure of the chapter as a whole. Christensen similarly points to the narrator’s ambiguous comment in Gen 37:2 that Joseph אֶת-אֶחָיו בָּעָשׂוֹן *ro’eh* *’et* *’ehāw baš-šo’n*, a phrase that one can read as “shepherding with his brothers among the flock” or “shepherding his brothers among the flock.” The latter anticipates Joseph’s later role as ruling over his brothers (cf. Ps 78:71) and sustaining them (Gen 45:8–11). From a functional standpoint, both cases of polysemy are referential in nature, whereas from a literary perspective, we might consider them examples of foreshadowing.

A final example, brought to our attention by Baruch Halpern and Richard Friedman, is the prophesy of Jonah to the Ninevites: “forty days more, and Nineveh will be overthrown נִהְפָּקֶת *nehpāket*” (Jon 3:4). Since the story begins with Yahweh commanding Jonah to go to Nineveh and speak against it on account of its evilness, one expects Jonah’s message to refer to the city’s destruction. However, when the people and king proclaim a fast even for the animals, and God repents of the evil he was going to bring upon the city, readers/listeners become aware that נִהְפָּקֶת *nehpāket* in Yahweh’s prophecy does not mean “will be overthrown,” but rather “will be turned around,” as in “repent” (already b. Sanh 89b).²⁹ Yet it is not until we reach the end of Jonah 3 that we realize this.

27. HALOT, s.v. “דָּלַק” I, II.” The polysemy was discussed by Yellin, “Polysemy in the Bible,” 6–7.

28. Christensen, “Anticipatory Paronomasia in Jonah 3:7–8 and Genesis 37:2.”

29. Observed by Baruch Halpern and Richard Elliott Friedman, “Composition and Paronomasia in the Book of Jonah,” *HAR* 4 (1980): 79–92; Jack M. Sasson, *Jonah: A New Translation with Introduction, Commentary, and Interpretation*, AB 24B (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 29.

Inherent in a strategy of delayed comprehension is an element of deception. The author deludes hearers/readers into accepting one interpretation only to destabilize that reading with another. The strategy creates an exegetical loop for interpreters who must rethink the previous reading in the light of a changed context. The process compels contemplation. Depending on the writing system, this contemplation inevitably focuses first on individual signs or words, but naturally extends to larger sections of text. Moreover, the sense of discovery that occurs when one comprehends polysemy instills in the reader/listener a feeling of owning the text, even as it enhances memory.

5.2.4. METAPHOR AND METONYMY

Also fundamental to the creation and use of polysemy and paronomasia are metaphor and metonymy. The study of metonymy and metaphor has undergone significant conceptual changes over the last several decades. For many years, metaphor and metonymy were considered figures of speech that occupy opposite poles in the nonliteral application of language: the former exploiting the similarity between signs and words, the latter underscoring their contiguity. The former was seen as substituting, while the latter was understood as associating. George Lakoff and Mark Turner then proposed that we understand metonymy as entailing ontological mappings within a single conceptual domain, but metaphor as operating across separate conceptual domains.³⁰ More recently, criticism of this approach has focused on the vagueness of what constitutes a domain, which since led Yves Peirsman and Dirk Geeraerts to argue that metonymy constitutes a prototypical category with derived/extended forms.³¹ My interest here is not in explaining polysemy and paronomasia through the lens of various approaches to metaphor and metonymy, but simply to note that, regardless of how one perceives them to operate, we may view many ancient Near Eastern cases of polysemy as metaphoric and/or metonymic in nature.³²

30. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980); George Lakoff and Mark Turner, *More Than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Lakoff, "The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor," in *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. Andrew Ortony, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 202–51.

31. Yves Peirsman and Dirk Geeraerts, "Metonymy as a Prototypical Category," *CL* 17 (2006): 269–316.

32. For a useful collection of essays on the topic of metaphor in biblical studies, see Pierre van Hecke, ed., *Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible*, BETL 187 (Leuven: Peeters, 2005). On the relationship between metaphor and multivalency in Mesopotamian and Ugaritic texts, see Simoneta Ponchia, "Some Reflections on Metaphor, Ambiguity and Literary Tradition," in *Of God(s), Trees, and Scholars: Neo-Assyrian and Related Studies in Honour of Simo Parpola*, ed. Mikko Luuko, Saana Svärd, and Raija Mattila, StudOr 106 (Helsinki: Finnish

One primarily sees this in cases of *double entendres* and riddles, which operate almost entirely within the world of metaphor, and in the polysemous clustering of body parts, which involves both the metaphoric use of idioms and the metonymic association of each member with the whole body. Metonymy also informs the use of parasonance, *notariqon*, and hendiadic paronomasia. Parasonance employs some, but not all, of the consonants that comprise one word in another. *Notariqon* literally creates a single word by combining the initial parts of several words or the sounds of the signs used to write them. Hendiadic paronomasia forms a single concept or action by combining two separate words. Loprieno’s remark concerning the significance of metaphor and metonymy in the production of paronomasia and polysemy in Egyptian texts is equally applicable to the other languages in this study:

while in Western tradition the pun is a figure of ambiguity, in ancient Egypt it belongs to the domain of the metaphor, or perhaps more precisely of metonymy—since it established contiguity within the semantic continuum of (broadly speaking) homophones. One of the main intents of Egyptian word play, therefore, is the scientific classification of the world and its entities.³³

While metaphor and metonymy do not inform all cases of Near Eastern polysemy and paronomasia, they do constitute two fundamental principles by which many forms operate.

5.2.5. CLUSTERING

A number of devices studied here generally involve the phenomenon of clustering. Whether based on the practice of memorizing lexica or not, there is no doubt that the ancient literati often felt compelled to gather like to like, whether sounds, devices, or lexical themes. Indeed, even paronomastic devices like homoeopropheron, homoioteleuton, epanastrophe, and parasonance involve the clustering of similar sounds. Homonymic paronomasia and antanaclasis too rely on mirroring likeness to achieve their effects. Cases of numerical polysemy and numerical paronomasia often appear in pericopes that contain hyperbolic numerical references (e.g., of military troops) or in which the ordinary use of numbers otherwise abounds.³⁴ Polysemy and paronomasia on body parts similarly occur in accounts in which a particular member is central to the text or in which

Oriental Society, 2009), 399–407; Joseph Lam, “Metaphor in the Ugaritic Literary Texts,” *JNES* 78 (2019): 37–57.

33. Loprieno, “Puns and Word Play in Ancient Egyptian,” 13.

34. Biblical texts that feature twins or twinness also contain paronomasia on the number two and the doubling of consonants. See Vermeulen, “Two of a Kind”; Noegel and Nichols, “Seeing Doubles.” On other kinds of clusters, see Noegel, “Shame of Ba‘al.”

bodily features appear unambiguously in other ways. Therefore, strategies of clustering amplify their literary contexts. This suggests that, when one encounters literary contexts in which some objects or themes appear in abundance, it would be prudent to look for polysemy and paronomasia clusters.

