Scott B. Noegel's latest work offers a comparative study of the various functions that "wordplay" serves in ancient Near Eastern texts and provides a comprehensive taxonomy for the phenomenon. Languages covered include Sumerian, Akkadian, Egyptian, Ugaritic, Biblical Hebrew, and Aramaic. Noegel illustrates that wordplay was based not just on words but on individual consonants, syllables, or signs (in cuneiform and hieroglyphic writing systems). Also discussed are issues of terminology, genre, audience, grammaticality, interpretation, and methodology. The book further considers the distribution and preferences of these devices among the languages and discusses a number of principles and strategies that inform their creation, such as ambiguity, repetition and variation, delayed comprehension, metaphor and metonymy, clustering, and the use of rare words. The book concludes by suggesting potential avenues for future research.

SCOTT B. NOEGEL is Professor of Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization at the University of Washington. He has authored, coauthored, and edited ten books and more than ninety articles on diverse topics related to ancient Near Eastern languages, literature, and culture, including Nocturnal Ciphers: The Allusive Language of Dreams in the Ancient Near East (2007) and Solomon's Vineyard: Literary and Linguistic Studies in the Song of Songs (coauthored with Gary A. Rendsburg, 2009).
“WORDPLAY” IN ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN TEXTS
“WORDPLAY” IN ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN TEXTS

by

Scott B. Noegel
For my students: past, present, and future.

Prov 1:5–6
# CONTENTS

Acknowledgments ................................................................................................ xi

Abbreviations ..................................................................................................... xiii

Introduction ........................................................................................................... 1
Purpose 1
Organization 2
Transliteration Guide 5

1. The Problem with Puns ................................................................................... 15
1.1. Previous Taxonomies and Vocabulary .................................................. 15
1.2. Terms and Taxonomy in This Book ......................................................... 25

2. Methodological Considerations ...................................................................... 27
2.1. Intentionality ............................................................................................ 27
2.2. Text Reception .......................................................................................... 30
2.3. Proximity .................................................................................................... 33
2.4. Scripts, Writing Systems, and Scribal Potential ......................................... 35
  2.4.1. Sumerian ............................................................................................ 35
  2.4.2. Akkadian ............................................................................................ 36
  2.4.3. Egyptian ............................................................................................. 38
  2.4.4. Ugaritic ............................................................................................... 40
  2.4.5. Hebrew and Aramaic ......................................................................... 41
2.5. Grammaticality ........................................................................................... 44

3. Function .......................................................................................................... 47
3.1. Aesthetic .................................................................................................... 53
3.2. Onomatopoeic .......................................................................................... 58
3.3. Emphatic .................................................................................................... 62
3.4. Rhetorical ................................................................................................... 65
3.5. Humorous .................................................................................................. 70
3.6. Ironic .......................................................................................................... 75
3.7. Deceptive
3.8. Referential
3.9. Allusive
3.10. Appellative
  3.10.1. Appellative Paronomasia within the Text
  3.10.2. Appellative Paronomasia on the Author’s Name
3.11. Structural
3.12. Mnemonic
3.13. Hermeneutic
  3.13.1. Divinatory
  3.13.2. Medical Diagnoses
  3.13.3. Commentaries
  3.13.4. Riddles
3.14. Concealing
3.15. Theological/Didactic
  3.15.1. Demonstrate Shared Essence
  3.15.2. Demonstrate Divine Ineffability
  3.15.3. Demonstrate *Lex talionis*
  3.15.4. Demonstrate Lessons
3.16. Display Erudition
3.17. Performative
3.18. Complexities

4. Taxonomy ......................................................... 155

4.1. Types of Polysemy
  4.1.1. Contronymic Polysemy
  4.1.2. *Double entendres*
  4.1.3. Antanaclasis
  4.1.4. Unidirectional Polysemy
  4.1.5. Multidirectional Polysemy
  4.1.6. Double Polysemy
  4.1.7. Bilingual Polysemy
  4.1.8. Polysemy Clusters
  4.1.9. Numerical Polysemy
  4.1.10. Isopsephy
  4.1.11. Notariqon
  4.1.12. Acrostics
  4.1.13. Transposition
  4.1.14. Amphiboly

4.2. Types of Paronomasia
  4.2.1. Homoeopropheron
  4.2.2. Homoioteleuton
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Those familiar with my published works will realize that this book is the result of more than two decades of research. However, my initial interest in “wordplay” began even earlier when I was an undergraduate in Hebrew Studies and History at the University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee. While there, I was fortunate to study Hebrew with Professor Alan Corré (ר"ש), who first clued me in to the world of biblical “wordplay.” His recent passing leaves me, and so many others, with an unfillable void. I will miss him, his incredible erudition, and wonderful sense of humor. I cannot thank him enough for his steadfast encouragement, mentorship, and long-standing interest in my career. I know that he would have appreciated this book.

While studying at the University of Wisconsin, my timing could not have been more fortunate, as I was able to study with two visiting scholars—and fantastic teachers—who helped to shape my early interest in the topic: Professors Moshe Garsiel of Bar-Ilan University and Yair Hoffman (ר"ש) of Tel Aviv University. I still recall Professor Garsiel collecting examples of puns on names on notecards during exam periods. These notes would eventually become his now classic work Biblical Names: A Literary Study of Midrashic Name Derivations and Puns (1991). I fondly remember Professor Hoffman introducing us to literary criticism while we studied the Psalms. With Yair’s recent passing we have lost another great light. I will miss his visits to Seattle and our absorbing study sessions in my office. Moshe remains a dear friend to this day. I thank both Moshe and Yair for their inspiration and long friendship.

My fascination with word manipulation reached still new heights when I undertook graduate work in the Near Eastern Studies Department at Cornell University. Gary Rendsburg, David Owen, Ross Brann, and Martin Bernal (ר"ש), in particular, cultivated my comparative interests, encouraged me to rethink scholarly assumptions, and instilled in me a love for the Sumerian, Akkadian, Egyptian, and Ugaritic languages. I thank them for being wonderful teachers and for their continued support and friendship.

I also here thank a number of other colleagues for their enlightening and useful discussions and for sharing their publications over the years: Bill Arnold, Ehud Ben Zvi, Marian Broida, Edward Greenstein, Jonathan Grossman, Chris-
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In addition, I would like to express my appreciation to the publisher and editors of the *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*. I wrote the entries on “Polysemy” and “Paronomasia” in the Hebrew Bible while simultaneously working on this book, and they kindly have allowed me latitude in using some of that material.

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

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<tr>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Analecta Aegyptiaca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td>Anchor Bible</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADAIK</td>
<td>Abhandlungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Kairo</td>
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<td>ADVGM</td>
<td>Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt Graz: Mitteilungen</td>
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<tr>
<td>AeLeo</td>
<td>Aegyptiaca Leodiensia</td>
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<tr>
<td>AfO</td>
<td>Archiv für Orientforschung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ÄgAbh</td>
<td>Ägyptologische Abhandlungen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIL</td>
<td>Ancient Israel and Its Literature</td>
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<tr>
<td>AIPHO</td>
<td>Annuaire de l’Institut de Philologie et d’Histoire Orientales et Slaves</td>
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<tr>
<td>AJA</td>
<td>American Journal of Archaeology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AJP</td>
<td>American Journal of Philology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AKSP</td>
<td>Aporemata, Kritische Studien zur Philologiegeschichte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ĀL</td>
<td>Ägypten und Levante</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AL</td>
<td>Anthropological Linguistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALK</td>
<td>Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation</td>
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<tr>
<td>AM</td>
<td>Adeva-Mitteilungen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMD</td>
<td>Ancient Magic and Divination</td>
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<tr>
<td>AnBib</td>
<td>Analecta Biblica</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANEM</td>
<td>Ancient Near East Monographs</td>
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<td>ANESS</td>
<td>Ancient Near Eastern Studies: Supplement Series</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANETS</td>
<td>Ancient Near Eastern Texts and Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>AnOr</td>
<td>Analecta Orientalia</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANRW</td>
<td>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AnS</td>
<td>Antiquités sémitiques</td>
</tr>
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<td>AnSt</td>
<td>Anatolian Studies</td>
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<td>AO</td>
<td>Acta Orientalia</td>
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<tr>
<td>AOASH</td>
<td>Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>AOAT</td>
<td>Alter Orient und Altes Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AOS</td>
<td>American Oriental Series</td>
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<tr>
<td>AP</td>
<td>Archiv für Papyroforschung</td>
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<td>APAWHK</td>
<td>Abhandlungen der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historisch Klasse</td>
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<td>ARM</td>
<td>Archives royales de Mari</td>
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<td>Archives royales de Mari, Texte</td>
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<td>ArOr</td>
<td>Archiv Orientálni</td>
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<tr>
<td>AS</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASEA</td>
<td>Annales du Service des Antiquités de l’Égypte</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASEAS</td>
<td>ASAE Supplément</td>
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<td>ASJ</td>
<td>Acta Sumerologica</td>
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<td>ATANT</td>
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<td>ATD</td>
<td>Das Alte Testament im Dialog</td>
</tr>
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<td>AuOr</td>
<td>Aula Orientalis</td>
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<td>AUS</td>
<td>American University Studies</td>
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<td>BA</td>
<td>Beiträge zur Altertumskunde</td>
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<tr>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Biblical Archaeologist</td>
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<tr>
<td>BagM</td>
<td>Baghdader Mitteilungen</td>
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<tr>
<td>BAM</td>
<td>Die babylonisch-assyrische Medizin in Texten und Untersuchungen</td>
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<tr>
<td>BARrev</td>
<td>Biblical Archaeology Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>BASOR</td>
<td>Bulletin of the Schools of Oriental Research</td>
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<td>BASP</td>
<td>Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists</td>
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<td>BBR</td>
<td>Bulletin for Biblical Research</td>
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<td>BBVO</td>
<td>Berliner Beiträge zum Vorderen Orient</td>
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<td>BCSMS</td>
<td>Bulletin of the Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies</td>
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<td>BdE</td>
<td>Bibliothèque d’étude</td>
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<td>BEATAJ</td>
<td>Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des antiken Judentums</td>
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<td>BES</td>
<td>Bulletin of the Egyptological Seminar</td>
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<td>BETL</td>
<td>Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium</td>
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<tr>
<td>BI</td>
<td>Biblical Interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bib</td>
<td>Biblica</td>
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<tr>
<td>BIFAO</td>
<td>Le Bulletin de l’Institut français d’archéologie orientale</td>
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<td>BiOr</td>
<td>Bibliotheca Orientalis</td>
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<tr>
<td>BJRL</td>
<td>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library</td>
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<td>BJS</td>
<td>Brown Judaic Studies</td>
</tr>
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</table>
“Wordplay” in Ancient Near Eastern Texts

CT  Cuneiform Texts from the Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum
DAIAK  Deutsches Archäologisches Institut. Abteilung Kairo
DAWB  Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin
DE  Discussions in Egyptology
DL  DavarLogos
DMA  Documenta Mundi-Aegyptiaca
DSD  Dead Sea Discoveries
EAJT  East Asia Journal of Theology
EAL  Einführung in die altägyptische Literaturgeschichte
EC  Les Études Classiques
EI  Eretz Israel
EPHE  École Pratique de Hautes Études
ETL  Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses
ExpT  Expository Times
FAT  Forschungen zum Alten Testament
GCA  Gratz College Annual
GM  Göttinger Miscellen
GMS  Grazer Morgenländische Studien
GMTR  Guides to the Mesopotamian Textual Record
GTJ  Grace Theological Journal
HANEM  History of the Ancient Near East. Monographs
HAR  Hebrew Annual Review
HDÔ  Handbuch der Orientalistik
HebAbst  Hebrew Abstracts
HOS  Handbook of Oriental Studies
HR  History of Religions
“Wordplay” in Ancient Near Eastern Texts  xvii

| HS      | Hebrew Studies                           |
| HS SCP  | Harvard Studies in Classical Philology   |
| HS ep   | Handbuch zur Septuaginta                  |
| HS S    | Harvard Semitic Studies                   |
| HTR     | Harvard Theological Review                |
| HUCA    | Hebrew Union College Annual               |
| IBS     | Irish Biblical Studies                    |
| ICC     | International Critical Commentary         |
| IDB     | Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible     |
| ID BS sup | Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible Supplement |
| IEJ     | Israel Exploration Journal                |
| JA      | Journal Asiatique                         |
| JA AR   | Journal of the American Academy of Religion |
| JAE     | Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections |
| JAGNES  | Journal of the Association of Graduates in Near Eastern Studies |
| JANEH   | Journal of Ancient Near Eastern History   |
| JANES   | Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society |
| JA OS   | Journal of the American Oriental Society  |
| JARCE   | Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt |


| JBL     | Journal of Biblical Literature            |
| JBQ     | Jewish Bible Quarterly                    |
| JCS     | Journal of Cuneiform Studies              |
| JEA     | Journal of Egyptian Archaeology           |
| JETS    | Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society |
| JHS     | Journal of Hebrew Scriptures              |
| JIAS    | Journal of the Institute of Asian Studies |
| JJS     | Journal of Jewish Studies                 |
| JJS S   | Journal of Jewish Studies: Supplement Series |
| JNES    | Journal of Near Eastern Studies           |
| JNS L   | Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages   |
| JPOS    | Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society |
| JQ      | Jewish Quarterly                          |
| J QR    | Jewish Quarterly Review                   |
| JRS     | Journal of Roman Studies                  |
| JS IS   | Jewish Studies, an Internet Journal       |
| JS J    | Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Periods |
| JS J sup | Journal for the Study of Judaism Supplement Series |
“Wordplay” in Ancient Near Eastern Texts

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<td>JSOT</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</td>
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<td>JSOTS</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series</td>
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<tr>
<td>JSRC</td>
<td>Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSS</td>
<td>Journal of Semitic Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>JSSEA</td>
<td>Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities</td>
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<tr>
<td>JTThC</td>
<td>Journal of Theology and the Church</td>
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<td>KAR</td>
<td><em>Keilschrifttexte aus Assur religiösen Inhalts</em></td>
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<td>KUSATU</td>
<td><em>Kleine Untersuchungen zur Sprache des Alten Testaments und seiner Umwelt</em></td>
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<td>LÄS</td>
<td>Leipziger ägyptische Studien</td>
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<td>LASM</td>
<td>Lingua Aegyptiaca. Studia Monographica</td>
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<td>MÄS</td>
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<td>MC</td>
<td>Mesopotamian Civilizations</td>
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<td>MelS</td>
<td>Melammu Symposium</td>
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<td>MIFAO</td>
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<tr>
<td>MoÅS</td>
<td>Monographien zur ägyptische Sprache</td>
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<td>MPIW</td>
<td><em>Max-Planck Institut für Wissenschaftsgeschichte</em></td>
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<td>MS</td>
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<td>MSL</td>
<td>Materialien zum sumerischen Lexikon</td>
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<tr>
<td>NABU</td>
<td><em>Nouvelles Assyriologiques Brèves et Utilitaires</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>NEA</td>
<td>Near Eastern Archaeology [formerly Biblical Archeologist]</td>
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<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td><em>Novum Testamentum</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>NTS</td>
<td>New Testament Studies</td>
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<td>OBC</td>
<td>Orientalia biblica et christiana</td>
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<td>OBO</td>
<td>Orbis biblicus et orientalis</td>
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<td>OIP</td>
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<td>OLZ</td>
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<td>OM</td>
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<td>OPOI</td>
<td>Orientalia: Papers of the Oriental Institute</td>
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<td>OPSNKF</td>
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<td>Oriens antiquus</td>
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<td>Orient</td>
<td>Orient: Journal of the Society for the Near Eastern Studies in Japan</td>
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<td>Old Testament Library</td>
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<td>OudMed</td>
<td>Oudheidkundige Mededelingen</td>
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<td>PIBRS</td>
<td>Publications of the Israel Biblical Research Society</td>
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<td>POS</td>
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<td>Pictura et Poesis. Interdisziplinäre Studien zum Verhältnis von Literatur und Kunst</td>
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<td>Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology</td>
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"Wordplay" in Ancient Near Eastern Texts


RA Revue d’assyriologie et d’archéologie orientale

RB Revue biblique

RdE Revue d’Egyptologie

RdEG Revue des Études Grecques

RdQ Revue de Qumran

RdISO Rivista degli Studi Orientali

RDSR Ritual Dynamics and the Science of Ritual

REG Revue des études grecques

REJ Revue des Études Juives

RINP Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period


RO Revue de l’Organisation internationale pour l’étude des langues anciennes par ordinateur

RTP Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie

SAA State Archives of Assyria

SAAAB State Archives of Assyria Bulletin

SAACT State Archives of Assyria Cuneiform Texts

SABMD Scholae Adriani de Buck Memoriae Dicatae

SÄK Studien zur altägyptischen Kultur

SAMD Studies in Ancient Magic and Divination

SANE Sources from the Ancient Near East

SAOC Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization

SAuK Seminar für Ägyptologie und Koptologie

SB Subsidia Biblica

SBE Studies in Bible and Exegesis

SBLMS Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series

SBTS Sources for Biblical and Theological Study

ScrHier Scripta Hierosolymitana

SEL Studi epigrafici e linguistici sul Vicino Oriente antico

Sem Semitica

SemeiaSt Semeia Studies

SIFC Studi italiani di filologia classica

SJ Studia Judaica

SJOT Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament

SLTHS Saphrut: Literature and Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures

SOPFOS Studia Orientalia Published by the Finnish Oriental Society

SSN Studia Semitica Neerlandica

SSR Studien zur spätägyptischen Religion

SSU Studia Semitica Upsaliensia
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STDJ</td>
<td>Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STRT</td>
<td>Studia Theologica Rhenoe-Traiectina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>StTh</td>
<td>Studia theologica</td>
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<tr>
<td>StudOr</td>
<td>Studia Orientalia</td>
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<tr>
<td>TAPA</td>
<td>Transactions of the American Philological Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>TAPS</td>
<td>Transactions of the American Philosophical Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAUOP</td>
<td>Tel Aviv University Occasional Publications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TCL</td>
<td>Textes cunéiformes du Louvre</td>
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<tr>
<td>TCS</td>
<td>Texts from Cuneiform Sources</td>
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<tr>
<td>TCSV</td>
<td>Trends in Classics: Supplementary Volumes</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOA</td>
<td>Testi del Oriente Antico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TQ</td>
<td>Theologische Quartalschrift</td>
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<td>TR</td>
<td>Theology and Religion</td>
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<td>TrinJ</td>
<td>Trinity Journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TS</td>
<td>Texts and Studies Third Series</td>
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<tr>
<td>TSAJ</td>
<td>Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSCPP</td>
<td>Transactions &amp; Studies of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UÄS</td>
<td>Untersuchungen zur ägyptischen Stilistik</td>
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<tr>
<td>UBL</td>
<td>Ugaritisch-biblische Literatur</td>
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<td>UF</td>
<td>Ugarit-Forschungen</td>
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<td>VAB</td>
<td>Vorderasiatische Bibliothek</td>
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<td>VR</td>
<td>Visible Religion</td>
</tr>
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<td>VT</td>
<td>Vetus Testamentum</td>
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<td>VTSup</td>
<td>Supplements to Vetus Testamentum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAW</td>
<td>Writings from the Ancient World</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WdO</td>
<td>Welt des Orients</td>
</tr>
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<td>WSEA</td>
<td>Wilbour Studies in Egyptology and Assyriology</td>
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<tr>
<td>WTJ</td>
<td>Westminster Theological Journal</td>
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<tr>
<td>WUNT</td>
<td>Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WVDOG</td>
<td>Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft</td>
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“Wordplay” in Ancient Near Eastern Texts

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

OTHER ABBREVIATIONS

Ant. Rom. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Antiquitates Romanae
b. Talmud Bavli
BM British Museum
CM Cairo Museum
CT Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum
Div. Cicero, De Divinatione
Gen. Rab. Genesis Rabbah
Inst. Quintilian, Institutio Oratoria
Inv. Hermogenes, On Invention
Frag. Fragments
l. Line
LXX Septuagint
m. Mishnah
Mp Masora Parva
Od. Homer, Odyssey
Or. Cicero, De Oratore
P. Papyrus
Poet. Aristotle, Poetics
Rhet. Aristotle, Rhetorica
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
Introduction

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


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. 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. Nevertheless, for the most part, I


have left Sumerian out of my final analysis. 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.”

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,

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).

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, bʾ, d, g, ĝ, h, ĥ, k, kʾ, l, m, n, p, r, r̂, s, š, t, tʾ, 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 ($b\prime$, $k\prime$, $t\prime$) are rendered simply $b$, $k$, $t$. The consonant $g$ 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 ɲ], and it is primarily represented by the syllabograms $GÁ$, $ÁG$, and $MI$. The consonant $h$ is pronounced like /ch/ in the Scottish “loch” but with more force [IPA x]. There is a lack of agreement on the consonant $r$. 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 /gʷ/ and /g̱/; 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 Ḫ to avoid confusion with the consonant $h$ found in other languages in this book.

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. 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: ‘, $b$, $d$, $g$, $h$, $k$, $l$, $m$, $n$, $p$, $q$, $r$, $s$, $ş$, $š$, $t$, $ṭ$, $w$, $y$, and $z$. All of these occur in English except four: $ḥ$, $š$, $ş$, and $ṭ$. The $h$ and $š$ are pronounced like their Sumerian counterparts; thus again, $ḥ$ 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 $ş$, $ṭ$, 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:

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8. The latter being the EME.SAL dialectical equivalent.
10. EME.SAL means “thin” or “high-pitched” language.
The sounds corresponding to q, s, t 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 = [kʾ]; s = [sʾ]; t = [tʾ]). In Arabic the phonemes corresponding to the Akkadian emphatics are pronounced as follows: q is articulated farther back than k (at the uvula); s and t 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: ٰ, ٱ, ِ, w, b, p, f, m, n, r, h, ñ, ٰ, ٰ, ٰ, k, q, g, t, ḫ, ḫ, and ḫ. Many appear in English except: ِ, ِ, ِ, h, ñ, ٰ, ٰ, ٰ. 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.\(^{12}\) The conventional way of teaching the consonant ِ 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 ِ and ِ, 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 /u/. If the double reed leaf sign (Queryable) is used, it probably sounded like /y(a)/. The consonant ِ 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 ِ found in Ugaritic, Hebrew, and Aramaic. The ِ is pronounced like the voiced /ch/ in German “Ich,” and it too appears in Ugaritic, Hebrew, and Aramaic as ِ [IPA h]. The Egyptian ِ [IPA x] is a much harder version of ِ and is equivalent to the same sound in

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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*, MoÂŞ 2 (Göttingen: Peust & Gutschmidt Verlag, 1999).
Akkadian and Ugaritic. The value of ḫ is less certain, but it appears to have been a lateral form of ḫ, in some cases closer to the sound /s/, thus [IPA ç]. 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 ṭ 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 ɟ], 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 /kʰ/ 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 Preust explains:

So in total we have 5 or 6 phonemes: /kʰ/, /k/, /kʰw/, /kʷ/, (or kʷ), and /q/. They are rendered by only three different graphemes (or by four if we consider the marginal grapheme ġ). 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 depalatilization of ṭ to /t/ and ḏ to /d/, though the latter change is not necessarily represented in the writing. The consonants ṭ and ṭ 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 š and ṭ (both rendered with š) 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

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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, ḫm.t “wife,” ḫs.w “phrases,” nṯr.wt “goddesses,” and t:wj “the Two Lands.”

UGARITIC

The consonantal inventory for the Ugaritic language includes: a, i, u, b, g, d, ḏ, h, w, z, ḥ, ḫ, ḫ, ḏ, y, k, l, m, n, s, ʿ, ḡ, p, q, r, š, and ṭ. Do not be confused by a, i, or 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 ’ (not to be confused with ‘ 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: ḏ, ḫ, ḫ, ḏ, s, š, ’, ḡ, š, and t. The consonants ḫ, ḫ, š, 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 t, s, 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: ḏ, ḫ, š, ś, ʿ, ǵ, and ṭ. In Ugaritic, ḏ is a voiced sound that is pronounced like /th/ in “there” [IPA ð] and sometimes also can represent /d/. The ḫ is pronounced like /th/ in “thought” but with the jaw open [IPA ð]. 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 ʿ is a richer, more guttural reflection of the consonant ’, and is produced as if saying the initial g in “gargle,” while gargling [IPA ɣ]. The ṭ is pronounced /th/, as in “thank” [IPA ð].

HEBREW AND ARAMAIC

Hebrew and Aramaic consonants are identical: ’, b, g, d, h, w, z, ḫ, t, y, k, l, m, n, s, ’, p, q, r, š, ş, and t. All of these have been discussed already in conjunction with Ugaritic, except for ’. The phoneme ’ is identical to the Ugaritic variants a, i, and u. It is a glottal plosive that one must distinguish from ’, 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

In inscriptions and other texts in which aspiration is not recorded, I transliterate as if not aspirated. Note that while I transliterate every ꠙ as ḥ and every ꠉ as ꠇ, evidence suggests that both consonants mask two potential phonemic values. The ꠙ can represent ḥ or ḫ [IPA ħ or x], and the ꠉ can represent ꠇ or ꠌ [IPA ğ or ţ]. 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 ḫ merged with ḥ, and ꠌ merged with ꠇ. 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 ṭ, ṣ, and q are unknown, so here too we adopt the convention of pronouncing them as them as t, ts, and k.

The reader should take care to note the difference between Hebrew and Aramaic ᵃ, the Egyptian ᵃ, and the Ugaritic ᵃ, each of which differs. As I noted above, the Hebrew and Aramaic ṭ 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 도וקין niqqud “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 (َا, ِ, ُ, ُُ), partial (َا, ُ, ُُ), and long (َا, ِ, ِِ, ُُُ). 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, ꠥﬠозвращает ꠡﬠﬠamientos ziywug 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.

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20. A note to Hebraists: I have elected to use ḥ 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 ḥ represents in the transliteration can consult the adjoining Hebrew.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consonant</th>
<th>Sumerian</th>
<th>Akkadian</th>
<th>Egyptian</th>
<th>Ugamic</th>
<th>Hebrew</th>
<th>Aramaic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ㄳ</td>
<td>1 or r</td>
<td>ʾ</td>
<td>ʿ</td>
<td>ʿ</td>
<td>ʾ</td>
<td>ʿ</td>
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<tr>
<td>ʾaleph—glottal plosive</td>
<td>ʾaleph</td>
<td>ʾ</td>
<td>ʿ</td>
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<tr>
<td>ʿayin—laryngeal fricative</td>
<td>ʿayin</td>
<td>ʿ</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consonant</td>
<td>Sumerian</td>
<td>Akkadian</td>
<td>Egyptian</td>
<td>Ugaritic</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>ḡ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>aspirated (g) [IPA (gʰ)]</td>
<td>aspirated (g) [IPA (gʰ)]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ḥ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>voiced (ch) in German Ich [IPA (h)]</td>
<td>voiced (ch) in German Ich [IPA (h)]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ḫ</td>
<td>(ch) as in loch [IPA (x)]</td>
<td>(ch) as in loch [IPA (x)]</td>
<td>(ch) as in loch [IPA (x)]</td>
<td>(ch) as in loch [IPA (x)]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ħ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>uncertain-perhaps a lateral (h), closer to (s)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ḫ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>like the last sound in uh-oh</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ḫ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>like (ee) in weep [IPA (i)] or (if double reed sign) (y)(a)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ḫ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>aspirated (k) [IPA (kʰ)]</td>
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<tr>
<td>ḫ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>aspirated (p) [IPA (pʰ)]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ḫ</td>
<td>(k) with a glottal closure and sharp ejection of air [IPA (kʰ)] or (q) articulated farther back than (k) (at the uvula)</td>
<td>(k) with a glottal closure and sharp ejection of air [IPA (kʰ)] or (q) articulated farther back than (k) (at the uvula)</td>
<td>(k) with a glottal closure and sharp ejection of air [IPA (kʰ)] or (q) articulated farther back than (k) (at the uvula)</td>
<td>(k) with a glottal closure and sharp ejection of air [IPA (kʰ)] or (q) articulated farther back than (k) (at the uvula)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>ḡ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>heavy (ss), as in hiss, with the jaw open</td>
<td>heavy (ss), as in hiss, with the jaw open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consonant</td>
<td>Sumerian</td>
<td>Akkadian</td>
<td>Egyptian</td>
<td>Ugaritic</td>
<td>Hebrew</td>
<td>Aramaic</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\checkmark$</td>
<td>ts as in tse-tse fly perhaps glottalized [IPA $s^\prime$] or pharyngealized [IPA $s$]</td>
<td>ts as in tse-tse fly perhaps glottalized [IPA $s^\prime$] or pharyngealized [IPA $s$]</td>
<td>ts as in tse-tse fly perhaps glottalized [IPA $s^\prime$] or pharyngealized [IPA $s$]</td>
<td>ts as in tse-tse fly perhaps glottalized [IPA $s^\prime$] or pharyngealized [IPA $s$]</td>
<td>ts as in tse-tse fly perhaps glottalized [IPA $s^\prime$] or pharyngealized [IPA $s$]</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>$\checkmark$</td>
<td>$sh$ as in sheep [IPA $ʃ$]</td>
<td>$sh$ as in sheep [IPA $ʃ$]</td>
<td>$sh$ as in sheep [IPA $ʃ$]</td>
<td>$sh$ as in sheep [IPA $ʃ$]</td>
<td>$sh$ as in sheep [IPA $ʃ$]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\checkmark$</td>
<td>$s$ as in sun [IPA $s$]</td>
<td>$s$ as in sun [IPA $s$]</td>
<td>$s$ as in sun [IPA $s$]</td>
<td>$s$ as in sun [IPA $s$]</td>
<td>$s$ as in sun [IPA $s$]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\checkmark$</td>
<td>type of $s$ sound renders Semitic /z/ and voiced /th/</td>
<td>$th$ as in thank [IPA $θ$]</td>
<td>aspirated $t$ [IPA $θ^\prime$]</td>
<td>aspirated $t$ [IPA $θ^\prime$]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\checkmark$</td>
<td>$t$ with root of tongue retracted [IPA $t^\prime$]</td>
<td>$t$ with root of tongue retracted [IPA $t^\prime$]</td>
<td>$t$ with root of tongue retracted [IPA $t^\prime$]</td>
<td>$t$ with root of tongue retracted [IPA $t^\prime$]</td>
<td>$t$ with root of tongue retracted [IPA $t^\prime$]</td>
<td></td>
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<td>$\checkmark$</td>
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</table>

IPA: International Phonetic Alphabet
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

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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.” Casanowicz first outlines some methodological considerations for the study of paronomasia by establishing which consonants he felt alliterate. His groupings include:

\[
\text{aleph (ʾ) and ʿayin (ʿ)} \\
\text{bet (ב) and pe (פ)} \\
\text{bet (ב) and mem (מ)} \\
\text{dalet (ד) and tet (ת)} \\
\text{het (ח) and kaph (כ)} \\
\text{het (ח) and het (ח)} \\
\text{tet (ת) and taw (ת)} \\
\text{mem (מ) and pe (פ)} \\
\text{qof (ק) and gimel (ג)} \\
\text{qof (ק) and kaph (כ)} \\
\text{lamed (ל) and reš (ר)}
\]

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

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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 gematria and noṭariqon (see chapter 4 for definitions), but all under the rabbinic expression לִשׁוֹן נפַּלֶל lašon nop̄el ʿal la šon (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.
1. The Problem with Puns

1. The Problem with Puns

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

Casanowicz then briefly discusses and demonstrates cases of alliteration, assonance, rhyme, and epanastrophe. 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 prophetical 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.

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

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3. Casanowicz spells rhyme as “rime.”
Compare Casanowicz’s approach with Janus Glück’s 1970 article on “Paronomasia in Biblical Literature.” Noting the lack of a comprehensive taxonomy, Glück attempts to provide one. His classification offers six types: equivocal pun, metathemastic pun, parasonantic pun, farraginous pun, associative pun, and assonantic pun. Additionally, some of the categories he provides group together quite different devices. Under the metathemastic 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.” Also unlike Casanowicz, his category assonantic treats assonance as a type of paronomasia, rather than as the aural effect of paronomasia. 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.

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

6. The terms encountered most frequently in aforementioned publications include: Wortspiele (German), jeux de mots (French), and the Hebrew expressions miṣḥeqe lašon “plays of language,” masheq haššel “ambiguity,” zīwqag haṣṣel “homonymic pairs,” kefīl mašmaʿaṭ “double entendre,” and ṣimmud šalem “antanaclasis.”


8. Chapter 3 provides definitions of these terms.


by discussing how paronomasia was used “by ancient Greek commentators when referring to rhetoric devices designed to engage an audience.” He then subdivides the topic into visual wordplay, oral wordplay, and extended wordplay. Into the first group, he places gematria (i.e., isopsephy), notarikon, acrostics, atbash, anastrophe, and epanastrophe. The second group includes equivocal, parasonancy, farrago, assonance, onomatopoeia, and antanaclasis. 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,” a more restrictive definition than offered by Glück. 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.

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-
lowing sections: assonance, alliteration, rhyme, onomatopoeia, and “wordplay.” 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.” 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-

1. The Problem with Puns

19. Glück and Sasson refer to this 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 mishēqe lašon “plays of language.”

22. For example, Klaus’s first category, “similar words in close proximity,” includes examples that one might classify more specifically as cases of homoeopropheron, homoiooteleuton, polyptoton, and superlative expressions like sīr 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. Sasson’s aforecited 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. 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 לִשׁוֹן נָפֵל עַל לִשׁוֹן lašon nopens 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). 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. 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 npl b-šwn “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 *allitteratio*) in 1519 to describe the repetition of a word’s initial consonants. He used this term as a further specification of the term *annominatio* (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.”
I. The Problem with Puns

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 rabbinc usage or the study of Western literature generally, 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.

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.” 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


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 *ṭs* “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,” *Annaire EPH* (1944–1945): 14 n. 54. Cited also in Ulla Jeyes, *Old Babylonian Extispicy: Omen Texts in the British Museum* (Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archeologisch Instituut te Istanbul, 1989), 17, 46. Note the related remark of Herman L. J. Vanstiphout, “*Miḥiltum*, 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.”


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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{35} Thus, many (but not all) cases of polysemy operate on a purely visual register, whereas all cases

\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{35} The term πολύσηµος, whence “polysemy,” is first attested in Democritus, Frag. 26 (sixth–fifth century BCE). We find παρονοµασία “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. In essence, it is a generic term that masks a number of distinct devices. 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). 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.


METHODODOLOGICAL 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 *niṣirtū u pirištū ša ʾilī “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 ṣd 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 לָשָׁמ māšāl “parable,” חָיָל molīšāh “figure, enigma,” and לָעַל hīḏāh “riddle, ambiguous saying,” each of which the author of Proverbs presents as a key to

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⁴ Morenz, *Sinn und Spiel der Zeichen*, 66.
“Wordplay” in Ancient Near Eastern Texts

unlocking the book’s hidden wisdom (Prov 1:6). 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. They include Eliphaz’s reference to Job’s language sikqah pi‘ahu bi-hi da‘at millin yakhrū “his mouth chirps without knowledge, he multiplies words” (Job 35:16). Glück proposed that Isaiah’s expression yiqqal balōlah ʾaḥārē geḇēš “with a stammering lip and in a foreign (lit. ‘another’) tongue” (Isa 28:11) refers to paronomasia. Since diviners used polysemy and paronomasia to interpret dreams, the following verbs are also relevant:

 tekstul “snatching” meaning (1 Kgs 20:33), ḫālaṭ “stealing” words, and ṭalāḥ “taking, learning” language (Jer 23:30–31, Prov 1:5, Job 4:12). 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. Nevertheless, though we lack native


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 lašon noqel al lašon “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. 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. 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


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. 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.” Master scribes were an interdisciplinary lot in Mesopotamia who wielded enormous social and cosmological power, especially if they excelled in the divinatory arts. While recitation and oral tradition played important roles for Mesopotamian literate elites, it was the act of writing that was central to their identity.

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.”


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 nṯr “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 mnh ḫkī “excellent of magic” and nb md.w nṯr “Lord of hieroglyphs.” 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. 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.

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

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


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 $mdw.t$ $nfr.t$ $ṣ.t$ $stp.w$ “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


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.’”

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

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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.’”

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, 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. Moreover, there is a great deal of evidence that memorization by rote was standard practice in the ancient world.

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. 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.


items of special focus, they even might have abetted a text’s memorization.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{32} The recitation of a text thus already constituted an authoritative interpretation of its ambiguities (see chapter 5).\textsuperscript{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


\textsuperscript{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.

Wordplay” in Ancient Near Eastern Texts

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, BA, BA₄, AḪ, AḪ, AḪ₄, 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 ša₄Marduk, in which the superscript š represents the determinative DIĜIR = ilu. When not used as a determinative, the same sign could be read as the phonetic syllables an, él, le₄, sa₄, ąna, 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.

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<th>Voiceless</th>
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<td>Sibilant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Velars</td>
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<td>g</td>
<td>q</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labials</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>b</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

So for example, a sign that has the value ūb also could represent ūp, ĕg could be read ek or eg, ńt could be ńd or ńt, 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., šē-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-is-lu-uš-ša iš-ku-nam-ma ša-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-as-ša-ra ū-ša-as-bit
He stretched out the skin and assigned watchmen,

140. me-e-ša la šu-ša-a šu-ma-iš 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.” 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) ū šikāra (KAŠ) rēšī (SAĜ) lummunu zīmušu “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 rēši “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 zīmušu “his face.” In this way, Akkadian can communicate aurally on one register and visually on another. 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. See, for example, the following dream omen: hr mît i’h wbn=f; nfr htp

34. For the rendering “dividing line,” see CAD M/1, s.v. “maṣṣaru.” 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).
n=fcnntnthr=fnnten=fn

“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 𓊅, which occurs after the word wbn “rises” in the protasis. This is not the usual determinative for this word (which is 𓊅). Its presence here provides the interpreter with a reason for interpreting the omen as the sign of a nṯr “god.”

In the Egyptian Tale of Setna I, the author adds a phallus determinative (𓊅) 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).