5.2.6. RARE WORDS

Another common strategy is the use of rare words and/or orthography. Whether for polysemy or paronomasia, poets often sought uncommon words or forms in order to achieve their desired effect. Certainly this is the case for Egyptian bards, for as The Complaint of Khakheperresonbe (BM 5645, rt. 2–3) informs us, Egyptian texts aim for *ḥn.w ḥmmj ts.w ḥpp.j m mdw.t m3.t tm.t sw3 šwy.t m wḥmm.jt* “unknown phrases, strange verses in a new speech which does not pass, free from repetition.”³⁵ An inscription in the temple of Hathor at Dendera is equally fascinating. It reads: *nb.t p.t ḥnw.t ntr.w nb.w* “Lady of heaven, mistress of all the gods.” Of particular interest are the nouns *nb* “lady” and *nb* “all,” which are both written with the reclining bovine sign  rather than the more common sign  in order to emphasize Hathor’s manifestation as a cow.³⁶

However, the strategy of using rare words and forms is most pronounced among Mesopotamian scribes. Chaim Cohen and Jacob Klein have shown that Akkadian texts exhibit a more frequent use of *hapax legomena* than found in the Hebrew Bible, even though Akkadian texts constitute a much larger corpus.³⁷ The use of rare words in Mesopotamian texts cannot be divorced from the long-lived scribal tradition of creating exhaustive lexical lists, a practice deeply rooted in priestly and divinatory conceptions of secrecy and the guarding of divine knowledge. Cohen and Klein conclude that “the rationale for such massive usage of *hapax legomena* in the lexical lists (including the large percentage of foreign words therein) can only be the scribes’ desire to take pride in and exhibit their vast erudition.”³⁸ Lexical lists embodied scribal knowledge and power and provided the raw materials for literary compositions and commentaries.³⁹

The production of lexical lists at Emar and Ugarit, along with evidence for cuneiform culture further south at Apheq, Ashqelon, Hazor, and Megiddo in the Late Bronze Age, reveal that Mesopotamian educated elites transmitted their traditions well beyond their geographic borders.⁴⁰ Such texts also constitute part of the diplomatic archive at Amarna, Egypt, though Hittite and Babylonian

35. Translation by Parkinson, “Literary Form and the *Tale of the Eloquent Peasant*,” 171, who also discusses the use of *hapax legomena* in the Egyptian *Tale of the Eloquent Peasant*.

36. Richter, *Theology of Hathor of Dendera*, 346–349, 545.

37. See Cohen and Klein, “Akkadian *Hapax Legomena*.”

38. See Cohen and Klein, “Akkadian *Hapax Legomena*,” 105.

39. Frahm, *Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries*, 88–94.

40. Veldhuis, *History of the Cuneiform Lexical Traditions*, 304.

intermediaries likely produced them. It is widely assumed that, after the disruptions that led to the collapse of Bronze Age palace societies, the practice of creating lexical lists ceased in the Northwest Semitic world. As evidence, scholars point out that excavations at Iron Age sites in the Levant have yielded no lexical lists. Nevertheless, the lack of lexical texts may be more apparent than real.

The widespread use of papyrus or wax writing boards as the writing medium of choice virtually ensured that many records would not survive from this time. Witness, for example, the entire Phoenician literary record, which no longer exists, except in fragments recorded in later textual traditions. Glenn Markoe explains:

The legacy of Phoenician as a language has been clouded by the almost complete loss of a literary record. Of the various Phoenician and Punic compositions alluded to by the ancient classical authors, not a single work or even a fragment has survived in its original idiom. An explanation may be sought in the dramatic transformation in writing medium that accompanied the introduction of the cursive alphabetic script. Perishable materials such as wood, ivory, papyrus, and parchment now replaced the durable baked clay medium of the cuneiform tradition. Very few have survived the humid environment of the coastal Levant.⁴¹

This situation also explains the exiguous textual record of ancient Israel. The entire Hebrew Bible represents only a small portion of the Hebrew language in use, and the earliest surviving biblical texts we possess, the texts from Qumran, stand at the end of a thousand-plus year history of textual production in Israel.⁴² It is safe to assume that Israel’s literary output was probably far greater than has survived today. This context might explain the lack of lexical lists.

Moreover, there is some evidence, though it is admittedly circumstantial, for the use of lexicons when creating some literary devices. In particular, it is reasonable to think that word pairs and rare words may have been culled or learned from lists.⁴³ Postulating the existence of lexical lists also might inform a number of the devices that involve clustering, like geminate forms and body parts (see 4.1.8.1).⁴⁴ Even if lexical lists were not transmitted in writing, some form of oral

41. Glenn E. Markoe, *Phoenicians* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 110.

42. See Edward Ullendorf, “Is Biblical Hebrew a Language?,” *BSOAS* 34 (1971): 241–55.

43. Note that the two lexemes for “moth” found in parallelism in Isa 51:8, i.e., סָס *sās* and שָׁשׁ *šš* ‘*šš*’, appear in cognate form in sequence in an Akkadian lexical list. Thus, *sāsu* “moth” follows *ašāšu* “moth” in *ḪAR-ra = ḫubullu* XIV, 268–269, and in two other copies replaces it. See Benno Landsberger, *The Fauna of Ancient Mesopotamia. 2nd part. ḪAR-ra = ḫubullu. Tablet XIV and XVIII*. MSL 8.2 (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1962), 30.

44. Cf. the recent comment by Jeffrey L. Cooley, “Judean Scribalism, Documentary Epistemology, and the Name יִשְׂרָאֵל,” in *The Scaffolding of Our Thoughts: Essays on Assyriology and the History of Science in Honor of Francesca Rochberg*, ed. C. Jay Crisostomo et al., AMD 13 (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 236, about the appellative paronomasia

thesaurus likely was in use.⁴⁵ The statement that Solomon’s wisdom included the knowledge of all botanical life, near and far, as well as animals, birds, and fish, in addition to three thousand proverbs and one thousand and five songs (1 Kgs 5:12–13), suggests that some forms of wisdom were embodied in lists. While obviously one cannot prove this at present, I aver that the use of word pairs, rare words, and some clustering devices in the service of polysemy and paronomasia likely have their origins in list-making traditions.⁴⁶

5.2.7. PHONEMES AND MORPHEMES: COUNTED AND UNCOUNTED

A close examination of each type of polysemy and paronomasia reveals that the literati entertained different strategies when it came to which features of their language were poetically meaningful to each device. This is particularly noticeable in consonantal texts, especially Hebrew and Aramaic, in which various linguistic features, such as the *waw*-copula, the definite article, and verbal and nominal affixes, do not count in the construction of some devices. Proverbs 1:33 demonstrates this well: *רָטַח וְשָׁנָן מִפְּחָד רָטַח לִי יִשְׁכֹּן בְּטָח וְשָׁמַע* *we-šōmēa’ lī yiškān beṭaḥ we-ša’ānan mip-paḥaḏ rā’āh* “he who obeys me shall dwell securely, and shall be quiet without fear of evil.” Note how the homoeopropheron between *וְשָׁמַע* *we-šōmēa’*, *יִשְׁכֹּן* *yiškān*, and *וְשָׁנָן* *we-ša’ānan* does not take into account the *waw*-

informing the name Israel that the angel provides Jacob in Gen 32: “The interpretation of the moniker is not literal, in the sense the interpretation does not offer exclusively valid equivalencies for each of the name’s components. It should, rather, be qualified as a process of synonymous interpretation, the kind we see in Mesopotamian word lists like *maluku-šarru*. That is to say, the scribe chooses to identify the components of the name from a spectrum of possible equivalents, none of which are intrinsically prioritized.”

45. On Mesopotamian school traditions of the Late Bronze Age as the ultimate influence on Israelite scribes, see William M. Schniedewind, *The Finger of the Scribe: The Beginnings of Scribal Education and How It Shaped the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

46. This tradition was continued into later times when the Masoretes marked and collected the Bible’s *hapax legomena*, a practice that abetted their poetic needs, as observed by Gérard E. Weil, “Prolegomenon: Nehardea, Sura, Tiberias—From Rab Hamnuna’s Masorah to the Masorah Magna,” in *The Massorah Magna: Part One, Massoretic Dictionary or the Massorah in Alphabetical Order*, ed. S. Frensdorff (New York: Ktav, 1968), xxi: “I think I can affirm that the presentation of these rare or peculiar forms and the systematic search for them found their *raison d’être* in the service of a budding liturgical poetry ... at the period when the art of liturgical composition was beginning to develop, the Hebrew language had become substantially a fixed liturgical language, and evolved no further in its classical form. The language of the Bible was limited to the subjects treated in it, and the vocabulary at the sacred poets’ disposition was necessarily scanty. For want of a rich and sacred vocabulary, the liturgical poets seized upon rare forms and utilized them freely, on this base the art of liturgical poetry was built.”

copula attached to the first verb (שָׁמַע *šāma* ') and the noun (שָׂאֲנָן *ša'ānan*), or the verbal prefix of the second verb (שָׁכַן *šākan*), because only the trilateral roots are meaningful to make the repetition of the first consonant *šin* (ש) effective. While such features are morphemically meaningful, they are poetically insignificant.

See similarly Prov 5:3: נִפְתַּ תִּטְּפֹנָה שִׁפְתֵּי זָרָה *nōpēt tiṭṭōpnāh šipṭē zārāh* "for the lips of a foreign woman drip honey." Homoioteleuton obtains between נִפְתַּ *nōpēt* and שִׁפְתֵּי *šipṭē* and anagrammatic paronomasia occurs between נִפְתַּ *nōpēt* and תִּטְּפֹנָה *tiṭṭōpnāh*. Note, however, that the *yod* (י) marking the construct state of שִׁפְתֵּי *šipṭē(y)* "lips of" is not counted as the final consonant contributing to homoioteleuton, because it serves as a vowel marker. Moreover, the phrase נִפְתַּ תִּטְּפֹנָה *nōpēt tiṭṭōpnāh* "honey drips" also constitutes parasonance, if we consider the verbal affix as required by grammar and not counted toward the device; for then the roots involved are נפת *n-p-t* and נטף *n-t-p*.⁴⁷

Isaiah's prophecy concerning the Valley of Vision also demonstrates this: וְהַפְּרָשִׁים שֶׁתָּוּ שְׂתוּ הַשְּׁעָרָה *wə-hap-pārāšīm šōṭ šātū haš-šā' rāh* "and the horsemen set themselves in array at the gate" (Isa 22:7).⁴⁸ Homoeopropheron between the infinitive absolute construction שֶׁתָּוּ שְׂתוּ *šōṭ šātū* "set themselves in array" and הַשְּׁעָרָה *haš-šā' rāh* "the gate" does not count the definite article. In addition, parasonance between הַפְּרָשִׁים *hap-pārāšīm* "the horsemen" and הַשְּׁעָרָה *haš-šā' rāh* "the gate" disregards the nominal plural ending ים *-īm*.

There is also the case of homoioteleuton in the description of Nebuchadnezzar's transformation: וְטַפְרוֹהִי כְצִפְרִין *wə-ṭiprōhī kə-šippārīn* "and his nails (became) like birds' (talons)" (Dan 4:30). Note how neither the copula וְ *wə*, masculine suffix הִי *dhī*, preposition כְּ *kə*, nor the masculine plural ending ין *īn* count towards the device.

Three more examples of anagrammatic paronomasia, noted long ago by Samuel Waldburg,⁴⁹ will suffice to show that only the triconsonantal roots matter for some devices: the phrase בְּחֶרֶב בְּחַיִּיךְם *ba-herēb baḥūrēkem* "(I killed) with the sword your young men" in Amos 4:10, the words מָצָאתִי *māšā' ītī* "I have found" and תְּאַמְּצֵנּוּ *tə'amṣennū* "will strengthen them" in Ps 89:21–22, and בְּקֶרֶב *bə-qereb* "inside" and לְבֹקְרִים *lab-bəqārīm* "mornings" in Ps 101:7–8. The phrase in Amos ignores the plural nominal suffix כֶּם *kem*. The two verbs in Ps 89 do not count the verbal affixes תִּי *ītī* and תְּ *tə*, and pronominal suffix נוּ *nnū*. In Ps 101, the anagram is achieved despite the prepositions ב *b* and ל *l*, and nominal plural ending ים *īm*.

Periodically in this study I have emphasized the importance of recognizing

47. Thus, contrary Arthur Keefer, "Sound Patterns as Motivation for Rare Words in Proverbs 1–9," *JNSL* 43 (2017): 38, who sees the passage as a challenge to the taxonomy of known devices. Indeed, anagrammatic paronomasia and/or parasonance describes the device.

48. Glück, "Assonance in Ancient Hebrew Poetry," 80, treats this passage as a case of assonance.

49. Waldburg, *Methods of (Hermeneutical) Transformations*, article 2, section 12.

that the ancients' understanding of etymology is not the equivalent of ours and that poets often sacrificed correct grammar to meet poetical needs. Yet, the examples above also reveal a general appreciation for the importance of the consonantal root structure underlying their grammar. Hallo similarly has noticed that when Israelite authors employ pejorative etymological paronomasia to foreign names, they do so always on the non-theophoric parts, suggesting that they were well aware of the proper etymologies of the names.⁵⁰ Whether poets elected in some cases to create false etymologies by connecting unrelated roots or in others to disregard morphemes in favor of root structures, depends entirely on the device they chose to employ. Indeed, some other devices do not disregard these morphemic features, but rely upon them. For instance, geminate parallels and clusters often take advantage of verbal affixes and nominal suffixes when they contribute to the doubling of sounds found in the root of a word.⁵¹ This indicates that different devices had different rules and expectations or could be manipulated by poets for their own needs. In some cases, such as those devices that disregard the copula and definite article, it might suggest that the device originated from a language that does not possess such features. Alternatively, it might suggest that the tradents had an understanding of free versus bound morphemes, even if they did not preserve terms for such. At the very least, the evidence again demonstrates the flexibility of grammar in the service of poetics.

One also must acknowledge that some of the polysemous devices known to the ancients could not have been caught when the text was read aloud unless they involved homophony. Consider, for example, the many learned polysemous readings of Marduk's fifty names in *Enuma Elish*, for which the author recommends contemplation and instruction: "they (the names) should be remembered; a leading figure should expound them, the wise and learned should confer about them" (7.145–146). In fact, any pause and meaningful analysis of the names would frustrate a smooth recitation of the text. Thus, we must envision the learned discourse on erudite readings and cases of visual polysemy as taking place in educational circles, where masters could share their commentaries and transmit their hidden wisdom to pupils. In effect, the true depth of knowledge contained in polysemes had to be glossed over during recitation.⁵²

5.2.8. RECITATION, POLYSEMY, AND AUTHORITY

Above, and in chapter 2, I noted that the smooth recitation of ancient texts precluded options for pausing and discussing any polysemous devices they might

50. Hallo, "Scurrilous Etymologies," 773.

51. Even particles and suffix formations could serve as tools of the craft in ancient Israel. See Michael B. Shepherd, "Is It 'To Him' or Is It 'Not'? Intentional Variation between וְל and אֲל in the Hebrew Bible," *JSOT* 39 (2014): 121–37.

52. The same can be said of some Ugaritic texts. See Noegel, "Kirtu's Allusive Dream."

contain, and that the very presence of such devices strongly suggests the existence of oral traditions. Alternative readings must have been explicated in the scribal academies, Houses of Life, and discipleship societies. In much the same way that we teach Akkadian, Egyptian, Ugaritic, or Hebrew texts today, rare words, grammatical curiosities, and other textual devices would have provided teaching moments for transmitting the deeper aspects of ancient Near Eastern learning. In essence, we may consider every text that contains polysemy as two overlapping texts: one as an object of study and another as an object of recitation.⁵³ The former was an erudite matter between masters and pupils, and sometimes committed to commentaries.⁵⁴ The latter constituted an authoritative interpretation of its ambiguities, one informed by the ideology of scholarly elites. Any dissonance between the two texts (unless homophony is involved) naturally points to a device whose function is meaningful primarily for the learned, for if it could not be espied and expounded during recitation, then its purpose must lie beyond the literary and rhetorical.

5.3. FILLING THE GAPS

While the foregoing conclusions are preliminary and highlight a few areas where scholars might look for promising research directions, a number of desiderata strike me as particularly critical to the field. I offer them below.