Consider also the Poetical Stela of Thutmosis III (CM 34010), in which we hear the following boast: tlt=k ỉwn.tjw sḤj r-ṃn-m ỉš.t m ḫm.t=f=k “you trample the Nubian tribesmen; as far as Shat is in your grasp” (l. 22). Here the place name ỉš.t is written with a bird-claw hieroglyph (𓊅), thus evoking the image of pharaoh as Horus, and anticipating the word ḫm.t “grasp,” which is written with a human fist determinative (𓊅). 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,” ḫḥ “heaven’s pillars,” and tḥ “land,” as 𓊅. 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 + ḫ = ḫḥ “(the god) Ptah.” 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 ḫḥs.wṭ nb.(w)t ḫm.d.(w) m ḫf=f=k “the princes of all foreign
lands I gathered into your grasp” (l. 4). Pictorially this line conveys the added sense of trapping birds with one’s hand, for ṣ wr.w “princes” is written ṣ ṣ ṣ and ṣ ṣ ṣ “gathered” is written ṣ ṣ Ṣ. In addition, following the word ṣ ṣ “grasp” is the determinative of the clenched fist ṣ ǲ. The scribe also achieves a nice symmetry by writing ṣ ṣ ṣ “foreign lands” as ṣ ṣ ṣ Ṣ.

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 ṣ ṣ “my tent.” This is followed immediately by ṣ ṣ Ṣ “a champion was this one without a peer.” The visual imprinting is striking: ṣ ṣ “tent” is written as ṣ ṣ ṣ ṣ Ṣ, with the house sign (pr) resting above the mouth sign ṣ Ṣ (r). The juxtaposition not only uses the sign ṣ Ṣ as a determinative and then immediately afterwards phonetically, it bring 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: ṣ ṣ ṣ Ṣ “the sun-disk is covered, it does not shine for people to see” (ll. 24–25). Usually ṣ ṣ “shine” takes the sun-sign determinative ṣ. 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: ṣ ṣ Ṣ “the waters of Egypt are empty.” Here ṣ Ṣ “empty” appears without its usual solar-disk determinative ṣ, 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. 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.
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
2. Methodological Considerations

The text exploits the homonyms $b\,r$ I “shine (like a star)” and $b\,r$ II “leave.” As we may translate $sb\,r$ as “he shines (like a star)” or “he causes to leave.” 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,

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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. “$b\,r$.”


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because it imposed upon the text a single authoritative interpretation. 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 יֵרְק qǝrē “(what is) read,” as opposed the ביִתְכּ kǝṯīḇ “(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 ח may represent the sounds /ḥ/ or /ḫ/ and the letter י may reflect /ʕ/ or / ǵ/, 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 /ṯ/. Once the phoneme /ṭ/ 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 /ṭ/ became /t/ and was represented by ת. The Masoretes later distinguished the sounds /š/ and /ś/ by dotting their tops as שׂ and שׁ, 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 ב derives from the word “house,” and was shaped like a tent, and the letter י 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).

אֲמוֹרָהְנַהֲתְנַו (בָּנְן) [בָּנְן] הָחוּמָה בָּכֶרְו מְפַ; מֵא בָּשָׁהְתְ הָטָבֶל

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

In this passage the phrase בָּבוֹר can mean “with lye” or “in a pit.” Though the readings derive from different roots, the former from בָּרָב b-r-r “purify,” and the latter from בָּר b-“r “pit,” the nouns are indistinguishable in sound. Of course, the primary meaning of בָּבוֹר 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 (תַחַשְׂ saḥaḥ) just afterwards makes one recontextualize the meaning of בָּבוֹר.

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

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

The verb רֹבְבּ in this passage usually is rendered “quieted,” “stilled,” or the like, if derived from the PS root r-g-g. 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. 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 בָּרוֹר kellē bōr kappāy also means “purity of my hands” (cf. Job 22:30, 2 Sam 22:21 [with דָי yāḏ “hand”]), and the consonants of תַחַשְׂ saḥaḥ “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., כָּשׁ s-w-h). I thank one of the publisher’s anonymous reviewers for this observation.
49. See also Joshua Blau, On Polyphony in Biblical Hebrew, PIASH 6/2 (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1982).
“Wordplay” in Ancient Near Eastern Texts

Umberto Cassuto observed that the verb in this passage ַﬠו וּכְל וּדְבִﬠ ʿiḇḏū can mean “work, labor” or “worship, serve.” 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. 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.” 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.MAḪ, but interpreted as markas “center, bond,” a translation that reads his name as if contains the cuneiform sign DÚR rather than DUR, even though that sign is not used. 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.

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:

52. Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet, Act 3, Scene 1.
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 ḥrj-tp, lit. “Which is on the head,” whose primary meaning is “leader.” The entire group, therefore, is to be read ḥrj-tp wp bz “leader who opened the secret,” with a grapho-phonetic dialogue between <head>, <horns>, and <fish> on the one hand, ḥrj-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 אֱישׁ אֱשָׁת iššāh “woman,” because “she was taken from a man (שָׁיָּא ēš),” though the two terms are etymologically unrelated.56 Similarly, the name נָו היא nōaḥ “Noah” derives from a root that means “rest” (i.e., נֶפֶשׁ n-w-h), yet the narrator tells us that his father named him saying יונָהמֶנָע yonahamēnū “he will comfort us” (Gen 5:29). Thus, his father “inaccurately” etymologizes his name by connecting it to the root נֶפֶשׁ n-h-m “comfort.” One more biblical example: Leah names her son לֶבֶן rēḇēn “Reuben,” explaining that “surely Yahweh looked [זַאָנָא rā ‘āh] at my affliction [בֹּבַע be-ʿōnyī],” 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 שָׁיָּא אֱשׁ “man” (PS šyš), אֱשָׁת iššāh “woman” (PS šyš), אֱנָשׁ לְאֲנָשִׁים ēnāšīm “men” (sing. formĒnōš, PS šnš), and נָשִׁים nāšīm “women” (PS nšy) are all etymologically unrelated; the four comprising a heteroclitic paradigm.
57. See BDB, s.v. “לֶבֶן”; HALOT, s.v. “לֶבֶן.”
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.”

Naphtali Meshel similarly has drawn attention to some biblical proverbs that rely on ungrammaticality to give readers pause for contemplating multiple readings. One of his examples is Prov 19:18: יָסַּר בִּינְּקָא קִי יֶשׁ תִּקְוָה וּוֶּל הָוְקִתּ שֵׁי־יִכּ רֵסַּי אָשִּׂתּ־לַא כֶָשְׁפַנ yassēr binkā kī yēsh tiqwāh wo-ʾel hâmīṯō ʾal tiššāʾ napōškā. 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). However, the pre-Masoretic text would have read הָוְקִתּ שֵׁי־יִכּ רֵסַּי hâmīṯō ŝey-ʾicy rēṣāy as והקית שֵׁי־יִכּ רֵסַּי hımīṯō shē-ʾicy rēṣāy, thus also permitting the vocalization והקית hımîṯō “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.”

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.”

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).
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. The situation is quite different in Assyriology and Egyptology, where

“Wordplay” in Ancient Near Eastern Texts

3. Function

scholars generally ascribe to it magical, theological, or mantic hermeneutical functions.\(^2\) Sheldon Greaves’s comment is representative:


“Wordplay” in Ancient Near Eastern Texts


Wordplay 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


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. Function

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

6. Noted by Foster, Before the Muses, 624.
7. See Vanstiphout, “Miḫiltum, 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). In the first line, KUR.U₂ is read šadû “mountain,” whereas in the second, U₂.KUR is read syllabically (i.e., ū-šat) as part of the verb ū-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. 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.

New Kingdom royal stelae (e.g., those of Ramesses II, Merneptah, and Ramesses IV) sometimes distribute their cartouches in well-organized zigzag patterns. 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[i]q .bt.wj

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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 ofḥtq “splendid,” which paronomastically anticipates the namešb“Shabaka” and recalls his Horus and Nebty name:ḥtq “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 readsnṯr.wḥpr.wmpth “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:ḥt ṭ m r+w n.w ṭ “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). Such texts were performed on special occasions like ahrwnfr “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

motivation and reception with the context of patronage in which individual works were produced.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{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.\textsuperscript{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,\textsuperscript{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.”\textsuperscript{17} Therefore, while we still can distinguish between “performed texts” and “performativ e 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.\textsuperscript{18} In many ways, such arrangements anticipate the later Masoretic stichometry of Biblical Hebrew texts.\textsuperscript{19} Sometimes texts are arranged in order to exploit polysemy and paronomasia, as in the Ugaritic Tale of Kirtu (\textit{CAT} 1.16.vi.22–23), in which the verb \textit{yṯb} “he returns” (from the

\begin{thebibliography}{9}

\bibitem{15} Eyre, “Performance of the Peasant,” 23.
\bibitem{18} Jonathan Yogev and Shamir Yona, “Visual Poetry in the Ugaritic Tablet KTU 1.4,” \textit{JANES} 33 (2018): 203–10. I thank the authors for sharing their work with me.
\bibitem{19} On this, see Emanuel Tov, \textit{Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible}, 2nd ed. (Assen: Royal Van Gorcum; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2001), 212–13, pls. 10–12.
\end{thebibliography}
root $t\cdot w\cdot b$) appears just over $y\cdot t\cdot b$ “he sits” (from $y\cdot t\cdot b$). Though the former is not precisely atop the latter, the proximity brings the two into contrast.\textsuperscript{20}

An even more obvious example was engraved into the famous Mesha stela ($KAI$ 181.12–13), where the verb $בשאו$ $w\cdot ʾšb$ (l. 12) appears directly above the verb $בשאו$ $w\cdot ʾšb$ (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.”\textsuperscript{21} In addition, two uses of $ךנא$ $ʾnk$ “I” are similarly juxtaposed in lines 28–29.\textsuperscript{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: $s\cdot ʾḥ\cdot t\cdot s\cdot ʾḥ\cdot w=sn$ “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 $s\cdot ʾḥ\cdot w$ “mummies.”\textsuperscript{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: $pḥ.n=n\ pḥ.wj\ w\cdot \ w\cdot t\ s\ h.n=n\ s\ h.m\ w.t$ “we ended at the end of Wawat, we sailed alongside Senmut” (ll. 9–10).\textsuperscript{24} Here the $pḥ.wj$ “end” of Wawat, echoes the verb $pḥ$ “reach an end” in the first stich, and the name $s\ h.m\ t$ “Senmut” resounds the verb $s\ h.n$ “pass” in the second. Note also that the verb $pḥ$ “reach an end” occurs at the start of the line, which adds an aesthetic dimension to the stich.\textsuperscript{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.


\textsuperscript{22} I thank my former student Clinton Moyer for the latter observation.


\textsuperscript{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. Among the expressions he cites are the description of the Israelite tabernacle as having $la-bāttīm la-buddīm$ “holders for the poles” (Exod 25:27) and the mention of $ʾet qărāsāw wē-ʾet qărāsāw$ “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. 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). 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: $šakkanakkššu unaššaqū šēpišu$ “the officers were kissing his feet” (3.211). 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:

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3. Function

46. a-na 4[DUMU-zi ḫa-mi-ri šu-uh-re-ti-ki]
   To Dumuzi, the husband of your youth,
47. šat-ta a-na šat-ti bi-tak-ka-a tal-ti-meš-šū
   to him you have allotted perpetual weeping, year on year.
48. al-la-lā bi-tu-me ta-ra-me-šu-me-ša
   You loved the speckled allāلل-áurs,
49. tam-ḫa-ṣi-su-ma kap-pa-šu tal-te-eb-ri
   You struck him and broke his wing,
50. izz-za-az ina qišá-tim i-šas-si kap-pi
   (Now) he stands in the woods crying “my wing”!

(SB 6.46–50)

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

42. a-a-ū ḫa-me-ra-ki i-b[u][r ana da-ris
   “What bridegroom of yours endured forever?”
43. a-a-ū al-lal-ki [ša ana šamē] i-lu-ū
   “What brave warrior [allalki] of yours is there [who] went up
   [to heaven]?”

(6.42–43)

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 ḪAR-gud (recension C) to ḪAR-ra = ḫubullu (MSL 8:2, p. 172, 18): al-lal-lum kap-pa ip-pu-uš “the allāللu-bird makes a kappa-noise.” Noted by George, Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic, 834.
31. See Iḥ 18; CAD A1, s.v. “allāللu.” Also noted by George, Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic, 834.
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 ḥāмерu 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 sšw sw šw sšw šw “O Shu, lift him up! O Shu, lift him up!” (Spell 253, §275f). One can hear the sound of the wind in the divine name šw “Shu,” the verb sšw “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: ḫt.w ḥr gmgm t ḫr 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).

Eyre also draws our attention to the following example of onomatopoeia in the poetical stela of Thutmosis III, in which Amun-Ra inspires pharaoh by saying: ḫ.t = m.jt tp = k sswn = st ḥq 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.

In Ugaritic, paronomasia has an onomatopoeic function in the Tale of Aqhat, in a passage that announces the coming of a drought: bl ṭl bl rbb bl šrʿ thmtm bl ṭbn ql bʿl “no dew, no shower, no roiling of the great deeps, no goodly voice of Baal” (CAT 1.19.1.44–46). Though the text proclaims the lack of Baal’s voice, that is, thunder, it evokes it in the rumbling of the repeated sounds /b/, /ʿ/, /l/, /m/, and /r/, all of which resound the word “thunder” (cf. רָעָם raʿam) and the very name of the stormgod bʿl “Baal.”

A similar case appears in the Hebrew Bible. The repetition of the sounds /b/ and /ʿ/, the sibilants /s/ and /š/, and the consonants in the words “mighty sound” (gāḏol qāl gāḏol) permit one to hear a peal of thunder and howling wind in Isaiah’s prophecy: bǝ-ḵittǝtū ḥarḇōṯām lǝ-ʾittīm wa-ḥănīṯōṯēhɛm lǝ-mazmērōṯ “they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks” (Isa 2:4). As Watson cleverly espied, the seven-fold

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35. Jay, Orality and Literacy in the Demotic Tales, 103.
37. One similarly hears the wind whistling when Eliphaz says that, because of the wind, ṭasammēr ša ārat bsārī “the hair of my flesh bristled” (Job 4:15).
3. Function

rhythmic appearance of the consonant ת (i.e., /t/ and /ṯ/) along with the repeated consonants ח and כ 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 /ḇ/ and /p̄ /), to capture the sound of beating wings in his description of the seraphim:

šēš kǝnāp̄ ayīm šēš kǝnāp̄ ayīm lǝ-ʾɛḥāḏ bi-štayīm
šēš kǝnāp̄ ayīm šēš kǝnāp̄ ayīm lǝ-ʾɛḥāḏ bi-štayīm
way-yaʿaś mōšɛh nǝḥaš nǝḥōšɛṯ wa-yǝśīmēh ʿal han-nēs wǝ-hāyāh ʾɛṯ ʾīš wǝ-hibbīṭ ʾɛl nǝḥaš han-nǝḥōšɛṯ wā-ḥāy

As Victor Hurowitz observed, Num 21:9 is equally onomatopoeic:

šǝp̄ ardǝʿīm
šǝp̄ ardǝʿīm
way-yānuʿū ʾammōṯ has-qīm miq-qōl haq-qōrē ʿal han-nēs wa-ʾēd hāʾēkān yǝ-ḥab-bayīṯ yimmālēʾ ʿāšān

The narrative depicting the plague of frogs offers an extraordinary display of onomatopoeia. Not only do we hear croaking in the very word מְירָצִים “frogs,” itself an onomatopoeia, we hear it eleven times in only sixteen verses, far more often than the story demands. 42

Four times we also hear the sounds /r/ and /ṣ/ repeated in מִשְׂרָיִים “Egypt” (Exod 7:26, 8:5, 8:8 (2x), 8:11, 8:15 (2x)).
when the narrator states that “Moses and Aaron went out (אֵצֵיַו way-yēṣēʾ) and cried (קַﬠְצִיַּו way-yiṣʿaq) to Yahweh” (Exod 8:8). We next hear that the dead frogs began to pile up in the תֹרֵצֲח ḥăṣērōṯ “courtyards” (Exod 8:9), again repeating the sounds /ṣ/ and /r/. The story reaches a fever-pitch of croaking in Exod 8:10, when we learn that “they gathered (וּרְבְּצִיַּו way-yiṣbǝrū) them together in heaps (םִרָמֳח ṭḥŏmārīm) and the land (ץֶרָאָה ṣērāṣ) stank.” Not only does the rare verb for “gather” and the noun “land” again employ the sounds /ṣ/ 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-ah-ra ki-iš-šu-ti ú-ul qar-ra-da-nu “we have invoked [Sargon, 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-mi-li-lim “revenge” or possibly ki mī-li-lim “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.
3. Function

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-ē-a šá-ru-ru-šu lu-šam-qit-ma kakkabāini (MUL.MEŠ) šá-ma-
      m[ī] lu-šam-sīk
   As for Shulpea, I want to annihilate its brilliance. I want to do away with
      the stars in the heavens.

125. šá iṣ-ṣi šu-ru-us-su lip-pa-ri-ma la i-šam-mu-ḫa pi-i-ri-šū
   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,” lušamsīk “I want to
do away with,” and isammuḫa “shoot,” each contains the sound /šm/. The verb
lunnīšma “quake” comes close with the sound /šma/. The repetition of these con-
sonants 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 par-
ticularly pertinent: ṛš.wj sḏd dp.t.n=f snl 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 ḫnt
“bent forward” (l. 66), which suggests by homonymy ‘rq ḫnt “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 (hm=f) on a great throne, on a
daïs of electrum. I stretched out on my belly. I did not know (hm.n=l) myself
in his presence.” Here the near homonyms hm “majesty” and hm “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.w] to the one who turns his back [s].
He is the one who is stout-of-heart in the moment of the attack [sīs].
He is the turner who never gives his back [s].

50. Richard B. Parkinson, The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems, 1490–
He is the broad-of-heart when he sees the soldiering-pack [ššt].

(ll. 56–59)

Note that the end of each stich is related paronomastically. The second and fourth lines end with šš “back,” but the former is the back of the enemy, while the latter is the back of pharaoh. The third line concludes with ššš “battle charge,” which echoes the two-fold use of šš “back.” The fourth line’s ššt “soldiering-pack” reinforces the paronomasia by employing the sibilant /š/ with /ḥ/. In the second of these lines, the scribe utilized the noun phwjt “end,” written with the hind-quarter sign ṭ, 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). In his account of how Thutmose I ran an arrow through a Nubian rebel, Ahmose relates how the pharaoh returned to Kar-nak nšt m ḥḏ “sailing downstream” with the corpse m šḥd m hšt bḥ n ḥm=f “hung upside-down on the prow of his boat, ‘Falcon’” (l. 35). Here ḥḏ “downstream” reverberates in šḥd “upside down,” even though the former takes the boat determinative ṭ, while the latter illustrates the act with the upside down man sign ṭ.

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 ḥ r’ q pr.t l hnt hmr šn m ghr ḥ ṭ ms.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). Here the verb šn “surrounded” atypically carries the crocodile determinative ṭ. A few lines later, the man in the ba’s story laments: mḥj ṭ ms.w ṭ msḥ.w “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 ṭ and ṭ follow the name of the crocodile god Khenti. Soon afterwards the man complains to his ba-spirit: bḥ rn=l mkt šn bšt.w m ṭ msḥ.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, msḥ.w “crocodiles” is spelled phonetically and takes the determinative ṭ. In the second, it is simply spelled logographically as ṭ. The ba-spirit then continues: bḥ ṭ m=t=ḥ dmḥ n ṭ msḥ.w m ṭ msḥ.w “my name reeks through you, (more than) the city of a ruler that conspires against him when he turns his back.”
Polysemy and paronomasia can occur over an extended distance in Near Eastern texts. In the biblical narratives concerning Noah, one frequently hears the flood survivor’s name echoed paronomastically. In the previous chapter, I discussed the naming of נֹאָה nōaḥ (meaning “rest”) based on his father’s prediction that יָנוּחַ yonahāmēnû “he will comfort us” (Gen 5:29). Yet paronomasia also obtains in the explanation for why Yahweh decided to save Noah: “Noah found grace (חֵן hēn) in Yahweh’s eyes” (Gen 6:8). When the flooding stops, the narrator recalls the name by recording that the ark חַנָתַּו wa-tānaḥ “rested” on a mountain (Gen 8:4). When Noah sends out a dove to look for dry land, we learn that it could find נַחֲמָא mānōaḥ “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 (חֵנִיָה han-nīḥoaḥ)” (Gen 8:21).

3. 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. 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. The relevant portion of the letter reads:

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57. ARMT 26/2, II. 9’21′.
“Wordplay” in Ancient Near Eastern Texts

9′. 1a-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-li-ia ši-ri-im-tam
into the army of my lord; I introduced the sirimtam and

11′. aš-ku-un-ma 8 gi-ḫa ba-ur-[a]-am ep-[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-teš-ḫi-ma a-tam-rum ma-di-iš ili-du
I supplied with water, so that Atamrum is rejoicing greatly.

14′. ū 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-li]-i-ka
in this temple, there is a nārum/narūm of your lord.

16′. a-na wa-ar-ki-it it u-[uš]-zi-iz
For all the days to come you have erected (it)!’

17′. i-na-an-na mu-ša ša iš-tu šī-šī ni-šī
Since the departure of the people, there is no water

18′. i-na bit (É) ilu (DIĜIR) še-tu ú-ul i-ba-aš-šu-ū
in that temple.

19′. a-[r]a-[k]a [ū-š]a-ab-ši ša-al-ma-am
I have created a statue

20′. [ša be-li-i]ša a-na wa-ar-ki-it it u-[uš]-zi-iz
of my lord. For all the days to come,

21′. [i-na É ḫe-ne-ŠI]-gī ša ṭu-[uš]-šu-[lim] 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. In addition, šābim, certainly means “army” here, but its appearance with šakānu suggests a “waterwork, irrigation.” The author’s rhetorical use of polysemy allows him to dazzle the ruler

59. See CAD Ṣ, s.v. “šabû.” See Scott B. Noegel, “Yašîm-El’s Sophisticated Rhetoric: A Janus Cluster in ARMT XXVI, 419, 1. 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. At the end of his second petition, he bemoans: “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 /r/, /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.”

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 “emanates from the mouth of Ra himself” (l. 350).

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:

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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
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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).
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. Indeed, this view has dominated biblical scholarship on the prophetic corpus, the Psalms, and the Jobian dialogues.


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

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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. 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. 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:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ì.ĜIN.ĜIN.NA.KE}&.EŠ \\
\text{Ì.KAŠ&.KAŠ&.NA.KE}&.EŠ \\
\text{BA.AN.DU}&. BA.AN.DU \\
\text{MU.MU.ŠÈ}&. BA.AN.DUG&.
\end{align*}
\]

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 ḤŪL (=Akkadian ḫidātu).
I.SI.IŠ.LÁ “break down, give way” occurs in reference to tears or
laughter. The Akkadian sāhu “laugh,” like its Ugaritic and Hebrew cognates, does not
always correlate with the “funny” or “comical” by modern Western standards. See Benno
Archiv,” ZA 42 (1934), 163–65; Benjamin R. Foster, “Humor in Cuneiform Literature,”

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 Akka-
dian Proverbs,” in Vogelzang and Vanstipout, Mesopotamian Poetic Language, 9–10;
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 Hec,” 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
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. 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, MU.E.DA.AK.E] is my name.”
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, MU.E.AK]: As far as sheep are concerned, there are none of them here!”

Here the name UMUM, MU.E.DA.AK.E “I cheated you” provides the raw materials for the nearly identical sounding response: UMUM, MU.E.AK “you were clever.”

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. 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

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70. The parallel to Homer, Od. 9.366 is remarkable.
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.” Bolstering Cooper’s
observation is the text’s extensive use of polysemy and paronomasia. For
example, the tribute (i.e., biltu) that Gimil-Ninurta brings the mayor resounds
when the mayor refers to it as an outrage (hibailtu), and when Gimil-Ninurta,
disguised as a doctor, lures the mayor into a dark room by saying “my cures
(bultūya) only work in the dark.” 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, and these also display

73. Jerrold S. Cooper, “Structure, Humor, and Satire in the Poor Man of Nippur,” JCS 27
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 Svärd, 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
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
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,” JSSE 4
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 bedeutet 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: יהו gibbōrīm li-štōṯ yāyin wa-ʾanšē hayil li-msōḵ šēḵār “Ah, to those heroes in drinking wine, men of valor in mixing beer” (Isa 5:22). He observes that the line references gibbōrīm “warriors” and ʾanšē 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.

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.
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. Some texts exhibit dramatic irony in that they withhold information from the character that is known to the reader/audience. 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 šipṭu, used for both “governance” and “destruction.” Peter Machinist explains:

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

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

Irony pervades a number of Egyptian texts. In the Tale of the Eloquent Peasant, we find a string of eulogistic statements that one can read ironically in more
than one way. The peasant’s claim is a case in point: \textit{nn gr rḏ.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.”\footnote{Parkinson, “Literary Form and the Tale of the Eloquent Peasant,” 173.} 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\footnote{235–52; Jean Winand, “The Report of Wenamun: A Journey in Ancient Egyptian Literature,” in Ramesside Studies in Honour of K. A. Kitchen, ed. Mark Collier and Steven Snape (Bolton: Rutherford, 2011), 541–59.}, who creates\footnote{90. Parkinson, “Literary Form and the Tale of the Eloquent Peasant,” 173.} truth and creates\footnote{91. Parkinson, “Literary Form and the Tale of the Eloquent Peasant,” 175.} every good thing \textit{[bw]}, who destroys every (evil) thing \textit{[bw]}” (B1 272–273). Yet, later we hear that “the cultivator of the wicked thing \textit{(bw)} is watering his garden with evil, to grow\footnote{92. \textit{DULAT, s.v. “yḥd.”}} his garden with falsehood\footnote{93. Noegel, “Kirtu’s Allusive Dream,” 307. When the narrator describes the actualization of the event (\textit{CAT} 1.14.iv.21), he instead employs the numeral \textit{ahd} “one,” which removes any allusion to Kirtu.}” (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.\footnote{94. The words appear to be placed in the mouth of El, though the beginning of the column is missing some thirty lines.}

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 \textit{yḥd} “sole survivor” (\textit{CAT} 1.14.ii.43). The \textit{yḥd} designates someone, like a widow or orphan, who is bereft of family.\footnote{92.} Yet, technically speaking, Kirtu too is a \textit{yḥd}, since he also has lost his family. The use of \textit{yḥd} 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.\footnote{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\footnote{94.} \textit{[’l tl[m] k rtrτ]} in the tillth … spent is all the bread from their storage” (\textit{CAT} 1.16.iii.9–14)! Here the use of \textit{rtrτ} “crows” for “heads of grain,” allusively underscores the irony that normally it is
the king’s responsibility to ensure the land’s fertility through sacrifice to Baal. Further emphasizing the irony is the phrase 克思[ml] “furrows, like,” which paronomastically suggests alus “king.” Moreover, enforcing the allusion to a royal crown immediately afterwards is the mention of “heads” in the narrator’s description: لس Reid ژر[ ] گد [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.”

On euphemism and polysemy, see Double Entendres (4.1.2).

Edwin Good has proposed a number of cases in the Hebrew Bible. One of his finest comes from Isaiah’s pronouncement against the king of Babylon, which brings into ironic contrast the king, whose oppression گب[šba] “has ceased” (Isa 14:4, 2x), and Yahweh, who گب[šba] “broke” his گب[šɛ] “staff” on account of his hubris (Isa 14:5).

An ironic use of polysemy involves the figure of گب[نا] “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). We hear his name no

95. Watson, Classical Hebrew Poetry, 309.
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. “Jon.” 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 گب[ن] “jar, pitcher, wineskin” or “harp, lute,” or to Ugaritic (nbf) and Akkadian (nablu) “flame,” seems unlikely, though the storey 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,\textsuperscript{99} until his wife informs David: “as his name is, so is he: Nabal (נַבָל nāḇāl) is his name and foolishness (הָלָבְנוּ hā-lāḇnū) is with him” (1 Sam 25:25).\textsuperscript{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.”\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{102}

Thus, in Job 4:6, Eliphaz asks: אֹלֲהךְָתָאְרִי kŏlā ʾeḥā “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 וָּו “and” joined to חָיְכֶכָרְדּ tiqwāṯḵā “your hope,” but it is not. In addition, קָיסֶלַט כָּו kislāṯɛḵā means “your confidence,” but also echoes “your foolishness.”\textsuperscript{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;


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

\textsuperscript{103} Though the meaning “fool” is spelled חָיְכֶכָרְדּ kāsīl, the paronomasia is effective.
the reader, however, knows that in a very concrete sense it was Job’s greatest error.”  

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 gullible 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 setup, 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.

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). Jeremiah at times employs polysemy and paronomasia to illustrate the transformative power of the divine word. 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 šōqēḏ “(divine) watchfulness” in an šāqēḏ “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. 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

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104. Meshel, “Whose Job Is This?,” 60.
“Wordplay” in Ancient Near Eastern Texts

Weapons she will ready against them: “I shall prepare arrows in the quiver. I shall... slingstones with the rope (ĒŠ.MAḪ.GIN₃). I shall begin polishing my lance. I shall prepare the throwstick and the shield” (ll. 41–44). Instead of employing the signs ĖŠ.MAḪ.GIN₃ “rope,” the text reads EN.TI.GIN₃, that is, EBIḪ.GIN₃. The peculiar writing draws attention to the fact that the Sumerian reflects both the Akkadian ebīḫu “rope” and ebīḫ Ki “mount Ebiḫ.”

Similarly, in the Curse of Akkade, we find an idiomatic expression for putting a population under administrative control: marḫaši Ki 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 lēʾā “writing tablets,” hence the translation, or as lēʾā “wild bulls,” thus producing the translation: “to turn the (people of) Marḫaši into wild bulls.”

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, 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.” 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 ukallānīkkūma lā takkal mē mu-ū-ti ukallānīkkūma 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 akal ša mu-ti “food of death” as akal šamūti “food of..."
3. Function

Anne Kilmer suggests that we read the mē mu-ū-ti “water of heaven” as mē emūti “water of transformation.” Sasson opines that the polysemy here involves understanding akala ša mūti “food of death” as akala ša muti “food of humankind.” Shlomo Izre’el further argues that Ea’s deception rests on the double meaning of balāṭi, which not only means “life,” as opposed to “death,” but “immortality.” 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 lw.t “office” ( swelling ) in the myth, which, of course, is the object of the competition (1.2, passim). 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 lw.t “old woman.” Though perhaps etymologically related to the noun “office,” lw.t is written here as t (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

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.
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 swelling ) 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 ʿt, but here it appears as ʿt (with the standard and scroll determinatives). Thus, ʿw.t “herd” and lw.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, ʿt. In 6.11, Isis again refers to the ʿw.t “flock” and there it is spelled ʿt. 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-Horakthy, the falcon determinative appears again (7.4–7.8). The trickster god Seth did not miss the paronomastic allusion to the “office,” for in 7.7, he himself refers to the “flock” in Isis’s story as an lw.t “office” ( ).

118. A similar use of paronomasia obtains in Nathan’s parable to David (2 Sam 12:1–12). See below.
120. Paronomasia abounds in this text. After Seth’s own statement tricks him, Isis turns herself into a ḫrī “kite” and alights upon the ḫɑl “tip” of an acacia tree. The former reminds us of the ḥdr ḫ “stranger” (6.10, 6.12), and the latter of the ḥl ḫ “ferrying” that brought Isis to the island. In 9.9, Horus cuts off the head (ḥɑl) of his mother Isis. Later still, in 11.8, Isis makes Horus’s penis drip semen into a cooking pot (ḥɑl). In 10.8, after Seth removes Horus’ eyes, Hathor finds Horus in the desert, milks a gazelle, and says to Horus: ḫ-wn ḫ.t=k ḫl=t ḥ.n=ḥ ḫ.t im “Open your eyes, that I may put this milk in it.” Paronomasia obtains between the nouns ḫ.t “eyes” and ḫ.t “milk.” Moreover, both words contain the sign n. 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 (ḥnw) stiffens (nḥt) and so he moves quickly (ḥnw) 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 יִמּוּרֲﬠ yārūmmīm “being naked” (Gen 2:25), the narrator paronomastically alerts us to the snake’s עָרַﬠ ʿārūm “cunning” (Gen 3:1). 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 (موت mōṯ tāmūṯ)” (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 (pen tāmūṯūn)” (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 לְמָטַר tūmēṯūn “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 [רשׁא rāʾš]. The rich man had many flocks and herds; but the poor man [רשׁא rāʾš] had nothing except one little ewe lamb, which he had acquired and reared; and it grew up together with him, and with [ים וֹמִּﬠ וֹמִﬠ wǝ-ʿimmō wǝ-ʿimmō] 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 הָיָּי t (ḥy,ḥy), The word “work” is קָת t, which is homophonous with קָת “vulva,” used of Hathor in 4.2. The word “work” usually takes the determinative ב, 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 in response. After Seth makes his claim, Horus similarly laughs in 12.4.

morsel (of bread), and drank from his cup, and lay in his bosom, and it was like a daughter [בַּת bāṯ] to him. And a traveler came to the rich man, and he spared to take [לָּיָה lā-yāḥ] from his own flock and from his own herd, to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but took [וַאֲיָה wā-yāḥ] the lamb of the poor man [שׁיִאָה שׁאָרָה hā-ʾīš hā-rāʾš], and prepared it [וַאֲיָה wā-yāḥ] 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 21:3 7). 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 שָׁר rāš and twice as שָׁר rāʾš. The defective spelling draws our focus to the paronomasia implicit in the forms, as the root שׁ-ר-שׁ also suggests “first, former.” The effect is especially striking near parable’s end when Nathan uses the full expression שׁיִאָה שׁאָרָה hā-ʾīš hā-rāʾš “the poor man,” thus paronomastically identifying him as the “first husband,” (cf. Hos 2:9 אִישׁ אֲרָשׁׁי hā-ʾīš hā-ʾāšī “my former husband”). Moreover, the words שׁיִאָה שׁאָרָה hā-ʾīš hā-rāʾš “poor” and שׁאָרָה rāʾš “rich” constitute a paronomastic word pair that features especially in proverbs that contrast the two (Prov 14:20, 28:6). The verb והַּק qānāh “acquire” also can be used for betrothal (Ruth 4:5), and the verb חַקִּיַּו lāqaḥ “take” twice used, can refer to marriage (Gen 4:19, 12:19, 25:1). Nathan’s addition that the lamb יָהְק בּ הַ בָּכְּשִׁת ū-ḇ-ḥēqō ṭiškāḇ “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 בת bāṯ “daughter” also evokes the first part of the name עַבֶשׁ-תַבּ baṯ-šɛbaʿ “Bathsheba,” especially following

3. Function

the juxtaposed prepositions מִﬠ wᵉ-ʹim “with him and with,” which elicit the patronymic element מִﬠ am “people” in her father’s name (םיָﬠיִל ʾĔlīʿām “Eliam” in 2 Sam 11:3, and מַﬠ ʿām “Amiel” in 1 Chr 3:5). Note too the use of the verb שִׂﬠֲﬠַיָּו wē-yaʿăšɛhā “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).

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).

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 [SignUp] ‘ăbaʃ] Baal a little; Jehu will worship him [SignUp] yaʿaḇḏɛnnū] much. Now summon to me all the prophets of Baal, all his worshipers [SignUp] ‘ōḇḏāw], and all his priests, let none be missing, for I will make a great sacrifice to Baal. All who are missing [SignUp] 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 (בְּקָﬠְב bǝ-ʿŏqbāh) with the intent that he may destroy (יוֹדֲאַה ha-ʾăḇīḏ) the worshipers (יוֹדֲע ʿōḇḏē) of Baal” (2 Kgs 10:19). According to Ora Prouser, the ruse is embodied in the paronomasia between ʿāḇaḏ “worship” and ʾāḇaḏ “destroy.”

Moreover, Jehu’s threat that “whoever shall be missing (יוֹדֲא יֵדְבֹע ʿōḇḏē) shall not live,” masks a polysemous promise, since the verb יֵדְבֹע yippāqēḏ “be missing” also means “shall be punished.”

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 לַ- ʿăśōṯ “to prepare” (lit. “do”) in 2 Sam 12:4.
126. In 2 Sam 12:4, we find both חֹלְאֵל ʿōḇaḥ lō “the wayfarer who had come to him” and חֹלְאֵל ʾūrāyāh “the man who had come to him,” with a change of nouns and prepositions. In 2 Sam 11:7, we hear that חֹלְאֵל ʾūrāyāh way-yăbōʾ ʿūrīyāh ʾēlāw “And Uriah came to him.” That Uriah is the wayfarer in the parable is clear in David’s query to Uriah: אֵל ʾūrāyāh ʾēl ad-dërēk ʿatāḥ bāʾ “did you know come from a journey?” (2 Sam 11:10).
figure’s character. 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.

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” (ʾīš ḥālāq) also means a “deceitful man.” 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 [יָכֹב יָאָב הָאָב]? For he has deceived me [יָאֲבֶנְי] these two times: he took away my birthright [בוֹקֲﬠַיַּו ḫאָרְו], and behold, now he has taken away my blessing [בּירֵקָּו]. (Gen 27:36)

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 שלָה šēlāh “Shelah” means “deceive” (cf. 2 Kgs 4:28), a connotation amplified by the reference to his birth at קֶזִיב kǝzīḇ “Kezib” (Gen 38:5), which also connotes “lie.”133 Moreover, the narrator describes Tamar’s disguise by saying עתנְמַלֵא wa-tāsar biḡḏē ʾalmǝnūṯāh mēʿālɛyhā “and she put off from her the garments of widowhood” (Gen 38:14). Here the verb תָסַר tāsar means “put off” as one would a garment, but also “reject, turn away” (Josh 11:15, Ps 66:20). In addition, the noun דֶגֶב bɛḡɛḏ “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

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 [דרפה bab-bāḡaḏ]. The phrase “with the cloth” also suggests “deceptive-wickedness.” Underlining 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 bāḡad “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.
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 [ןוֹא ʾōn].
In all my labors, they have found in me no iniquity [ןוָֹﬠ ʿāwōn] that was sin.”