5.3.1. COMPREHENSIVE FOCUSED STUDIES

Foremost among the immediate needs are exhaustive studies on all topics related to the phenomena of polysemy and paronomasia in ancient Near Eastern texts. Most texts, literary and otherwise (including the biblical books), have not been mined for their use of any one device, and very few studies exist of individual devices in any one language. Thus, the field lacks comprehensive data. Even relatively straightforward studies such as homoeopropheron in Job, or homoioteleuton in the Ugaritic texts, anastrophe in the Epic of Gilgamesh, or geminate clustering in the monumental inscriptions of Ramesses III, just to name a random few, would provide useful information for assessing issues of preference and distribution.⁵⁵ Alternatively, one could select a particular text and examine it for each of the devices listed in the comparative taxonomy offered here. Much work remains.

53. See Noegel, “Kirtu’s Allusive Dream.”

54. Though evidence for oral traditions exists in Mesopotamia from very early times, commentaries as a genre do not appear until the late second millennium BCE. On the various kinds of commentaries and their relationship to oral traditions, see Frahm, *Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries*.

55. A welcome recent exception is that of Richter, *Theology of Hathor of Dendera*.

5.3.2. DISTRIBUTION OF PHONEMES

It also would be useful to the field to look for patterns in the specific phonemes used in each paronomastic device.⁵⁶ The importance of this is perhaps most obvious in paronomasia that has an onomatopoeic function. In chapter 3, I showed how some Akkadian texts employed sibilants to mimic the sounds of drinking and kissing, whereas in Egyptian, the same sounds evoked the sound of the wind. In Hebrew, sibilants imitated the hissing of snakes. Isaiah resounded the tools of the blacksmith by hammering the sounds /t, t̥/, /h/, and /k/ again and again. Elsewhere the prophet characterizes the mutterings of necromancers as birds' chirping by repeating the emphatic affricate /s/ (Isa 8:19). Yet this is just a starting point. One might ask also whether some phonemes are preferred when rendering paronomasia in certain genres like laments, prayers, or love songs. One also could examine whether particular paronomastic devices show a preference for certain phonemes, or if certain phonemes are shared among various devices.⁵⁷ There certainly is evidence that some paronomastic relationships were desired enough to be repeated over a long period of time. We have seen how Sargon and his son Sennacherib both took advantage of the homonymic paronomasia between *kiššatu* "universe" and *kiššūtu* "strength" (4.2.6). Egyptian bards appear to have enjoyed using the sign *ph* "end" for paronomastic and polysemous ends (3.1, 3.3, 4.1.2). Several Egyptian texts also reveal an interest in marking poetic stanzas with numerical paronomasia (4.2.7). Some paronomastic preferences appear in biblical texts as well. Such is the case for the expression *פַּחַד וְפָחַת וְפָחַת* *pahad wā-ṭāḥaṭ wā-ṭāḥ* "terror, pit, and a snare," which occurs in Isa 24:17, Jer 48:43, and in abbreviated form as *פַּחַד וְפָחַת* *pahad wā-ṭāḥaṭ* in Lam 3:47. One also finds numerous cases of paronomasia between the roots מִשַּׁל *m-š-l* "rule" and מִשַּׁל *m-š-l* "parable,"⁵⁸ the roots בֹּשַׁם *b-w-š* "shame," יָבֵשׁ *y-b-š* "wither," and לָבַשׁ *l-b-š* "clothe,"⁵⁹ and between the roots שׁוּב *š-w-ḥ* "turn, return," יָשַׁב *y-š-ḥ* "sit, dwell," and שָׁבַח *š-b-h* "take captive."⁶⁰ Other common cases involve the use of גִּיד *g-w-r*

56. Julia Puglisi, a PhD candidate at Harvard University, has informed me that she is employing computer programming to ascertain the existence of various paronomastic patterns in some Egyptian texts. Such work is a desideratum.

57. Eyre, "Performance of the Peasant," 16, observes the need for similar studies in Egyptian.

58. See, e.g., Joel 2:17 as discussed by Yellin, "Polysemy in the Bible," 2; Yellin, *Pesher to Habakkuk* (1QpHab XIII, 9) discussed above (3.13.3); also Isa 14:4–5, 14:10.

59. See, e.g., Johanna Stiebert, *The Construction of Shame in the Hebrew Bible: The Prophetic Contribution* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 126–27; Noegel, "Shame of Ba'al."

60. See, e.g., Hos 12:7–10 (see 4.2.9), the Tale of Kirtu, the Mesha stela (see 3.1), and Porten, "Root Pair שׁוּב–יָשַׁב in Jeremiah," 381, who also notes the same paronomasia in the Aramaic Sefire inscription.

for both “dwell” and “fear,”⁶¹ or גלה *g-l-h* for “reveal” and “exile,” sometimes in a paronomastic relationship with גיל *g-y-l* “rejoice.”⁶² Greater attention to such patterns might yield insights into ancient conceptions of sound and language.

5.3.3. MICRO AND MACRO CONSIDERATIONS

Future researchers also should consider whether the polysemous or paronomastic features they examine obtain on more than one level. I have shown how some devices operate at the level of signs, lexica, sentences, or even narratives, depending on the writing system, but it is well-recognized that many other kinds of devices and strategies found in ancient Near Eastern texts can occur on both micro and macro levels. Ambiguity, as we have seen, was fundamental to many of the devices. Yet in Sumerian, it was a generative force in the production of poetry, as Vanstiphout notes: it “was recognized and consciously used as a technical tool or even as a subject for poetic language.”⁶³ Repetition and variation, parallelism, and chiasmus can occur within and between lines, but also as part of larger narrative programs.⁶⁴ Lists of ten that highlight the importance of the seventh and tenth items also can inform compositional structures.⁶⁵ Authors can

61. Davis, “Strategy of Delayed Comprehension,” 218–19; Landy, *Hosea*, 128.

62. Landy, *Hosea*, 128.

63. See H. L. J. Vanstiphout, “Ambiguity as a Generative Force in Sumerian Literature,” in Vogelzang and Vanstiphout, *Mesopotamian Poetic Language*, 155–66.

64. The narrative reflection of chiasmus is called a “ring structure” (also called “envelope structure”). See Gershon Brin and Yair Hoffman, “The Use of Chiasmus in the Bible” [Hebrew], in *Moshe Zaidel Jubilee Volume: Studies in Biblical Research*, ed. E. Elinor et al. (Jerusalem: Israel Society for Biblical Research, 1962), 280–88; John S. Kselman, “Psalm 72: Some Observations on Structure,” *BASOR* 220 (1975): 77–81; Jonah Fraenkel, “Chiasmus in Talmudic-Aggadic Narrative,” in *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis*, ed. John W. Welch (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981), 183–97; Murray H. Lichtenstein, “Chiasm and Symmetry in Proverbs 31,” *CBQ* 44 (1982): 202–11; Robert H. O’Connell, “Isaiah XIV 4b–23: Ironic Reversal through Concentric Structure and Mythic Allusion,” *VT* 38 (1988): 407–18; Michael G. Hasel, “Israel in the Merneptah Stela,” *BASOR* 296 (1994): 45–61; Marian Broida, “Closure in Samson,” *JHS* 10 (2012): 2–34; Gregory T. K. Wong, “Psalm 73 as Ring Composition,” *Bib* 97 (2016): 16–40.

65. Compare the observations of Sasson above (4.2.9.1) with regard to the ten word line in Gen 6:9 that starts and ends with the name Noah, and which ends with consonants that provide a palindromic relationship between the names Noah and Enoch. This chapter also contains a literary structure that highlights the seventh and tenth names in the list, i.e., Enoch and Noah. On the seventh and tenth structure in Gen 6, see Jack M. Sasson, “A Genealogical ‘Convention’ in Biblical Chronography?,” *ZAW* 90 (1978): 171–85. For the structure elsewhere, see Rendsburg, “Notes on Genesis XV”; Scott B. Noegel, “The Significance of the Seventh Plague,” *Bib* 76 (1995): 532–39; Jonathan Grossman, “The Structural Paradigm of the Ten Plagues Narrative and the Hardening of Pharaoh’s Heart,” *VT* 64 (2014): 588–610.

demonstrate *lex talionis* on the lexical level or over the course of an entire story,⁶⁶ and antanaclasses can occur in Akkadian on the sign level, but Hebrew poets sustain it through variations over entire narratives. Polysemy too can take place on the sign and lexical levels and over several lines as polysemy clusters. Multidirectional polysemy has a macro counterpart in what Watson has called the pivot-pattern,⁶⁷ and on a macro level we find it operating as “narrative ambiguity.”⁶⁸ Strategies that involve deception obtain on the lexical and line level, but also across narratives.⁶⁹ As research continues on these devices, I aver that it will be useful to consider whether they obtain on multiple levels.⁷⁰

5.3.4. RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN DEVICES

Another promising avenue for research is to determine whether there exist formal relationships between the various polysemous and paronomastic devices, and between them and other literary devices. For instance, Kselman has shown that chiasmus sometimes integrates cases of paronomasia to strengthen the parallel.⁷¹ Such is the case in Esau’s statement about Jacob in Gen 27:36:

66. Noegel, “Drinking Feasts and Deceptive Feats,” 163–80.

67. Wilfred G. E. Watson, “The Pivot Pattern in Hebrew, Ugaritic, and Akkadian Poetry,” *ZAW* 68 (1976): 239–53; more recently described by Katharine Dell and Tova Forti, “Janus Sayings: A Linking Device in Qoheleth’s Discourse,” *ZAW* 128 (2016): 115–28, unfortunately, without reference to Watson’s work.

68. See, e.g., Yellin, “Polysemy in the Bible”; Robert Gordis, “Rhetorical Usages in the Sacred Writings,” 253–67; Paran, “Double Meanings in the Bible”; S. Molen, “The Identity of Jacob’s Assailant: Wrestling with Ambiguity in Gen 32:23–32,” *Shofar* 11 (1993): 16–29; Allen Mark Darnov, *Equivocal Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (PhD diss., Jewish Theological Seminary, 2006); Grossman, *Ambiguity in the Biblical Narrative and Its Contribution to the Literary Formation*; Grossman, “Use of Ambiguity in Biblical Narratives of Deception and Deceit,” 483–515; Eric Ortlund, “Intentional Ambiguity in Old Testament and Ugaritic Descriptions of Divine Conflict,” *UF* 38 (2007): 543–56; Ingram, “Riddle of Qohelet and Qohelet the Riddler”; Gregory D. Cook, “Naqia and Nineveh in Nahum: Ambiguity and the Prostitute Queen,” *JBL* 136 (2017): 895–904.

69. On ambiguity and deception, Scott B. Noegel, “Sex, Sticks, and the Trickster in Gen. 30:31–43,” *JANES* 25 (1997): 7–17; Noegel, “Drinking Feasts and Deceptive Feats”; Grossman, “Use of Ambiguity in Biblical Narratives of Deception and Deceit.”

70. I also wonder whether there might be a conceptual overlap between the use of contronyms and merisms.

71. Kselman, “Semantic-Sonant Chiasmus in Biblical Poetry.” See also his “A Note on Gen 7:11,” *CBQ* 35 (1973): 491–93, and his “Psalm 72.” Watson, *Traditional Techniques in Classical Hebrew Verse*, 326, 389–91, also finds a relationship between chiasm and “quasi-acrostics.”

וַיַּעֲקֹבֵנִי זֶה פַּעַמַּיִם
אֶת־בְּרִיתִי לָקַח
וְהִנֵּה עֲתָה לָקַח בְּרִיתִי

way-ya 'qəḥēnī zeh pā 'āmayīm
'et bəḵōrāṭī lāqāḥ
wə-hinnēh 'attāh lāqāḥ birkāṭī

He has deceived me these two times:
he took away my birthright,
and behold, now he has taken away my blessing.

Here בְּרִיתִי *bəḵōrāṭī* “my birthright” paronomastically (anagrammatically) and chiasmatically matches בְּרִיתִי *birkāṭī* “my blessing” in the next stich. See similarly Ps 147:15:

הַשִּׁלַּח אֶמְרָתוֹ אֶרֶץ
עַד־מְהֵרָה יָרוּץ דְּבָרוֹ

haš-šōlēaḥ 'imrāṭō 'āreṣ
'ad məhērāh yārūṣ dəḥārō

He sends out his commandment upon earth,
his word runs swiftly.

Abetting the chiasmus here is homoioteleuton between אֶרֶץ *'āreṣ* “earth” in the first stich and יָרוּץ *yārūṣ* “runs” in the second.

Antanaclasis also can form an inclusio. Thus, in Hos 11:5, the verb שׁוּב *šūb* means “return” at the start of the first stich, and “repent” at the end of the second, forming a linguistic bookend: “No! They return [שׁוּב *yāšūb*] to the land of Egypt, and Assyria is their king, because they refuse to repent [לָשׁוּב *lā-šūb*].”⁷²

Guglielmi has noted the close relationship in Egyptian texts between numerical paronomasia and structural devices like inclusio and ring structures. As a tool of compositional order, he relates it to the acrostics of other ancient Near Eastern texts.⁷³ The numbering of poetic stanzas (*hw.t* lit. “house”) and the paronomastic reflection upon the numbers does resemble the consonantal acrostics that paronomastically resound the name of the consonant and its sound in the line that follows. Indeed, it is useful to recall that when we read consonantal acrostics vertically, we may read them numerically or alphabetically, whereas when we read them horizontally, we can do so only alphabetically.

72. One finds several such inclusios in Deutero-Isaiah.

73. Guglielmi, “Wortspiel,” col. 1289.

Moreover, some passages testify to the virtuosity of poets who employ multiple devices simultaneously. Such is the case with Prov 30:33: **כִּי מִיץ הָלֵב יוֹצִיא הֶמָּה וּמִיץ אֶפְסִים יוֹצִיא רִיב** *kī mīṣ hālāḇ yōṣī' hem'āh ū-mīṣ 'ap yōṣī' dām ū-mīṣ 'appayīm yōṣī' rīb* “for the churning of milk brings forth curd, and the wringing of the nose brings forth blood, and (so) the forcing of wrath brings forth strife.”⁷⁴ Antanacsis obtains in the three-fold use of **מִיץ** *mīṣ*, which means “churn” in the first case, “wring” in the second, and “force, oppress” in the last (cf. **הָמָץ** *ham-mēṣ* in Isa 16:4). The repetition of **מִיץ** *mīṣ* also displays parasonance with the three-fold use of the verb **יוֹצִיא** *yōṣī'* “bring forth.” When used with blood, the repeated sounds /m/ and /ṣ/ recall the verb **מָצָה** *māṣāh* “drain (blood)” (cf. Lev 1:15, 5:9). The passage’s focus on the “source” of anger, also suggests that one hear **מוֹצָא** *mōṣā* “source.” More antanacsis occurs between **אֶף** *ap* “nose” and **אֶפְסִים** *appayīm* “anger” (lit. “noses”)—also a clever use of a body part. The noun **דָּם** *dām* means both “blood” and “homicide.” In addition, the noun **הֶמָּה** *hem'āh* “curd” suggests **הָמָה** *hamāh* “anger” (Dan 3:13, 3:19 [**הֶמָּה** *hemā*]).⁷⁵ The result is a veritable potpourri of polysemy and paronomasia.

Some of the polysemous devices examined in this book depend upon parallelism to be effective. Others rely on repetition. Still others are achieved through the phenomenon of clustering.⁷⁶ It remains to be seen whether the ancient literati employed other devices in tandem, and if so, to what end.