(Hos 12:8–9)

Underscoring the context of mercantile deception are the parallel lines יתאָצָמ ֶלַי ʾōn lī “I have found myself wealth” and אֹל יִל־וּאְצְמִי lōʾ yimṣǝʾū lī ʿāwōn “they have found in me no iniquity,” which force one to recognize the paronomasia between ןוֹא ʾōn “wealth” and ןוָֹﬠ ʿāwōn “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.”

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.

3.8. REFERENTIAL

Polysemy and paronomasia also can have a referential function. As such, they often establish comparisons and contrasts. 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 [dadāša] 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.

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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 not 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 ṭīṭṭu “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 iṣ iṣ-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.”

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

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 ʿršm 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 ʿršm yšu “the ruler will take (his) bed.” When the conscription occurs, Kirtu is healthy (CAT 1.14.iv.23–24), so zbl must refer to a drafted sick man. However, the alternative rendering of the god’s ominous missive is realized later

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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 ʾAthirat. At that time, Kirtu’s son Yaṣṣib 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 aḫt ʿrš mdw anšt ʿrš zbln “illness has become your lover, sickness a bed companion” (CAT 1.16.vi.35–36), 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 הוק q-w-h “hope” when lamenting the day of his birth (3:9): “let one hope (וַקְי yǝqaw) for light and have none.” Eliphaz then employs the nominal form הָוְקִיתּ tiqwāh “hope” in 4:6, but alludes to its other meaning “thread” by employing it with the noun לַדּ dal “poor,” which is related to הָלַּדּ dallāh “thread of a loom.” Job then retorts, “my days go swifter than a weaver’s shuttle (גֶרָאʾārɛḡ); they go without הָוְקִיתּ tiqwāh” (Job 7:6). In light of what Eliphaz has said, one cannot tell here if הָוְקִיתּ 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” (והוק tiqwāh) of the godless to the web of a spider (שׁיִבָכַּﬠ ʿakkāḇīš) (8:13–14). The impact of his statement derives from the fact that Job’s “weaver’s shuttle” (גֶרָאʾārɛḡ) 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 [וָקּ qāw] (38:5)?

144. Though the root וַקְי ʿ-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 use וַקָּרַה ʿakkāḇīš wa-qūrē “they weave the webs of a spider” (Isa 59:5). We also hear how they לא תָּבִיד their webs do not become a garment (qūrēhem loʾ yihyū la-ḥeḇeg) “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” (uṭṭūtu/ettūtu) informs the name of the Sumerian goddess of weaving, Utu. CAD E, s.v. “ettātu.” The Sumerian and Akkadian terms for “weave,” i.e, ZE-ZE = DUN-DUN (Akk. šatū), also refer to a “spider’s web.” CAD S/2, s.v. “šatū B.” The Akkadian qū “thread” also means “spider web.” CAD Q, s.v. “qū A.”
3. Function

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. Cases of allusive paronomasia appear already in Sumerian texts. See the following proverb: KASKAL NĪĜ.KŪ.DA LŪ.NU.KŪŠ.Ū U₄Š.Ū.E KI BĪ.B. R.I.RI.GE “the widow scavages evenings on the road for something to eat.” According to Robert Falkowitz, the signs U₄Š.Ū.E allude to the reading U₄Š.Ū.A (= Akkadian berū) “hungry,” thus suggesting that the widow scavages hungrily/at night. Another proverb reads: ŠĀ.SUR NU.UB.RA.KAR ZÌ.NI NU.ŠUB.BĒ GI.ŠĀ.SUR NU.UB.RA.KAR ZÌ.NI NU.ŠUB.BĒ “he did not take away the sieve and his flour does not fall (through) it.” Here the signs GI.ŠĀ.SUR evoke ŠĀ.SUR “diarrhoea,” and the sign ZÌ doubles for ŠÈ “feces.” The result alters the rendering to “(though) the diarrhoea was not taken away, his feces do not fall.”

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.” 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 ummānu “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.

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).” 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.
149. Van der Mieroop, “Sargon of Agade and his Successor in Anatolia,” 156.
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 ia maḫrīšu us-a ʾānḫakuma qib[i] “Likewise, he (the chief), said in his presence: ‘Alas, am I tired!’” (l. 93). The scribe has employed the sign us in the interjection, because it doubles as a logogram for lāḥru “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 kiṣru “meteorite” that fell on top of him from anu “heaven,” and a haṣṣimu “axe” that one embraces as “a wife,” paronomastically allude to a kezru “male prostitute” and an assinu a “male servant of Ishtar,” respectively. 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 Ânim ʾIštar, 1.iv.37, 44).

The Ramesiside dream manual demonstrates allusive paronomasia in Egyptian. One of its omens reads: ḥr wnm  lsf n msh nfr wm n ḥ.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 ḫt “ruler.” 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 lh m ṭmr.t=f nfr smr p[i]=f lrl-n-h.[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 ḫmr “bull.” Nevertheless, it also forms a lexical association with ḥmr “killed” by way of the noun smr “wild bull” (the determinative for which is also  or  ), because smmr also can mean “kill.” Nevertheless, the smmr “wild bull”

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 [ḥw]l my father, who killed one greater than himself.
You have smitten [ḥw]l my father, you have killed one greater than you.
O my father Osiris this king, I have smitten [ḥw]l for you him who smote you as an ox [ḥ].
I have killed [sm]l for you him who killed [sm]l you as a wild bull [sm]l.
I have broken [ng]l for you him who broke [ng]l you as a long-horn [ng]l.
On whose back [ḥr]s=f you were, as a subjected bull [ḥr]s=f.

Janet Johnson and Robert Ritner proposed another example from the Demotic Chronicle. In that text, a prophecy associates ḫbj “honey” with the štr “red crown” (of Lower Egypt), based on paronomasia between ḫbj “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.tl ḫk:i.w m tp=f “then there sprouted the two great magicians from his head” (l. 14b–c). Appearing after wr.tl ḫk:i.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: ḥijing =i tp=î pî npr r tml dl.t ptrl sw k.tl îr.t “when it (night) descends, I will load the god so that no other eye can see him” (1.42).^{155}

Though the verb mn “hide” does not occur, it is implicit in the act of hiding Amun

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

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 dlil “Danel.” Elsewhere in the story, we find another example in Danel’s call to his daughter Paghit (CAT 1.19.i.1–5):

1. šmʾ pgt ṭkmt [ ] my
   Listen, Paghit, bearer of water,
2. ḫṣpt l šʾ r tl ydʾ[tl]
   Collector of dew from the fleece,
3. hlk kkbbm mdlʾr
   Who knows the course of the stars. Bridle the donkey.
4. smd phl št gmy dt ksp
   Harness the ass. Lay on my silver bridle,
5. dt yrq nhbkny
   My golden harness.

Of note here is the verb mdl, which only can mean “bridle” in this context. However, mdl also means “meteors, thunderbolt.” Its use following kkbbm “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 tḥm ym bʾlkrm “the decree of Yam, your master” (CAT 1.2.i.17). Since Yam’s use of bʾlkrm “your master” usurps Baal’s authority by placing him below Yam, the use of bʾlkrm here belies Yam’s intention to harm bʾl “Baal.”

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

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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: tl šmm tskh [r]bh nskh kkbbm “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).
3. Function

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 *itn* “gift” the primordial serpent *tnn* “Tannīn.”

The Hebrew Bible contains abundant demonstrations of the allusive function of polysemy and paronomasia. Ezekiel’s prophecy against Egypt rails against “the young men of iniquity (*nā wyn*)” (Ezek 30:17) in a way that alludes to the city of Heliopolis (*nā ’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 *ma-yi’ḥāḥ* “and he hid them” offers a not-so-subtle allusion to Jezebel’s husband, king *ʾāḥʾāḇ* “Ahab.”

Job’s comparison of his brothers to unreliable streams represents another fine allusion: “(they) are dark [*ḥaq-qōḏrīm*], because of the ice, and in which [*yiṯʿallɛm*] the snow hides itself [yitʿallɛm]. 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 רָדֵק *qēḏār* “Qedar” and שָליֵﬠ *ʿēlām* “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 [*ḥaq-qōḏrīm*] “dark” and the latter by way of [*yiṯʿallɛm*] “in which” and [*yiṯʿallɛm*] “hides itself.”

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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 ננת “gift” twice in Mic 1:7. Watson sees the lexeme as an allusion to ננת “dragon.” I would add an additional allusion to the dragon via ננת *tamīm* “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 *tnn* 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).

Numerous allusions in the book of Jonah suggest that the fish that swallowed the prophet was none other than Leviathan. When Jonah cries out: יִנֵכיִלְשַׁתַּו הָלוּצְמ bāḇ yammīm wĕ-nāhār yēsōḇēnī “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 התַּנִּינָי wĕ-nāhār yēsōḇēnī “River surrounded me.” Implicit in the root בָּב s-b-b is a twisting, undulating, or encircling motion, as one would use of a watery serpent. Jonah’s complaint that יִנוּפָפֲא בָּם שֶׁפֶנ־דַﬠְו בָּהōֹם ʾăp̄ āp̄ ūnī mayīm ʿaḏ nɛp̄ ɛš tǝhōm yēsōḇēnī “waters engulfed me, even to (my) throat, Deep surrounding me” (2:6), employs the noun בָּהōֹם “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. For example, Mal 1:11–12 employs the idiom מִמְּמִזְרָח שֶׁמֶשׁ wĕ-ʿaḏ mǝḇōʾō “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 lairְבָּהְמ mēhullāl “praise” of his name, Mal 1:12 refers to the priests מְחַלְלָהлим mohallālim “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.

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: שֶׁמַּקְמִי נַהֲמִי nēm ʿaḏ ʾdšʾ “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

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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.
3. Function

“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

3. Function

paronomasia prefigure future moments or destinies. 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). Jan Assmann has coined the term etymography for this phenomenon in Egyptian texts, and this term has been adopted by some Assyriologists. 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.” Joan Goodnick Westenholz similarly remarks: “On the intellectual
level, knowing the organization of the world made it possible to affect the universe
by magical means.” 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. 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). 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 presmed
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
GAL3.LÁ GAL ĜÍR.SUkö
"IG.ALIM DUMU KI ĜÁ.ĜÁ.NI

The great door, the post of Girnum,
the chief bailiff of Girsu,
Igalim, his beloved son.

As Klein and Sefati observe, paronomasia identifies the IG.GAL “great door”
with the minor deity 4IG.ALIM “Igalim.”

In Cylinder A 2.20, the phrase GŬ.DĔ.A.NI ĜIŠ BA.TUKU.ÂM “his call
having been heard” echoes the name “Gudea.” A praise poem of Shulgi
similarly employs the sign ŠŬL “young man” instead of the usual ĜURŬŠ to echo

Historical Studies Presented to Erica Reiner, ed. Francesca Rochberg-Halton (New Haven,

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

1288.


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 Ninḫursaĝa, which recounts how Ninḫursaĝa 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, \(^{4}\)AB.Ū is created from the UGU.DÍLI “brainpan,”\(^{178}\) \(^{4}\)NIN.SIKI.LÁ from the PA SIKI “top of the hair,” \(^{4}\)NIN.GIRI₁₇.Ū.DÚ from the GIRI₁₇ “nose,” \(^{4}\)NIN.KA.SI from the KA “mouth,” \(^{4}\)NA.ZI from the ZI “throat,” \(^{4}\)Á.ZI.MÚ.A from Á “arm,” \(^{4}\)NIN.TI from the TI “rib,” and \(^{4}\)EN.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 \(\text{bāb ilīm} \) “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 \(\text{ḥābiru} \), Hallo observes:

> The earlier (Old Babylonian) orthography used a logogram, SA.GAZ, which may be a loanword from Akkadian \(\text{saggāšu} \) “murderer” and which was also used to express Akkadian \(\text{ḥabbātu} \) “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.\(^{181}\)

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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 /agʷu/, and thus was close in sound to ABU.
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.”

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

223. 4we-e-î-la ša i-šu-ú te-e-ma
Wē-ila, who had intelligence,
224. i-na pu-ul-ri-šu-nu it-ta-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, thus, producing ‘aw-e-î-la “divine human being.” Stephen Geller explains:

The god Wē(ila) was chosen to be slaughtered because his name contained the phoneme /w/ through which the new creature, man [awīlu], was to be distinguished from divinity [ilum]. In the first line of the epic the phrase ilu-awīlu 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 awīlu.
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 *AMAR.UD* “Marduk.”

Some cases in Akkadian demonstrate incredible erudition. In the Song of Erra, we find: 
\[\text{d}en-gi \text{6-du-du} \text{bēlu muttallik mūši muttarrū ru-bé-e}\]

Steve Tinney has shown how the sign gi₆ in the name *den-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 *rubû Marduk* it becomes clear that this epithet is a key point in the intertwining of the roles and characters of Išum, Erra and Marduk.

A particularly interesting demonstration appears in the Epic of Gilgamesh in reference to the monstrous Humbaba, about whom the counselors of Uruk ask:

\[\text{mannu ša igerrūšu ina } \text{d}igî[gi]\]

Here the phrase *igerrūšu “oppose him”* (from gerû) evokes *gîrû (GîR) “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.

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


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: 

\[\text{inu sârišunu uḫtappû sirara u labananu ḫasîlim urpatum pešiûm “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, “*Narru and *Zulummār 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

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3. Function
That such examples were not intended to be literary whimsy can be seen in a commentary to the Gula Hymn of Bulluṭsarabi, which reads: 

\[\text{Anum abī kīma šemīšūma im-ba-an-ni} \] “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 dani, ‘Anu called.’” 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.

A well-known example involving a common noun appears in the Egyptian Coffin Texts (Spell 1130, §465a), in which the Lord of All proclaims: 

\[\text{rmṯ m rmwt} \] “I made humankind from tears,” a statement that recalls Spell 80, §33d, in which Atum asserts: 

\[\text{rmṯ pr.t m} \] “humankind emerged from my eye.” The same paronomasia occurs in the Hymn to Aten, and in the Book of the Cow of Heaven, where 

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


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-sḫpr m nj m hrw t jrw m rmṯ s nh s b t n mwfr sgrh sw m tmtrm m “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: \[\text{lw y m swht mdw.j m lr} \] “the chick in the egg chirps in its shell, you give him breath in it to keep him alive.” Note specifically the use of y “chick” and lw “breath.”

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 [ṣḥḥ] in her womb, in this name of yours Sahure [ṣḥḥ-r”] … may you not stay dark [kkw] in her womb, in this name of yours Keku (kkw)!” (10.16–17, 10.23–24).  

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 ḥq-hwn.w “ruler of Heliopolis,” the text boasts that ḥq.w=f ḥṣ.t [mh.fw] “he captured the foreign land of Temehu” and ln.w r ḫ.t “carried (them and their spoils) to Egypt” (1.2–2.3). Here the verb ḥq “capture” echoes ḥq “ruler,” and the verb ln.w “carried” resounds hwn.w “Heliopolis.” The poem later calls the king a [mil] ḫr ḫw “lion against Hurru” (3.8), an epithet that recalls his name wṣr-mḥ ḫ.t “Powerful One of Maat and Ra” (3.9).

The Poetical Stela of Thutmosis III (CM 34010) similarly trumpets the king’s exploits by suggesting his name (i.e., ḏḥwtj-mss). Hence the use of mss “totter” in ḫr mss n ṣḥm.w=f “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: ml ṣḥm.t nṣn.tl m-ḥt ḫ.t ḫ.t ṣḥr.w=f ḥt=sn ṣḥm m ḫ.t=f ṣḥm ḫ.t “like Sekhmet raging during a plague, he flings his arrows against them, seizing on their limbs.” Here the verb ṣḥm “seizing” resounds the name ṣḥm.t “Sekhmet.”

The Pyramid Texts of Pepi I also illustrate this: ḫr ḫ.t= ḫ.t ḫ.t ṣḥm ḫ.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 ṣḥ “cast down” serves as an inherent etymology for the toponym nd.t “Nedyt.”

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: ḏḥ.w=k ṣḥ pr ḫ.t=f ṣḥ ṣḥr “you said, this one wipes (ṣḥ) the mouth (r) of his father in his name Sokar (ṣḥ).” Found in Alan Gardiner, “Hymns to Sobk in a Ramessum Papyrus,” RdE 11 (1957), 49 and n. 6.


196. The god Ra exploits the same paronomasia for appellative purposes in the Destruction of Mankind, ll. 14–15: ḫr ḫ.t ṣḥm ḫ.t= ṣḥ ṣḥr “I shall have power (ṣḥm) over them as king, diminishing them.” Thus, Sekhmet (ṣḥm.t) came into being.”

197. See similarly the following excerpt from the Book of the Night: ḫpr ḫ ḫ ḫ.t ḫ.t ḫ.t q m ṣḥ ḫ.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-bi-nb-gd.t n-sw hr.l-hr.l* “it belongs to (pharaoh) Smendes (Nesubanebed), 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 *sī-nht “Sinuhe” ("son of the sycamore"): *nm.n=m.t.tj m-ḥw nh.t* “I traversed the Seas of Truth in the area of Nahat” (l. 8). Pharaoh’s children similarly illustrate their linguistic abilities when they refer to Sinuhe as *sī-mḥ.jt “son of the northwind,”* rather than *sī-nh.t “Sinuhe”* (l. 276).\footnote{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 yšt*  
   Parched are the furrows of the divine fields.
3. *b’l ’nt mḥrṯ*  
   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. *yiḫd b’l bn aṯrt*  
   Baal seizes the sons of Athirat.
2. *rbm ymḥṣ b ktp*  
   The mighty he strikes with a mace,
3. *dkym ymḥṣ b ṣmd*  
   The attackers he strikes with a weapon.
4. *ṣǵ r ym ym ṣḫ l arṣ*  
   The young of Yam he drags back to the earth.


3. Function 107

The name Yam in line 4 is anticipated visually by the two-fold use of \textit{ymḥṣ} “(he) strikes” and \textit{dkym} “attackers.” The passage is abetted by paronomasia between \textit{ymḥṣ “(he) strikes,” smd “weapon,” and ymṣḥ “(he) drags.”}199

In \textit{CAT} 1.15.v.19–21 we find paronomasia on the name of Kirtu’s son Yaṣṣib:

19. … šbia špš

… the niche of the sun,

20. b’lny w ymlk

our lord, therefore Yaṣṣib will reign

21. [y]ṣb ‘ln …

over us.

Observe how the noun \textit{šbia “niche”} anticipates the name Yaṣṣib, and how the connection is enhanced by paronomasia between \textit{b’lny “our lord” and ’ln “over us.”}200

Paronomasia has an appellative function also in the Tale of Aqhat, in which Yaṭpan, the Sutean (ṣṭ) warrior, informs the goddess Anat that Aqhat has \textit{št ṭrm “set (down) a meal”} (\textit{CAT} 1.18.iv.14). In line 17 of the same text, Anat uses the same verb \textit{št “set”} in her reply to the Sutean: \textit{ašṭk 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: \textit{aqt w yplṭk bn [dnīl …] w yʿḏrk “(Then cry) to Aqhat and he will save you, to the son of Danel … and he will rescue you”} (\textit{CAT} 1.18.i.13–14). Note how \textit{yplṭk “he will save you”} paronomastically anticipates El’s title \textit{lṭpn “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, אֶבֶּקֶא

199. Yam’s name appears elsewhere in the same text when Yam does battle with Baal. There we are told: \textit{z ym l ymk “Yam is fierce, he does not sink”} (\textit{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 (\textit{tmt}), a quarter by disease (\textit{zblnm}) (\textit{CAT} 1.14.i.16–17. Here \textit{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 \textit{šlḥ “the sword,” which could allude to the chthonic deity šlḥ “Shaleḥ”} (l. 20).

200. This pericope contains another example of appellative paronomasia between the noun \textit{ḥbr “lad”} and the toponym \textit{ḥbr “Hubur.”}

“Wordplay” in Ancient Near Eastern Texts

yaʿăqōḇ “Jacob” receives his name, because he grabbed the בֵקָﬠ ʿāqēḇ “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 šǝmūʾēl “Samuel” explaining: הָוהְיֵמ וִיתְּלִאְשׁ mē-YHWH šǝʾiltīw “I asked Yahweh for him.” Though the etymology of the name Samuel is debated, scholars agree that it is unrelated to the verb šāʾal meaning “ask.”203 Nevertheless, the presence of the sounds /š/, /ʾ/, 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:

יִכּ הָזַּﬠ ʿazzāh ʿăzūḇāh ṯihyɛh wǝ-ʾašqǝlōn lišmāmāh ʾašdōḏ baṣ-ṣŏhŏrayīm yǝg̱ āršūḥǝ wǝ-ʿɛqrōn tēʿāqēr “for Gaza shall be forsaken, and Ashkelon a desolation, they shall drive out Ashdod at noon, and Ekron shall become barren.”205 The name הָזַּﬠ ʿazzāh “Gaza” resounds in the verb הָבוּזֲﬠ ʿăzūḇāh “forsaken” and נוְרֶﬠ ʿɛqrōn “Ekron” in the verb רֵקָﬠֵתּ tēʿāqēr “shall become barren.”206 In addition, the name דוֹדְּשַׁא ʾašdōḏ “Ashdod” suggests the verb דַדָשׁ šāḏaḏ “destroy.”

In addition, the name הָבְוָﬠ ʿăzūḇāh “forsaken” and נוְרֶﬠ ʿɛqrōn “Ekron” in the verb רֵקְﬠֵתּ tēʿāqēr “shall become barren.”


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 שׁ sām and יָגָר 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 noṭariqon, see 4.1.11.

204. Similar appellative paronomasias informs the account of the necromancer of Endor in 1 Sam 28:3–25, in which we find הָבְוָﬠ ʿăzūḇāh “ask,” and הַשּׁוֹא ʿal “Sheol,” so the paronomasia between them is effectively primarily visually.

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

206. הָזַּﬠ reflects PS ʿazzāh, whereas הָבְוָﬠ represents PS ʿăzūḇāh, so the paronomasia between them is effectively 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.\textsuperscript{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 [šāʾūl] died because of his unfaithfulness to Yahweh … and also for asking [li-šʾōl] counsel of a necromancer to seek (advice).”\textsuperscript{208} See also 1 Chr 28:9: “And you Solomon [šālōmōh], my son, know the God of your father, and serve him with a perfect [šālēm] heart and a willing spirit.”\textsuperscript{209}

Paronomasia with an appellative purpose also informs the pious boast of the Moabite king Mesha: “I built a high place of salvation [yinušă], because Chemosh saved me [h-šʿny] from all kings” (ll. 3–4). Here the highlighted words recall the king’s name [mšʿ] “Mesha.”\textsuperscript{210}

The Phoenician inscription of Azitawadda (\textit{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 (bʿl krntryš) to bless it with prosperity: w-kn h-qrt z bʿlt šbʿ w-trš “and may this city possess grain and new wine” (C, l. 7).\textsuperscript{211} The petition echoes the name Baal in the verb bʿlt “possess” and the noun krntryš “mace” in the words trš “wine.”\textsuperscript{212}

\textsuperscript{207} Zalcman, “Ambiguity and Assonance at Zephaniah II 4,” 367.
\textsuperscript{209} Kalimi, “Paronomasia in the Book of Chronicles,” 38.
\textsuperscript{210} The repeated use of bʿl “father” in the inscription (ll. 2–3) in conjunction with the repeated name נֶמ [mēa “Moab” mʿb (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 נֶמ ’āb + יִס min “from the father,” i.e., by way of incest. Zakowitch, “Explicit and Implicit Name-Derivations,” 168, notes that “in the Moabite dialect the Hebrew ō-vocalization is pronounced ę. The name being derived, then is Mē ʾāb.” He compares the forms with ה mē in Gen 19:32, 19:34, 19:36.
\textsuperscript{211} Cf. Prov 3:10.
\textsuperscript{212} On the interpretation “mace-bearer,” from the Greek *κορυνητήριος, see Philip C. Schmitz, “Phoenician KRNTRYŠ, Archaic Greek *ΚΟΡΥΝΗΤΗΡΙΟΣ, and the Storm
One also finds an appellative use of paronomasia in the Aramaic Levi Document from Qumran. When the mother of Merari (מראיר mrry) recalls his birth, she states:

for I was bitter [רֵר מרי lr yr mry] on his account particularly, for when he was born he was dying. And I was very bitter [יהוה מראיר ול] on his account since he was about to die, and I implored and beseeched on his account, and there was bitterness [מרי mlr] in everything. (XI, 8)

Amram (עמאם ʿmrm) too is given his name in XII, 4, as his grandmother recalls, “for I said [ʾמר תראית] when he was born, ‘This one will raise up [בראשית והוהי נברג המרמ ] the people from the land of Egypt. Accordingly [his name] will be called the exalted people [אמרה עמאם ʿmʾ rmʾ].’”

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 [שרחיה šḥrh] star shone forth like light [הרוה נעריה nwrh šḥyrh], to redeem the black one [שרחיה שחרה šḥrw] from the land of the Nile [שרח יה נעריה šḥyrh].” Though the Hebrew term for the Nile derives from the Egyptian ś-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.” Adding to the paronomasia is נורח nwrh “light,” which repeats the final sound /ra/. 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.

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


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

3. Function

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.” An 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.

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 mušāšir 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.”

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

The Egyptian Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor illustrates this function as well. The text’s colophon informs us that the text is ššš.w qr n ḏb.ʿw=š.m.j sš ‘a writing of the writer, clever-fingered, Ameny’s son Amenaa” (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.

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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.
(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.

In addition, the name Amun, twice contained in ln.j ʿlm-n-ʿ j “Ameny’s son Amenaa,” also recalls the mn.t “mooring-post” at the start of the tale.

In Ugaritic, we find the name of the scribe Ilmillku (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 Ilmillku instruct you?"

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 (šlōmōh). These occur in the lines “for why (šlōmāh) should I be as one who strays” (1:7); “return, return, O Shulammite (ḥaš-šūlammīṯ)” (7:1), and in the noun šalōm “peace” (8:10). The name šlōmōh itself follows the latter paronomasia closely in 8:11. Several lexemes in the Song reference Solomon’s other name yǝḏīḏyāh “Beloved of Yah(weh)” (2 Sam 12:25), in particular the repeated forms ḏōḏī ḏōḏɛḵā “your love” and ḏōḏī “my beloved” (e.g., Song 1:4, 2:9, 2:17, etc.).

Another subtle colophon in Isa 12:2–3 exploits the root y-š-ʿ “triumph, deliver” to echo the name yǝšaʿyāh “Isaiah.”


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

Behold the God of my triumph [יִתָﬠוּשְׁי yǝšūʿāṯī]! I am confident, unafraid! For my strength [יִזָּﬠ ʿŏzzī] and might is Yah, Yahweh, and he will be my deliverance [לָﬠוּשׁי lī-šūʿāh]. Joyfully shall you draw water, from the fountains of triumph [הָﬠוּשְׁיַה ha-yǝšūʿāh].

In addition, the use of יִזָּﬠ ʿŏzzī “my strength” (12:2) represents a subtle allusion to King Uzziah (וּהָיִּזֻּﬠ ʿuzzīyyāhū), 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 קזח h-z-q “be strong, strengthen,” a synonym for יִזָּﬠ ʿŏzzī. 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.”

I add to Garsiel’s observations that the repetition of the root קזח h-z-q recalls the name Hezeqiah (וּהָיִּקְזִחְי yǝḥizqīyyāhū), 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.” 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 = šaqû, and SIG7.ALAN = nabnītu. 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.” 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

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

A similar strategy appears in some Egyptian texts. The Ramesside dream manual contains several examples. The omen in r. 2.8 reads: $[hr]$ rd $t$ n=f $hm$ m [..] $[nfr]$ h.t [qīl]=f lm=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 hīj $[nfr]$ hm gw. wt pw $irj=$f [..] “his woman to a married man; [good], it means that the bad things related to him will retreat.” The two omens were written in sequence, because $hr$ “upon” and $hm$ “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 [sʿ$m$] plants are there, and one feels great [sʿ$i$] in front of them,” and concludes, “if I am met by any of your glances, it would be better than food and drink [wm-swf].”

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.

However, the Hebrew Bible contains several examples of paronomasia serving as an organizing principle. In Gen 4:20–22, the narrator states that...
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 (יהל זילל), whose name derives from a root meaning “musical tone or ring,” whence מִשְׁלֵי הָלִיץ mesilayim “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: לָבָי yāḇāl “Yabal,” לָבוּי yūḇāl “Yubal,” and לַבוּתּן yūḇāl qayīn “Tubal-cain.”

Some of the legal materials also appear to have been organized according to paronomastic principles. Alexander Rofē 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 ἐντα ὑποκειμένον ἐντα “fee” and the former the similar sounding verb ὑπενθύμισι ὑπενθύμισι “oppress him.”236

Cassuto similarly opined that the list of Moses’s spies draws upon paronomastic associations of their names. Thus, לֵאיִדַגּ gaddīʾēl bɛn sōḏī “Gaddiel the son of Sodi” naturally preceded the similar sounding יִדַגּ gaddī bɛn sūsī “Gadi the son of Susi,” and אֱסֶתוֹר Sethur “Sethur” was followed by נָהֵב nahbi “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 [דָﬠְמֶא ʾɛmʿāḏ]” (26:1), and concludes: My foot stands [ăn̄māדāh ʾămōdāh] 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 בָשַח, 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.


237. “Sethur” from the root s-t-r and “Nahbi” from h-b-.” Cassuto’s observations are cited by Rofē, “Arrangement of the Laws in Deuteronomy,” 265.
two verbal stems are anagrams and antonyms of each other and form an inclusio.\textsuperscript{238} 

He also points to Ps 64:9–10:

\begin{verbatim}
way-yakšīlūhū ʿālēmō bsōnām yipqōḏāḏū kōl rōʾēh ḃām
way-yīyrǝʾū kōl ʾāḏām way-yaggīḏū pō al el-ḥūm u-ma ʿāsēhā hiskīlū
\end{verbatim}

And they shall cause themselves to stumble on account of their own tongues, they shall shudder, all who see them.
And all men shall fear, and they shall declare the work of God and they shall understand his doing.

The first verb in the first line (וּהוּליִשְׁכַיַּו way-yakšīlūhū “and they shall cause themselves to stumble”) and the last in the second line (וּליִכְּשִׂה hiškīlū “they shall understand”) are paronomastic. So too are the penultimate word in the first line (הֵאֹר rōʾēh “who see”) and the first word in the second line (וּאְריִיַּו way-yīyrǝʾū “they shall fear”).\textsuperscript{239} To these fine observations I add the inherent paronomasia between דונ n-m-d and הֶד יִגְגִּד n-g-d.

The Aramaic Proverbs of Ahiqar similarly employ paronomasia as an organizational principle. In particular, proverbs C1 1:126, 1:128, and 1:129 appear to have been grouped together, because the first proverb contains the noun טח ḥṭ “arrow,” the second טח ḥṭ “arrow” and אטח ḥṭʾ “sin,” and the third אטנח ḥnṭtʾ “wheat.”\textsuperscript{240}

\begin{footnotes}
238. Nachman Levine, “Vertical Poetics: InterLinear Phonological Parallelism in Psalms,” JNSL 29 (2004): 73, notes additional (nonparonomastic) lexical items tying the beginning to the end. He argues for seeing the vertical use of paronomasia as a new device. However, all texts are, in essence, vertical structures in which one finds paronomasia. So I see his examples simply as additional cases of extended paronomasia, as found elsewhere in biblical poetry and prose. See also John S. Kselman, “Semantic-Sonant Chiasmus in Biblical Poetry,” Bib 58 (1977): 219–23, for related observations.


240. Proverbs C1 1:127 and 1:129 also have nearly identical endings. On other poetic features in the text, see Wilfred G. E. Watson, Traditional Techniques in Classical Hebrew Verse, JSOTSup 170 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 72–86.
\end{footnotes}
3. Function

3.12. MNEMONIC

A mnemonic function has been attributed to some cases of polysemy and paronomasias. Nathan Wasserman has argued that such devices abetted the memorization of proverbs in Mesopotamian culture. Loprieno has suggested that aiding the memory was one of the primary functions of paronomasia in Egyptian texts since it produced a rhythmic effect. 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.

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, or in the case of the book of Lamentations, to provide readers with a mechanism for interacting with their emotions through reason. 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. One Egyptian acrostic appears equally performative in that it reads in multiple directions and contains a hymn to the goddess Mut. Another from Egypt records the prayer of a man who is deceased.

241. In Akkadian proverbs, for example. See Wasserman, *Style and Form in Old Babylonian Literary Texts*, 171.
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. Thus, in an Akkadian dream omen compendium one finds: “if one dreams he is eating a raven [ārubu]; it means he will have plenty [irbu].” 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*. For example, “if a sow gives birth, but (the babies) die [imūtū]: its master will soon receive an order [amātu].” The verb *imūtū* “they will die” in the protasis connects paronomastically to *amātu* “order” in the apodosis (22.86). See also omen 6.42: “if there is a malformed birth, and in its belly [libbișu] there is an egg [pelûmma], and inside [libbi] the egg [pelî] there is a chick [atmu]: the throne will change; the lake [tâmtu] will dry up [ibbal].” As De Zorzi notes, paronomasia obtains between *atmu* “chick” and *tâmtu* “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 *pelû* “egg,” which suggests *palû* “reign, length of reign.”


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).

The interpretation derives from the knowledge that if one writes the word for “fox” syllabically as šē-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: 4LAMMA = 4ŠU, LAMMA being Sumerian for Lamassu.

Not only do Akkadian divinatory texts employ polysemy and paronomasia as a hermeneutic, but literary texts that report divinatory activity do so as well. 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-qā-tam a-na se-ri-ia
   A [meteor]ite of Anu fell down upon me.
8. aš-ši-šu-ma ik-ta-hi-it e-li-ia
   I picked it up, but it was too heavy for me.
9. ú-ni-ši-su-ma nu-uš-ša-šu ú-uš el-ti-ʾi
   I pushed at it, but I could not budge it.
10. uruk44 ma-tum pa-ši-ir e-li-šu
    The land of Uruk gathered around it.
11. eš-lu-tum ú-na-su-qā ʾši-pi-šu
    The young men were kissing its feet.
12. ú-am-mi-id-ma pu-ti
    I braced my forehead
13. i-mi-du ia-ši
    and they supported me.
14. aš-ši-a-šu-ma at-ba-la-aš-šu a-na se-ri-ki
    I picked it up and carried it off to you.

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253. CAD L, s.v. “lamassu.”
254. For other Akkadian dream accounts, see Noegel, Nocturnal Ciphers, 57–88.
Of particular interest is the noun kiṣru, which in the context of the dream means "meteorite," but also can mean a "steppeland plant" as well as "strength." The word sērīya appears to be the preposition and suffix, that is, "upon me," though sēri 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 sēri iwalidma “born of the steppeland.”

In the Egyptian dream manual, one finds that if a man dreams of: dī=tw n=f t ḥḏ nfr h.t pw ḥḏ 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 ḥḏ “white bread” in the protasis resounds in the verb ḥḏ “brighten” in the apodosis. The same device appears in the only extant literary report of a dream interpretation in Egypt.

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 ṣeq qayīṣ “summer fruits,” which is interpreted as signaling the ṣeq qēṣ “end” of Israel. Similarly, in the book of Jeremiah, Yahweh shows the prophet a ṣeq šaqēḏ “almond-branch,” which is decoded to mean that Yahweh will ṣeq šōqēḏ “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...
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 לולֶץ [סָלָל] ṣĕlōl [ṣəlīl] “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 שבץ [לֶחֶם שֶׁעַרִים] ṣĕḥem šə’ārīm “loaf of barley,” which David Yellin brilliantly espied as an echo of לֶחֶם שֶׁעַרִים [לֶחֶם שֶׁעַרִים] lāḥĕm 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 חפש [חָפָה] ḫāp̄ aḵ “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

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East, 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-xú NIGIN-šu ri-ta-šu ü GÌR.MEŠ-šu i-ra-ú-ba ŠU ra-bi-ti šà ki šà-aš-šà-ṭì-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 raʾābu “tremble” and rabû “great one.”

The Edwin Smith Surgical Papyrus also employs paronomasia at times to diagnose a symptom:

It is seminal emission [mnsʾ ] 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 sʾw],” when it cannot sink downward (and) it cannot lift upward. (10.19-21)

Here the mnsʾ “seminal emission” and nšw “discharge” paronomastically suggest the explanation mn sʾw “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


264. Examined in Scurluck and Andersen, Diagnoses in Assyrian and Babylonian Medicine, 68, with the “pun” noted on 693 n. 203.

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 MA it means “cause to sprout” (= Akkadian aṣû). Moreover, SAR can refer to “vegetation.”\(^\text{266}\)

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.”\(^\text{267}\)

One Mesopotamian medical commentary goes a step farther in attempting to explain the word GUDUM: “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 BÜR) “ear,” and renders it “the one who opens the ears.”\(^\text{268}\)

The same method is applied elsewhere to the sign designating the gallû-demon, that is, ḪUL. In this case, the cuneiform sign is read as if composed of ŠI and UR, and understood as pseudo-Sumerian signs that yield IGI TĒŠ meaning “the eye that comes to shame.”\(^\text{269}\)

Though some Egyptian texts show evidence of hermeneutical glosses based on polysemy and paronomasia, the Egyptians never developed the commentary as a literary genre.\(^\text{270}\) 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


\(^{267}\) 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 TŪG-su it-ta-na-as-su-û-rap-pad IGI-šû u-ma-ḫa-as NA BI ḪUL 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.”

The root רָשׁפ p-š-r, whence “pesharim,” essentially means “interpret,” and it has its origins in divination, especially by way of dreams. 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.”

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 וַשָּמְל māšāl “proverb.” The Pesher to Habakkuk interprets the passage as alluding to the Priest of Wickedness who became a וַשָּמֶל mšl “ruler.”

In the Pesher to Nahum (3–4, III, 1–5), וָשַׁמְל w-šamtìḵ “I will make you (a spectacle)” in Nah 3:6, is understood to mean וָשָמֶל wšm “I will make you guilty.” As Shani Berrin observes, the interpretation relies on reading the consonant sin (ש) in וָשַׁמְל w-šamtìḵ as a šin (ש), and thus deriving the verb from the root ש-מ-ש š-m-m “be guilty.” Elsewhere in the Pesher to Nahum (3–4 III, 8–9), we find the prophet’s reference to a וָשַׁמְל wšm “rampart” (Nah 3:8), interpreted as נֶמֶשׂ חָל nš y ḥyl “men of power.”


276. Berrin, Pesher Nahum Scroll from Qumran, 279.
3. Function

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


eighteenth century BCE, conclude with the formula KI.BŪR.BI “its solution,” and then give the answer. Civil remarks: “Phonological ambiguities, double-entendres, and all kinds of word plays are everywhere essential features of the genre.”

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.GÂL BA.AN.KU₄
5. IGI JGÂL BA.AN.TA.É
6. KI.BŪR.BI É.DUB.BA.ÂM

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 ABSÌN “furrow.” We may understand DUB.ŠEN as “tablet box,” but also URUDAŠEN “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.”

1. HE.EL.ŠU KA […] Á BÌ.ÍN.[GAR?]  
2. GÚ.MU.DA HIÉ.[IM.DA.LÁ]  
3. KI.BŪR.BI GAL₄.LA.[ÂM]

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 ḫittu and tētu, the former cognate with Hebrew ננפני hîḏāh “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.”
Here the Sumerian ḪE.EL.ṢU is a loanword from Akkadian ḫalṣu “fortress” (with a by-form hilṣu), a noun selected to evoke the Sumerian ḪI.LI.SÙ “full of (sexual) charm.”

1. ŠUŠKINŠE.ŠÈ Ì.DU.DÈ.EN.MA.A
2. EĞIR.MU.ŠÈ I.IM.GUR.RE.EN
3. [KI].BÚR.BI GIMBAR.À[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.” A few other Sumerian riddles are known, but their interpretations are difficult.

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.

The Egyptians have not left us riddles as a distinct literary genre. 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:
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. The solution to the problem is that the “trap” is “love.” In a similar way, the capture of the weḏ 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.” 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.

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. 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: ‘to understand parables and figures, the words of the wise and their riddles’ (Prov 1:6). See

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.  
similarly Samson’s famous riddle: 
מה הוא המאכל במצולма
פְּרוֹפָהּ
שָׁאָה
d-mē-āḵēl
yāḏā’ maʾāḵāl ū-mē-ʿōḵēl
“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 יֵרְא ʿĂrī for both “lion” and “honey.”

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 Dan, which settled between רֵי הָעֵרְצָה Ṭzorah” and Eshtaol (Jud 13:25). The Danites lived in לַיְיוֹשׁ layiš “Laish” (Judg 18:29), meaning “lion,” and the place name Ṭzorah means “hornet, bee” (Exod 23:28), which evokes the “honey.”

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. Such also is the account of Daniel’s “writing on the wall,” which Al Wolters observes, functions like a riddle.

Karel Deurloo has made similar arguments for Ps 19. 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.

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 לָשׁוֹן 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

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.  

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.” 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 ḪU.MU.NI.IN.RI, which the scribe used to render the Akkadian ṭābiš ṭu 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.”

In the same text, the Sumerian KUŠ₂ BI MUŠ₂ GA.E.NE oddly renders the Akkadian pilludāšumu nussuqūtu “their choice rituals” (l. 21). Though MUŠ₂ GA is EME.SAL for MÚŠ₂.TÚM naparkû “cease work,” the Akkadian reads nussuqūtu “choice.” The writing constitutes a learned extrapolation on naparkû, for naparkû also translates Sumerian ŠAḪḪ (ḪA.A), which the author identifies with SUḪ nasāqu “choose, pick out.”

A number of Akkadian commentaries employ cryptographic writing in order to keep their contents from the non-initiated. 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.

There are numerous examples of cryptographic writing in Egyptian texts, most notably in later Ptolemaic inscriptions, like those at the temples of Esna and


304. George, “Ninurta-Pāqidāt’s Dog Bite, and Notes on Other Comic Tales,” 64.

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...
3. Function

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: *kabōḏ ʾɛ̆lōhīm hastēr dāḇār* “the glory of God is to conceal a matter (lit. “word”).” Indeed, the Israelites appreciated clever speech, as the following proverb informs us: *tapūḥē zāḥāḥ ba-maskīyyōṯ kāsɛp̄ dāḇār dāḇur ʿal ʾāp̄ ǝnāw* “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-ḥasis 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
shared essence, the text draws a paronomastic connection between the divine ētemmu “spirit” of the god Wē-ila and the temu “intelligence” of the first awīlu “man.”

The biblical counterpart to this account is the stream of paronomastic terms that inform how God created the first בָּדָא ʾāḏām “human” from the הָמָדֲאʾăḏāmāh “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., בָּדָא ʾāḏōm) inherent in both terms suggests their fertility.

Moreover, the implicit suggestion in both of דֵאʾēḏ “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.” 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. 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.

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 Enḫeduanna, 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

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.”

The readings pivot on a double polysemy (see 4.1.6): the sign ME means “divine properties that permit cosmic activity” (= Akkadian *parṣu*) or “battle” (= Akkadian *tāḫāzu*); 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. Throughout the opening hymn the poet describes Marduk as a god of extreme contrasts. Indeed, we hear that he is *ēzīz mūši muppašīr 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.”

Moreover, many of the merisms are ambiguous and impel one to contemplate the meaning of Marduk’s actions. With regard to the aforementioned expression *muppašīr 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…?

The poem continues:

8. *mu-ussaḫ-ḫir ka-ra-as-su ka-bat-ta-šū ta-a-a-rat*
   His mood turns, his emotion pivots,

9. *šā nak-bat qa-ti-šū la i-na-aš-šu-ū šā-ma- ʿu-ū*
   The force of whose hand, the heavens cannot hold,

10. rit-tuš rab-ba-a-ti ú-kaš-šu mi-i-ta
   Whose palm is gentle, it assists the dying.
11. ḫAMAR.UTU ša nak-ba qa-ti-šu la i-na-aš-šu-ú šá-na-ʾu-ú
    Marduk, the force of whose hand, the heavens cannot hold,
12. rab-ba-a-ti rit-ta-šu ú-kaš-šu mi-i-ta
    Gentle is his palm, it assists the dying.
13. ša i-na šá-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: *musahḥir karassu kabattašu tārat* “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 *musahḥir* 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 *kâšu* (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 *rabbâtu*, 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: *kī ʾāḏām lǝ-ʿāmāl yūllāḏ* “for mankind is born...
for toil/trouble” (Job 5:7). Typically, scholars suggest repointing the verb to make it a passive (niphal) form דֵלָוִּי, yōlēḏ. However, before the Masoretes added vowels, the verb דֵלָוִּי also permitted the reading דֵלָוִּי, a causative (hiphil) conjugation, thus allowing us to render the line with quite the opposite sense: “humankind begets trouble.”

In fact, many manuscripts also read דלי, which would permit a reading דַלֻי, yulaḏ (a qal or hophal passive) or דִלֹי, yolīḏ (hiphil). 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.

Perhaps the most well-known biblical example of polysemy to express divine ineffability is the divine name that God reveals to Moses: הוהי רֶשֲׁא ʾɛhyɛh ʾăšɛr ʾɛhyɛh (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 הוהי רֶשֲׁא ʾɛhyɛh is part of the name or the explanation the deity offers for why his name is הוהי ʾɛhyɛh. 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

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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.\footnote{330} Sennacherib’s Annals (2.24–25) offer a fine demonstration.\footnote{331}

1. UN.MEŠ KUR.KUR ki-šit-ti ŠU.II-ia IN A lib-bi ú-še-šib
   I populated the land with those that I had conquered.

2. UN.MEŠ KUR kušši-ti u KUR 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 kušši “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[idi]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 bilta emēdu “impose tribute”).\footnote{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: \textit{w lb=k m sk=k m šd=k n šh.t ër.w bpr hr.t=k m ër.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).\footnote{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: \textit{lr n=1 mrr.t nb.t k<st>š.ḥ. n=1 lw n=1 m k.t nḥḥ “who does for me all that my ka desires. You have built my

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{330}{Watson, \textit{Classical Hebrew Poetry}, 246.}
\footnote{331}{Grayson and Novotny, \textit{Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib}, 3.}
\footnote{333}{Sethe, \textit{Urkunden der 18. Dynastie}, 116.}
\end{footnotes}
sanctuary as a work of eternity” (l. 24). Note how the connection is realized by way of paronomasia between kt “ka-spirit” and k.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). 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. Often this serves, with Watson, to denote reversal. Jeremiah’s prophecy illustrates this well:

Make known in Noph [ףֹנְב多万元] and in Tahpanes [סֵחְנַפְּחַתְבוּ] and say, “stand forth and prepare yourself, for the sword has devoured round about you. Why is your strong one overthrown [ףַחְסִנּ nishap̄]? He did not stand, because Yahweh thrust him down.” (Jer 46:14–15)

The sounds /n/ and /p/ in 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 [דַגּ gaḏ] and fill bowls of mixed wine for Destiny [יִנְמ manī], I will destine [יִתיִנָמ mānīṯī] 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 manī “Destiny” with Yahweh’s promise mānīṯī “I will destine.” The second is the punishment by “sword,” which reminds us of the audible connections between

334. See Noegel, Nocturnal Ciphers.
336. Levine, “Vertical Poetics,” 65–82, also examines cases of paronomasia that demonstrate reversal.
The paronomasia that obtains between מִלְחָא yāḡūrū “feel dread” and נָבָל lāḇān “departed” underscores a connection between the act (idolatrous worship) and consequence (exile). Moreover, as Landy remarks, the verb נָבָל lāḇān “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.”

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. To cite one example, one hears the name לָבָן lāḇān “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 lāḇān “white” on them (Gen 30:35), and collects fresh rods of לִפְנָה līḇnɛh “poplar” (Gen 30:37), in which he peels לָבְלוֹן lēḇānōṯ “white streaks” in order to reveal their הָלָכוּ hal-lāḇān “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.

Illustrating *lex talionis* in Aramaic is a wisdom saying in the Proverbs of Ahiqar: “[i]f you have dr[rawn your bow and shot your arrow (טח ḥṭ) at a more righteous man than yourself, it is a sin (אטח ḥṭʾ) against the gods” (C1 1:128). Here paronomasia connects the act of shooting the arrow and the sin.

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339. Noegel, “Drinking Feasts and Deceptive Feats.”
340. Note the rabbinic expression: מַה דִּמְי חָסָד אֲדָם מִי מַדְּדִי ט וּבַז מָדְדַּי b-mdh š-ʿdm mweed bh mvuyd lω “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 šuttatum šeṭītum “disputes are a covered pit” (l. 38). The repetition of the /t/, /m/, and /š/ sounds, combined with the two emphatics (š and ṭ), strengthens the connection between disputes and a covered pit. Later, we also hear:

81. ma-ri lu-u lib-ba-šá-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 22KIŠIB (kunukka)-šá lu al-lat
   If you attach his closely guarded seal (around your neck),
83. pi-ti-ma na-šir-ta-šú e-ra-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 (naṣramma) the seal, the son will have access to the nasiritu “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 phî 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 rû st].
   It is a wretched liaison [tû], 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.
According to James Allen, a number of polysems present in the text comprise sexual innuendos. The expression *ḥr pḫ st* “splitting it open” can refer to the private area of the house and also female sexual organs. The words *ḥr rḫ st* “experiencing” (lit. ‘knowing’) it can mean “have sexual relations.” The *ṯ* “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: קהנוה חוכמה והרמשי המהר ישנה וננה ליט לשנים וקסט קאנה סלע נהר
“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 כהנ רמש, which one can read as the noun “gold,” and thus a perfect parallel with פסכנ כסה “silver,” or as a passive participle from the root כרה, 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 נמ 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 ניחו “be chosen” before כסה היר “silver” in this passage offers an ironic turn of phrase on the expression כסה ניחו “high-grade (i.e., select) silver” (Prov 10:20).

In Prov 22:22, we find polysemy and paronomasia used for delivering moral precepts: לא תצעל דאל כי יאל חא’ וואל תדהק ‘א니 בָּשָׁא עַר “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 דאל 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ようです “gate.” G. R. Driver explains:

3. Function

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 תפש משמה חכמה ובידודיהו מתיש
בי מעון תלמהו כלך בהשכוף לא ירי

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...
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. 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). Though he hears the message in Sumerian, the context clarifies that the raven 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). Namzitarra responds:

12. 4EN.LÍ.L.E IGI.NI MU.NI.IN.GI
    Enlil had changed his appearance:
13. UGA[^mune]-AŠ Ù.MU.NI.IN.KU
    having turned into a raven,
14. GÙ A.L.DÉ.DÉ.E
    he was croaking.

348. See Noegel, Nocturnal Ciphers, 50–55, 176–82; Noegel, ‘‘Sign, Sign, Everywhere a Sign.’’
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?”
3. Function

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. Specifically, Namzitarra’s statement in line 18 evokes the words UGA ZU, that is, “to know the raven.” Vanstiphout also observes that the last few signs in line 18 permit the reading NAM.GA.ZU meaning “I surely know this/you.” 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. It marks his wisdom and priestly status. Indeed, as a reward for his wisdom, Namzitarra receives a hereditary prebend.

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. 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...
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 rāμû “untie” and rāμūti “slack.”\(^{361}\)

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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. “rāμû”), rēmu “love” (CAD R, s.v. “rēmu”), “wild bull” (CAD R, s.v. “rēmu”), rēmu “womb, pity” (CAD R, s.v. “rēmu”), and rāμû “set, bestow, occupy” (CAD R, s.v. “rāμû”). A few examples will demonstrate. In a Hymn to Sin, we find: rēmu álīd nāphari ša itti šiknat napiši šubtu elleti rāμû “womb that gives birth to all things, that has occupied a holy residence among mankind.” The line ties rēmu “womb” to rāμû “set, bestow, occupy” Cited in CAD R, s.v. “rāμû.” The text appears in Edmund Guthrie Perry, *Hymnen und Gebete an Sin* (Leipzig:
3. Function

An Akkadian ritual for pacifying a crying baby offers the following instructions: “in a tavern, where the beer barrels [ḫubûru] are, during the silent time [qūltu] of night you sweep together dust from between them.” The dust from the vats of ḫubûru “beer” linguistically assists in making a salve to silence (qūltu) the infant’s ḫubûru “noise.”

See also the Akkadian anti-witchcraft series Maqlû 1.126–130, which contains twenty-five consecutive words that derive either from the root kašāpu “bewitch” or epēšu “do (magic)”:  

kaššāpu ikšipanni  kaššāpu ikšipanni  kišipšu
kaššāptu takšipanni  kišipši takšipanni  kišipši
ēpišu īpušanni  īpušanni epussu
ēpištu tēpušanni  epuši tēpušanni epussi
muštēpištu tēpušanni  epuši tēpušanni epussi

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.

The repetition of the sounds /p/, /š/, or /s/ evokes the verb pasāsu “break, annul, cancel,” while muštēpištu suggests the pištu “revilement” of the witch.

Hindrichs, 1907), 1. In the Epic of Gilgamesh 1.35–36, the hero is described as: rīmu (AM) ša 4lugalbanda 4Gīš-gimmaš gītmālu emūqi ēniq arḫi širri rimat-4nisun “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.


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: ušēṣiaši a-pa-ni ušaḫlipašši sé-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 sé-er-re-nim as “door-pivot” (ṣerru), “snake” (ṣerru), or “steppe” (ṣēru). 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 ḥr “effective in speech,” spd ḏls.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: lmn=st ḥkt.w=sn r t tmm šd m sbj.jt “they (scribal masters) hid their magic from the whole land, to be read in (their) instructions” (8.6–7). According to the

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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.\(^\text{371}\) This perceived power explains a Coffin Text spell (§647) that invokes Ptah by referring to him as “creative” (\(\text{ph.t}\)) and “strong” (\(\text{ph.tj}\)), adjectives that evoke his name.\(^\text{372}\)

Equally performative are Amun’s declaration to Thutmose III in his so-called Poetical Stela (CM 34010): \(\text{sn.t} = k \ \text{hr} \ n = k \ \text{sn} \ \text{hr} \ \text{hr} \ \text{hr} \ \text{gw.t}\) “(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 \(\text{hr}\), once as the verb “raise,” twice as the preposition “up” or “upon,” and then in embedded form in the verb \(\text{shr} \ “\text{crush.” Strengthening the connection visually is the appearance of the face sign \(\pi\) in each word.}\(^\text{373}\)

On a situla in the Louvre is an inscription that ritually connects Osiris with Khnum of Elephantine by employing the following words: \(\text{ẖnm} = s \ n = k \ \text{ẖnm.w}\) “she (Sothis) associates you with Khnum.”\(^\text{374}\) Here the ritual of identification takes place in the very word \(\text{ẖnm} \ “associate,” which anticipates \(\text{ẖnm.w} \ “\text{Khnum.”}\)

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 (\text{CAT} 1.100, 65–67).\(^\text{375}\)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{r’rm yn’nh} & \quad \text{With the tamarisk, he scatters it,} \\
\text{ssnm ysynh} & \quad \text{With the date-palm branch, he slashed it,}
\end{align*}
\]


\(^{372}\) 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),” \text{JE} 482 (1996): 198–99.

\(^{373}\) Additional paronomasia obtains between \(\text{sn.wt} \ “\text{sisters and sn \ “them.” A similar paronomastic use of hr appears in the Tale of Sinuhe (P. Berlin 3022), II. 277–278, where pharaoh’s children say of Sinuhe: } \text{rw} = k \ \text{ti n hr (li)} = k \ \text{mi hr n mi hr} = k \ “\text{he abandoned the land for dread of you. There will be no destruction for the face that sees your face.” Here hr is used for “dread,” then twice for “face,” each time using the sign } \stackrel{\circ}{\circ}.\)


With a flowing current, he made it disappear,
With a stream, he took it.

Note how the spell embeds the sounds of the noun 'r 'tamarisk' in the verb n 'shake,' the ssn 'date-palm' in the verb nsy 'slash,' the dt 'current' in the verb dy 'cause to disappear,' and the ybl '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 ḫṭk r[ ]
   (Baal) shall drive off the young man's accuser, the affliction of your staff [ ].
2. b 'l tg ḫṭk w tsu lpn ql ṭ'y
   Baal, the affliction of your staff. So, you shall depart before the voice of the incantation priest,
3. k qṭr urbmk k ḫṣn 'mdm
   Like smoke through an aperture, like a snake up a pillar,
4. k y lm zrh k lsbm shh
   Like goats to a rock, like lions to a lair.
5. ḫṭ nqh u qrb ḫṭ ḫṭa l ṣbk
   Staff, attention! Draw near, staff! May it harm your back
6. w trš l mnk tlhm lhm
   And waste your figure. (CAT 1.169)

It is unclear whether the spell aims to protect one from sorcery or to heal impotence, because the noun ḫṭ "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 ḫṭ "staff" with yḫṭa "harm." The second relies on reading tg ḫṭk "the affliction of the staff" as a single word tḡḥk "may you cast out!" 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

377. See DULAT, s.v. “ḡṭ.”
transformation via polysemy and paronomasia. For an example of the former, I turn to Ps 107:33, where Yahweh’s power is described:

םֵשָׂי
torān
רָבְּדִמְל
יֵאָצֹמְ
םִיַּמ
ןוֹאָמִּצ
yāšēm nǝh ārōth lǝ-miḏbār ū-mōṣāʾē mayīm lǝ-ṣimmāʾ Ĥn “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 יֵאָצֹמ mōṣāʾē “flowing” to create ןוֹאָמִּצṣimmāʾ Ĥn “drought-land.”

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.

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 [ןיִנַּתּ 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 [םיִלַּג gallīm], a den of jackals [םיִנַּת 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 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 tannīm “jackals.” Just previously, Yahweh had described the king as a ןיִנַּתּ 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 (לֵבּ bēl) in Babylon (לֶבָבְבּ bǝ-ḇāḇɛl), and I will make him disgorge what he has swallowed (וֹעְלִבּ bilʿō).” 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.  

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. 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.”

Scholars often draw a sharp distinction between the literary and the performative, but the ancients did not share this view. 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.

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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 tekhne of performative power and how it reveals mantic preoccupations and anxieties. 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.

4

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, homoioteleuton, homonymy, isopsephy, and notariqon.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.
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, notarikon, 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 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
4. Taxonomy

sometimes refer to the phenomenon as اضداد ‘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.”

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).\(^5\) 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

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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 ṭm is a contronym since it can mean “complete, whole,” but also serve as a verb of negation. However, the basic meaning of ṭm may simply be “exhaustion,” and thus it can have positive and negative applications. Consider the similar case of the lexeme ṣfr “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 ṣw “light” and ṣw or ṣw.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: "קַפַּאָו wā-ʾɛṯʾappaq and I offered the burnt-offering” (1 Sam 13:12). As Jonathan Grossman observes, the verb קַפָאʾāpq, 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 תִּתיֵנְסַחְתִאְו wǝ-ʾiṯḥasnēṯ, which

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9. Unless the one is a nisba form of the other, in which case “shade” is simply “that which belongs to the light.”
similarly means both “I strengthen myself” and “I restrained myself.” 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 تَوارِيْه tawrīya or مَهْيَة ihām. Often double entendres serve as euphemisms. Consider the following Sumerian proverb.

[N]U.UM.ME.D]A.NÁ AL.PEŠt-A
[EN?E.Š]E NU.KU.DA.AN.NI
[A]L.KURt.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.GLt.GLs) with him” (ll. 55–56). As Hallo and Van 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, “Tawrīya (a.),” EncIs 10:395.
Dijk point out, the highlighted Sumerian can be read as referring to “speaking” or “intercourse.” 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)

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 (kuruppû) become plentiful!” (l. 34). As Walter Farber informs us, the statement’s use of the rare noun kuruppû “malt-baskets” evokes the verb qarābu “draw near,” and thus, functions as a double entendre that is tantamount to a proposition for sex. Mesopotamian poets often employ rare words to make their devices effective (see 5.2.6).

Egyptian texts too employ polysemy in order to create double entendres. In the Instructions of Ptahhotep one learns: ṭḥw sk=ḥ rd ṭḥw st nṯr ṭḥw “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 sk “plow” can mean “have sex.” In fact, elsewhere this text teaches that a man should love his wife and treat her well, because ṭḥw ṭḥw ṭḥw nḥ=f “she is a field of fertility for

her lord” (l. 330).21 Note too that the scribe has written the noun “plant(s)” as  (i.e.,  ) instead of  (i.e.,  ). 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 ( ) appear first, since the noun “hand” (i.e., ), 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 “you will reach your house, the thing that you are in” (ll. 5.19, 5.23, 5.25). According to Ritner, the verb “reach” is rich in sexual connotation also meaning “to penetrate” and “attain orgasm.”24 Steve Vinson observes that “house,” but that entering a woman’s house is a euphemism for sexual penetration. Moreover, as he notes, “two arms, two hands,” thus suggesting that Setne will reach orgasm only by masturbating.25 Moreover, as Pieter Pestman has discussed, the nouns “love” and “sleep” take a phallus determinative in the text, contrary to typical usage, thus nuancing said lexemes to mean “sexual desire” and “sleeping with a woman,” respectively.26

22. Noted by Burkard, Textkritische Untersuchungen zu ägyptischen Weisheitslehren 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 Schorh, 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 ḏr.t “hand” for “penis,” is also suggested in the Memphite Theology (Shabaka Stone, BM No. 498, 1. 55): psḏ.t=f m bḥ=f m ḏr.t ḏr.tj ḏm.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 bḥ=f “before him” employs the sign , and that “hands” appears as =. 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.
At Ugarit we find a similar use of the word “hand” in El’s advance to Athirat:

\[ \text{hm yd ilmlk yḫssk ahbt tʿrrk} \]

“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):

\[ \text{tirkm yd il kym} \]

El’s “hand” grows long like the sea,

\[ \text{wyd il kmdb} \]

Indeed, El’s “hand,” like the flood,

\[ \text{ark yd il kym} \]

El’s “hand” is long like the sea,

\[ \text{wyd il kmdb} \]

Indeed, El’s “hand,” like the flood.

El then lowers his ḫṭ “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:

\[ \text{דֵּרְךְָתיֵבְל} \]

“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:

\[ \text{וַאֲנִי ʾāḇō ʾɛl -bēṯī lɛ ʾĕḵōl wǝ -li-štōṯ wǝ -li-škaḥ ʾim ʾišt} \]

“and I should go to my home to eat and drink and sleep with my wife!?” (2 Sam 11:11). 28

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John Kselman has discovered a sophisticated *double entendre* in Ps 59:7 (repeated in 59:15): יִשְׁמַע לְעֹרֶב תֹּחֵם הַכְּלוֹב הַמָּסֹב וְעַד וּבּוּשָׁי בֶּרֶﬠָל וּמֱהֶי בֶּלָכַּכ וּבְבוֹסִיוִו רִﬠ yasūḇū lā-ʿerɛḇ yɛhĕmū ḵak-kăleb wī-sōḇǝḇū ʿīr. As he has shown, one can interpret the Hebrew text as either “In the evening they return, they howl like dogs, they prowl 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.”

A final case of *double entendre* occurs in Hebrew text of Ben Sira from Qumran (Sir 51:19, 11Q5 XXI, 17, Ms A):

יִד פְּתַחַת שָׁרֵיחַ [ydy ptḥ[h šʿryḥ]
[w-h]-mʿmyh ṭbwwn

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.”

*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 לְדָנָעָנִים לְלִבְמָתָה לְבֵית יָמָּה “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 לִיבֵית “night,” which creates a perfect fit for יָמָּה "my days," which follows.


An example of a double entendre in Aramaic occurs in the description of Belshazzar’s fearful reaction to the mysterious writing on the wall. Wolters has shown that the line “his limbs gave way” (יֵרְטִקְו הֵּּצְרַחֹתְּשִׁמֹן wǝ-qiṭrē ḫarṣēh mištārayīn) 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 loosen the knots, that is, “solve enigmas” or “break spells” (Dan 5:12).

The Proverbs of Ahiqar offer a case of double entendre in the form of a wisdom saying: “I have tasted (תמעט ḫmt) even the bitter medlar, and have eaten endives, but there is nothing more bitter (רייר מיר mryr) than poverty” (COS 1:89). The proverb hinges on the dual meaning of תמעט ḫmt, both “taste” and “experience,” and רייר מיר mryr, both “bitterness” and an “unpleasant experience.”

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. ANTANAACLASIS

Antanaclasis is the repetition of the same sign, word, or expression, each time with a different meaning. 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 pwrtʾ in a Yemenite midrashic text for “a little bit” and “a turd.”
33. Cf. the realization of the sailor in the Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor: rš wy sgd dp t=r=fn sn h.t mr “how happy is the man who relates what he has tasted after a bitter thing passes” (l. 124).
34. ἀντανάκλασις “antanaclasis” 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).

\[
\text{GAL.GAL.BI ŠU.GL.TA GA.ÅM.GL} \text{4}
\]
\[
\text{NU.MU.Ú.GL.ÉŠ}
\]
\[
\text{NU.MU.Ú_DA.GL.E.ŠA.A}
\]
\[
\text{U} \text{4 LA.BA.DA.AB.SUD.RÀ.AŠ}
\]
\[
\text{LUGAL.ME.ÈN ŠU URU.ĠÂ GA.ĠÂM.GL} \text{4}
\]

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 GI\text{4} “return,” along with ŠU “hand,” to mean “kill in revenge” (= Akkadian gimilla turru “return vengeance”). However, in line 218, he used GI\text{4} to mean “smite (Akkadian dâku).”

A similar case occurs in The Return of Ninurta (ll. 94–97), as Cooper observes:

\[
\text{UR.SAĜ KUR SAĜ UM.MA.AB.GL} \text{4.A.AŠ}
\]
\[
\text{ZÀ.ZU A.A.ZU DIĜIR.DÌŠ NU.UM.MA.ŠLIN.GL} \text{4.GL} \text{4}
\]

Warrior, because you have smitten the mountains,
Your father need send out no other god beside you.

In this passage, the sign GI\text{4} means “smite” in the first line, but reduplicated as GI\text{4}.GI\text{4} in the second line, it means “send.”

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 tîši šâninamma tebû kakkâšu (TUKUL.MEŠ) ina pikkišu tebû rû āšu “the attack of his weapons verily has no equal, on account of

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his ball (game) his companions are (constantly) aroused!" The first occurrence of tebû means “attack,” whereas the second means “arouse.”

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 lištaksībamma “may the cloud’s thunder diminish” (7.121).

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 ḠÚ.Òatu “gatekeeper,” where it is read as DU₈ (i.e., LÚ.Í.DU₈). 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-šá-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. An excellent example appears in the Tale of Wenamun (P.Moscow 120). In this text, the author has employed the verb ḫl “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 ḫl “stole” Wenamun’s gold and silver. Soon afterwards, Wenamun asks the king of Byblos to ḫl “take” him back to Egypt (1.36). Two lines later we hear about a Byblian god who ḫl “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

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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 = nâqu, Aa A = nâqu, 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 ŠÚ: erēbu ša šamši “entering of the sun (i.e., ‘setting’)” and erēpu ša ūmi “darkening of the day.”
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 ūl “move” (lit. “take”) his ships. We find the lexeme again in the prince’s words, “take (ūl) him to see the tomb wherein they (previous merchants from Egypt) lie” (2.52). The verb ūl 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., ūl ḫḥ = f śḥr.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. The relationship is underscored visually; the arm sign that comprises part of the word “cubit” (∆) grasps a stick in the verb “seize” (˚).

In addition, the same consonants resound in the nouns msḥ “crocodile” and mnḥ “wax” (3.13).

Another case of visual antanaclasis appears in the Pyramid Texts of Unas. In Spell 217, §152a, we read: ṭm.w ṣḥr ḫ ṣḥr.w ḫmn 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: ḫn ḫ.t ḫ.n ḫn “you shine in the horizon in the place that is beneficial to you.” Observe how ḫ is first used for “akh-spirit” and then ḫ “shine.” It also resounds paronomastically in ḫ.t “horizon.” Moreover, all three words employ the ḫ-sign "Ì.

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
Baal the following: *lyrt bnpś 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 npś lbim thw* “Is my appetite the appetite of a lion in the wasteland?” (14–15). In Mot’s remark *npś* 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 qṭr baph u ap mprh ank laḥ wy* “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, 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 שֹׁאר תֶא אָשָׂנ *nāšāʾ ᵐr ṭāʾ* “lift up the head of (+ noun/pronoun),” always with a different meaning. 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 רֶבֶדּ *dēḇēr* “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 רָמִי שָׁמַע הָאָמַר *wē-ʾāmartā* “and you shall say,” he uses רָבָדֹה *wē-dibbartā* “and you shall speak” (Exod 9:1). In addition, the author employs the related form רָבָדֹה *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. 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 *qṭr* “smoke” would come from a nose in unclear. The *u-aleph* also lacks explanation. Furthermore, the word *mprh* is difficult. I relate it to the Egyptian *nppi* “convulsion,” with Richard M. Wright, “Egyptian *nppi*: A Cognate for Ugaritic *mpr* ‘convulsion,’” *UF* 26 (1994): 539–41.


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: "וַהַאֲשֻׁעְיִיםּ וַאֲנָהִים לָאֵ֨ם מְנָאֵ֖הֶם". The first time it means "no one to comfort them," but the second time we must translate "no one to avenge them." This example of antanaclasis is in step with other uses of the device in this work.

A final, well-known demonstration of antanaclasis in the Bible occurs in 2 Sam 7, in which "בַּיֵּת" 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).

In the Hebrew text of Ben Sira from Qumran, we also find cases of antanaclasis. See, in particular, Sir 13:10 Ms A:

"לֹא חָרַךְ פִּנְיוֹן חָרַךְ לֹא וַחֲרַךְ פִּנְיוֹן בְּחַדְּשָׁה"

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 "חרך" ḫrḥq, “in the Hitpael 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.’” As such, Ben Sira demonstrates “that an utterance made in one context can have a different meaning or significance in another.”

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.\textsuperscript{55}

Antanaclasis also appears in the eighth century BCE Phoenician stela of Prince Kilamuwa (\textit{KAI} 24), which also exhibits a great deal of repetition and a complex literary structure.\textsuperscript{56} In line 2, the prince informs us that בְּרַמְל יִדְעָה הָגָבָר בַּל תָּבָה "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: בְּרֵב הָגָבָר בְּשַּׁב בָּעַל "They gave a slave girl for a sheep, and a man for a garment." The first use of בְּרֵב is the personal name "Gabbar," the second is the noun "man."\textsuperscript{57} Moreover, both uses contain בְּר as "son," which recalls Kilamuwa [8] תִּי יִתְּר בְּר יִתְּר "son of Haya," immediately prior. The stela also employs בָּעַל for the deity Baal (ll. 15, 16) and the noun "lord, owner" (ll. 11 [2x], 12 [3x], 16).\textsuperscript{58} Abetting the antanaclasis is parasonance with the repeated negative particle בְּל (ll. 2, 3 [2x], 4, 5, 11 [2x], 12) and the verb לְעַפְּרַל "make, do" (ll. 3 [2x], 4 [2x], 5).\textsuperscript{59}

The Aramaic text of Daniel contains several cases of antanaclasis. See, for example, the use of the verb אָרְשׁ for "dwell" (Dan 2:22), "loosen" (Dan 3:25), and "solve" (Dan 5:12, 5:16). Similarly exploited is the root ט-מ 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 ר-ג-ר occurs in Dan 4:4 for גַּזָּר יָאוֹנִי "astrologers," but in Dan 4:14 for גְּזֹרָה הָרֵבֶג "decree." See also the use of נָפְרָפְרָפ "pleased" to introduce Dan 6:2, and הִשָּׁפַר "in the morning" in Dan 6:20. The text also employs the verb בּוּרֵא "antanaclastically for "seek" to harm (Dan 6:5), "pray" (Dan 6:8, 6:14), and "make a petition" (Dan 6:12).\textsuperscript{60}

Since antanaclasis 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

\textsuperscript{55.} Reymond, “Wisdom of Words in the Wisdom of Ben Sira,” 226.
\textsuperscript{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.
\textsuperscript{57.} The personal name also occurs at the end of the inscription in l. 15.
\textsuperscript{58.} Antanaclasis on this root appears also in the Bible (e.g., Hos 2:18–19).
\textsuperscript{59.} The closeness between the phonemes /b/ and /p/ in the dialect of the stela is clear also in the repeated nouns נָבָה "affection, life, appetite," instead of the more usual נָפָה.\textsuperscript{[10 / 2x]} (l. 13 [2x]). The same form appears also in other Yaudi inscriptions and in the Aramaic inscriptions from Sefire. Noted by Avishur, \textit{Phoenician Inscriptions and the Bible}, 168.
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.GI MÂŠ.ĜI, MUD, ĀM “to a dog a dream means joy.” Klein and Sefati have shown that the signs MÂŠ.ĜI can mean “dream” or “black goat.” In addition, the sign MUD, suggests by way of paronomasia the sign MUD (= Akkadian gilittu) “fright, terror.” 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 Ū NU.GU, 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”: lw=f rḫ.w rḏ.t šm mḥ hr-s=f r ḫ t “he knows how to make a lion walk behind him, its upon the ground” (7.4–5). As for the bull, sḫr tp=f r ḫ t “its head was felled to the ground” (8.25), and yet ḫ’n pt lw ḫ “w

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“Wordplay” in Ancient Near Eastern Texts

hr-si=f –=f hr r ti “the bull stood up behind him, its – fallen upon the ground” (8.26–9.1). The active polyseme in these lines is the untranslated hieroglyphic sign –. We can read it either as ssd “rope,” which seems fitting, or as fh “loosen, unleash,” in which case we must render the phrase –=f hr r ti “its restraint expelled.”63 The scribe’s use of – draws attention to the polysemy, because it is not the usual sign used for “rope” or “bind” (which is ‾). 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 Webaoer 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 sḫ “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 ḥwr.w n rḥti ḫwn-lb ḫḏ.t ḫmns “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 ḫḏ.t is ‾, suggesting that we translate it “destroy.” However, the existence of an unrelated word ḫḏ.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 nḫt-hr “violent” in the prior verse.

Another Egyptian example appears in the Admonitions of Ipuwer (P.Leiden 1.344), in Ipuwer’s pondering: lw ḫḥw r m.w m ḥm.t n ḫm.w n ḫfr ḫfr n ḫw.n(l) nsw lw n=f mį : 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 mį : t both as “truth,” which faces back to lw n ḫw “the heart of pharaoh,”67 and as “tribute,” which faces back to ḫḥw “the treasury.”68

A particularly involved example occurs in the Demotic Chronicle. In 2/11 we read: ḥḥ prẖr pẖr ḫt r ḫhr r ḥry r ḥr ti ṣḥtyt n pẖr ḫr t ḫt “the moon ḫhr’s the water; the ruler will make the circuit of the entire land.” As Johnson and Ritner conclude, the verb ḫhr has three meanings in the text, each of which fits the context that

64. There is a lacuna here, but Eyre, “Yet Again the Wax Crocodile,” plausibly suggests that the verb for “release” here is sḫ.
66. Even though the determinative that usually goes with ḫḏ.t “white linen” is ‾.
67. The heart is naturally connected to mį : t, because, according to Egyptian belief, mį : 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. The first is “circumambulate, surround,” which anticipates “make the circuit.” Yet, since the verb appears with the hand-to-mouth determinative (מ) and not the usual legs determinative (כ), 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,” עֹרְזָה rāḡaʿ 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):

אַשִּׁרֵיהּ לְיַהוֹ הִשָּׁמֶשׁ עַדְיוֹ הֶזָּה וַאֲמִזָּרָתָו יִזְמָרֵיהּ לִי לְיִשְׁעָעַה

I will sing to Yahweh, for he has triumphed gloriously, horse and rider he hurled into the sea.

My strength יִזָּמָרָה יִזָּמָרָה, he is my deliverance.

Here the phrase יִזָּמָרָה יִזָּמָרָה can mean “and Yah(weh) is (my) might” (PS gmr) or “and Yah(weh) is (my) song” (PS zmr). As “Yah(weh) is (my) song” יִזָּמָרָה יִזָּמָרָה faces back to יִזָּמָרָה יִזָּמָרָה “my strength.” As “Yah(weh) is (my) song” יִזָּמָרָה it looks back to יִזָּמָרָה "I will sing.”