5.3.5. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AURAL AND VISUAL REGISTERS

Most previous studies on polysemy and paronomasia in ancient texts typically focus only on their aural aspects and the effects they have on listeners. Yet, most aural devices simultaneously operate visually. Conversely, many visual devices also operate aurally. In some, the relationship between the aural and visual registers is especially close. Acrostics, for example, are perhaps more immediately apparent visually than aurally, especially in consonantal scripts and when read from a scroll. Some cases of paronomasia are as striking to the eye as they are to the ear. Akkadian texts can exploit the polysemy of signs to convey information that is not accessible when recited. Egyptian texts, too, often exploit the use of determinatives, which communicate information visually, but are not read aloud.

It is important to recognize that the aural and visual registers are not in competition in ancient texts, but rather exist in a symbiotic relationship. Demonstrating this well are geminate clusters. The geminate forms do not always

74. See Weiser, “Wordplay in the Book of Proverbs,” 147.

75. Some of these observations belong to Schökel, *Manual of Hebrew Poetics*, 29.

76. On the cluster and its relationship to “wordplay,” chiasmus, and half-line (internal) parallelism in Akkadian, Ugaritic, and Hebrew, see Watson, *Traditional Techniques in Classical Hebrew Verse*, 24, 113–26.

occur in perfect parallelism, but rather spice the text periodically in both nominal and verbal forms. The repetition of forms with doubled consonants achieves a balanced sonic effect that works within the confines of parallelism without being held to its conventions.

One also sees the symbiotic relationship between the aural and visual in the tablets and scrolls on which we find the texts. In most cases, poetic texts are not written stichometrically, as one might see them printed in modern editions, but in linear sequence without punctuation. Nevertheless, some devices are most visually apparent on the tablet and scroll when *not* laid out stichometrically. Therefore, when studying Near Eastern texts one must keep in mind that the ancients composed them with *both* the aural and visual in mind.

5.3.6. MUSICAL CONNECTIONS

A number of the devices appear to accentuate or emphasize rhythmic aspects of the texts in which they appear, and consequently, it is reasonable to think that the musical accompaniment might have influenced their use. Especially relevant here is the use of homoeopropheron, homoioteleuton, rhyme, and geminate parallels and clusters. Insofar as the devices evince the influence of Mesopotamian or Egyptian scribal culture in the Levant, they also may reveal the prestige of Mesopotamian and Egyptian musical tastes.

5.3.7. RENDERING BIBLICAL HEBREW POLYSEMY AND PARONOMASIA IN THE TEXTUAL WITNESSES

Another topic that requires attention is the ways in which the Bible’s textual witnesses (LXX, Targumim, Vulgate, and Peshitta) handle cases of Hebrew polysemy and paronomasia.⁷⁷ Rendering literary devices of any text into another language is extremely difficult. One only can approximate paronomasia by using consonants with similar sounds in the target language (if they exist!) or by imitating the paronomasia with different consonants, but translating polysemy is virtually impossible unless one resorts to epexegetis (i.e., adding lines to capture the multiple meanings of a polyseme).⁷⁸ We have seen this in chapter 4 with the Akkadian translations of Marduk’s polysemous Sumerian names. Of course,

77. Nearly fifty years ago Mathias Delcor, “Homonymie et interprétation de l’Ancien Testament,” *JSS* 43 (1973): 40–54, drew our attention to the way that the witnesses treat homonyms, though his eye was trained upon the potential methodological problems they posed for exegesis.

78. In an important, but largely neglected study, Charles Fritsch, “Homophony in the Septuagint,” in *Proceedings of the VIth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1977), 115–20, shows that the LXX attempts to render some Hebrew terms with similar sounding Greek words.

translating a text into a related language (e.g., Hebrew to Aramaic) offers more opportunities to capture such devices, because the languages possess similar phonetic inventories and cognate vocabulary, but even then, difficulties exist. See, for example, the contronym faithfully rendered into Aramaic in the previous chapter (4.1.1). Though scholars have begun to examine the witnesses for what they can tell us about translation technique,⁷⁹ only a few studies pay attention to the treatment of Hebrew literary devices, and they focus almost entirely on the LXX.⁸⁰

79. See Emanuel Tov, "The Septuagint," in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Martin Jan Mulder (Assen: Royal Van Gorcum; Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1988), 161–88; Tov, *The Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research*, 3rd ed. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015); Isaac L. Seeligmann, "Problems and Perspectives in Modern Septuagint Research," *Textus* 15 (1990): 169–232; Staffan Olofsson, *God Is My Rock: A Study of Translation Technique and Theological Exegesis in the Septuagint*, CBOT 31 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1990); Olofsson, *The LXX Version: A Guide to the Translation Technique of the Septuagint*, CBOT 30 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1990); Joachim Schaper, *Eschatology in the Greek Psalter*, WUNT 2/76 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 69–70, 91. Less work has been done with regard to translation technique in the Syriac and Latin traditions.

80. These have come from the scholars focused entirely on the LXX. See Emanuel Tov, "Loan-Words, Homophony, and Transliteration in the Septuagint," *Bib* 60 (1979): 216–36; Jan de Waard, "'Homophony' in the Septuagint," *Bib* 62 (1981): 551–61; Hans Ausloos, "LXX's Rendering of Hebrew Proper Names and the Characterization of the Translation Technique of the Book of Judges," in *Scripture in Transition: Essays on Septuagint, Hebrew Bible, and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honour of Raija Sollamo*, ed. Anssi Voitila and Jutta Jokiranta, JSJSup 126 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 53–71; W. Edward Glenny, *Finding Meaning in the Text: Translation Technique and Theology in the Septuagint of Amos*, VTS 126 (Leiden: Brill, 2009); Hans Ausloos, "Judges 3:12–30: An Analysis of the Greek Rendering of Hebrew Wordplay," in *Text-Critical and Hermeneutical Studies in the Septuagint*, ed. Johann Cook and Hermann-Josef Stipp, VTSup 157 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 53–68; Ausloos, "The Septuagint's Rendering of Hebrew Toponyms as an Indication of the Translation Technique of the Book of Numbers," in *Textual Criticism and Dead Sea Scrolls Studies in Honour of Julio Trebolle Barrera. Florilegium Complutense*, ed. Andrés Piquer Otero and Pablo A. Torijano Morales, JSJSup 158 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 35–50; Ausloos, Bénédicte Lemmelijn, and Valérie Kabergs, "The Study of Aetiological Wordplay as a Content-Related Criterion in the Characterisation of LXX Translation Technique," in *Die Septuaginta: Entstehung, Sprache, Geschichte*, ed. Siegfried Kreuzer, Martin Meiser, and Marcus Sigismund, WUNT 286 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 273–94; Ausloos and Lemmelijn, "Etymological Translations in the Septuagint," in *Die Sprache der Septuaginta*, ed. Eberhard Bons and Jan Joosten, HSep 3 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlaghaus, 2016), 193–201; Marieke Dhont, "A Two-Faced Translation? The Greek Rendering of Hebrew Janus Parallelism in Job," *ZAW* 126 (2014): 111–16; Dhont, "Double Translations in Old Greek Job," in *Die Septuaginta–Orte und Intentionen 5. Internationale Fachtagung veranstaltet von Septuaginta Deutsch (LXX.D)*, Wuppertal 24.–27. Juli 2014, ed. Siegfried Kreuzer, Martin Meiser, and Marcus Sigismund (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck,

Nevertheless, preliminary research on the topic is promising. In a previous publication, I showed that the various witnesses sometimes capture the polysemy of the Hebrew text.⁸¹ See, for instance, Yahweh’s rhetorical question from the whirlwind (Job 39:19–20):

Do you give the horse its strength?
Do you clothe his neck with רַעְמָה *ra ‘māh*?
Do you make him quiver like locusts, his majestic snorting (spreading) terror?