Unidirectional polysemy in Hebrew also occurs in Ps 2:9: תַּרְוֹ עֶמֶנּ בֹּשֶׁת בַּרְצֵל קִי-לְלָ בֹּשֶׁת תֵּעָפְסָה "you will break them with an iron staff, you will shatter them like pottery.” We can derive תַּרְוֹ עֶמֶנּ, from עֶמֶנּ עֶמֶנּ, which renders it “break them,” or we may derive it from the root ה-ע-ל ע-ל-ל in which case it means “shepherd them.” The latter would require us to revocalize as ע-ל-ל, but the pre-Masoretic text would be

ambiguous. Both meanings face ahead, the former to tonappṣēm “you will shatter them,” and the latter to bǝ-šēbɛṭ “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 bǝ-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).

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 mwsr either as a noun derived from y-s-r meaning “discipline,” or as the identically pronounced hophal participle from s-w-r “withdrawn,” as Reymond describes:

Presented with only the first colon of 6:22, a reader might be forgiven for connecting mwsr (“discipline”) to the common verb y-s-r “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 mwsr 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

4. Taxonomy

Since both meanings of "מְשֹר" 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,” is distinguished from unidirectional polysemy in that it

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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, dozens more have been found in ancient Near Eastern texts. There are two types of multidirectional polysemy: symmetrical and asymmetrical. 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):

DĪΓIR BURU, ME.ES
ME.E MUTIN.MEN
DĪΓIR.A.NUN.NA DI.DA.ME.ES
ME.E SŪN.ZI.MEN
SŪN.ZI a a 4EN.LIL.LĀ.MEN
Ū.SŪN.ZI SAG.GĀ DL.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.ES “wander about,” and as the latter it looks ahead to SAG.GĀ DL.A.NI “leads the way.” 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.


4. Taxonomy

18. **ik-kar-ra[τ]-ma za-mar-ma x x a-lit-tuš**
   Yet quickly takes pity … on the one who begets,
19. **id-da-ud-ma ri-ma-[s]a [u]-kan-ni**
   He acts quickly and assigns (bad fortune) on the one he loves,
20. **ù ki-i a-ra-ah bu-ú-ri it-ta-na-as-ḫa-ra EGIR-šu**
   Yet, like a cow with a calf, he keeps turning back to him.

As Benjamin Foster has noted, **ri-ma-[s]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[τ]-ma** “takes pity” and the latter anticipates **araḫ būri** “cow with a calf.”

An asymmetrical example, first discovered by Kilmer, occurs in the Atra-ḫasis Epic 3.viii.9–17.

9. **ki-ma ni-iš-ku-nu [abāba]**
   How we have brought about [the flood],
10. **a-wi-lum iš-lu-ta i-na [karašši]**
   yet a man survived [the cataclysm].
11. **at-ta ma-li-k i-ḫ-ir ra-bu-ti**
   You, a counselor of the great gods,
12. **te-re-ti-[k]a**
   at [your] command,
13. **ù-ša-ab-ši [qabla]**
   I caused the [destruction].
14. **ša-ni-it-ti-[k]a**
   For your praise,
15. **an-ni-a-am za-ma-ra**
   this song
16. **li-iš-su-ma 4-L-gi-gi**
   let the Igigi-gods hear!
17. **li-iṣ-ṣi-ru na-ar-bi-ka**
   Let them make famous your greatness!

The form **ša-ni-it-ti-[k]a** 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.”

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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.
Another asymmetrical form of multidirectional polysemy occurs in the Epic of Gilgamesh 11.14: šakān abūbi ubla libbāšunu ilānī rabûti “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.

\[
\begin{align*}
sw \ tji & : m \ mk=tw=f \\
& \text{It (my heart) has leapt from its place.}
\\
bw \ dl=f & : tji=lmss \\
& \text{It does not allow me to don a tunic.}
\\
bw \ wan= \ tji & : \ hbn \\
& \text{I cannot put on my over-garment.}
\end{align*}
\]

Of note is the noun mss “tunic,” here written ŠS with the cloth determinative ˟. The consonants mss are polysemous and also can be read “totter, leap.”\(^79\) In addition, the semantic range of \(tji\) (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 tfj “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 šbʿr can mean “shine (like a star)” or “leave.” The former anticipates kbkb “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).\(^81\)

\[
\begin{align*}
23. & \text{ša ydk} \\
& \text{Raise your hands}
\\
24. & \text{šmm dbḥ l ṯr} \\
& \text{to heaven. Sacrifice to Bull,}
\\
24. & \text{abk il Šrd b’l} \\
& \text{your father, El. Adore Baal}
\end{align*}
\]

79. Though one expects the determinatives \(\text{abytes}\), 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 \(\text{Odyssey}\). See Richardson, “Devious Narrator of the \(\text{Odyssey}\).”

81. On the close relationship of polysemy to dreams and their interpretations, see Noegel, \(\text{Nocturnal Ciphers}\). However, the passage here is not included in that book.
4. Taxonomy

25. *b dbhk bn dgn*  
with your sacrifice, the son of Dagan

26. *bm ṣdk w yrđ*  
with your offering. And let (Kirtu) descend

27. *krt l ġgt*  
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 *šārid* 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. *ahdy d ym*  
I myself am the one who reigns

50. *lk ’itm l ymrstu*  
over the gods, indeed, who commands

51. *itm w nšm d yšb*  
gods and men, who satisfies

52. [*] *ḥmlt arṣ*  
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

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.
F. K. McEacheren

"Wordplay" in Ancient Near Eastern Texts

180

Fear not, Abram!
I am a נֵגָמ māḡēn to you.
Your reward shall be very great!

The noun נֵגָמ māḡēn bears the meaning “shield” (if derived from the root נ g-n-n) or “gift” (if from the root נ m-g-n). As “shield” it faces back to God’s protective command to “fear not,” and as “giver, donor” it faces ahead to שָׂקָרָך šǝḵarkā “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 (נֵגִּמ miggēn) your enemies into your hands.” This polysemy functions also like antanaclasis, though in this case the two Hebrew roots are not identical.

An example of an asymmetrical type in biblical Hebrew appears in Song 1:7.

הָדיִגַּה lī šɛ-ʾāḥăḇāh nap̄ šī ʾēḵāh ṯirʿɛh ʾēḵāh tarbīṣ baṣ-ṣŏhărāyīm

Tell me, O whom my inner-being loves, where do you ṯirʿɛh?
Where do you cause-(them)-to-lie-down at noon?

At first blush, the verb ṯirʿɛh appears to mean “pasture,” as if derived from the verb הָﬠָר rāʿāh (PS r-ʿ-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 /ḍ/ > /ʿ/, and thus serve as a dialectical equivalent of the Judahite Hebrew form הָצָר rāṣāh (PS r-ḍ-y) “desire.” Read in this way, the lexeme follows nicely upon the mention of הָבֲהָא ʾāḥăḇāh “loves.” The former reading finds support in Isa 27:10, where the roots הער r-ʿ-h “shepherd” and צבר 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 נֵגָמ māḡēn of victory, and your right hand sustains me; you stoop down to make me great.” As “shield,” נֵגָמ māḡēn goes with bow in the previous line. As “gift” it follows nicely the verb חַתְתִית tīṭan “you give” (cf. the related noun חַתְתִית mattān “gift”) and goes with מֱרִים וּמְשַׁפֵּרֲי wē-ishlistā tīs ʿăḏēnī “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 vn and lḥm). Hence, the fitting parallel with מָשַׁא s’d “sustain,” which essentially means “feed” (Gen 18:5, Judg 19:5). In Ps 104:15, the root מָשַׁא s’d is used of bread and wine.
pairs רָעָה רֵצָה "desire" and אָבֹה אֶהְבָּה "love" in Prov 3:12. As this polyseme operates within two poetic stichs, it constitutes an asymmetrical multidirectional parallelism. 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 Tikwah 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 יָאוֹת אָמַד Ya‘omat “and it endured” can also mean “and it put to an end.” As Nahum Ben-Yehuda observes, David Qimhi (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.”

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.

4.1.6. DOUBLE POLYSEMY

Double polysemy exploits two words in successive stichs, each of which projects multiple meanings. 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.


88. I thank Nahum Ben-Yehuda for sharing this with me via personal communication on December 31, 2019.

89. The Hebrew reads: וַיְרַחְשׁ בָּהֲיָה בְּהַנָּן שָׁקִים וּלְאֵרַחְשׁ בָּהֲיָה. וּלְהַנָּן תַּעֲדוֹ נְאָרִי וֶתַּעֲדוֹ נְאָרִי תַּעֲדוֹ נְאָרִי וַיְרַחְשׁ בָּהֲיָה בְּהַנָּן שָׁקִים. See similarly Basser, “Did Rashi Notice a Janus Parallelism in Ezek 20:37?”

90. See Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 64.

poem Ninmešarar 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 Utapishtim in the Epic of Gilgamesh 11.25–27:

25. *muš-šir mešrām-ma* (NĪG.TUKU) *šeʾ-i napšāti* (ZI.MEŠ)
   Reject riches and seek life!
26. *[m]a-ak-ku-ra ze-er-ma na-piš-ti bul-liț*
   Spurn property and save life.
27. *[š]u-li-ma zēr nap-šā-a-ti ka-la-ma a-na liḫ-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 *ṣêrma* “construct”; and *makkûru* “property,” which suggests *makûru* “boat” (from Sumerian MÁ.GUR\(^8\)), 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 *elîppu* “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:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{pni ty} & \text{s nh lb=l} \text{lh n=} \text{t sn.(t)}= \text{r pfr.wt nb.wt wr sw n=l r ti dmd.jt pjj=l} \\
\text{wgj.(t) pjj=s(t)} & \text{q w n bn r ptr st k snb wj=s(t) ir jf)=s(t) rmp h2 \ : t=l}
\end{align*}
\]

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.l*t can mean “amulet” or a “compendium” of medical spells. The noun *wgj(t)* is written simply as \(\ast\), and is typically understood as the “eye of

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\(^93\) The passage is also rich in paronomasia, especially in the repeated sounds /b/, /l/, and /m/, and the phrases *muššir mešrē* “abandon wealth,” *libbi elîppu* “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 $wdj.t$, in both its senses; and $wdj.t$ 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 $…$) 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’dn]h l-1r=w hl r pt rh … mh pij pt sh nj=f ḡ[w’w …] ni $ḍm’ “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 $sh$ ($= ss$), meaning both “nest” and “document,” and the second is $ḍm’$ 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. $yṣly ’rpt b$
   Curses the clouds in the
40. $ḥm un yr ’rpt$
   grievous heat, the (early) rain. “Let the clouds
41. $tmṭr b qẓ ṭl yṭll$
   rain in the summer. Let the dew lay dew
42. $1 ḡnbm$
   upon the grapes.”

Here both $un$ and $qẓ$ 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

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, qẓ can mean “summer” or “figs” (i.e., “summer fruit”). As the former, qẓ faces back to the ḫm “heat” in line 40, and as the latter, it faces forward to ǵnbm “grapes.” It is thus a case of multidirectional double polysemy.

Illustrating double polysemy in Hebrew is a ingenious case, spotted by Rendsburg, in the last testament of Jacob (Gen 49:6).

Two polysemes are active here—the verbs אובּ tāḇōʾ and דחַ tēḥaḏ. The former is vocalized as if it derives from the verb אֹבּ bōʾ meaning “enter.” However, we also can derive it from the verb אָבָא ʾāḇāh meaning “desire.” The verb דחַ tēḥaḏ is pointed as if it derives from the root דחי y-ḥ-d, in which case it means “unite with, be one with.” However, it also could derive from the root דיח y-h-d, meaning “rejoice.” Both verbs require revocalization to achieve their dual meanings. To read “desire,” we must point the verb as אֵבֹתּ tōḇēʾ, and to read “rejoice,” we must vocalize ְדַחִתּ 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: כי יש לך חוכה אציקרא והוא יתпаיך ותן לו תיאדאל “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 יחליפ̄ yaḥălīp̄ and תיאדאל ṯɛḥdāl. The former can mean “renew” or “pass away” and the latter “cease” or “survive.” 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.
4. Taxonomy

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 אַרְיָה שִׁנְפָּה אָרְוָה אֲרֵמֵה שֶׁרֶּא הָמִּﬠ אֵרְשָׁ הָמְﬠ שֶׁרֶּא אָרוֹה (Daniel 2:22). The line contains two polysemes. The first is אַרְיָה nohīrā “light” or “insight.” See, for example, וּרְיָה nāhīrū in Dan 5:11, 5:14, which is identified with וּנָתְלְכָו wē-šôḵlānū wē-ḥōḵmāh “understanding and wisdom,” and is closer in form to the Kethib. The second is אֲרֵמֵה šērē’ “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:

\[ \text{d}A\text{.GILIM.MA šaqû nāšîh āgî āšîr šalgi bānu KI-tîm elîš A.MEŠ mukîn elîti} \]

\[ \text{sd}A\text{.GILIM.MA, the lofty, who drives out waves, who marshals snow. Creator of the earth above the waters, est} \]

\[ \text{shlisher of the on-high.} \] An ancient commentary to this text reads the Sumerian sign MA in the name \( ^dA\text{.GILIM.MA} \) as the equivalent of MÚ meaning \( \text{banû “create, build,” and thus also phonetically as } mû, \) that is, the Akkadian word for “water.” Moreover, the Sumerian A also means “water.” Thus the commentary sees the name \( ^dA\text{.GILIM.MA} \) as meaning \( \text{bānu ēr̄etim elîš mê “the creator of Earth on top of the waters.”} \)

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.”

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:

\[ \text{MŠIPA-Še kî LÚ SIPA ša šēnašu ḫabta ēdānuššu iparšidma “SIPA fled alone like a SIPA whose flock has been stolen.” The Sumerogram SIPA appears twice in the passage. Typically it means } rēû “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, it is a case of learned paronomasia that understands the Akkadian \( rēû \) as the Egyptian name Ra \( (r̄) \), the sungod pharaoh. This permits us to translate the line “Re fled alone like a shepherd (= \( rēû \) 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 \( ^d\text{MES} \) used to designate Marduk reflect the Egyptian \( msî “give birth,” \) since the context is one of Marduk’s auto-creation.

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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 ḫsf.t “chaos,” the opposite of mḥ.t “truth, justice.” 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.”

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 ḫḏ ḫḥ dd šrm “all the princes (of Syro-Canaan) lie prostrate saying, ‘peace’” (l. 26). Here šrm renders the Semitic šalām “peace” in Egyptian. The author chose to use this term, and not the ordinary Egyptian word ḫtp “peace,” in order to capture the foreigners’ pleas. The Tale of Sinuhe (P.Berlin 3022, l. 219) also makes reference to the mkt of Qedem (or perhaps Qatna), which renders the Semitic noun mlk “king.” 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 ṣwp ṣpr ṣd, the Egyptian reflection of Northwest Semitic ṣpr ṣd ‘learned scribe.’

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.”


Nevertheless, despite evidence that some Egyptians possessed a working knowledge of other languages,\textsuperscript{109} we lack examples of bilingual polysemy.\textsuperscript{110}

\textsuperscript{109}F. Wente, \textit{Letters from Ancient Egypt}, WAW 1 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990), 110 n. 10. The Egyptian text employs the scribe and man determinatives (Ø⁄) after the first word, and the hand to mouth determinative (♀), after the second. The scribe also uses group writing to spell other Semitic words including \textit{mrkbt} (= Semitic \textit{mrkbt} “chariot,” 19.7; 26.1), \textit{bkî} “balsam tree” (= Semitic \textit{b’k}, 23.7), and possibly \textit{w šb} usually meaning “respond,” but here (20.4) for “dwell” (= Semitic \textit{w’yšb}).

4. Taxonomy

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.\(^\text{111}\) A particularly adept example in the Tale of Kirtu also constitutes a case of double polysemy: ‘db akl l qryt ḥṭt l bt ḫbr “prepare food for the city, wheat for the house of Khubur” (CAT 1.14.ii.27–29).\(^\text{112}\) Here qryt means “city,”\(^\text{113}\) but also reflects the Akkadian qarītu “granary.”\(^\text{114}\) Similarly, bt Ḫbr means “house of Khubur,” but also renders the Akkadian bīt ḫubūri “beer room,” that is, a room devoted to the storage and fermenting of grains.\(^\text{115}\) Thus, we have a case of double bilingual polysemy.\(^\text{116}\)

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: υπηρέτησεν ρα ἀρα φαραον προς μωυση “see, indeed evil is before you!” The noun rendered “evil” (i.e., ρα ἀρα φαραον) 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.\(^\text{117}\) Another Hebrew-Egyptian example is that of the name Moses, which we can derive from the Hebrew verb for “draw water” (משׁוֹח māšāh, PS m-t-y) or the Egyptian lexeme

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\(^{112}\) See Noegel, “Kirtu’s Allusive Dream,” 304–5.

\(^{113}\) DULAT, s.v. “qryt.”

\(^{114}\) CAD Q, s.v. “qarītu.”

\(^{115}\) CAD H, s.v. “ḫubūri A.”

\(^{116}\) The passage also constitutes unidirectional polysemy, since qryt as both “granary” and “city” points ahead to the next line, the former to ḥṭt “wheat” and bt Ḫbr “beer room,” and the latter to bt Ḫbr as “house of Khubur.”

“Wordplay” in Ancient Near Eastern Texts

mss meaning “infant” (Exod 2:10). It also has been suggested that we read the name מֶהָם hām “Ham” in Gen 9–10 bilingually as the Hebrew name and the Egyptian noun ḫm “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 ṣeḇəd “servant” to his brothers (Gen 9:25). 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 לַגְּבוּשׁ nēṣɛr.” As Hays shows, the Hebrew noun meaning “shoot,” here also reflects the Egyptian nṯr “divinized dead.”


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 לָשָׁקָהֵן šākānu “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 לָשָׁם šām (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 הַרְבּוֹתָם harḇōtām “swords” can be understood as “plows” or as a part of a plow (as in m. Kelim 21:2 and in Syriac), and that מָצֶמֶרֶת mazmērōṯ “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):

וה הוא יִסְרָאֵלְךָ וּכָּל הַמִּלְּלִים מֵעָלָיו:

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 יִסְרָאֵלְךָ yissartā. Typically, exegetes derive it from the Hebrew verb יָסָר yāsar and translate “you have admonished.” However, numerous Aramaic features in the book of Job (including מִלְּלִים millīn “words” in this passage), permit us to read it as if derived from the Aramaic verb רֶסְי rēṣar meaning “bind, strengthen.” Supporting the reading is the parallel קֵזַּחְתּ tēḥazzēq “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 לְשׁוֹנַ וַמֵּר וַמֵּר lškn šmwr 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 מ-כ-ן 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.

prior support of others, while simultaneously suggesting that it is now his turn for chastisement.\textsuperscript{125}

Another case of Hebrew-Aramaic polysemy appears in Exod 16:15, where the Aramaic query \( \text{מָן} \ \text{הוּא} \) “what is it?” serves as an exegesis for the name of the \( \text{מָן} \) “manna” in Exod 16:33.\textsuperscript{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 “\( \text{מַחַבַּד} \) of Isaac” (Gen 31:53). Here one can read \( \text{מַחַבַּד} \) as Hebrew for “terror,” and thus as an epithet of Yahweh, or as Aramaic for “flock,” “tribal clan,” or “thigh” (PS \( \text{מַחַבַּד} \)).\textsuperscript{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).\textsuperscript{128}

Wolters has discovered a fascinating case of Hebrew-Greek polysemy in reference to Lady Wisdom in Prov 31:27.\textsuperscript{129} There we hear that \( \text{שׁוּפִי} \ \text{תוֹכִילָה} \ \text{שָׁתי} \ \text{בֵּיתא} \) “she oversees the ways of her household.” Here \( \text{שׁוּפִי} \ \text{תּוֹכִילָה} \ ) can be understood as Hebrew for “she oversees” or as a bilingual reference to the Greek noun \( \text{sóφια} \) “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 \( \text{פָּחֶר} \) “clay.” When the king recounted his dream for Daniel he did not use this term, but rather the synonym \( \text{חֵסְפָא} \) “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,\textsuperscript{130} and rests on the reading of \( \text{פָּחֶר} \), not as the Aramaic word for “clay,” but as the Akkadian \( \text{puḫru} \) “assembly (of nations).”\textsuperscript{131}

The Aramaic Proverbs of Ahiqar also contain a fine example of bilingual Aramaic-Akkadian polysemy: \( \text{אֲרָי} \ \text{ל} \ \text{אָל} \ \text{בֵּימא} \ \text{ל} \ \text{כָּנשָּׁא} \ \text{למָה} \ ) \ “there is no lion in the sea, therefore they call the \( \text{qп} \) ‘fish a \( \text{ל} \ )” (C1 1:165). Here the name \( \text{ל} \ ) \ means both “lion” (in Aramaic

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{125} Noegel, \textit{Janus Parallelism in the Book of Job}, 43–44.
\item \textsuperscript{126} Greenstein, “Wordplay, Hebrew,” 971.
\item \textsuperscript{127} The same bilingual polysemy may be active in Job 3:25, Job 4:14.
\item \textsuperscript{128} Noegel, “Drinking Feasts and Deceptive Feats,” 171.
\item \textsuperscript{130} Noegel, \textit{Nocturnal Ciphers}.
\item \textsuperscript{131} Noegel, \textit{Nocturnal Ciphers}, 148–49.
\end{itemize}
4. Taxonomy

and Akkadian) and also the mythological sea dragon *labbu* (in Akkadian). 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.

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, as well as in Greek and Latin literature.

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


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.\footnote{136. Michalowski, “Where’s Al?,” 199.}

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
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. So, to use his examples, at Ugarit spn “Zaphon” is the name of Baal’s sacred mountain, which poets sometimes modify with mrym “summit” or ērrt “remote parts.” These lexemes are used by Hosea, but transformed, when he proclaims: “Ephraim’s guilt is bound up (רָוְצָר sārūr), his sin stored away (זָפַע sǝp̄ ūnāh)” (Hos 13:12). Note how one hears the sounds of ērrt in sārūr, and those of spn in sǝp̄ ūnāh. See similarly Ps 27:5: “He will hide me (יִנֵנְפְּצִי yiṣpēnēnī) in his pavilion on an evil day, grant me the protection of his tent, raise me (יִנֵמְמוֹרְי yǝrōmēnī) upon a

rock (רוּצṣūr).” In addition to hearing ſpn in yiṣp̄ǝnēnī and mrym in yǝrōmēnī, the noun ṣūr “rock” recalls Baal’s mountain by allusion to ṣrīt and in its Ugaritic cognate ǧr “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).  

A classic illustration of a polysemy cluster in Sumerian is the Song of the Hoe. Indeed, Michalowski has shown that the entire text is filled with homonymic polysemy on the noun GIŠAL “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 Ú.TU.DÈ LUGAL Ú.TU.DÈ
4NIN.MEN.NA.KE4 TU.TU AL.ĬÁ.ĬÁ

The mistress, to create sovereigns, to create kings,
Nin-men established birthing.

In addition to the sound /al/ in AL.ĬÁ.ĬÁ “birthing,” we find TUD = Akkadian walādu “bear,” EREŠ = bēlitum “mistress,” EN = bel “sovereign,” and 4NIN.MEN.NA = Bēlet-ilī “mistress of the gods.” In line 61, we find: URU EN.ŠÈ NU.ŠÈ.GA ŠU.ŠÈ AL.ĬÁ.ĬÁ “(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: GIŠAL GIŠTUBŠIK NĪG URU DŪ.ĐŪ.DAM “The hoe and corvée basket, those are for building cities.” Here GIŠAL “hoe” is followed by URU = ālum “city.” Moreover, lines 83–84 constitute a latent “riddle.”


139. See Michalowski, “Where’s Al?,” for the examples used here.
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 gis.l in the next line. Plus, the paronomasia between ALTIRI and DIĜIR = ilum “divine” explains its identification as a divine bird. 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 USUMGAL = 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 kâšunu ušaznanakkunūši nuḫ šamma … [ina šer] kukkī … ina l īlâti u šaznanakunūši šamittu kibāti “shall rain upon you abundance … in the morning, cakes (kukkū), and in the evening, he shall rain down a pouring of wheat (kibittu),” 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 nuḫšu “abundance,” which can refer to “agricultural yield” or “flood waters.”

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. 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 pū “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.”
can mean šālu “inquire, ask.” Hence the line: ištāla piya “my mouth inquired.” The listing of each of the gates in subsequent lines, each with a polysemous and/or paronomastic connection to what follows, constitutes a polysemic 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 polysemic 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 polysemic 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.

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.

A classic polysemic cluster in Hebrew appears in Jacob’s last testament: bēn pōrāṯ yōsēp̄  bēn pōrāṯ ʿălē ʿāyin bānōṯ ṣāʿăḏāh ʿălē 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 bēn and bānōṯ, which literally mean “son” and “daughters,” respectively, but also can be used figuratively for offspring or the offshoots of plants. The noun pōrāṯ 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 ʿāyin as “well” or “eye” and šūr as “wall” or “gaze,” 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

145. See Noegel, “Kirtu’s Allusive Dream.”
146. These meanings were noted already by Rashi.
4. Taxonomy

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).

Scholars have proposed multiple interpretations for the polysemy cluster in verse 10. These include reading וַצ saw and וַק qaw as (1) the babbling talk of drunkards; (2) the unintelligible sounds a baby might make; (3) abbreviations for הָוָצ sawāh “command” and הָוָק qāw̄ ah “hope”; (4) the names of the alphabetic letters צ q và ק q in proper sequence, and thus, as a school-master-like instructional rebuke that likens his targets to children; (5) a sequence of imperatives in the Assyrian language that read סָיו לֶא qī luqqi ṣēḫēru šēme “Get out. Let him get out! Wait! Let him wait! Slave! Listen!”, (6) an imitation of unintelligible Assyrian; (7) baby talk for excrement (הָאֹצ ṣōʾāh) and vomit (איִק אֶק). Scholars have proposed multiple interpretations for the polysemy cluster in verse 10.

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 θλῖψιν ἐπὶ θλῖψιν “affliction upon affliction” suggests that we render וַצ saw as רָצ sār “affliction.” He further proposes that וַצ saw in v. 13 be rendered רָצ sār “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 נב אֶבֶן). 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 וַצ saw as from the Assyrian verb או go out,” וַק qaw as from qu’ âm “wait,” the preposition ל l “to” as the preceptive particle ל, כ וַצ ל little as ק שר slave,” and כ וַצ there as an imperative of the verb שָמַע hear.” The interpretation finds refrain with כ וַצ qaw qaw “the nation [i.e., Assyria] of gibberish” in Isa 18:2, 18:7. It is possible that כ וַצ qaw qaw here means “power.” HALOT, s.v. כ וַצ 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.”
“Wordplay” in Ancient Near Eastern Texts

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. Adding additional food for thought in 28:17, is Yahweh’s promise to apply judgment “as a plumbline [וָקְל וֶ-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.” 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. 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.


4. Taxonomy

After I spoke they did not reply, 

my words were like a drought 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, יִשְׁנַיִם (yisnāyim) can be rendered “renews” (יִשָּׁנַיִם, PS ḥlp) or “made to pierce” (יִשָּׁנַיִם, PS ḥlp). We may understand the second, יָסְדֵי מְדִּים (ws-昱דֵי מְדִּים) as “they awaited” (from יָסָדֵי מְדִּים, yāḥal) or “they pierced” (from יָסָדֵי מְדִּים, yāḥal and repointed as a pi el יָסָדֵי מְדִּים). The third polyseme, יִלְחַת (yīlḥāt), we can render “renews” (יִלְחַת, PS ḥlp) or “made to pierce” (יִלְחַת, PS ḥlp).

The fourth polyseme, יָשִׁי (yišnī), we can translate as “reply” (from יָשִׁי, PS šny) or “was sharpened” (from יָשִׁי, PS šnn and repointed as a niphʿal יָשִׁי).

Each of these polysemes is strictly visual. Capping off the polysemous cluster is the verb פֹטִית (tiṭṭōp̄), 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 polysemic cluster in Aramaic is the famous “writing on the wall” that Belshazzar saw appear in his palace: אֵנְמִיָּמִי אֵנְמִיָּמִי לֵקְטִי וּנְשִׁי (mēnēʾ mēnēʾ tēqēl ū-p̄ arsīn) (Dan 5:25). Each of the words bears multiple meanings that ancient and modern commentaries have multiplied. 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 סָרָפ (pars) “Persians” (5:26–28). Yet, the cryptic writing also suggests units of currency: “a mina, a shekel, and two half minas.” Furthermore, Wolters has pointed out additional examples of paronomasia and the relationship of the written cryptogram to the constellations of the zodiac.

Encountering a polysemic 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...
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. The result is an assembly of human features that provides a subtext that reinforces key themes.

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. 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 [nis-is-re-tum] of the gods are placed before me,
5–7 (and) because you even have the words [zi-ik-ru-tum] 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-ṭi] 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-ši-ir-ka] will not diminish.

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.
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. For example, the text employs the noun šiptu “command” in line 10, which echoes šaptu “lip” and constitutes an orthographic reflection on šiptu “incantation.” In addition, the oracle mentions “your mouth” (pika) in line 6, “your hand” (qaṭka) 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.”

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 zikrūm “words” in line 5, and the use of libbu “inner body, heart,” resounding in libbašiam “be available” (from bašû) in line 26.

The oracle is filled with orthographic and paronomastic devices that extend beyond the mention of body parts. For example, it treats maḫīrka in line 18 ambiguously as “your economy” or “your rival,” and it offers an inclusio that connects by way of paronomasia niṣ-ri-re-tum “secrets” (ll. 3, 7) and na-šē₂-er-tum “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 niṣrētu) 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 ni = NE, the diviner also hints by way of allusion at the more common reading of niṣ as bi₂, thus suggesting biṣru (“physician’s bag, commentary”), that is, “the tools (used in the activity) of the diviner.” 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.
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. 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.” 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).

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 \( \text{tp-’s} \) “before we could reach (land).” One sees in the phrase, which is written \( \text{Ûx} \), 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 \( \text{b} \) four times in the following line describing the king’s offering found in the temple at Dendera: \( \text{înd=î hr=t m bs.t m stj hnts lb=t m wbn.t m w’r.t} \) “I greet you with what emerges from the leg (of Osiris). Your heart rejoices over what appears from the leg.” Not only does the sign \( \text{b} \) serve as a determinative for \( \text{stj} \) and \( \text{w’r.t} \), both “leg,” but the verb \( \text{bs.t} \) “emerge” is a combined ligature containing the legs sign \( \text{Û} \) attached to the fish sign \( \text{¶} \), and \( \text{hnts} \) “rejoice” is written with a sign that depicts the

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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.”

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.

foresection of a horse dangling its two legs (ʔm). 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.”

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. [h]rltk bm ymn
   Your gorge in your right hand …
46. apnk ḡzr īlḥu
   Thereupon, the hero Ilḥu
47. [m]rhḥ yḥd 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 mrḥ “spear,” which suggests ṛh “nose,” and grgr “lance,” which also means “throat.” 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. In the episode detailing Gideon’s campaign against the Midianites (Judg 7:1–25), one finds יד yāḏ “hand” used abundantly as a keyword. In addition, the word “hand” constitutes a partial anagram with the name מִדִּין 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 שפאת hay-yām “lip of the sea” for “shore” (7:12), רָשָׁם ra’sım “heads” for “men” (7:16), שָׁפַט saḥāt “head” for the “beginning” of the middle watch (7:19), שפאת abēl “lip of the meadow” for “border” (7:22), and רַא שֶׁאֶר raʾ šĕʾēr “heads” of Oreb and Ze’eḇ “leaders” (7:25). In turn, these are reinforced by polysemes that suggest body parts such as ישב way-yaškēm “get up early” (7:1), which suggests ישב saḥem “shoulder,” יֶשֶׁן īʾēn “spring” (7:1), which suggests יָשָׁן ayīn “eye,” and יְדֵף sēḏāh “provisions” in 7.8, which reminds one of יָד sad “side”

Wordplay in Ancient Near Eastern Texts

(7:8). The combined impact of the numerous body parts, and the audible connection between יָדָא ‘hand’ and מִיְדָן ‘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 יִדָּאַשׁ רָבָד אֱשֶעַבֶּא הָנָאָשׁ ‘the fingers of the hand of a man’ (5:5). Nevertheless, we are told that the king perceived it as הָדְיָא הָאֹשׁ אֱשֶעַבֶּא ‘the palm of the hand’ (5:5). Later, it is again called פַּסַּא יִדָּא ‘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: יִרְטִק הֶצְרָח ‘knots, enigmas’ (5:12, 5:16), which recalls the “joints,” אוֹזְנָא הַפְּלֵת ‘languages’ (lit. “tongues”) (5:19), and רַבְד ‘in his power’ (lit. “hand”) (5:23). Note too how the verb יִנְשִׁי ‘changed’ in Dan 5:9 suggests “teeth” (cf. זְיָא הָסְנִי ‘teeth’ in 7:7), and how the verb יִשְׁטַבֵּא ‘wet’ (5:21) recalls the noun “fingers.”

Given the concatenation of so many body parts and allusions to them, one cannot help but hear יָדָא בָּדָא ‘in hands’ in the repeated introductory particle בָּדָא ‘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 רָשִׁי ‘writing’ (5:24, 5:25), which resounds the noun רָשִׁי ‘heads.’ The second is מֶאָזְנָא ‘scales’ (5:27), which echoes the Hebrew מֶאָזְנָא ‘ears.’

Given the bilingual nature of the book, such interplay between Aramaic and Hebrew should not surprise us. 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...
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.\(^\text{181}\) 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.\(^\text{182}\)

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).\(^\text{183}\) 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 \(\text{ḥanša} “\text{Fifty}”\) (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 (\(\text{ḥḥ}\)) also could be read as the consonant \(\text{w}\), 1000 as \(\text{ḥḥ “lotus plant,” 10,000 as ḫḥ “finger,” 100,000 as ḫḥ “tadpole,” and 1,000,000 as ḫḥ, one of eight ḫḥ-gods who holds the sky aloft. Nevertheless, while the name of the number and the object used to represent it glyphically were

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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. On the other hand, they do show a great interest in numerical paronomasia, as I show below (4.2.7).

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 yʿr
   He cuts two incisions with a razor,
19. yḥdy lḥm w dqn
   He cuts cheeks and beard.
20. yṯlṯ qn ḏrʿh
   He furrows the measure of his arm.

Here the poet follows the dual form psltm “two incisions” with two objects, lḥm w dqn “cheeks and beard,” and then with the verb yṯlṯ “furrow,” which derives from the word ṣlṯ “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).

An even more sustained demonstration occurs in the Ugaritic Epic of Kirtu. 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 (ḥmš) or six (ṭdṭ) 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 [rbr] 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., ḫmnw), is followed by the Ennead (psḏ.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.

[tn], two [tn] will march, after three [tl], 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 [tl], and a fourth [rb'], a fifth day [hmš], and a sixth [tdt], 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 [tl], and a fourth [rb'], a fifth [hmš] day, and a sixth [tdt] … 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 [tl, 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 ṣlṯ 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 yḥd (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 tnn, 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.

The case of one person [דָחֶא ʾɛḥāḏ], with no companion [יִנֵשׁ šēnī], who has neither son nor brother.
Yet he amasses wealth without limit, and his eye is never sated with riches [לארשי ממשל תשש תשש ור]. For whom, now, is he amassing it while denying himself enjoyment. That too is a futility and unhappy business. The two [הארסי הָּשְׁנַיִּים] are better off than the one [ידוהי הָּשָּׂא], in that they have greater benefit from their earnings. For should they fall, the one [ידוהי הָּשָּׂא] can raise his friend; but woe to the one who is alone [ידוהי הָּשָּׂא] and falls with no companion [שֶׁנֶּנְּי] to raise him! Further, when two [הארסי הָּשְׁנַיִּים] lie together they are warm; but how can one alone [ידוהי הָּשָּׂא] get warm? Also, if the one [ידוהי הָּשָּׂא] attacks, the two [הארסי הָּשְׁנַיִּים] can stand up to him. A three-fold [שלוש הָּמְשֻׁלֶּשׁ] cord is not easily broken!

Note how the number one (ידוהי 'הָּשָּׂא) is used idiomatically for someone who is “alone” in lines 8, 9, 10 (2x), 11, and 12, and how the number “two” (הארסי həšənayim) appears variously in lines 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12, often with the meaning “friend, companion.” Moreover, in the consonant text, the phrase לֹּאְ תִּשְׁבָּא אָשֶּׁר “never sated with riches,” resembles the numbers שֶׁבֶּה “seven” and עַשֵּׁר “ten.” The passage finishes by making reference to a “three-fold” (משלש mašullāš) cord in line 12. 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 non-numerical 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: הֲכַיָּה יִרְדֹּג יָדֹּג יָדֹּג וֻיַּנְּיֵי יָרְבָּה “how can one pursue a thousand, and two put a myriad to flight.”
4.1.10. ISOPSEPHY

Another form of polysemy that involves numbers is isopsephy (called gematria in early Jewish parlance). 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 counts—much like the Israelite scribes (lit. “counters”). Indeed, some Akkadian scribes encoded their names numerically in colophons. 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 (= īru), and 44 = ri. In total, the numerical values constitute isopsephy for the name Anu-abu-uttirri.

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 = pāliḫ, 21 = Anu, 33 = zēru, 20 = šu, LID.30.NAGAR = liḫliq, thus producing the reading: la pāliḫ Anu zēršu liḫliq “may Anu destroy the seed of the irreverent.” 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...
have come to light. As Hermann Hunger remarks: “The preferred place for scribes to play around with the writing system is the colophon.”

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. Moreover, isopsephy was employed as a hermeneutic in commentaries.

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 exegetical 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. Additional evidence comes from some biblical acrostics, which appear to reflect an awareness of the consonants’ numerical values, in addition to an abecedary and


198. Weidner, “Geheimschrift”; Andreas Fuchs, Die Inschriften Sargons II. aus Khorsabad (Göttingen: Cuvillier Verlag, 1993), 42:65, pp. 294–295: ŠÁR ŠÁR ŠÁR ŠÁR GÉŠ + u GÉŠ + u GÉŠ + u 1 UŠ 3 qa-ni 2 KUŠ (ammati) nībi šūmīya mīšiṭi dārīšu aškunna eli ašū abān šadē zuqī uṣarāšīma 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.