On the one hand, the noun רַעְמָה *ra ‘māh* suggests the meaning “thunder,” or by expansion “terror.” On the other, the form appears to be the Hebrew equivalent of the Arabic رَعَم *ra‘im* “mane.”⁸² The former meaning anticipates the quivering in the next stich (cf. Isa 29:6, Ps 77:19), whereas the latter follows the horse in the previous line—another case of multidirectional polysemy. The Targum translates with תוּקְפָא *tūqṣā*, both “strength” and “anger (terror?),” while the Vulgate renders *ad sensum* with *hinntum* “neighing.” However, the Syriac tries to capture both senses of the Hebrew by taking a compromise approach with זִנָּה *zyn* “terrifying clothing,” that is, “armor.” The LXX is especially clever in its use of φόβον “terror,” for it paronomastically evokes φοβήν “mane.”

Natalio Marcos has observed a similar effort by the LXX translators to reflect paronomastic passages in Judges. For example, the Old Greek reproduces the sonority of חִידָה נָא לְכֶם *‘ahūdāh nā’ lākem hīdāh* “let me put a riddle to you” with προβαλῶ ὑμῖν πρόβλημα (Judg 14:12).⁸³ He also points out that, though

2016), 475–90; Dhont, “Stylistic Features in OG Job: An Example, Job 5:6–7,” *JNSL* 42 (2016): 51–60; Dhont, “Literary Features in the First Cycle of Speeches in LXX Job,” in *XV Congress of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies*, ed. Wolfgang Kraus, Michaël van der Meer, and Martin Meiser, SCS 64 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 357–74; Valérie Kabergs, *Creativiteit in het spel? De Griekse weergave van expliciet Hebreeuws woordspel op basis van eigennamen in de Pentateuch en Twaalf Profeten* (PhD diss., Leuven, 2015); Elizabeth Backfish, “Transformation in Translation: An Examination of the Septuagint Rendering of Hebrew Wordplay in the Fourth Book of the Psalter,” *JBL* 137 (2018): 71–86; Backfish, *Hebrew Wordplay and Septuagint Translation Technique in the Fourth Book of the Psalter*, LHBOTS 682 (London: T&T Clark, 2019). On the Vulgate, see Matthew A. Kraus, *Jewish, Christian, and Classical Exegetical Traditions in Jerome’s Translation of the Book of Exodus: Translation Technique and the Vulgate* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

81. See Scott B. Noegel, “Wordplay and Translation Technique in the Septuagint of Job,” *AuOr* 14 (1995): 33–44.

82. See Marvin H. Pope, *Job* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973), 311; Robert Gordis, *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation and Special Studies* (New York, NY: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1978), 461; *HALOT*, s.v. “רַעְמָה.”

83. Natalio Fernández Marcos, “The Septuagint Reading of the Samson Cycle,” in *Samson: Hero or Fool?*, Erik Eynikel and Tobias Nicklas (Leiden: Brill 2014), 90–93.

the Old Greek does not render the repetition of consonants in מֵהָאֵל מַאֲכָל *mē-hā-’ōkēl yāšā’ ma’ākāl* “out of the eater, something to eat,” *Codex Vaticanus* is more successful. It translates: τί βρωτὸν ἐξέσθαι ἐκ βιβρώσκοντος (Judg 14:14).

Recently, Elizabeth Backfish observed a number of cases in the Psalms in which the LXX translator was able to mimic the presence of paronomasia in the Hebrew text, though with different consonants in the Greek. For example, Ps 91:7 reads: יִפֹּל מִצִּדְּךָ יֶלֶד *yippōl mišsidkā ’elap̄* “a thousand will fall from your side.” The LXX responds in kind to the repeated פ /p/ and ל /l/ by translating “side” with κλίτους and “one thousand” with χιλίας.⁸⁴ See also the homoeopropheron created by the repeated פ /f/ and פ /p/ in Ps 104:12: “The birds (הַיּוֹן *ōp̄*) of heaven dwell with them, from among the foilage (מִן הַיַּעַר *ōp̄ā yīm*) they lift up a voice,” which the LXX faithfully renders with its own case of homoeopropheron by means of πετεινὰ “birds” and πετρῶν “rock,” respectively.⁸⁵

It also has been observed that the authors of the LXX sometimes chose not to transliterate names, as is their usual practice, but translate them in order to retain appellative function of the Hebrew paronomasia in the passage. Gen 3:20 demonstrates this well: “Adam called the name of his wife Eve (הַחַוְוָה *hawwāh*), because she is the mother of all living (הַחַיָּה *hāyā*).”⁸⁶ Rather than transliterate Eve’s name, the LXX translates it Ζωή “Life” to connect it to all ζώντων “living things.”⁸⁷ See similarly Num 11:3: “the name of that place was called Taberah (תַּבֵּרָה *tab’ērāh*), because the fire of Yahweh burned (הַבָּרָה *bā’ārāh*) among them.” The LXX captures the paronomastic link between the name of the town and the verb “burn” by using Ἐμπυρισμός “Burning” and the verb ἐξεκαύθη “kindle,” respectively.⁸⁸ This is the case also in Judg 2:4–5: “the people lifted up their voice, and they wept (וַיִּבְכּוּ *way-yibkū*). And they called the name of that place Bochim (בּוֹכִים *bōkīm*).” Again, rather than transliterate the name of the town, the LXX has opted to translate it, employing ἔκλαυσαν “they wept” and Κλαυθμώνες “Weepings” to capture the connection.⁸⁹

84. Backfish, “Transformation in Translation,” 80. She also notes the presence of לְפָנַי *ōp̄el* “darkness” in the previous verse.

85. Backfish, “Transformation in Translation,” 84. It is possible, as Backfish notes, that the translator chose the noun “rock” here, either because the *hapax legomenon* was unknown, or in order to achieve the paronomasia.

86. On the meaning of this name, see Jack M. Sasson, “The ‘Mother of All ...’ Etiologies,” in *A Wise and Discerning Mind: Essays in Honor of Burke O. Long*, ed. Saul M. Olyan and Robert C. Culley, BJS 325 (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2000), 205–20.

87. Ausloos, “Judges 3:12–30,” 54. However, see already, Zakovitch, “Explicit and Implicit Name-Derivations,” 170–71 n. 5, not cited by Ausloos, who lists this passage and many other examples of the LXX translating, rather than transliterating, a name.

88. Ausloos, Lemmelijn, and Kabergs, “Study of Aetiological Wordplay as a Content-Related Criterion in the Characterisation of LXX Translation Technique,” 289–90.

89. Ausloos, “LXX’s Rendering of Hebrew Proper Names and the Characterization of the Translation Technique of the Book of Judges,” 57–58.

Even this brief survey of examples illustrates that the translators of the early textual witnesses sought to preserve, wherever possible, the polysemy and paronomasia of the Hebrew text. The evidence from the witnesses reveals that the tradents recognized such devices long after they were authored. The evidence should give pause to textual critics, for some added glosses in the witnesses might not represent a different Hebrew *Vorlage*, but rather exegesis in an effort to capture the text’s multivalency.⁹⁰ As research on translation technique in the witnesses continues, it is my hope that scholars will pay greater attention to the treatment of such devices.