4. Taxonomy

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 monarchical period, evidence from ostraca shows that the Israelites used the Egyptian hieratic numeral system.202 Later the Mesopotamian sexigesimal 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., הַכָּה) year of his rule in paleo-Hebrew script.
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 1QM IV, 3–4: לֶדֶת מַדְמֵעַ דִּמְעָה מַרְבּ לֶדֶת מַדְמֵעַ דִּמְעָה מַרְבּ “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.
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 יֵמֵי מָשָׁר יֵמֵי מָשָׁר “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. 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.

In more recent times there have been additional proposals. Addison Wright has drawn our attention to a number of cases in Qoheleth, though they have been met with some skepticism. Rüdiger Heinzerling has argued that “using a key laid 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. 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).

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


Testament passage is the Aramaic form of the name נרון קפר, “Neron Caesar,” i.e., $50 + 200 + 6 + 50 + 100 + 60 + 200 = 666$ (var. נרון קפר, “Nero Caesar,” i.e., $50 + 200 + 6 + 100 + 60 + 200 = 616$).\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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. \textit{Noṭariqon}

\textit{Noṭariqon} (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.\textsuperscript{215} As Stefan Maul observes, one finds \textit{noṭariqon} in Akkadian texts mainly as a hermeneutical tool, and often working across languages, that is, Akkadian and Sumerian.\textsuperscript{216} Thus, one commentary interprets the Sumerian KISIM “sour milk” (= Akkadian \textit{kisimmu}) as meaning a “shepherd’s pen,” by breaking it up into the Sumerian signs KI “deep place” (=

\textsuperscript{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,” \textit{NT} 44 (2002): 35–54, argues that the isopsephy here spells the name Claudius when based on the Latin numeral system.


\textsuperscript{215} “\textit{Noṭariqon}” derives from the word νοτάριος “shorthand writer, secretary,” which in turn derives from Latin notarius “notary.” See Athanasius, \textit{Apologia ad Constantium imperatorem} 2035.011 (fourth century CE); Johannes Chrysostom, \textit{Ad Innocentium papam} 2062.094 (fourth–fifth century CE). On the use of “etymography” see Assmann, “Etymographie,” 37–63; Frahm, \textit{Babylonian and Assyrian Text Commentaries}, 70.

Akkadian *tarbaṣu* “pen”) and SI (= Akkadian *rēʾûti*) “sheep.” In another commentary, we find the following interpretation, again based on *noṭariqon*: *ḫur-da-ti: ḫur-ri da-di, da-du: ma-ra* “(the term) ‘Vulva’ (*ḫurdatu*) means ‘cavity of the loved-one’ (*ḫurri dādi*), where ‘loved-one’ (*dādu*) means ‘son’ (*māru*).”

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) saḥar and (the Akkadian) saḥar ‘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.

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.” 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 [image]. On the surface, one may read the inscription as *ḫpr.w nṯr mrj* “the beloved divine being.” However, if one reads just the first consonant of each of the logographic signs it yields *ḫnm* “Khnum.”

To date, no examples of *noṭariqon* have been found in Ugaritic texts. Either examples await discovery or the device was not employed.

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217. The commentary focuses on the forty-first *pirsu*-section of *Aa* (= *Ea* 8.3), ll. 3–4.
220. Jiménez, “‘As Your Name Indicates,’” 88.
Notariqon 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 הָמֵּה hēmmāh “these” (Jer 7:4). The odd line has encouraged some to conclude that the three consonants that comprise הָמֵּה hēmmāh (i.e., $h + m + h$) are an acronym for הַמַּמְשָׁכֵה here [h]\text{am-}[m]\text{aqōm} [h]\text{az-zech} “this place.” Like isopsephy, notariqon is more common in later rabbinic texts and talismans, where it bears a performative and/or ritual function.

Another example appears in Esther’s statement to the Persian king: אוֹבָיךְֶלֶמַּהןָמָהְוםוֹיַּה [y]āḇōʾ [h]am-mɛlɛḵ [w]o-hāmān [h]ay-yōm “let the king and Haman come today” (Esth 5:4). The initial consonants of each of these words (i.e., הוהי yhwh) spell out the divine name Yahweh, which otherwise appears nowhere in the book.

Some authors use notariqon for appellative purposes. Thus, Gen 16:11 combines עַמָשׁ šāma “he heard” and הוהי yahweh to name "Ishmael," Gen 17:4–5 reads אֲבֹרְאָה hāmön “many (nations),” Gen 31:48 explains the place name גַלָּה hag-gal “the heap” and עֵד ʿeḏ “witness,” and Judg 6:32 accounts for the name יֵרְעָב שְׁלוֹג yǝrubaʿal “Jerubaal” by noting that the people said בֶרָי וֹבּ לַﬠַבַּה yārɛḇ bō hab-baʿal “let Baal contend against him.”

Notariqon continued in Aramaic as an exegetical tool. Thus, b. Shab. 77b explains the difficult Aramaic word מַטְוְכֵי ymtkly by way of notariqon: יתמיא וילכת אד ʾymty tkly dʾ “When will it end?” Elsewhere the rabbis use notariqon to render the Hebrew word יִלָל b=לוֹה "dumb" in Ps 38:14 into Aramaic: יַשְׁטִיל מיוליחʾ ʾyštqyl mylwlyh “his speech has been removed” (b. Hag. 2b [= Git. 71a]).

In Akkadian and Egyptian texts, notariqon 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 notariqon visually, but aurally as well, especially if one is attentive to the paronomastic rendering that derives from the device. This is because notariqon employed in these scripts operates on the level of the consonant. The visual and aural effect of notariqon generally is one of metonymization. Its function is primarily hermeneutic or perhaps didactic.

225. These examples of notariqon, and many more from talmudic and midrashic texts, appear in Waldburg, Methods of (Hermeneutical) Transformations, article 4, section 1.
4.1.12. ACROSTICS (ALSO TELESTICHES, MESOSTICHES, AND MENOSTICHES)

An acrostic is a form of polysemy that works by reading vertically the initial letter or sign of the first word in successive lines. 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, a few do appear. The examples illustrated here anticipate the long history that acrostics would have in later Greek and Latin literature.

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.


Since Akkadian is a syllabic system, it lends itself well to these devices. 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-dās-ma-šu ka-ri-bu ša i-li ū šar-ri “I, Saggil-kīnam-ubbib, the exorcist, am adorant of the god and the king.”

Two learned prayers from Khorsabad, one to Marduk and another to Nabu, also contain acrostics that read “Nabu-ušebši, the exorcist.” 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.” 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 iššassû “one can read the start and end of each line in two directions.” 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.”

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 ā-š-ab-du-du ma-ru-uš-tu “I will cause him to pity the distress” on the left and right of the incantation. The imbedding of words and use of script is especially applicable to this text since it calls upon Nabu, the patron god of scribes.


230. See Lambert, Babylonian Wisdom Literature, 63; Oshima, Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers, 121–23.


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.


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.


Wordplay” in Ancient Near Eastern Texts

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-tīʾiš lu-ter-ru-ba lu-nu-ʾi bu-bu-ti
   From house to house I will go (lit. “enter”), I will drive away hunger.

141. bi-ri-ʾiš lu-ut-teʾe 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-qīš ana qer-bi lu-[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, and it is a feature shared by lexical lists organized acrographically.238


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 qū. 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 qi, and l. 87 with qē. 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. 129–136) relies upon ka, 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 bi, but ll. 225, 226, 227, and 228 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 ra. See Oshima, Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers, 157, 358.

238. Thus, one lexical text lists successive entries that begin with same cuneiform sign, ḪAR, though one must read each with the following phonetic values: ḫur, mur, urs, aras, and kin. See Veldhuis, History of the Cuneiform Lexical Traditions, 166–68.
4. Taxonomy

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 ë for mwt “mother,” when read horizontally, but as the goddess “Mut,” when read vertically. Similarly, when read in one direction, the signs ë are understood as šw meaning “to be,” but when read in another, with the determinative ë, they are understood as ššt “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. aṯr ṯn ṯn hlk
   After two, two went,
20. aṯr ṯlṯ klhm
   After three, all of them.
21. aḥd bth ysgr
   A bachelor closed up his house.
22. almnt škr ṭškr
   A widow became a mercenary.

Each successive line starts with an a-aleph. See similarly CAT 1.6.ii.30–35:

\[
tiḥd bn ʾlm ʾmt  \\
\text{She seizes divine Mot.}
\]

\[
b ḫrb ṭḥqn  \\
\text{With a sword she splits him,}
\]

\(^{239}\) 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.
\(^{243}\) Watson, Traditional Techniques in Classical Hebrew Verse, 432.
“Wordplay” in Ancient Near Eastern Texts

*b ḫtr tdr ynn*
With a sieve she winnows him,

*b ʾšt tšrp nn*
With fire she burns him,

*b ṭhm ṭḥnn*
With a millstone she grinds him,

*b ṣd tdrʾnn*
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:

14. *tšmʾ mṯ [h]ry*
The woman Hurray obeyed:

15. *ṭḥ ṣmn [m]rḥh*
She slew the fattest of her fatlings,

16. *ṭḥ ṣḥḥt ṹn*
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):

*ybk ṣwšn*
He cries, and gnashes his teeth,

*ytn gb ṣky*
He makes his voice heard while crying,

*b ṣykh ṣb[n] ṣṃḥ*
“In your life, our father, we delighted.

*bl mtk ṣglḥ*
In your not-dying we rejoiced.

*k ṣlb b ṣḥk ṣṭq*
Like a dog you pass into your (eternal) house,

---

4. Taxonomy

Like a cur into your grave.”

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. 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 ḏd ī[l w ybu]
He enters E[l]’s mountain [and comes]
[qrš mlk] ab herits
[To the tent of the king], the Father of Years.
[l[p’n il yhbr wql]
A[El’s feet he bows down and falls].

Here the entrance of the god Kothar-wa-Ḫasis 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, tql “she falls.”

A third case occurs in the same text, in the mouth of Mot (CAT 1.6.vi.14–16):

ahym ynt b’il 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.”

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 gmrm
They eye each other like fighters.

246. Long after catching this acrostic, I came upon Yogev 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 č̄ā’ib’āʾ ʾăḇīʾaḵā ʾēl bēṯ ʾimmī “I would bring you into my mother’s house.” Here the phrase ʾăḇīʾaḵā “I would bring you” suggests ʾăḇi “my father.” Such devices evince a desire to cluster terms for family members.
“Wordplay” in Ancient Near Eastern Texts

224

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


t₁ z b₁ l z
Mot is fierce, Baal is fierce,
yngḥn k ṭamm
They gore each other like aurochs,
mt₁ z b₁ l z
Mot is fierce, Baal is fierce,
yngḥn k ṭamm
They bite each other like serpents,
mt₁ z b₁ l z
Mot is fierce, Baal is fierce,
ymsḥn k ṭamm
They drag each other like runners,
mt ql b₁ l ql
Mot falls, Baal falls.

letter in each of the three successive verses. 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, Prov 24:1–22, and Prov 29:22–27. It is worth noting that while Israelite poets typically start the twenty-second verse of an acrostic with the letter ש, they also could use a ש, because the diacritic that distinguishes the two consonants was an invention of a later age (e.g., שׁישׁ “rejoice” in Lam 4:21, שׂשׂ “princes” in Ps 119:161, שׂשׂ “rejoice” in Ps 119:162, שׂשׂ “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 mnemonics or to convey a sense of order. Those in Lamentations might have provided readers with a tool for interacting with their emotions through reason.

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 הֶדוֹפּ-poḏɛh “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 פַלָא ʾālap̄ “learn.” 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., וַה בְּפַחַד “glory,” יִדְוַוְהַהָהּ “to make known,” וַאִשָּׁתָה malkūtgā)
“Wordplay” in Ancient Near Eastern Texts

“your kingdom”) in each verse offer a reverse spelling of מֶלֶךְ mɛlɛḵ “king,” a keyword throughout the poem. Though the line starting with the letter נ nun is lacking in Ps 145, it appears in the version from Qumran (11QPs). When one reads the first two words of Lam 5:1–3 in conjunction with a half-line acrostic, the text yields the menostich: זֶכַּרְיָהוּ hān-nāḥî “Zechariah the prophet.” Philippe Guillaume has suggested that this is followed in Lam 5:19–22 by an acrostic, telestich, and menostich that produces: מֶלֶךְ מֵאָלְּהָ לָדְיָהוּ ‘elōhɛḵā râm mɒl[ ]ōd “your God is exalted greatly.” Other menostichs have been suggested, but with varied success (e.g., Ps 2, Ps 9, Ps 10, and Lam 5:17–18).

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 יַדְיוֹ yāḏɛyhā “her hands,” קָפֹף kappāh “her palms,” and פְיוֹפִי pīhā “her mouth,” respectively. Another way to enhance an acrostic is to emphasize the acrostic letter in the verse. Thus, the בeth verse in Prov 31:11 contains no less than fourbeths: בָּחָה bāṭaḥ bāh lēḇ baʿǝlāh “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. In this way, some acrostics demonstrate what Ceresko has rightly called “alphabetic thinking.” 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. Thus, Prov 22:2–3 reads:

259. Watson, “Reversed Rootplay in Ps. 145.”
4. Taxonomy

The rich ['āšīr] and the poor meet together.
The maker ['āšeḥ] of them all is Yahweh.
A prudent man ['ārūm] sees the evil and hides himself,
But the fools [ḥāʾīyām] pass on and are punished.

The first three lines begin with the consonant "ע" and the last with a "פ", the very next consonant in the Hebrew alphabet. See similarly Exod 15:11–13:

Who [מī] is like you, among the mighty, O Yahweh?
Who [מī] is like you, glorious in holiness?
Fearful [נורā] in praises, doing wonders?
You have led [נāṭīṯā] your right hand the earth swallowed them.
You have guided [נēhaltā] them with your strength to your holy habitation.

This passage repeats the consonant "מ" at the start of the first two lines, and then the consonant "נ" at the start of the next four. The latter consonant follows the former in alphabetical order.

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.

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. However, this passage also includes the five "sophīt" or "final" forms,

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.
and three of the six begadkepat letters (i.e., ב ג ד כ פ ת b, g, d, k, p, t) 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:")

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way-yinnâgef yohuḏâh li-ʾp̄nē(y) yîṣrāʾ ēl way-yānūsū īs (ʾȳś) l̄- ʾāhōlō [l̄- ʾōhālāw]
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"and Judah was struck before Israel; and they fled every man to his tent." Though the "yod in ʾȳś and ʾl̄- ʾōhālāyw are not consonantal, they are visually present. Such devices, most of which the Masora records, appear to represent a display of erudition.

The acrostic that concludes the Hebrew text of Ben Sira from Qumran (51:13–30 = 11QPsX XXI, 11–17, XXII, 1) represents a continuation of earlier traditions. 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.

Acrostics also appear in Aramaic in late antiquity, and many are found imbedded in Targumic manuscripts. However, scholars debate whether they represent a continuation of practice in biblical times or the influence of a tradition.
that was more widespread during this period. Functions proposed for these acrostics range from the didactic and the liturgical to the mystical.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{278}

277. I thank Julia Hejduk for this observation.
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 $GÉŠ \times U$ $(60 \times 10)$ “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 Anunnaki.\(^{279}\)

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” ($\text{אָתָבָשְׁו}$), 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, $\text{א} (aleph)$, $\text{ת} (taw)$, $\text{ב} (bet)$, and $\text{ש} (sin)$. 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 abecedaray from ‘Izbet-Šartā shows it to be in use well before the Israelite monarchy.\(^{282}\) Moreover, scholars often treat atbash as if it functions as a

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279. See Beaulieu, “Excerpt from a Menology with Reverse Writing,” 5.
281. In later rabbinic circles, atbash was considered a form of gematria. See Derovan et al., “Gematria.”
cipher, though there is limited evidence that it served such a purpose. I have argued elsewhere that atbash was employed as a performative device of illocutionary power.

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. 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 šēšak shall drink” (Jer 25:26). As the Targum translates and medieval Hebrew commentators observe, the consonants in the word šēšak are a transposition for bāḇɛl “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). 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 [w- nakrīṯɛnnāh] as a nation!”
You too, Madmen, shall be silenced.
The sword is going [tēlɛḵ] after you.

When transposed, tēlɛḵ “going” becomes ʾākal “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 w- nakrīṯɛnnāh “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 ʾākal “devour” again, this time to describe a fire that will destroy the Moabites (Jer 48:45).

285. See Noegel, “Ritual Use of Linguistic and Textual Violence in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East.”
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 תְּמִאְשׁ, which is a transposition for בֶּזְיָא 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 וַאֲכִיתָו wa-tiḵāʾ kī maḥālāh “but she was shaken when he remained ill (referring to Jezebel’s son Ahaziah),” and that Ezekiel changed it to וַאֲרֵתָו wa-tĕrɛʾ kī nōḥālāh “when she saw she had despaired.” The third letter kaph in וַאֲרֵתָו wa-tiḵāʾ 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 שְׁמְיָה mṣ stand as a cipher for the sacred name יְהֹוָה yh. Thus, we read: וַּב-שְׁמַע mṣ mṣ mṣ mṣ mṣ mṣ “and in the name of Yah, Yah, Yah, Yah, Yah” (MS 2053/278, 9–10). It also appears in magical formulae in manuscripts from the Cairo Genizah: בָּשִּׁמְיָה דֶּנָּשׁ mṣ rbh gybrʾ w-b-דֵּחִלְי d-ʾytgly l-מְשׁ b-סְנְה b-שֵׁמַע b-שֵׁמַע b-שֵׁמַע b-שֵׁמַע b-שֵׁמַע b-שֵׁמַע b-שֵׁמַע “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.

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289. A later form of transposition involves substituting the letter ת for h, and the letter ש for אב, etc. It is known as atbah 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 AṬBḤ of R. Hiyya in Light of a Syriac, Greek and Coptic Cipher,” JNES 74 (2015): 45–65.
4. Taxonomy

4.1.14. AMPHIBOLY

Amphiboly (also called amphibology) is the employment of an ambiguous morphology or grammatical structure for polysemous effect. 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 ferrago, 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.” 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.”

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: gḥb=k w ḥr qib.t=ḥ pḥr n=k mẠw.t=l “your arm rests on my arm, for my love has surrounded you” (5.3–5.4). The noun qib.t normally means “breast,” but here it takes the arm determinative ( ... ). The determinative encourages us to read it as gḥb “arm,” thus representing a coalescing of the phonemes /q/ > /ɡ/ known to occur in this period. However, the use of gḥb “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).
293. As observed in CAD K, s.v. “kamāṣu.”
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 lw.n.t “the lady of lunet (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 šaleph 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 [יִתְּלַדֳחֶה hɛ-ḥŏḏaltī] 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 qameṣ rather than a hateph-games 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 רַאֲשׁאֵנ nēʾšăʾar, I fell upon my face and I cried out” (Ezek 9:8). As seen already by Radaq, the form רַאֲשׁאֵנ nēʾšăʾar combines the qal conjugation (in the imperfect tense) and niphʿal conjugation (in the past tense) of the verb רַאָשׁ šāʾar “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 נְדַלֹי wī-yolaḏǝt in Gen 16:11 and Judg 13:5, 13:7 (combining נְדַלֹי wǝ-yolaḏǝt and נְדַלֹי wǝ-yoleḏǝt), וּלֲאֹגְנ nǝḡoʾălū in Isa 59:3 and Lam 4:14 (combining וּלֲאְגִנ niḡʾălū and וּלֲאֹג goʾălū), and so forth.

295. Fox, Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs, 22 n. b, suggests this reading is an aural error or “deliberate pun.”
yiradōp̄ in Ps 7:6 (combining  יִירְדֹּ֣דְי yirdōp̄ and  יִוָ֣יְדֹדְי yǝraddēp̄), and  קרָשִׁ֣נְכּ kǝ-hindōp̄ in Ps 68:3 (combining  קרָשִׁ֣נְכּ kǝ-hinnādēp̄ and  קרָשִׁ֣נְכּ kǝ-ndōp̄).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. lw ḫsf = tw=s n swî hr ḫp.w=s
He who transgresses its laws is punished,
91. ṭt pw m ħr ʿwn-ḥb
it is what escapes the attention of the greedy.
92. ln ngt.t ḥt t ḥ.w
It is the small-minded that seizes riches,
93. n ṭbw ġj.t mnl sp=s
but crime never managed to land its rewards.
94. lw= f ḏd= f sḫt = ḫr ḥn.t=
Who ever says, “I snare for myself,”
95. n ḏd. n= f sḫt = ḫr ḥn.t=
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 יִנַפ pn̄ y in Exod 20:3 and Deut 5:7, and on בתמר mt̄ ḥt 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 רֵהַמ לָלָשׁ שָׁח זַבּ mahēr šālāl ḥāš 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 slesi 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. und 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 ḫn-ḥb in l. 91 as ḫm-ln.t. Guglielmi, “Der Gebrauch rhetorischer Stilmittel in der ägyptischen Literatur,” 493–95, also uses amphibolie for various types of ambiguous devices.
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 $wlt$, making it a causative, that is, $swlt$. The options are thus $hp.w$ “the laws” or $hp.w=s$ “its laws” (referring to Maat in l. 88) and $wlt$ “way” or $swlt$ “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 amphiboloy are cases of polysemy. The verb $sw$ (l. 90) can mean “happen, pass, escape, become distant” or “fell, chop off, strike.” The preposition $ḥr$ (i.e., $π$) “in the sight of, attention of” that follows also can be understood as the noun “face.” This permits us to read $hw$ $ḥsf=tw$ $n$ $swlt$ $hr$ $hp.w$ 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 $¶$, which appears after $ḥsf$ “punish.”

In line 92 the verb $ḥt$ appears with the determinative $¶$, suggesting it means “take” or “rob.” However, the verb also means “bring forward” or “use.” In addition, the noun $ḥ往外$ appears to mean “possessions, heaps, riches” since it carries the determinative $¶$. However, in the context of mooring a boat, which immediately follows, it suggests its other meaning “landing, location, position.” Moreover, $ḥ往外$ can mean “life.” Thus, we may render the phrase $n$ $ḏj.t$ $ḥt$ $ḥ往外$ 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 $mnl$ usually means “moor, land, dock,” but it can be euphemistic for passing beyond death, in the sense of mooring in the afterlife. Thus, we may translate $n$ $p$ $ḏj.t$ $mnl$ $sp=s$ 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 amphiboloy. Moreover, adding to the nautical language of the passage is the mast sign $¶$, which provides the triconsonantal value $ḥ$ in the word $ḥ往外$.

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 sḫt as “acquire” or s “man” + (â)ḫ.t “thing(s), possession(s), wealth.” Also amphibolous is line 97: wn ph.wf mš’t wš=sj. The orthography permits us to read the last word as wš=sj or wš=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.”

In Ugaritic, this type of amphiboly appears in El’s charge to Kirtu that he: šrd bʿl b dbḥ k bn dgn bm ṣdk (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.”

For an example of this type of amphiboly in Hebrew, I turn first to Isa 6:13: דוועו הדבב הדירש הדבשו הדיה הדלי הדלאכ נוולה רשל תכשל תבצמ ירב ערז שדק הדתבצמ וע-ʿוḏ bāh ʾăširīyyāh wǝ-šāḇāh wǝ-hāyṯāh lǝ-ḇāʿēr kā-ʾēlāh wǝ-ḵā-ʾallōn ʾăšɛr bǝ -šallɛḵɛṯ maṣṣɛḇɛṯ bām zɛraʿ qo ḏɛš maṣṣaḇtāh. 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.” Adding to the amphiboly is the verb רַﬠָבּ bāʿar, which Torsten Uhlig notes, can mean “burn” or “destroy, plunder.” The former encourages the first reading, the latter the second.

Paul Raabe has espied a number of examples of amphibolous passages in the Psalms. A brief example occurs in Ps 4:9: kīʾattāh YHWH lǝ-ḇāḏāḏ lā-ḇɛṭaḥ tōšīḇēnī. The placement of בֵּדַד “alone” is

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 iḥ.t iḥ.tl m iḥ.w=s permits multiple readings. The word iḥ.t may be understood as “divine eye,” “shining one,” “uraeus,” or “cow;” the verbal construction iḥ.tl as “is effective” or “is luminous”; and the phrase m iḥ.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.”
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:

The translation is only provisional, since there are different ways of understanding the sentence depending on how one understands the preposition דַﬠ as 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 הלֹיִשׁ “Shilo” may be read as a dialectical reflex of the words יַשׁ הלֹ “tribute belongs to him.” 311

In Ps 17:14, the Psalmist advises:

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 יָֽשְּבוּ בָנִים yišbǝʿū bānīm. One can read בָנִים “sons” either as the subject or object of the verb, that is, their

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 שְׁיָטִיב יַעֲבֹר ‘ōlĕhem “their young,” but as the object, it forces one to rethink בֵּיתָם 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): יִכְּבָּשׁ וַיַּשְׁבֶּשׁ שְׁיָטִיב יַעֲבֹר וַיָּשְׁבֶּשׁ בְּכָרֵד וְהָנָּה “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” (תְאֵשׁ bšʾt) in the first stich, which is also visually striking immediately before מָשָא mšʾt (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:

Wordplay in Ancient Near Eastern Texts

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.
ףֹסָאםֵפיִסֲא ʾāsōp̄ ʾăsīp̄ ēm 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: ʿāsōp̄ ʾăsīp̄ ēm. The infinitive absolute derives from the root ʾ-s-p “gather,” but the finite verb derives from the verb 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 bōš lōʾ yēḥōšū “they are verily not ashamed.” However, immediately following we hear the infinitival form wa-hikkālēm “to be humiliated,” which by parallelism would suggest that the finite form yikkalmū “they are humiliated” would come next; but instead we hear lōʾ yāḏāʿū “they do not even know,” which is derived from a wholly different verb.316 This, then, prepares us for the amphiboly of ʾāsōp̄ ʾăsīp̄ ēm, 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 ʾāsōp̄ 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, hendiadis paronomasia, rhyme, and geminate parallelism and clustering. The sound effect produced in each case we may call alliterative.

4.2.1. HOMOEOPROPHERON

Homoeopropheron is the repetition of the initial sounds of words. 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-šamuḫ.

\[
\begin{aligned}
\text{LÚ IN.NA SU.LUM.MAR.ŠÉ BA.KU₄,RE.EN} \\
\text{NAM.TAR.MU BA.KÚR.E.EN}
\end{aligned}
\]

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 “estrange.” This example also represents a case of end rhyme (see 4.2.11).

See too the following proverb:

\[
\begin{aligned}
\text{GUD SÚN GU₇, A.GIM} \\
\text{GIR₆(GÍRxKÁR) GU₄,UD.DÈ.ZA}
\end{aligned}
\]

317. The term ὧμοιοπρόφερον “homoeopropheron” appears first in Martianus Capella, Grammaticus Latinus 5.167 (fifth century CE).
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:

\[
\begin{align*}
&[EN].GIM \text{ DÙ} \ SAĜ.GIM \ DU \\
&S\text{AĜ.GIM DÙ} \ EN.GIM \ DU
\end{align*}
\]
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:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{AMAR BÀN.DA SI GUR₄.GUR₄. RA} \\
&\text{Â.UR ŠU. DU₇} \\
&\text{SU₄ ZA. GIN.NA SÙ. SÙ ḪILLI} \\
&\text{LA.LA MA. AL.LA.TA}
\end{align*}
\]
Impetuous calf with sturdy horns,  
Perfected limbs.  
Adorned with a lapis lazuli beard,  
Full of voluptuousness and allure.

Paronomasia in this passage occurs between SU₄ “beard” and SÙ.SÙ “adorn.”³²¹

Ludlul bēl nēmeqi demonstrates homoeopropheron in Akkadian. Near the end of the first tablet we read: \text{arḫu innamma inammera šamši (⁴UTU)} “the moon will change and the sun will shine.”³²² Here the initial consonants of the word \text{innamma “will change”} are repeated immediately afterwards in \text{inammera “will shine.”}³²³

A particularly striking case of homoeopropheron occurs in the Atra-ʾhasis 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.” 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 šibabbu ʾeli (UGU) šēri (EDIN)-ki “his love will caress and embrace you” (1.86). Shortly after this, the narrator tells us: urtammī šāmat didāša “Shamhat untied her skirts” (1.18). The use of didāša “her skirts,” reminds us of dādušu “his love.” Afterwards we are informed: ipussuma lullā šipir sinnište “she treated the man to the work of a woman” (1.192), and ultu isbū 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-šaḫ-lu-u u₄-mu-še-rīd a₄-n-qul-₄-an erṣētim qab-l₄-me
Who makes the day to shine, who sends down scorching heat to the earth at midday.

179. [m]u-šaḫ-mi₄-ṭ ki₄-ma nab-li erṣētim ra-pa-₄-d₄-tum
Who makes the broad earth glow like flame,

180. [m]u-kar-ru₄-u u₄-me mu₄-n₄-r₄-ku mu₄-sṣ₄-ti
Who yet shortens the days and lengthens the nights,

181. [m]u-šaḫ-ṣu₄-[u₄] ku₄-su ḫal₄-pa₄-a šu₄-r₄-pa šal₄-gt
[Who causes] cold, frost, ice, and snow.

324. W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, Atra-ʾhasīs: 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 ramû “untie” here (i.e., in urtammî) is powerful in its subtlety. In 1.180, the hunter first had told the prostitute: rumî kirimmîki “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., ramû) her hold, but instead that she “untied” (i.e., ramû) her skirts. The audience is thus expected to hear one paronomastic phrase, but instead is treated to another.

Homoeopropheron obtains both vertically, in that each of the successive lines starts with /mu/ (the first two with /mušaḫ/), and horizontally through the repetition of the /mu/ sound in āmu “day” and mušērid “sends down” in line 178, murriku “who lengthens” and mušātī “nights” in line 180, and mušabšā in line 181. Here erṣetim “land” (2x), kīma “like,” and rapištum “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:

ʿḥʿ.n ms.n sj msḥn.t r=f “then Meskhenet approached him” (10.20). Here the consonants of the verb ms “approach” are repeated in the same order in the name msḥnt “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

m lḥlw.w n lwq.t lw=l m ḥḏḏw t=f “like the dogs of the street, I being under his hand (i.e., power).” Here the consonants lw repeat four times: twice in the word lḥlw.w “dogs,” once in ḥḏḏw “street,” and again in the copula lw.

Similarly, in the Hymn to Amun-Ra inscribed on the stela of Suty and Hor, Amun is praised as follows: snḥp=k r wbn dwl.w ḥḏḏw t=k wbl=s br 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 wbl “opens.”

The Prophecy of Neferti offers a similar example in line 51: wr ṭp t ḫl=q l ṭ ḥḏḏw t=k wbl=s br tj ṭ ṭ “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 wnn.w “hour.”

On the granite monolith inscribed with the Triumph Hymn of Thutmosis III (CM 34010.9–10), we read:

lr=s īs-hq m nbd.w-qd lm=s īnj.w nh.w =sn m ṭsr.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 nh.w “entirety.”

A final demonstration in Egyptian was noted by Lawrence Stager.

328. The use of wbn “overflowing” and wbn as “shine” also constitutes homonymic paronomasia (see 4.2.6).
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 gym il
   shoulder to shoulder, brothers, attendants of El.
6. bšmt ṭm y[ ... ]bš šm il mmt
   There mortals ... the name of El,
7. y bš brkn šm il ġrm
   ... heroes bless the name of El.
8. ṭm ṭmq rpu b ’i ...
   There Thumuqan (and) the shades of Baal ...

The passage presents some difficulties such as the unknown etymon ʿbš. 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 di drdrk “the dominion of your eternity” in the words of the craftsman god Kothar-wa-Ḫasis to Baal (CAT 1.2.iv.10). Here the sounds /d/ and /r/ in drkt “dominion” resound in drdr “everlasting,” which the relative pronoun di 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 Pāḥād wā-Ḥāṭ ġmāt wā-Ḥāḥ “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: ḫr ‘oz lānu yāṣē ḥōmōt wā-Ḥēl “we have a strong city, he (Yahweh) established salvation, walls, and a rampart.” The first two words begin with an ’ayin (י), the second two with a yod and šin (ש), and the last two with a het (ח).

Hosea 10:10 offers a particularly fine example: bḥ-awwāṯī wḥ-ʾēssōrēm wḥ-ʾussūṭū ʾālēhem ṭamīm bḥ-ʾōsrām li-šṭē ḫōnēm [”ōnāqām] “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 ṭēsōrēm “I will chastise them” with ṭēsūṭū “shall be gathered,” which repeats the first two phonemes /Ḥ/ and /Ḥ/. The use of ṭēsōrām “they are tied” does as well, and

provides homonymic paronomasia with מֵסְרֶא ʾɛssŏrēm “I will chastise them.”

See too Hosea’s complaint that מִיַרְפֶא מִיַדְקֵדְו ʾɛp̄ rayīm rōʿɛh rūaḥ wǝ-rōḏēp ʾqâlā “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:

וּנֶּחיִרְבַי־אֹל לֹʾ yahriḥɛnnū ʾbɛn qāṣɛt ls-qāṣ neḥpokā lō ʾabnē ʾqâla “an arrow (lit. ‘son of a bow’) does not make him flee, slingstones are turned into stubble” (Job 41:20). The chiastic arrangement allows for the juxtaposition of bow and into stubble, which lets the poet repeat the consonants כ ג/ qoph and ש ש/ shin in close succession.

Shalom Paul has drawn attention to another example of homoeopropheron in Amos’ prophecy concerning Samaria’s elite:

רָסְו חַזְרִמ מִיחוּרְס wǝ-sār mizra ḥ sǝrūḥīm “the revelry of those who stretch themselves shall pass” (Amos 6:7). The phonemes /s/ and /r/ in פָּס ק / qāṣ “shall pass” are identical to the first two consonants in מִיחוּרְס sǝrūḥīm “those who stretch themselves.”

Proverbs 23:13 offers another demonstration: עַנְמִת־לַא רַﬠַנִּמ תֶשָׁק qāš ʾal timnaʿ min-naʿar “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 תֶשָׁק שַׁקְל qāš ʾešq “bow” and “into stubble,” which lets the poet repeat the consonants כ ג/ qoph and ש ש/ shin in close succession.

The Moabite stela of King Mesha (ca. 840 BCE) also illustrates homoeopropheron. We hear the initial consonants רָק / qr repeated several times when the king boasts that he built banks for the reservoir “inside the city [בּרַק b-qr], but there was no cistern inside the city at Qarho [בּרַק b-qrḥh]” (ll. 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): אלמו�ךנא仞ʿ랭פלו fungus ʿl ss “I filled the arsenals of Paar, and I added horse upon horse.” Note how the verb לעפ pʿl “added” (lit. “made”) immediately follows upon the toponym לעפ pʿl “Paar,” the two sharing their first two consonants. Later the king similarly promotes his success at making his subjects live בּשֵׁב בּשֶׁב בּשׁב תבשבו b–šbʿ

331. Noted as a “pun” by Morris, Prophecy, Poetry, and Hosea, 87. The qere/ketib [וָתֹנוֹע ʿō ʿōṯ] raises the question of whether one should read “their two rings” or “their iniquities.”

332. The words לֹʾ yahriḥɛnnū 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.

w-b-mnʿm w-b-šbt nʿmt “in satedness, and in pleasantness, and in pleasant living” (B, ll. 12–13). Visual homeoepropheron occurs here between between סֶעַשׁ šbʿ “sated” and תבש šbt “living” (lit. “dwelling”). Assisting the device is the repeated preposition ב “in” and the use of the root נʿ-מ “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 חֲנַנַיִּא dǝnāh dānīyyēʾl “this Daniel” (Dan 2:24), which appears in various forms (Dan 6:4, 6:6, 6:29), as well as the phrase לֶחְמְ לִבְרָבְרַבְל lǝḥɛm raḇ lǝ-raḇrǝḇānōhī “a great feast for his nobles” (Dan 5:1). See also Dan 6:22: מִיָּדְא לאֵיִּנָדּ אָכְּלַמ־םִﬠ לִלַּמ אָכְּלַמְ יִיֱח ʾĕḏayīn dāniyyɛʾl ʿim malkā ʾ mallīl malkāʾ lǝ-ʿālmīn ḥĕyī “then Daniel said to the king, O king, live forever!” There also are the repeated consonants mem and lamed (ם-ל) in מַלְלָﬠְל תבש lǝ-ʿālmīn “forever” and the preposition ב “in” and the use of the root מ-ל “pleasant” twice with different nuance.

Each of the primary words in the line begins with a nun (ב, נ). See similarly the repeated initial קָפָר qāl qarnāʾ mašrōqīṯāʾ qīṯārōs [qātrōs] “the sound of the horn, pipe, harp” (Dan 3:5, 3:7, 3:10, 3:15). Adding to the device is anagrammatic paronomasia between מַלְלָﬠְל תבש lǝ-ʿālmīn “forever” and the preposition ב “in” and the use of the root מ-ל “pleasant” twice with different nuance.

Like most cases of paronomasia, homeoepropheron 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 homeoepropheron also introduces Daniel’s vision in 7:2: וּרְאַו עַבְּרַא wa-ʾărū ʾarbaʿ “behold the four (winds of heaven).”

335. The dulcimer does not appear in Dan 3:7. Homeoepropheron with the zayin (ז) also obtains in the phrase מַלְלָﬠְל תבש lǝ-ʿālmīn “forever” and the preposition ב “in” and the use of the root מ-ל “pleasant” twice with different nuance. 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: is [rf spr] n mn-nfr spr r […] [...]. =f m hs hs w m šm ’šm ’w n ml tll[š]w m g]w mi[n]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[claimers, and the w]histling 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

Homoioiteleuton is the repetition of the final sounds of words. An example of this device occurs in the Sumerian tale of the Return of Ninurta to Nippur (ll. 92–93).

\[\text{LUGAL} \, \text{GÍŠRAB AN NA GÚ GAL DIĞIR, RE E E KÍŠIB LÁ 4ENLÍL LÁ ZI ŠÁ GÁL E KUR RA} \]

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.ＧÁL “inspired.”