5.3.8. THE NEED FOR GREATER PRECISION

The typology offered here aims to serve a comparative enterprise by establishing greater precision in terms of vocabulary so that future researchers can set aside the unhelpful practice of applying vague labels to the phenomena, such as “alliteration,” “pun,” “wordplay,” and the like. We are at a stage in the field when it no longer suffices simply to label a device indistinctly. Indeed, even a casual perusal of previous publications on the subject (and I include my own!) shows that greater accuracy is possible.⁹¹ Moreover, as we have seen, different polysemous and paronomastic devices have different effects on listeners and/or readers, and so grouping them all under vague rubrics only obscures this. Only by classifying the phenomena with greater exactitude and analyzing their aural and/or visual effects can we come to understand the full repertoire of devices employed by the ancient bards and the preferences for their use. Only then will we be able to appreciate their influence upon later cultures that were heirs to the literary legacy of the ancient Near East.⁹²

90. Efforts to render biblical paronomasia continued into much later times as well. See, for example, Isidore of Seville (636 CE), *Origines sive Etymologiae*, XI, who rendered the paronomasia between the nouns אָדָם *’ādām* “human/Adam” and הָאָדָמָה *’ādāmāh* “soil” (Gen 2:7) into Latin with *homo* and *humus*, respectively, thus capturing the linguistic tie that marks their shared essence. See William D. Sharpe, “Isidore of Seville: The Medical Writings; An English Translation with an Introduction and Commentary,” *TAPS* 54 (1964): 38. On the meaning and implications of the man’s connection to soil, see Noegel, “Scarlet and Harlots,” 35–39. The implications of the witnesses’ treatment of polyvalency for textual criticism has been observed also by Seow, “Orthography, Textual Criticism, and the Poetry of Job,” 84, who notes double readings in the Old Greek (Job 9:3, 32:16), Syriac (Job 4:21, 15:26, 19:27), Vulgate (Job 20:25), and Targum (Job 20:10).

91. Most studies on alliteration are more accurately defined as addressing cases of homoeopropheron, homoioteleuton, parasonance, or anagrammatic paronomasia. Since each of these devices has a different effect on readers/listeners, we do well to distinguish them.

92. Indeed, a number of the devices studied here also made their way into Syriac, and medieval Hebrew and Arabic literature. See Andras Hamori, “Notes on Paronomasia in Abu Tammam’s Style,” *JSS* 12 (1967): 83–90; Hamori, *On the Art of Medieval Arabic*

5.4. FUNCTION

Finally, the research here reveals that though devices of sound and meaning can possess multiple functions, in many cases, these devices are less stylistic and rhetorical than performative. In this sense, we may think of the function of these devices in an etymological sense, as “the action of performing; discharge or performance *of* (something).”⁹³ Naturally, these finds raise the question as to whether other so-called literary devices, such as chiasmus, inclusio, repetition, parallelism, hyperbaton (i.e., anastrophe, hypallage, hysteron proteron), merism, and ring structure, to name a few, also possess performative functions. As research on ancient Near Eastern texts continues to advance, it will be useful if scholars consider this possibility and ask whether our understanding of the rhetorical and literary has influenced the way we think of “literature” and its manifold “devices.”

Literature (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974); J. H. Charlesworth, “Paronomasia and Assonance in the Syriac Text of the Odes of Solomon,” *Semitics* 1 (1970): 12–26; Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, “Sarah and the Hyena: Laughter, Menstruation, and the Genesis of a Double Entendre,” *HR* 36 (1996): 13–41; Heinrichs, “*Tajmīs*”; Pereira, *Studies in Aramaic Poetry* (c. 100 B.C.E.–c. 600 C.E.); Pereira, “Word Play in the Hymns of Ephrem the Syrian,” in Noegel, *Puns and Pundits*, 251–65; Fedwa Malti-Douglas, “The Names of the Blind in Al-Safadi: Towards an Onomastic Rhetoric,” in Noegel, *Puns and Pundits*, 291–303; David S. Segal, “Pun and Structure in Medieval Hebrew Poetry: The Case of Shmuel Hanagid,” in Noegel, *Puns and Pundits*, 307–24.

93. *Oxford English Dictionary* (2017), online.

FIGURE 2. POLYSEMOUS DEVICES

Polysemous Device	Sumerian	Akkadian	Egyptian	Ugaritic	Hebrew	Aramaic
Conronymic polysemy	X	X			X	X
<i>Double entendre</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X
Antanaclassis	X	X	X	X	X	X
Unidirectional polysemy	X	X	X	X	X	X
Multidirectional polysemy	X	X	X	X	X	X
Double polysemy	X	X	X	X	X	X
Bilingual polysemy	X	X		X	X	X
Polysemy cluster (other)	X	X			X	X
Polysemy cluster (body parts)		X	X	X	X	X
Numerical polysemy		X		X	X	
Isopsephy		X			X	X
<i>Noṭariqon</i>	X	X	X		X	X
Acrostic		X	X	X	X	X
Transposition		X			X	X
Amphiboly (mixed morphology)		X	X	X	X	
Amphiboly (ambiguous grammar)			X	X	X	
Amphiboly (infinitive absolute)					X	

FIGURE 3. PARONOMASTIC DEVICES

Paronomastic Device	Sumerian	Akkadian	Egyptian	Ugaritic	Hebrew	Aramaic
Homoeopropheron	X	X	X	X	X	X
Homoioteleuton	X	X	X	X	X	X
Anastrophe		X	X		X	X
Epanastrophe		X	X	X	X	X
Parasonance		X	X	X	X	X
Homonymic paronomasia	X	X	X	X	X	X
Numerical paronomasia			X	X	X	
Bilingual paronomasia	X	X			X	X
Anagrammatic paronomasia		X	X	X	X	X
Palindrome	X	X	X	X	X	
Hendiadic paronomasia	X	X	X	X	X	X
Rhyme	X	X	?	X	X	X
Geminate parallelism and clustering	X	X	X	X	X	X

FIGURE 4. DEVICES WITH GREEK TERMS AND THEIR ATTESTATION (FROM EARLIEST TO LATEST)

Greek Term	Source and Date
πολύσημος “polysemy”	Democritus, <i>Frag.</i> 26 (sixth–fifth ca. BCE)
ἀμφιβολία “amphiboly”	Aristotle, <i>Poet.</i> 1461a25 (fourth ca. BCE)
ὁμοιοτέλεuton “homoioteleuton”	Aristotle, <i>Rhet.</i> 1410b1 (fourth ca. BCE) Demetrius Phalereus, <i>Demetrius on Style</i> 26 (fourth ca. BCE)
ὁμωνυμία “homonymy”	Aristotle, <i>Rhet.</i> 1404b (fourth ca. BCE)
ἀναστροφή “anastrophe”	Athenaeus of Naucratis, <i>Deipnosophistae</i> 11.493d (third ca. BCE)
ἰσόψηφος “isopsephos”	Leonidas, Epigrams (third ca. BCE), found in <i>Anthologia Graeca</i> 6.321; Artemidorus Daldianus, <i>Oneirocriticus</i> 3.34, 4.24 (second ca. CE)
παρονομασία “paronomasia”	Cicero, <i>Or.</i> 2.63.256 (first ca. BCE); Rutilius Lupus, <i>de Figuris sententiarum et elocutionis</i> 1.3 (first ca. BCE–first ca. CE)
ἀκρόστιχίς “acrostic”	Dionysius of Halicarnassus, <i>Ant. Rom.</i> 4.62 (first ca. BCE–first ca. CE); Cicero, <i>Div.</i> 2.54.111 (first ca. BCE)
ἀναγραμματίζειν / ἀναγραμματισμός “anagram”	Artemidorus Daldianus, <i>Oneirocritica</i> 4.23 (second ca. CE); <i>PGM XIII</i> 107 (fourth ca. CE)
ἐπαναστροφή “epanastrophe”	Hermogenes of Tarsus, <i>Peri Ideon Logou</i> 1.12 (second ca. CE)
νοτάριον “notarion”	Athanasius <i>Apologia ad Constantium imperatorem</i> 2035.011 (fourth ca. CE); Johannes Chrysostom, <i>Ad Innocentium papam</i> 2062.094 (fourth–fifth ca. CE)
ὁμοιοπρόφερων “homoeopropheron”	Martianus Capella, <i>Grammaticus Latinus</i> 5.167 (fifth ca. CE)
ἀντανάκλασις “antanaclasis”	Quintilian, uses “ <i>contraria significatio</i> ,” <i>Inst.</i> 9.3.68 (first ca. CE). Greek occurs in the Scholiast to Apollonius Rhodius, <i>Argonautica</i> 1.746 (fifteenth ca. CE)

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