In Akkadian, we find homoioiteleuton in Ludlul bēl nēmeqi, in which the erudite sufferer laments:

\[šarru šír išī išamši ša nišīšu “the king, flesh of the gods, who is the sun of his people” (1.55). \]

Note how both šamši “sun” and nišīšu “his people” repeat the syllable /ši/. Reinforcing the homoioiteleuton is homoeopropheron between šarru “king” and šīr “flesh,” the relative pronoun ša “who,” and the suffixed pronoun šu “his.”

Assonantal homoioiteleuton also occurs in the Hymn to Shamash, which records the people praising the sun god:

\[šinama palḫaka [i]štammar zikirka “they in their reverence of you, laud the mention of you” (l. 165). \]

Observe how each of the four words in this line ends with /a/.

The Instructions of Amenemope (P.BM 10474) demonstrate homoioiteleuton in Egyptian. I refer to Amenemope’s advice in 16.1–5:

\[m lēj lēj mt n mdw t n ‘ḏi Do not brush aside with false words, \]

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336. We first find the term ὧμωιοτέλευτον “homoioiteleuton” 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 homoioiteleuton 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.”
4. Taxonomy

\[mtw = k\]  \[rmn \]  \[kj\]  \[m\]  \[ns.t = k\]

So as to brush aside a man by your tongue.

\[m \ irj irj \ hsb\]  \[tl\]  \[nkt\]  \[mtw = k\]  \[s’dl\]  \[pijw = k\]  \[’r\]

Do not assess a man who has nothing, and thus falsify your stylus.

\[lr\]  \[gmi = k\]  \[wdi\]  \[’t\]  \[n\]  \[nmh\]

If you find a large debt against a poor man …

Here the final consonants in ’\[dl\]“false,” resound in the realized verb s’\[dl\]“falsify,” and w\[di\]“debt.”

Homoioteleuton also appears on the stela of Suty and Hor. Note in particular line 10, which characterizes Amun-Ra as \[hm.w\]  \[hm.mm.t\] “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 \[gḥṭ\] “cast out” and the noun \[r[ḥt]\] “hand.” Paronomasia on these same consonants recurs in line 5: \[ḥt\] \[nqḥ\] \[uqr ḫṭ tḥta l gbbk\] “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 \[ḥṭa\] “harm.”

Homoioteleuton also occurs in an Ugaritic incantation against the evil eye (\[CAT\] 1.96.5–13).

5.  \[tpnn\] ’n
   The eye of

6.  \[bṭy\] ’n \[bṭt\]  \[tpnn\]
   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 \[ṭgr\]  ’n \[ṭgr\]
   (and) the eye of the gatekeeper: The eye of the gatekeeper,

9.  \[l \ṭgr\]  \[ṭb\]  ’n \[pḥr\]
   will revert to the gatekeeper, the eye of the potter,

10. \[l \pḥr\]  \[ṭb\]  ’n \[mḥr\]
    will revert to the potter, the eye of the tax collector,

11. \[l \mḥr\]  \[ṭb\]  ’n \[bṭy\]
    will revert to the tax collector, the eye of the wizard,

12. \[l \bṭy\]  \[ṭb\]  ’n \[ḥṭf\]
    will revert to the wizard, the eye of the witch,

13. \[l \ḥṭf\]  \[ṭb\]  …
    will revert to the witch …

Observe how the final phonemes /ḥ/ and /ṭ/ repeat in \[mḥr\] “tax collector” and \[pḥr\] “potter.” Additional paronomasia appears between \[bṭy\] “wizard” (and the
female form bêt “witch”) and tēb “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 tēb “gatekeeper.”

A concise example of homoioteleuton in Ugaritic appears in the Epic of Baal (CAT 1.2.iii.15–16): šm ’m ’ [ttr yṯ ir tr 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 ’tr “Athtar,” yṯir “he will avenge,” and tr “bull.”

Homoioteleuton appears in the Hebrew Bible in the prophecy of Nahum:

Nakam debenken akkal betlev namissi mēpē birkayim “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 /ḇūqāh/ and the third with /ḇullāqāh/.

See also Prov 12:25: “anxiety in a man’s heart depresses him [yashēnāh], but a kind word cheers him up [yēshammēnāh].” 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 /ḥēnnāh/ at the end of each stich.

Lady Wisdom employs homoioteleuton in Prov 9:4: ‘whoever is simple turn [ṣer yāsur] here,’ to those who lack [hāsar] judgment she says it.” The highlighted words share the same two final consonants ṣ/s and resh /r/. Enhancing the visual impact of the device is the defective spelling of ṣer yāsur. Homoioteleuton continues in 9:7 with ṣer yōṣēr “he who chastises.”

We also find homoioteleuton at work in Job 28:16: “it (wisdom) cannot be purchased with the gold of Ophir [ʾōp̄ īr], with precious onyx or sapphire [sappīr]. Here the sound /pī r/ occurs at the end of the words “Ophir” and “sapphire.” See also Job’s complaint about God: yip̄ rēnē pērēs ’al panē pērēs yārus”ašay ka-ḡibbôr “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., ṣer ṣes) repeat in the two cognate nominal forms ṣer pērēs “breach,” and in the first verb of the second stich ṣer yārus “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 yōr as opposed to ṣer (yōṣēr) enhances the poetry.339

In Aramaic, we find homoioteleuton in the description of Nebuchadnezzar’s transformation, during which tēp̄ ṭēp̄ ṭēp̄ “his nails (became)
4. Taxonomy

like birds’ (talons)” (Dan 4:30). Here the last two consonants of both roots are identical (רִפ pr). See also Daniel’s interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, which includes a kingdom that will never be 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 homoiooteleuton. In lines 21–22, we find: “if it (the light) is abundant like snow [תָּלָהṯālgāḥ] in the middle of Elul, know then that it will be struck with snow [תָּלָהṯālgāḥ]. There will be great strife [פָּלַגְּט p̄ ǝlagū] in the world.” Here the last two consonants of the root for “snow” (ל/l/ and ג/g/) repeat in the verb for “strife” (נפפ p̄ ǝlagū).

Homoiooteleuton 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, homoiooteleuton 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. An excellent demonstration in Akkadian occurs in the Epic of Gilgamesh 1.37–39.

341. The word ἀναστροφή dates as least to Athenaeus of Naucratis, Deipnosophistae 11.493d (third century CE). Hyperbaton 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: רֶבֶגְו wǝ-ḡɛḇɛr yāmūṯ way-yɛḥĕlāš “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 Manfried 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 ךְּנָיִי Muqaddam wa-Muʿaḫḫar see Steiner, Muqdam u-Meʾuḥar and Muqaddam wa-Muʿaḫḫar.” As Steiner notes, the rabbinic treatment of anastrophe, under the expression
37. ši-i-ḫu ʿGIŠ-gim-maš gīt-ma-lu ra-šub-bu
   So tall, Gilgamesh, perfect, awesome,

38. pe-tu-ū né-re-bé-e-ti ša ḫur-sa-an-ni
   Who opened passes in the mountains,

39. ḫe-ru-ū bu-ū-ri ša kīšād (GÚ) šadī (KUR)
   Who dug wells on the hills.

Here the text fronts the adjective šīḫu “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, 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.”

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:

\[\text{fīlā.t} \text{ṯw} \text{mrj=f} \text{wḫmj.t nmj.t lm=f n.t mk ūmn ln ḫt ḫ(w)h n=ī s(y) ʾh:n dp.t} \]
\[\text{m(ī)nl=m(l) n.tj.w lm=s nj spl wʾ lm ḫr-ḥ.w=ī mk ṭr gs=k} \]

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 \(\text{-ln ḫt ḫ(w)h n=ī s(y)}\) “only the mast, it (the wave?) broke it for me,” conveys the fear and confusion of the moment, while also providing an opportunity to repeat the sound /ḥ/, found in ūmn “eight” and ḫ.w “except,” and the consonant ḫ, found in ṭhrj “repeat,” ṭḥ “cubit,” ṭḥ “then,” and ḫr “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 (\(\U05e0\)) in the noun ṭw “wind,” the mast (\(\U05e0\) in ḫ’

342. George, Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic, 783, suggests the inversion may be for emphasis.
343. The effect continues with the first two words of ll. 40: ʾēbir ayābbā “he crossed the ocean.” Note also in ll. 37 the repetition of the phonemes /g/, /l/, and /m/ in ʿGIŠ-gim-maš gīt-ma-lu “Gilgamesh, perfect” (i.e., ʿGIŠ is a logogram that was read as gīlga). See George, Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic, 84. The line also appears in ll. 1.35, 211, 218.
“then,” and the harpoon (ʼ) in ʾ one,” in addition to the expected boat determinative (ʼ) in dp.t “ship.”

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. In a panic he asks his brothers א י נ ʾ anē ʾēnēnū ʾānāh ʾānē ḫāʾ “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 ʾānē “I,” and in נ ʾēnēnū “is not” and נ ḫāʾ ʾānāh “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 ו ʾēnēnū hanpēq “to bring out” the sacred vessels that once belonged to the temple of Yahweh (Dan 5:2). We then are told that ו ʾēnēnū 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 ו ʾēnēnū hanpiqū “appeared” (Dan 5:5). Arnold observes that the antanaclastic change in meaning of the verb ו ʾēnēnū hanpiqū “bring” to “appear” presents a peʾal 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.” 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.”

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.
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. ša\(^4\)gi-gi la i-du-ū qī-ri-bī-hi-šā
37. šamaš (UTU) bir-bir-u-ka ina ap-stī-ī u-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, \(^4\)šamaš, 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-\(^-\)ū i-maḥ-ḥar-ka
[kal]-par-ri ina te-še-e na-gi-du ina\(^1\) nakri (KUR)

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. \(^4\)marūtuk at-ta-ma mu-tīr-ru gi-mi-li-ni
14. ni-id-din-ka šar-ru-tu, kīš-šat kal gim-re-e-ti
15. ti-šab-ma i-na puḫri lu-ū ša-qā-ta a-mat-ka
16. gašakki (TUKUL)-ka a-a ip-pal-ṭu-ū 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).
\(^{353}\) Lambert, *Babylonian Creation Myths*, 110–11.
7. *lu-ub-ni-ma lullâ* (LÚ-U₁₈-LU-a) *a-me-lu*
8. *lu-û en-du dul-û ilânî-ma šu-nu lu-û pa-âš-ûlu*

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 precative particle in “I will create” (*lubnima*), and it appears in “man” (*amêlu*), “toil” (*dullu*), and “verily” (*lû*). It also is supported by the sound /la/ in *lullâ* “Lullû-man” and *ilânî* “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): *fhw wnls nsb=f sbš.w lm lw 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:

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štis[b] bn qrytm
tmhš lim ḫp y[m]
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(Anat) battles 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 *qirvatêmi* and the first word in the second line as *timḥasu*.

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-Ḫasis implores Baal:

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šm’ m’ l af[i]yn b’l
bl ašt ur[bt] b bhtm
```

Please listen, O mightiest Baal,
Shall I not install a window 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*):
“Wordplay” in Ancient Near Eastern Texts

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 ’ilmā) and lymru “indeed who fattens” (pronounced la-yimraʾ ā).

We can appreciate epanastrophe in Hebrew in Qoheleth’s contention that God tests humankind so that they can see for themselves they are like animal(s) (Qoh 3:18).

Visual epanastrophe appears in the line ṣārāp rēṣēṯ lā-raḡlay “he has spread a net for my feet” (Lam 1:13). The first word ends with the sounds /š/ and the second begins with /š/. Though the letters šīn and šīn 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 devour the entire earth (Dan 7:23).

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. Demonstrating parasonance

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-ta-li bu]-ú-ri šá ú-ḫar-ru-ú [ana-ku]
[He has filled in the] pits that I dug.
131. [ut-ta-as-si-iḫ n]u-bal-li-ia šá uš-n[i-ša]
[He has uprooted] my traps that I laid.
132. [uš-te-li ina qātī-ia] bu-lam nam-maš-šá-a šá šē[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=ln=f m ḏr.t=f msh n mnḥ “in his hand it was a crocodile of wax” (4.2–3). The nouns msh “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 msh “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: ʿr ḫr=k r šl n mš.t sqd=k īm=f m mš.t “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.t “breeze.”

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 hr mš.t w pšn 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 ⰹ 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: 

\[ \text{m}́\text{i} ki \text{lb}=\text{sn r m}.\text{w} \text{“they see the sky, they see the land, fiercer their hearts than lions” (ll. 28–30). The repeated verb m}́\text{i} \text{“see” reverberates in m}́\text{i} ki “fierce” and m}.\text{w “lions.”} \]

In Ugaritic, we find parasonance in the Tale of Aqhat (CAT 1.17.vi.30–32):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{k b}́\text{l k yḥwy} \\
\quad \text{Like Baal, when he revives,} \\
\text{y}́\text{ṣr} \\
\quad \text{He prepares a banquet,} \\
\text{ḥwy y}́\text{ṣr} \\
\quad \text{Prepares a banquet for the revived,} \\
\text{w yšqyḥ} \\
\quad \text{And he offers him drink,} \\
\text{ybd w yṣr ’lh} \\
\quad \text{Intones and sings over him,} \\
\text{n}́\text{m[n w]y}́\text{nyn...} \\
\text{with pleasant (sound) he choruses …}
\end{align*}
\]

Parasonance exists between the repeated form ýṣr “he prepares a banquet” and yṣr “he sings” (i.e., /y/, /ṣ/, and /t/) and between n mn “pleasant (sound)” and ýnyn “he choruses” (i.e., /n/ and /y/).

An exquisite case of parasonance occurs in the performative speech of Kothar-wa-Ḫasis to Baal in the Epic of Baal (CAT 1.2.iv.8–10).

8. \text{ht ibk} \\
\text{Now your enemy} \\
9. \text{b’lm ht ibk tmḥṣ ht tṣmt ʂrtk} \\
\text{Baal, now strike your enemy, now vanquish your foe!} \\
10. \text{tqḥ mlk ’lmk drkt dt drdrk} \\
\text{Take your eternal kingship, your everlasting dominion!}

Note in particular the parasonance between tmḥṣ “strike,” tṣmt “vanquish,” and ʂrtk “your foe” (i.e., the first two share the phonemes /m/ and /ṣ/, the latter two share /ṣ/ and /t/). Additional parasonance occurs between mlk “kingship” and ’lmk “your eternal” (/ml/, /l/, and /k/) and between drkt “dominion” and drdrk “your everlasting” (/dr/, /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” (נָבֵל bāḇeł) by “confusing” (לָלָב bālal) the language of its people (Gen
The famous cry of Isaiah works similarly:

\[
\text{וַקְיַו} \text{טָפְּשִׁמְל} \text{הֵנִּהְו} \text{חָפְּשִׂמ} \text{הָקָדְצִל} \text{הֵנִּהְו} \text{הָקָﬠְצ}
\]

wa-yǝqaw lǝ-mišpāṭ wǝ-hinnēh mišpāḥ li-ṣḏāqāh wǝ-hinnēh ṣǝʿāqāh “he (Yahweh) hoped for justice, but behold bloodshed, for righteousness, but behold a cry” (Isa 5:7). Technically speaking, only ṣǝḏāqāh “righteousness” and ṣǝʿāqāh “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 mišpāṭ “justice” and the mem, pe, and šin in mišpāḥ “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:

\[
\text{יִכּ} \text{יִנְנִה} \text{ֵלַּשְׁמ} \text{םֶכָבּ} \text{םיִשָׁחְנ} \text{םיִנֹעְפִצ} \text{רֶשֲׁא} \text{םֶהָל־ניֵא} \text{שַׁחָל} \text{וּכְשִּׁנְו} \text{םֶכְתֶא} \text{הָוהְי־םֻאְנ}
\]

kī hinǝnī mǝšallēaḥ bāḵɛm nǝ ḥāšīm ṣip̄ ʿŏnīm ʾ ăšɛr ʾ ēn l āhɛm l āḥaš wǝ-niššǝḵū ʾɛṯḵɛm nǝʾum 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 ṣǝḏāqāh “send,” nǝḥāšīm “serpents,” lāḥaš “charmed.” Note too that niššǝḵū “bite” is parasonant with nǝḥāšīm “serpents.” Moreover, the parasonance onomatopoetically 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: hwl l’hwl k-nḥl ʾytn “From sand to sand like an eternal wadi.” This brief line repeats the noun hwl “sand” before the noun nḥl “wadi” with which it shares two consonants. The shared consonants bespeak a shared essence that the simile invites us to compare.

The second case appears in Sir 4:9 MS A.

hwšʿ mwṣq m-ṃsyqyw
w- l tp̄qw rwbk b-mšpī ywsr


359. See the discussion by Rüdiger Schmitt, Magie im Alten Testament, AOAT 313 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2004), 110–12.

Deliver the oppressed from their oppressors, let your spirit not dread just judgment.

Note how מְשָׁק “oppressed” and מְשָׁק “oppressors,” share two of their three consonants with תְּשֵׁק “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.”

Several cases of parasonance in Aramaic appear in Daniel’s description of Nebuchadnezzar’s transformation into a wild man:

Note in particular תְּרִיד “driven,” מְדֶרֶח “his dwelling,” and טַרְיַד “onagers,” which share the consonants ד and ר. See also מְשָׁק “grass,” יָסְבָּה “wet,” and יִשְׁבָּה “desires,” the first two of which share ס and ב, and the latter two, צ and ב.

Parasonance also occurs in the Proverbs of Ahiqar:

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:


4. Taxonomy

If a fugitive flees from me [קריק נמי קרך ירקרק מני קרך yrqrq mny qrq],
Pacify them [קרקandra קרקה רקח trqhm] and restore them to me.
And if they do not [דwell] in your land [ארקך ρqk],
Pacify [קרך ρqw] (them) there.

Here the consonants ר /r/ and ק /q/, which form the start of the root q-r-q “flee,” also appear in the root r-q-h “pacify,” and again in 활용 ρaq “land.”

Parasonance continued to have a long life in Jewish literature, as demonstrated by b. ʿErub. 65b: “a person can be identified by three things: his drinking habits (בכוס b-kwsw), his spending habits (בכוסו w-b-kysw), and the way he behaves when he is angry (בכוסו w-b-kʿsw).” 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. It differs from polysemy in that the device operates between words,


364. Observed by Yona, “Rhetorical Features in Talmudic Literature,” 84, along with other examples.

not within a single word. Moreover, the relationship between words is
paronomastic, and thus not exact. This distinguishes it from antanaclasis (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.GALLA
NÍG.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.” In line 27, we find: NIN.ĜU À NI.ZA NA.ZÚ ZÚ Ė.GU “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.” 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 [Sargon], 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. Though in each case the sounds appear visually identical, they
would have been pronounced differently.

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 𓊃 for both “flock, herd” and “office”
represents homonymic paronomasia.

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.
367. Zgoll, Der Rechtfall der En-ḫedu-Ana im Lied nin-me-šara, 4–5, 173; cited by Klein
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 ŚA ĕ-ši-b
UN.MEŠ KUR LU kaš-ši-i ă KUR LU ya-su-hi-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 kašši “I conquered” (from kaššû) is echoed in kašši “Kassites” (from
kaššû). The paronomasia is reinforced by the word order of the two verses, which both
begin with UN.MEŠ KUR = niši 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 ʿnḥ n ḏsr nṯr=k ḫr ʿnḥ wīs n ḫr=k mwn.tl “receive a bouquet, that your god has sanctified, bringing life and prosperity to your dear face” (11). The song employs the homonyms ʿnḥ “bouquet” and ʿnḥ “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 lw.t appears for “flock, herd” and “office” (1.2). As such, the device fits well the political interpretation of the story. It occurs again when Anubis’s wife takes a piece of ʿḏw “fat” to make it look like she had been beaten ʿḏw “unjustly” (4.6). In 4.8, the narrator says that her husband returned home to find her seemingly sick (lit. ʿḏw “false” 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 šd “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 hw.t “ferment” (12:10). The lexeme recalls Bata’s reference to Anubis’s wife’s kt.t hw.t “vagina that is rotting” (7.8), and the hw.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: sḥtm.w m rdj ḥtm=tw “Destroyer, let not perish!” The entreaty employs two homonymic verbs. The first is a causative conjugation of ḥtm “provide.” The second ḥtm is an unrelated verb that means “perish.” 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: sḏm.w mdw.t rmḏ fr ṣms nsw lrl=f stwḥl mdw.t sn pn[ ]=f nsw “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 nsw “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) l ʾš-n.(l)-ḥt.t m wnw.t=sn ... n lʾš-n=tw n=k m šwl ʾd r=s “there are no pilots on duty ... no one can call upon you, being one free of aggression against it.” The lexeme recalls Bata’s reference to Anubis’s wife’s kt.t hw.t “vagina that is rotting” (7.8), and the hw.t “sore” heart of the washerman grieved by his quarrels with pharaoh (11.1).

370. Noted by Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature, 1:183 n. 22, who simply calls it a “wordplay.”
poet here exploits the compound noun ʿš-n.(-ḥ)t “pilot” for its relationship to the verb ʿš-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. ṣb bny l mḥtkm
    Stay seated on your seats,
25. l kḥḥ zbl[k]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: יִכּ לוֹקְכָם תַחַת ריִסַּה תַחַת ריִסַּה קֹחְשׂ ליִסְכַּה has-sīrīm taḥaṯ has-sīr kēn šāḥōq hak-kēsīl “like the crackling of the thorns under the cooking-pot, such is the laughter of a fool.” Qoheleth exploits the homonymity of מָסִירִים has-sīrīm “the thorns” and מָסִיר has-sīr “the cooking-pot.” The connection between the thorns and the fool is strengthened by repetition of the phonemes /s/ and /ī/ in ליִסְכַּה hak-kēsīl “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 קֹחְשׂ לוֹקְכָם śǝḥōq hak-kēsīl “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: פְּרֶס פְּרֶס מַלְכְּתָה לֶֽמַדַּי לֶֽמַדַּי פָרְסָה פָרְסָה wī-yḥīṯaḥ la-māḏay ū-pārās “Peres—your kingdom is assessed, and it is given to the Medes and Persians” (Dan 5:28). Here Daniel decodes the enigmatic פְּרֶס parēs via paronomasia that identifies it with פָרְסָה pārās “Persia.”

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.”
4. Taxonomy

The plaster wall inscription from Deir ‘Alla (eighth century BCE) also exhibits the device. 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: "Indeed the swift reproached the raptor, and the voice of vultures cried out. The stork has the young of the nḥṣ-bird, and tore up the chicks of the heron." (Combination I, lls. 7–8). Here the consonants in nḥṣ “raptor” echo soon afterwards in the verb נשתר “tore up.”

In the Aramaic Sefire inscription, we also find an excellent visual case amidst the stela’s curses (1.A.22–23).

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 שבעה “seven” and ends with the verb שבע “satisfy.” The homonymic paronomasia is visually striking, constitutes homoioateleuton, and creates an inclusio.

Even more than parasonance, homonymic paronomasia forces readers/listeners to differentiate the lexemes involved. At the same time, one


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. 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 ḫk j “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 [w ʿ t], take the second alone [sn[t w ʿ t], quench [ ḫm] it, remove it, give [d ʿ] it to me. You have wiped [f ʿ] at it, be friendly [snn t] towards me; do not let go [sfḥḥ] of it; have no pity [ḥtb] on it; make the Eye bright [ṣḥd]; give the Eye to me.” The highlighted terms evoke the numbers w “one,” sn “two,” ḫm “three,” f d “four,” dw “five,” srs or sls “six,” sfḥ “seven,” ḫmn “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. See Sethe, “Ein altägyptischer Fingerzühlreim,” 27–28, who draws attention to a similar device in the Pyramid Texts, Spell 670, §1978: ḫm.n=f ḫm.₅ ṯnw m ḫm-nw=f ḫw ḫm.n=f ḫw ṭw=h ṭw=m ḫm.nw=f ḫw “he has wiped away [ ḫ] the evil, which was NN, on his fourth [ ḫ-nw] day. He has canceled [ ḫm] what has been done against him on his eighth [ ḫnn.nw] day.” He also highlights a ritual to Amun (p. 18 n. 1): ʿb.n=k ṭw.k m d.t.wy=k m ṭw=k m ṭw p=m ṭw ṭw ṭw ṭw “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, ḫw.t mḥ.t ṣn.mw.t “the second full stanza” begins with ṣn=ỉ “my brother,” ḫw.t mḥ.t ḫmt “the third full stanza” begins ḫmt.ḥ ṭb=ỉ “my heart expected,” 379 the ḫw.t mḥ.t ḡw.t “fourth full stanza” starts with ḡfd ṣw ṭb=ỉ “a fleer it is, my heart,” and the ḫw.t mḥ.t ḫw.t “fifth full stanza” opens with ḡw=ỉ mḥ.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 [ḥw.t mḥ.t-ssw]:
Each region [sw] succumbs to the fear of you,
it’s inhabitants are curbed at your glory …
Seventh full stanza [ḥw.t mḥ.t-sfḥ]:
Misery is dissolved [sfḥ] in Thebes, city of Ra, Mistress of cities, which conquers whatever is useful to the Universal Lord …
Ninth full stanza [ḥw.t mḥ.t-psḏ]:
The Nine gods [psḏ] who came out of the Ocean
gather to worship you, great of awe …
Tenth full stanza [ḥw.t mḥ.t-mḏw]:
Thebes is more famous [mtd] than any city,
water and earth were here in the First Time …
Twentieth full stanza [ḥw.t mḥ.t-ḏwt]:
How pleasantly you ferry [ḏ3 ṭw] O Harakhte,
in performing your eternal duty every day …
Thirtieth full stanza [ḥw.t mḥ.t-mʿb]:
The harpoon [mʿb] is in the Evildoer,
who has fallen by its blade …
Fortieth full stanza [ḥw.t mḥ.t-ḥmw]:
The One who crafted [ḥmw] 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): ḡw=ỉ m ḏbʿ s ṣ ṭ r “I have entered in a finger and toe of Osiris.” 379 The fifth stanza also contains the paronomastic line ḫm.t ṭb=ỉ “my heart was ignorant.” 380 The words “first full stanza” do not appear, but the first line of the poem (and the last!) is ḡw=ỉ “one, unique-one.” The ḫw.t mḥ.t srs “sixth full stanza” is less paronomastic as it starts with ṣw=ỉ “he passed by.” The seventh and final stanza simply repeats the number ṭb “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 Oudheden, 1947); passage cited from Loprieno, “Puns and Word Play in Ancient Egyptian,” 14.
In the Admonitions of Ipuwer (P.Leiden 1 344, r.12.13–14), we read: *mk kj ḫr wd t* r *kj snl=tw r wd(t).n=k lr snl s 3 ḫr w.t gnm=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 *snl* “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 ḫt.n=f hnt(f)=f w̱l* “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 *ḥmt* “thought” recalls *ḥmt* “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:

**וּהָיְצַמֲאַו קַזַּחְתִּים גַהְנִיַּו וֹמַּﬠ־תֶא כְֶלֵיַּו אֹיְגּ חַלֶמַּה כְַיַּו רִﬠֵשׂ־יֵנְבּ־תֶא תֶרֶשֲׂﬠ שִפּלֲא** *wa-ʾămaṣyāhū hiṯḥazzaq way-yinhaḡ ʾɛṯ ʿammō way-yēlɛḵ gēʾ ham-mɛlaḥ way-yâḵ ʾɛṯ bənē śēʿīr ʿăśɛrɛṯ ʾălāp̄ īm* “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 *ריִﬠֵשׂ* śēʿīr “Seir” paronomastically anticipates the number *תֶרֶשֲׂﬠ* ʿăśɛrɛṯ “ten.” 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 [*יִנָשׁ* šānīy], saying: ‘This one came

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382. This is followed in 13.1 by an allusion to the number one in the statement *n(l) mw.r.t is pw w* “one is beloved.”

out first [הָנֹשַׁאִר riʾšonāh]” (Gen 38:28). The noun יִנָשׁ šānīy “scarlet” suggests יִנֵשׁ šēnīy “second,” thus perfectly (and also paronomastically!) anticipating הרָנֹשַׁאִר riʾšonāh “first.”

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 [ךְִיַנִּשׁ šinnayīḵ] are like a flock of shorn -ones, who come up from the washing; all of whom are twinned [םיִנְשׁ šǝnayīm].” This time the noun מִיָּנַשׁ šēnayīm “teeth” (here with suffix) paronomastically evokes מִיָּנְשׁ šǝnayīm “two” in the context of twinning.

In fact, the strategy of doubling also appears in narratives that feature pairs or the doubling of amounts, that is, not necessarily texts that employ the noun “twin.” Thus, in the acrostic poem of the woman of valor we read: אָריִית אֲ¼ול הָּתיֵבְל גֶלָשִּׁמ יִכּ הָּתיֵבּ־לָכ שֻׁבָל מִיָּנַשׁ lōʾ ṯīrāʾ lǝ-ḇēṯāh miš-šālɛḡ kī ḵŏl bēṯāh lāḇuš šānīm “She does not fear for her household on account of snow, because all of her household are dressed in a scarlet” (Prov 31:21). Here “scarlet” also can mean a “two-ply-garment,” which, when followed by שֵׁשׁ šēš “linen” in the next verse, allows us to hear שֵׁשׁ šēš also as “six” by way of numerical paronomasia. The doubleness of the garment finds contextual reinforcement in the use of בֶּת bēṯ “household,” a lexeme that also suggests the name of the letter ב b, that is, which doubles as the number two. Moreover, as if to emphasize the reference to “two” the poet has employed בֶּת bēṯ twice in the verse. Bolstering the pivot function of the polysemic מִיָּנַשׁ šēnayīm is the fact that the verse in which it occurs occupies the central position of the acrostic, that is, it is the last word in the eleventh of twenty-two lines (the acrostic ל l line). Thus מִיָּנַשׁ šēnayīm divides the poem into two equal halves. Moreover, at the very center of this verse is the phrase גֶלָשִּׁמ miš-šālɛḡ “on account of the snow,” whose segholate pausal form allows one to hear it the word لماšāl “proverb.”

385. See Karolien Vermeulen, “Two of a Kind: Twin Language in the Hebrew Bible,” JSOT 47 (2012): 135–50, who observes that many of the cases involve repetition and geminate clustering (see 4.2.12), which also emphasize the dualities present in the text. There may be an analogue to this device in the following Sumerian proverb: KA.S.A MAŠ.BI MU.UN.ŠUB MAŠ.TAB.BA.NI AM[I.I “the fox dropped her young. Her twins came out.” As Alster, Proverbs of Ancient Sumer, 416, notes: “Since MAŠ means ‘young’ (of an animal), MAŠ.TAB.BA means ‘double cubs,’ but also ‘twin.’” Cited by Klein and Sefati, “Word Play in Sumerian Literature,” 35 n. 39.
Numerical paronomasias 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 ṣUTU-ši ṣUTU-ši ša DIĜIR.DIĜIR
   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

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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.  

Ottervanger espied another case of bilingual paronomasia in the Tale of the Poor Man of Nippur. In particular, he observed the interplay between the Akkadian infinitive šumʾud “to increase” and the Sumerian signs ŠUM (= tabāḫu “slaughter”) and UDU (= immeru “sheep”) in line 92: NU.BÀN.DA ana šúmʾu-ud ma-ka-li-šú ŠUM-uh UDU.AS₄[LUM] “The chief slaughtered a pasīl[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. Nevertheless, a possible case of paronomasia between Egyptian and Semitic occurs in the Poem on the King’s Chariot. The pertinent passages read:

6. The handgrip [ṯ] of your chariot [mrkb.t (Semitic)],
7. takes away [tī=sx] the troops’ courage and pride, whereas the side panels [bt.w (Semitic?)]
8. of your chariot are Bata [bt] lord of
9. Saka [sx] who is in the arms of Bastet [bis.tt],
10. sent out against all foreign countries. The weapons [ḥml.t] of your (chariot)
11. are the steering oars [ḥml.t] behind the foreign lands. The javelin [nl] of your chariot—
12. the terror of you [nrw=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 _MET, 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.
13. The sword \( \text{ḥrp} \) (Semitic) of your chariot
terrifies \( \text{ḥr}=f \) those who are in your hand … Recto 6–14

1. The knife \( \text{sf.t} \) of your
2. chariot—when your right arm smites \( \text{sf.t} \), the hills
collapse …

14. As for the thong \( \text{mḥl} \)
15. of your chariot, it
16. binds \( \text{mḥl}=f \) 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 \( \text{mrkb.t} \) “chariot” resounds in the \( \text{bt.w} \) “panels” (perhaps a Semitic word itself), and in \( \text{bt} \) “Bata” and \( \text{bt.t} \) “Bastet.” The Semitic noun \( \text{ḥrp} \) “sword” finds balance in the Egyptian \( \text{ḥr}=f \) “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 [\( \text{ṭaʿam} \)] of the king and his great ones” is to “let them not taste [\( \text{ṭaʿam} \) a thing.” The noun \( \text{ṭaʿam} \) means “taste” in Hebrew, but “decree” in Aramaic.\(^{394}\) In addition, the Hebrew \( \text{ṭaʿam} \) 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 antanaclasis.

Berrin has suggested the possibility that the Pesher to Nahum (3–4 I, 4–6) from Qumran interprets the Hebrew noun \( \text{ṭōrep̄} \) “prey” in Nah 2:13 with the verb \( \text{nāḵāh} \) “smite,” because the root \( \text{ṭ-r-p} \) in Palestinian Aramaic also bears the meaning “hit, throw down.”\(^{396}\) If this is the case, we have yet another example of bilingual paronomasia.

395. I thank one of the publisher’s anonymous reviewers for this observation. The reviewer also suggested that \( \text{miṭ-ṭaʿam} \) in Jon 3:6 paronomastically suggests the Aramaic \( \text{miṭ-daʿam} \) “anything,” which is the semantic equivalent of Hebrew \( \text{məʾūmāh} \) “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 \( \text{ṭ} \) and \( \text{ṭ} \) 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 לַֽטִּמוּ עַבַּטְצִיū-miṭṭal šǝmayyāʾ gi šmēh yi ṣtabaʿ “his body was wet from the dew of heaven” (Dan 5:21). The Aramaic nounםֶשֶׁגּ gɛšɛm “body” is homonymous with Hebrewםֶשֶׁגּ gɛšem “rain.” While הֵּּמְשִׁגּ 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: nahlapta a履职ti pulḫāti ḫalipma “he was garbed in a ghastly armored garment.”399 The sounds /ḫ/, /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 ἀναγραφωστιζεν and ἀναγραφώστιζομός 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 mûrrikû reverse the length of each other; the former ends with a long ū 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-si
   They [were complaining], backbiting.
40. [ut-ta-a]-za-mu i-na ka-la-ak-ki
   Grumbling in the excavation.

The verb ikkalû “backbiting” (from akâlu lit. “eat”) anticipates the anagrammatic kalakku “excavation.” Assisting the anagram is additional repetition of the phoneme /k/ in the noun karṣu “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 ҽkal-ҽkal “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-gi-um-ta]m
   Every single [one of us gods has declared] war.
147. ni-iš-ku-u[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.” Anagrammatic paronomasia appears in Egyptian as well. In the Tale of the Eloquent Peasant, the peasant tells the overseer: ḥîl ь ḥmw m sbn sѣw m gṣi ḥṣl m ṭrj nwner “Plumbline supporting the weight. Rudder, do not drift. Beam, do not tilt. Plumbline, do not misdirect” (P.3023 + P.Amherst I, ll. 122–123). Consonantly, wdn.w “weight” and nwdx “misdirect” are anagrams of each other.

See also the Pyramid Texts of King Unas, on the east wall of the antechamber: wnls pl wnm rmr ’ṇḥ m nfr w nb ln.w ḥṣr wp.wt ln ḫmn ṭ ḫm’ wp.wt ḫm.l khî: w sph sn n wnls “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 \(kḥ.t.w\) “Kehau” and \(ḥkt.w\) “magic” (in §506). The latter is an anagrammatic. The consonants \(wp\) occur again: \(wpw.t\) \(pw\) \(hḥb.w\) = \(fr\) \(ḥsf\) “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: \(sdm.n=lr\) \(hrw\) \(nm\) \(nmn.t\) “I heard the sound of the bleating of goats.” Here \(nm\) “bleating” and \(mnmn.t\) “goats” are partial anagrams.

In the Admonitions of Ipuwer (P.Leiden I 344, r.14.14–15.1), Ipuwer proclaims: \(mdj.w\) \(ndm.w\) \(hn’\) \(km.t\) \(ml-m\) \(hr=fs\) \(nb\) \(hr\) \(smmw\) \(sn=fd\) \(dim.w\) \(tsl=n\) \(n=n\) \(hrp.w\) \(m\) \(pg.t(l)\) “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 \(mdj.w\) “Medjay” and \(dim.w\) “youth,” which finds support from partially anagrammatic paronomasia with \(ngm.w\) “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 \(nr\)) and “protection” (from \(nr\)).\(^{403}\)

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. \(qm\) \(y’t\r\)
   He arises, prepares
5. \(w\) \(yšlmnh\)
   and he feeds him.
6. \(ybrd\) \(ṭ\) \(lpnwh\)
   Slices a breast before him
7. \(b\) \(ḥrb\) \(ml\)
   with a salted knife.

The anagrams in this passage are \(yšlmnh\) “feeds him” (from the root \(l-h-m\)) and \(ml\) “salted” (from \(m-l-h\)).

A clever example from Hebrew enhances Job’s cry that he would have rather been stillborn, like infants who \(rāʾū\) \(ʾōr\) “never saw light” (Job 3:16). The two words are anagrams of each other. Elihu’s statement about God also employs the device: \(yshaffles\) \(ʿání\) \(ḥa-ōnyō\) \(wō-yiḡel\) bal-

\(^{401}\) The usual translation for \(mnmn.t\) is “cattle,” but the determinative in B is \(\approx\) (not \(\approx\)). 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 \(w.wt\) \(ḥs.wt\) “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.
“Wordplay” in Ancient Near Eastern Texts

лаḥaṣ ʾŏznām “he delivers the afflicted from his affliction, and opens their ears through distress” (Job 36:15). The verb צַלָח ḥālaṣ “deliver” is an anagram of the noun צַחַל 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 לֹא-הָלֹאֵבּ וּשָׂת bē-ʾlōhɛḵā tāšūḇ “and you must return to your God” (Hos 12:7) with the promise יִשָׂרְאֵל bā-ʾōhālîm “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: מִיא-םיִﬠָר יֵנְפִל מִבוֹט יֵנְפִל יֵרֲﬠַשׁ׃קיִדַּצ וּהֵﬠֵר-םַג אֵנָשִּׂי שָׁר יֵבֲהֹאְו׃םיִבַּר šaḥū rāʿīm li-p̄ nē ṭōḇīm ū-ršāʿīm “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 יֵרֲﬠַשׁ šaʿărē “gates,” יֵנְפִל nē ṭōḇ “good,” יֵנְפִיל nē ṭōḇ “good” and יֵרֲﬠַשׁ šaʿărē “gates.” Each word is an anagram of the other. Bolstering the paronomasia is רַﬠ “poor,” and homoeopropheron between וּהֵﬠֵר rēʿēhū “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 [תָּמְחַר rḥmt] for Ashtar Kemosh. (KAI 181.17)

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 ṭḥrmτ “servant women” and ḥḥrmth “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 [הַנְּטוּז יֵדָּנִין] will pass over you until you know [וַיֵּּכְּנָה יִנְדָּא] 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: וְיָשְׁנָא הַנָּשְׁא “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-ʾ and the second from ʾ-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:

\[
\text{KUR E.ḪUL} \begin{array}{c}
\text{ḪU-LU-ŪḪ} \\
\text{ma-as-sú-nu ú-} \{x\} \text{-pár-ri-dam}
\end{array}
\]

And frightening the foreign land // and frightened their land.

As the editors remark:

ḪUL.ḪUL’ (with one vertical in the end instead of the broken one) is unorthographical for LUḪ.LUḪ and LUḪ, to be read ḥuluḫ, and agrees with parādu... LUḪ 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: \textit{ana irīš šīri 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 šīri “meat.” The same palindrome appears in the Poem of Erra III A: “in vain will the sick man be


\(^{410}\) 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 [šīrī] for his voluntary offering [bibil libbišu]] (l. 24). However here, bibil “offering” and libbi “voluntary” (lit. “heart”) also are virtual palindromes.\footnote{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.}

An Egyptian example of palindromic paronomasia is the name of the famous sage ptḥ-ḥtp “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 ptḥ “Ptah” in other texts.\footnote{See Friedrich Junge, Elephantine XI. Funde und Bauteile, DAIAK Archäologische Veröffentlichungen 49 (Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 1987), pl. 47g, pp. 76–77.}

Another example, examined by Stefan Bojowald, is the phrase \begin{math}wbn m nbw\end{math} “arise in gold,” said of Amun, Hathor, Ra, Horus, Isis, Ra-Horakhty, and Mut in their solar aspects.\footnote{Stefan Bojowald, “A Wordplay between the Egyptian Words \begin{math}WBN\end{math} ‘Arise’ and \begin{math}NBW\end{math} ‘Gold?,” AOASH 64 (2011): 357–62, characterizes the phrase as a “wordplay” but does not describe it as a palindrome.}

Through 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 kbbhtitbijjtjis as a cypher for \begin{math}sš tj-jjtj jjt hh bj jk\end{math} “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 [bj jk lit. “face to face”] to serve as his scribe.\footnote{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 organisé par le musée du Louvre les 29 et 30 Septembre 2000, ed. Yvan Koenig (Paris: Musée du Louvre, 2002), 191, 203, fig. 4.}

Elsewhere we find palindromes as cryptographs: \begin{math}gn\end{math} for \begin{math}ng\end{math} “bull of sacrifice,”\footnote{Pierre Montet, Scènes de la vie privée dans les tombes égyptiens de L’ancien Empire (Paris: Strasbourg University, 1925), 138–39.} \begin{math}nr\end{math} for \begin{math}rn\end{math} “name,”\footnote{Posener, “Le mot égyptien pour désigner le ‘nom magique,'” 214.} and \begin{math}n-m-jw\end{math} for \begin{math}lmn\end{math} “Amun.”\footnote{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.}

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 homoioiteleuton (4.2.2), but it also contains an anagram.
Note specifically the verb *tṯb* “will revert” and *bṯt* “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: *naʿum hag-geber la- ʿāqōḇ lā-ḥallāmūṯ wa-ḥāyāh “thus says the warrior to Ithiel, even to Ithiel and to Ukal” (Prov 30:1). The name לֵアイִתיִאְל lǝ-ʾīṯīʾēl 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: *hă-yēʾāḵēl tāp̄ēl mi-belī melah ṭēʾa am borir ḥallāmūṯ “is tasteless food eaten without salt, or is there flavor in the juice of a pursain-plant?” (Job 6:6). The nouns נֻאְנַרֹבֶגַּה nǝʾum hag-gɛḇɛr and חַלֶמ-יִלְבִּמ ʾim yēš ṭa am borir ḥallāmūṯ “pursain-plant” are palindromes of each other.

In Gen 38:7, we find: *wa-yǝhī ʿēr bǝḵōr yǝhūḏāh raʿ bǝ-ʿēnē YHWH “and Er, Judah’s firstborn, was evil in eyes of Yahweh.” Here יִהְיַו rē revive יִהְיַו rē “evil” and לֵאִיו YHWH 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: ṭוֹקִים מִשׁוֹר rōšīm “mountain tops” (a later attested spelling for מִשָּׁר rāʾšīm), 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: *וֹנֶךְֶלַּהְתִּיּ הָﬠְקִבְל wa-hārḵāsīm lɐ-hāyāh “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 מִשׁוֹר rōšīm to a presumed original רוֹסִים “mountain tops” (a later attested spelling for רושום rōʾšum), 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

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.


Additionally this sequence of ten words no doubt underscored the fact that Noah formed the tenth generation since creation.\(^\text{420}\)

Sasson adds that the inverted syntax allowed the author to end the verse with the consonants \(\text{כ–נ–ח} \) \(\text{k-n-h} \), which are a palindrome for the name of his illustrious ancestor \(\text{ךוֹנֲח} \) \(\text{ḥănōḵ} \) “Enoch,” who also “walked with God” (Gen 5:22, 5:24).

Anagramatic 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.\(^\text{421}\) Some cases of hendiadys also possess a paronomastic effect. There also are forms that employ three words, called hendiatris.\(^\text{422}\) According to the Arab grammarians, this device usually fell under the heading \(\text{עﺎﺒﺗا} \) \(\text{āʿ} \).

Numerous examples of hendiadic paronomasia exist in English, for example, fiddle-faddle, \(^\text{420}\). Jack M. Sasson, “Word-Play in Genesis 6:8–9,” \(\text{CBQ} \) 37 (1975): 165. The passage reads:

\[
\text{נֹֽהַּא ʾīs }s s{	ext{d}}{t}{	ext{d}}{g} \; támìm hāyāh bə-gorōṭāʾw ʾět hā-ʾēlōhîm hīṭḥalleḵ nōaḥ “Noah was a righteous man, he was blameless in his age; Noah walked with God.”
\]

\(^\text{421}\). See E. Z. Melamed, “Hendiadys (ΕΝ ΔΙΑ ΔΥΟΙΝ) in the Bible” \([\text{Hebrew}]\), \(\text{Tarbiz} \) 16 (1945): 173–89.

\(^\text{422}\). An extraordinary case of five verbs joined (with one following a pause) appears in Gen 25:34:

\[
\text{w}ay-yōʾḵal way-yēšt way-yāqām way-yēlaḵ way-yīḇɛz ʿēśāw ʾět hab-bəḵōrāh “he ate and he drank, and he got up, and he left, and Esau despised the birthright.” However, this passage does not constitute paronomasia.
\]

\(^\text{423}\). Joseph Reider, “\text{ītbaʿ} in Hebrew and Aramaic,” \(\text{JQR} \) 24 (1934): 321–30. The term also was used periodically for cases of parasonance.
4. Taxonomy

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 hendiads 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 liqeamma alkam “I shall proceed” (lit. ‘let me take and I come’), found in Old Babylonian letters, 427 and the rare hendiastic example in the Cuthah Legend (l. 121): arkišunu ardu d ṣ mu ṣ urri ḫ “after them I harried, I hurried, I hied.” 428

An excellent example of hendiadic paronomasia in Egyptian is the relatively common idiom ʿḏ wḏ “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 ḫrw ḥnw “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 ḫtj.w-ʿnt.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 hendiatristic paronomasia occurs in Baal’s urgent message to the goddess Anat in the Epic of Baal: ḥšk ʿṣk ʿbṣk “hasten, hurry, rush!” (CAT 1.3.iv.11). The repetition of the /ṣ/ and /k/ phonemes reinforce the singularity of action. 432

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424. Cf. the German Kuddelmuddel meaning “mess, muddle, mix up.”
426. See the important study by Wasserman, Style and Poetry in Old-Babylonian Literary Texts, 5–28.
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 ḫtjw n.w ʿntjw.
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. Such include: דָּנַּהּ אֲלֵּךְ הַכֵּלָּנָה (Gen 4:12), בֹּשֶׁהְוָ נֶסֶּהְוָ לִּחְמָה (Deut 28:53), עַמָּלָנָה פֶּקֶּמָה (Num 21:3), מִטֶּבֶּאֵה וַיְכָרֶב (Isa 29:5), יִזָּמְלָנָה פִּטֶּמָה וַיְכָרֶב (Ps 21:6), מִטֶּבֶּאֵה וַיְכָרֶב (Ps 18:8), לֵחֶמֶה וַיִּדְרֶב (Lam 2:8), וַיְמָהַהְוָ מִטֶּבֶּאֵה (Ezra 8:31), וַיְמָהַהְוָ מִטֶּבֶּאֵה (Num 14:45). Martin Noth also once proposed that the names דָּדְּלֶא דָּדיֵמוּ אֲלֵדָד וַיָּמָה (Num 11:26–27) were fictitious, because of their inherent paronomasia.

An example of hendiadic paronomasia in Aramaic occurs in Dan 2:14 in the phrase אָטֵﬠ וַיְבָּטֶה (Dan 2:14) “counsel and discretion” used to describe Daniel’s response to the captain of the king’s guard. For a paronomastic hendiadys, see אָיַּנָּשִּׁלְו אָיַּמְמַﬠ אָיַּמֻא (Dan 5:7, 3:31, 6:26, and 7:14), and אָיַּנָּשִּׁלְו אָיַּמְמַﬠ אָיַּמֻא (Dan 5:19, 3:7, 7:14). Dan 7:23 also provides an example: הַנִּשׁוּדְתְו הַנִּקְדַּתְו וַיְתַדְּקִינָה וַיְתַדְּקִינָה (Dan 7:23) “and trample it, and break it.”

Given that hendiadic paronomasia involves juxtaposition, syntetic 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 as 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 syntetic, 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.

4. Taxonomy

4.2.11. RHYME

Rhyme is rare in ancient Near Eastern texts, but it is attested in small portions. 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
EN.LI.L.E SAĜ.BA GUR BÍ.DAR
NIN.IJUR.SAĜ.KE, IGI.ZI BA.ŠI.BAR

Holy Anu established (the temple) properly,
Enlil wound the turban round its head.
Ninursag looked at it favorably.

Here the signs GAR, DAR, and BAR provide the rhyme. End rhyme also occurs in the first five verses of the poem Ninmešarra, each of which concludes with the sound /a/.

NIN ME ŠAR.RA U₄ DALLA É.A
MUNUS ZI ME.LI₉ GÜR.RU KL.ÂĜ AN URAŠ.A
NU.GIG AN.NA SUḪ.KÉŠE GAL.GAL.A
AGA ZI.DÈ KL.ÂĜ NAM.EN.NA TŪM.MA
ME INIM.BÉ ŠU SÃ 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 suḫkeše-pectorals,
You, who love the right aga-crown, who is fitting for the en-priestood,
Empowered with all of its seven Mes.


In Akkadian, one finds rhyming couplets (also called homoioteleutic couplets), especially in incantations, doxologies, and exclamations. See, for example, an incantation against Wardat-lilîm (YOS 11, 92).

28. [b]ît errubu
   The house I enter,
29. [l]â terrubîma
   you shall never enter!
30. [ēma] ruti addu
   [Wherever] I spit,
31. [lā ta]lappatîma
   [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.”

A sustained example of rhyme in Akkadian occurs in the Song of Erra III D 5–7:

5. tam-tam-ma dal-ha-ta šad-dë-ma gam-ra-ta
   The oceans you convulse, the mountains you finish off.
6. UN.MEŠ (niši)-ma re-dä-ta hu-lam-ma re’ä-a-ta
   Men you govern, the herds, you shepherd.
7. ĕ-sar-ra-ma pa-nu-uk-ka ē-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/.

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. With this in mind, Watson suggested that the poet has created end rhyme in the Epic of Baal \((\text{CAT} \ 1.2.i.36–37)\) by repeating the enclitic particle \(mā\). I cite the text below with the vocalization reconstructed in parentheses:\textsuperscript{444}

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{'bdk} & \text{ b'l} \text{ yamm} \ (\text{ya-yammu-mā}) \\
\text{'bdk} & \text{ b'l} \ [nhr] \text{m} \ (\text{naharu-mā}) \\
\text{bn} & \text{ dgn} \text{ asrkm} \ (\text{asiruka-mā})
\end{align*}
\]

Baal is your slave, O Yamm,
Baal is your slave, O River,
Dagan’s son, your prisoner.

See also in the same text \((\text{CAT} \ 1.2.iv.10)\) (also with vocalization reconstructed):\textsuperscript{446}

\[
\begin{align*}
tiqqāhu & \text{ mulka} \ ʾālamikā \\
darkat & \text{ dt} \text{ dār dārikā}
\end{align*}
\]

Assume your eternal kingship,
Your everlasting dominion.

Biblical Hebrew offers a handful of examples of rhyming, though not all proposals have been convincing.\textsuperscript{447} The lament of Jeremiah offers one of the more profound examples: 

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{maḥlīḡī} & \ ʾālē \ ṣāgōn \ ʾālay ġabbī \\
\text{gawwāy} & \ “\text{when in grief I would seek comfort, my heart is sick within me}” \ (\text{Jer} 8:18). \text{Strengthening the repetition of the consonants } \text{beth, gimmel, lamed, and mem} \text{ is assonance of the short and long } a- \text{ and } i-\text{vowels. See also Isaiah’s prophecy of } \text{yōm mshūmāh ē-mbūsāh ē-mbūḵāh “a day of tumult, trampling, and terror” (Isa 22:5). The same vocalic structure} \ (⟨\texttt{ū}⟩ />⟨\texttt{ā}⟩) \text{ repeats three times and finds reinforcement in the repetition of the } \text{beth} \text{ and mem.}
\end{align*}
\]

\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{445}. Watson, \textit{Classical Hebrew Poetry}, 230, records the enclitic particle as \(mī\), based on a reconstruction by Frank Moore Cross, \textit{“The Song of the Sea and Canaanite Myth,”} \textit{JThC} 5 (1968): 3 n. 8. I opt for an enclitic particle as found in Akkadian.

\textsuperscript{446}. Also suggested by Watson, \textit{Classical Hebrew Poetry}, 230 n. 29.

\textsuperscript{447}. See, for example, the early effort of Burney, \textit{“Rhyming in the Song of Songs.”} Corely, \textit{“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. Some cases of hendiadic paronomasia also constitute miniature rhymes, as seen above. I add the following: בֶּשׁפָּם בֶּקֶם "in a torrent of anger" (Isa 54:8), והות והובו "formless and void" (Gen 1:2), and the Aramaic idiom אָיְמְﬠַﬠ אָיְמֻﬠ "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.

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):

PIRĬĪ.KUR_RA TĔŠ.BI DU₃.DU₂.GIM
SU.ZI ḪĔ.EM.DU₅.DU₆

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. This example also constitutes homonymous paronomasia.

A second example, also paronomastic in nature, occurs in a proverb:

NÌ.MAḪ KÚ.KÚ.E
Ú NU.UM.ŠI.KU.KU

He who eats too much,
cannot sleep.

Here KÚ.KÚ “eat” finds a parallel with KU.KU “sleep.”

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: ṣḥumbaba rigmašu abūbu “Humbaba, his voice is the Deluge” (2.122). The geminate abūbu “Deluge” resounds the geminated name ṣḥumbaba “Humbaba.”

Other examples are carried over multiple lines. So, in Ludlul bēl nēmeqi 3.7–8, we find:

7. [u]r-ra u mu-šū iš-ten-iš a-na-a[š-su-us]
Day and night alike I groan,
8. MAŠ.GE₆ (šuttu) mu-na-at-tū mal-ma-liš šu-um-[u-ṣa-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:

5. ... [iš-p]a-ra-ak-ma qē a-ma-ḥa-as ú-la-ba-a; um-na-nam-na
... I am a weaver and beat up the threads. I clothe the troops.
6. [...] ma-aš-ša-ak-ma bi-it i-li-im ú-la-al
[...] I am the exorcist and purify the temple.

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 ḫar-mi-ša*
   She was furious and screamed at her lover,
43. *mar-ṣi-iš uγ-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 sbl.w n.w ddn=f ḫt.k.w-li n.w šfšf.t=f* “the rebels to his wrath. The disaffected to his awe” (ll. 64–65). Here *ddn* “wrath” provides a geminate parallel for the reduplicate *šfšf.t* “awe.”

Similarly, in the Tale of Wenamun (P.Moscow 120), the Tjeker people, in search of Wenamun, respond to the question of why they have come to Byblos by saying: *ršrš ʿḏʿḏ n p śmb dbdb=štṯṯ.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 *tḥḥ.w* “quarrel.”

Egyptian love poetry also exhibits the device. In P.Turin 1996, we read: *k mrj nḥb ṭtṯt rʿ-mʿ p tḥḥ m ṭtṯṯ ḫnḥn f ṭḥḥ m ṭḥḥ “your gardeners are joyful, they exult at the sight of me” (2.8). The short line contains three geminates: ṭrṣḥ “joyful,” ṭ ṭ “exult,” and mb “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], *swtw.t* “journey” and *mḥ* “see” [2.14]). Finally, I note that the geminate *tḥḥ* “totter,” in *tu :t-hnq.t tḥḥ m ṭḥḥ “the place of drinking totters with drunkenness” (2.13), adds to the gemination cluster and paronomastically anticipates ṭḥḥ “drunkenness.”

The Instructions of Amenemope (P.BM 10474) gives ample evidence of the device. For example, as Amenemope instructs: *m iṭṭ nḥb ṭṭṭ rʿ-ḥ p ti ṭḥḥ m ṭḥḥ ḫnḥn=š ṭḥḥ “do not cause a quarrel with a hot mouth. Do not strike him with words” (5.10). Here ṭṭṭ “quarrel” is followed by *dbdb* “strike.” Later he adds: *mr snsn.t n=k p ṭḥḥ m ṭḥḥ ḫnḥn=š ṭḥḥ “do not fraternize with a hothead nor approach him for a conversation” (11.13), which employs *snn* “fraternize,” *šmm* “hothead,” and ḫnḥn “approach.” These lines are then followed by a veritable
tapesty of geminate forms including qnqn “beating” (12.5), tmm “people” (12.7), ttt “quarrel” (12.10), pilpil “make bricks, knead” (12.17), and once again ttt “quarrel” (13.1). This is continued with śś “gullet” (14.8), wëwë “confused” (14.14), swmwn “flattery” (14.15), smm “prostrations” (14.16), and qnqn “beating” (14.16). We also find smm “hothead” (15.13) and sns “fraternize” (15.14). Amenemope does not use this device again until chapter 22, but there he does so frequently: tmm “people” (22.11), kjwj “population” (22.13), sns “fraternize” (22.14), šš “run, hurry” (22.17), ttt “quarrel” (22.20), and mtt “see” (22.22).

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: h. n gdl n gdl t=f m bkt wat w n ln pi smm h h rb hbbi gīdī=f m-m-lt hr-m-h t spr=f w ’ r w ’ h n pi smm h hr gīgí “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).

The brief statement is loaded with gemination. Its three reduplicated forms (hbhb “waddling,” gīdī “head,” and the onomatopoeic gīgī “cackling”) are supported by the name gd “Djedi,” the verb gī “speak,” and the noun gī “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 hr-m-h “near and behind.” The entire passage about the smm “goose” ( resemblances) is visually enhanced by the frequent use of the legs and feet determinative used of movement. We see it repeated four times in the verb h (twice for “stood up” and twice modally for “then”) and in hbbi “waddling,” spr “reached,” and hr-m-h “near and behind.” Moreover, the verb hbbi “waddling” is spelled ḫ but ḫ, which provides two more feet (the phonetic letter = b) and contains and echoes the ba-bird ḫ, 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 Thuthmosis III inscribed at Karnak, we read of the king’s battle at Megiddo (ll. 86–87): 455

\[
\text{iw=sn hr hjd m gqghb […] mkt m hr.w n snq hj.b=n=sn wsm.wt=sn wrr.wt=sn n.w nh hr hjd jlh=tw st m bth m hbs=sn r dml n lst hr n n ni n n rmj dml pn hr [shi n=sn} r fth hr r dml pn ljt hj mn hr mš’t n hm=f rdl.t lb=sn r hq n n hj.t n ni n hr.w \]

\[
iw=[sn hr hjq] mkt m tj.t
\]

They (army of Megiddo) fled, falling headlong [toward] Megiddo with fearful
dead faces, they having abandoned their horses and chariots of gold and silver 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 ṣbṣb “hoist.”

The device occurs several times in the Poetical Stela of Thutmose III (CM
34010). The paean to victory comprises ten stanzas that begin i.l=1 tlt=k X
“I (Amun) have come, I have caused to trample down X,“ where X is another
people or region. The gemination in i.l “come” and tlt “trample down” inspires
gemination in the very next verses in these stanzas in several places. In line 4,
Amun declares: sj=šfšf=k m ḥt nb.n w=š hmhm.t ḥm=k ḥt pd.w t psd.t “I
magnified your charisma in every body. I caused that your majesty’s war-
cry reach the nine bows.” Note the šfšf “charisma” and hmhm.t “war-cry,”
and the pseudo-gemination caused by pd.w t psd.t “nine bows.” This occurs again
in slightly different form in line 8: m ḥt m ṣwr w=š n=k sdm=sn hmhm.t=k
q.(w) m ṣbwb.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 ṣbwb.w “holes,”
the latter perhaps suggestive of pharaoh’s ṣb “power.” Another geminate variation
occurs in line 18: ṣ=š ṣ=š m ḥw ḥt ḥ ṣw ḥ ṣ ṣ ḥ ṣ ṣ ḥ ṣ ṣ “you circle (like Horus)
over your enemies. You have crushed who rebel against you.” Here we find tlt “trample,”
šm.t “encircle,” mît “see,” ṣggt “espys” (written defectively with g
twice just for the effect), and mrr “desire.” 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 ḣḥ “swift” (l. 16),
ḥḥ “seek” (l. 16), ss “ash” (l. 20), ṣsk “destroy” (l. 20), nḥt “terrible,” instead of
the expected nḥt (l. 21), ḥḥ “flourish” (l. 28), mît “see” (l. 28), ḥḥ “rejoice” (l. 28), and ḥḥ
“boast” (l. 28). The Poem of Victory of Ramesses III also demonstrates an interest in
geminated forms in its use of ḣḥḥ “traverse” (l. 5), followed by pḥḥ “trample” (l. 8), and
ṣsk “destruction” (l. 10). See too the Triumph of Sheshonq I inscribed at Karnak (l. 9):
lw=k m ṣw n ḥ ṣ ṣ ḥ ṣ ṣ ṣ ḥ ṣ ṣ ḥ ṣ ṣ k “you circle (like Horus) over your enemies.
You have crushed who rebel against you.” Here ṣw “circle” parallels tlt “crush.”
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 wtt “begot,” mrr.t “desired,” sʿḥʿ “erected,”
lwnn “sanctuary,” nḥḥ “eternal,” and swsḫ “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.  yıšṯ nh r bmt ʿr
    He sets Asherah on the back of an ass,
15.  l ysmsmt bmt pḥl
    On the beautiful back of a donkey.
16.  qdš yuḥdm šbʿ r
    Qadish seizes, he leads.
17.  amrr k kbkb l pnm
    Even Amrar like a star before him,
18.  aṯr btlt ʿnt
    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 Ammar.

Geminate ballast is achieved a bit later again (CAT 1.4.v.54–55):

54. ḥš trmmn hk[l]
    Quickly you shall erect a palace
55.  b tk srrt spn
    In the midst of the summit of Saphan.

Earlier in the Baal cycle, Baal’s mountain is called ǵry il “my holy mountain”
(CAT 1.3.iii.29) and mrym spn 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 srrt spn “summit of Saphan.” The
geminate srrt 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. wyqrh trẓẓh
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 trẓẓ “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 ǵzr yqra mt
of El, the hero. He will call Mot
48. bnpšh ystrn ydd
with his throat, instruct the beloved
49. bgngnh abdy dym
with his insides, I alone reign.

Several geminates create the cluster in this passage including dll “delegation” (l. 45), ʿdd “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: yšlḥm kṯrt 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 tlḥ “third” (l. 34) and ṭdḥ “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 kṯrt bnt hll snnt “the Katharat leave his house, the radiant daughters of the month” (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 ymsmsnt “delights” and ḥlḥt “childbirth.”

An impressive example of geminate parallelism and clustering in Hebrew occurs in Ps 74:13–14.

457. Other examples of geminate clustering that appear in CAT 1.18.iv include qdqd “pate” (l. 22) and ḥlḥd “thrice” (l. 23).
4. Taxonomy

ʾattāh p̄ ōrartā ḇǝ-ʿozzǝḵā yām šibbartā rāʾšē ṯannīnīm ʿal ham-māyīm
ʾattāh riṣṣaṣtā rāʾšē liwyāṯān tittǝnɛnnū maʾăḵāl lǝ-ʿām lǝ-ṣīyyīm

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: רַרָפּ p̄ ārar “break,” קַנָת tātan “Tannin,” and רֶשֶׁץ rāṣaṣ “crush.” The fourth is the first- and third-radical geminate verb קַת nāṭan “give” (in וְנֶנְתִּית tittǝnɛnnū “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 (י) as well, creating an imitation geminate. This allowed for additional paronomasia with ניִנַּת tannīnīm “Tannin” and נָתָיְוִל liwyāṯān “Leviathan.” Adding to the cluster is יִיִּצ sīyyīm “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:

וּהְמְהַמְתִה וּהָמְתוּ וּעְשַׁﬠַתְּשִׁה וּעֹשָׁו hiṯmahmǝhū ū-ṯmāhū hištaʿašʿū wā-šoʿū

“stupefy yourselves, and be astonished!
Blind yourselves, and be blind!”

The parallel between the geminate roots מִהַמ m-h-h and עעשׁ š-ʿ-ʿ is bolstered by homoeopropheron with the verbs מַת tāmah and a qal form of the verb עַﬠָש šāʿaʿ.

An example in prose can be found in 2 Sam 6:16:

אֶרֵתַּו כְֶלֶמַּה־תֶא דִוָדּ זֵזַּפְמ רֵכְּרַכְמוּ יֵנְפִיל הָוהְי זֶבִתַּו וֹל הָּבִּלְבּ wa-tērɛʾ ʾɛṯ ham-mɛlɛḵ dāwīḏ mǝp̄ azzēz ū-mḵarkēr li-p̄ nē YHWH wa-tiḇɛz l ō bǝ-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 מֶפ̄ azzēz “leaping” (from the root זזפּ p-z-z) and מֶקֶר̂ mǝḵarkēr “laughing” (from the root ררכ k-r-r).549 The gemination is enhanced by paronomasia between the zayin, mem, and pe in מֶפ̄ azzēz “leaping” and the zayin and bet in תֵּחֶז tiḥez “she despised.” Moreover, these geminate forms recall two reduplicate forms in 2 Sam 6:5, where David dances to the sounds of מֶפּ הַסִּיסְרֵים bi-mnaʿnǝʿīm ū-mḵarkēr “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: וְכֶר wa-raʾnan

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459. On the meaning of this verb as “laugh” or “to play with the fingers of one’s hand or hands,” see Avisur, 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 מַרְעַקֵד u-mšahēq “dancing and laughing.”
“Wordplay” in Ancient Near Eastern Texts

“flourishing” (Dan 4:1), הָרֹהְרַה harhorīn “imaginings” (Dan 4:2), נִרְוַרְוַי nīrōrvāyi “and cut off” (Dan 4:11), יִלְלוּא ʿālīlān “came” (Dan 4:4), נִיָּלָא ʿālīlān “took shade” (Dan 4:9), לֵלְטַת taṭlēl “and the heart” (Dan 4:13), יִהוֹבִב liḇēḇēh “its heart” and בַבְלוּ ulḇaḇ “and the heart” (Dan 4:13), אָיַיַּח ḥayyayyāʾ “the living” (Dan 4:14), יִמָּשְׁקʾ ēštōmam “appalled” (Dan 4:16), יִהוֹתֹחְתּ tēḥōḥōhī “under it” and נָנְכְּשִׁי yiškēnān “dwelled” (Dan 4:18), יַנָבְרְבַר raḇrēḇānay “my lords” (Dan 4:33), וּמֵמוֹרְמוּ umrmēm “and extol” (Dan 4:34), and the pseudo-geminate forms יִתְנִי ṣētninah “he gives it” (Dan 4:14, 4:22, 4:29) and רָדְו dār wē-ḏār “generation to generation” (Dan 4:31).

The geminate cluster forms in Dan 7 include: לֶלֶלֶל lelyāʾ “the night” (Dan 7:2), וּיִמָּשְׁקʾ ēštōmam “and the heart” (Dan 7:4), מַמְמָלָל raḇrēḇān “great” (Dan 7:3), נִיָּלָא ʿālīlān “fangs” (Dan 7:5), מַמְמָלָל raḇrēḇān “speaking great things” (Dan 7:8), יֱנִיבְשִׁי šǝḇīḇīn “flames” and גָּלִילֵגִּל galgillōhī “its wheels” (Dan 7:9), מַמְמָלָל raḇrēḇān “great” and מַמְמָלָל raḇrēḇān “spoke” (Dan 7:11), יֶלֶלֶל lelyāʾ “the night” and מַמְמָלָל raḇrēḇān “great” (Dan 7:17), מַמְמָלָל raḇrēḇān “speaking great things” (Dan 7:20), יַנָבְרְבַר raḇrēḇānay “my lords” (Dan 7:25).

The device appears in some texts from Qumran. The Aramaic Levi Document displays it in 4QLevi XIII, 2: “Listen to the word of your father Levi, and pay attention to the instructions of God’s friend דידי ydyd. I instruct you, my sons, and reveal the truth to you, my beloved חבייבḥ ḥbyby.”

461. Anticipating the geminate cluster in Dan 4 are two more geminate forms at the end of Dan 3: אָתָבְרְבַר raḇrēḇāṯāʾ “great” (Dan 3:31) and מַמְמָלָל raḇrēḇān “generation to generation” (Dan 3:33).
4. Taxonomy

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 ʾAnunakki 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 i-ti-ti ʾa-nu-n-na-ki ʾA.MEŠ a-šat-ti. Note first how the emphatic particle me (normally ma) paronomastically anticipates mē “water” (written logographically as ʾA.MEŠ). Homoeopropheron obtains by way of the repeated sound /an/ in annītu “this,” anāku “I,” and ʾAnunakki. Observe as well how the cuneiform a- sign in both a-na-ku and ʾa-nun-na-ki (themselves a case of homoioteleuton) and a-šat-ti, envelope the logographic reading of the same sign in ʾA.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 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:

\[ \text{raʾēh YHWH kī šar lī mēʾay hāmarmārū} \]
\[ \text{neḥpaḵ liḇbi ba-qirbi kī māro mārīṯī} \]

See O Yahweh, for I am in distress, my inwards burn,
My heart is turned within me, for I have grievously rebelled.

The lament contains a number of devices. Parasonance obtains between hāmarmārū (from הָמַר hāmar) and mārō mārīṯī (from מַרְרוּ mārū). The repetition of the consonants m m and r 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 וַתַּמְרָר בִּבְרָא), in the use of the verb בִּבְרָא mārāh “rebel.” See, for example, אֲמָרֵר בּוֹבֶגְיָה ’āmārēr bab-beḵī “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: מַבְלִיץ בַּמַּלְאָה יֵלֶלָּﬠְנַוָּי יִבְּל יַלָּﬠ יִבִּל יָוָד maḇlīḡītī ʿălē yāḡōn ʿālay libbī ḏawwāy “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 מַבְלִיץ maḇlīḡītī, 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. The phrase offers bilingual paronomasia, because the poet here draws on the Akkadian balag “lamentation.” It is contronymic, because the Hebrew root גֶּלֶב 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 גֶּלֶב balag “the balag-lamentation of his heart.” In turn, this is an anagram for גֶּלֶב בִּבְרָא 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.”

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. 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. In any event, there can be no doubt that Israelite scribal culture experienced influence from both of its superpower neighbors. 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,

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love songs, parables, riddles, magical and divinatory texts, prophecies, epics, chronicles, and even historical inscriptions and some letters. 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. 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,

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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.
5. Conclusions

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. The lack of contronymic polysemy in Egyptian is a reflection of the lack of contronyms generally in the language. 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. 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, 1,000, 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 mi’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 _ṣariqon_._ Acrostics appear with relative frequency in Hebrew and later Aramaic, though they are far more rare in Akkadian, Egyptian, and Ugaritic.

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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., _ṣariqon_, 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.
5. Conclusions

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 nigh 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 antanaclasis 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, hendiadis 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*, antanaclasis, unidirectional polysemy, multidirectional polysemy, double polysemy, bilingual polysemy, polysemy clusters, *notarigon*, 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 songstresses 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. 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
5. Conclusions

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.”\(^\text{14}\) 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).

“Wordplay” in Ancient Near Eastern Texts

same root in different verbal and nominal formations (e.g., metaphony, polyptoton, polyprosopon), devices not under consideration here. 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: בָּרֹעְכָּה קַּן הַחַיַּּוּ לָּיְּוַאַדְּוַם בֶּ-גַלְוַן אַמְרִי “as they increased, the more they sinned against me; I shall turn their honor into shame” (Hos 4:7). The use of the proposition כ “as” before רֻבָּמ “they increased” encourages one to think at first that the same consonant starting the very next stich (i.e., in בֶּ-גוֹדְדָּם) might also be the same preposition, especially because assonance abets the comparison between בָּרֹעְכָּה and בֶּ-גוֹדְדָּם. However, the reader/listener soon realizes that the consonant is part of the noun “honor.”

Verbs also can play the trickster. Psalm 79:5 reads: מִדְוַּי יְהֹוָה לָאֶנָּא תֹּפַּע הָאוֹרִּי-דֶנַּּוּ מַלְבֶּסְכָּה יְחִסְטֶּּכָה יְחִים כֵּנָּא עַל אֲדוֹ-ֶדְוַק "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., תֹּפַּע טֹפַּע “you will be angry”), one is encouraged by way of parallelism and grammatical form to hear the second verb, תֹּפַּע as a second person masculine form, that is, “you will burn.” However, it is not until one hears the final words כֵּנָּא עַל אֲדוֹ-ֶדְוַק “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:

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 כָּנֵסֶר kanasēr stirs up his nest, hovers over his chicks, spreads his wings כָּנֵסֶר kenasēr, 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.
5. Conclusions

wa-hāyāh ḫā-ām kak-kōhēn ka-ʿeḥeq ka-ʿqōna wak-kōkāk kag-gōhāh kag-qōne ḫam-mōḥēr ḫam-malwēh ḫal-lōwēh ḫan-nōšē ḫa ʿāṣer nōšē ṣēḥ

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 כ and כ). We must read the first eleven as the preposition “as, like” attached to nouns. 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 אֶשֹׁנ nōšē “creditor” and אֶשֹׁנ “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/כ and ל/ל repeated in every bicolon and tricolon, save for 4a, 8b, and 10b.

1. How [מְדָה kmh] splendid and beautiful is the image of her [הלְמֹל צֹל lh ṣlm] face,
2. How [מְדָה kmʾ] lovely are [הלְנֹמ לִי lhwn lh] her eyes,
3. All [לְכָל kwl] the radiance of her face [ .
4. Her arms how beautiful,
5. And her hands how [מְדָה kmʾ] perfect [קָלְי לְי klylyn],
6. And [ ] is all [לְכָל kwl] the appearance of her hands.
7. The repetition, but not the variation, was noted by Glück, “Assonance in Ancient Hebrew Poetry,” 78.
“Wordplay” in Ancient Near Eastern Texts

6a. Her feet [איהלגר rglyh ‘] how [אמכ kmʾ ’] beautiful,
6b. And how [אמכו wkmʾ ] perfect [המלש šlmh lhn lh] are her legs.
7a. And every [לכ kl] virgin [ןלותב btwln] and bride [ןאלכ klʾn]
7b. Who enters into a bridal-chamber [לנגל lgnwn]
7c. Is not [אל lʾ ] more beautiful than she.
8a. And above all [לכ kl] (other) women
8b. Her beauty is beauty.
9a. And her beautifulness is the highest [אילעו wʿlyʾ ],
9b. Higher [אלעל lʿlʾ ] than all of them [ןהלוכ kwlhn].
10a. And along with all [לוכ kwl] this beauty,
10b. Much wisdom is with her.
10c. And her handiwork [לד dl] is lovely.

The concatenation of the repeated consonants lends the poem cohesiveness while reinforcing its central theme of the ‘totality’ of kwl “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 לכו mk “behold” (ll. 2, 10), but then soon uses the same signs for מ ק m ’ k “in your hand” (l. 16). Then, in line 29, one encounters the adjective מ ק k “fierce,” spelled ו ק ל ו hēn gōr. 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: א ו נ ג כ י hēn gōr

20. See 3.13.1, and Noegel, Nocturnal Ciphers; Noegel, “Kirtu’s Allusive Dream.”
5. Conclusions

The strategy involves three homophonous verbs: יָגָר I “dwell”, יָגָר II “quarrel, gather together,” and יָגָר III “fear.”\(^{21}\) 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.”\(^{22}\) 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.”\(^{23}\) Yet, one also can read it: “there is nothing at all to fear apart from me.”\(^{24}\) Equally ambiguous are the phrases מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ מִי יֵרָג יִמ Mī ḡār ʾittāḵ, which can mean “whoever quarrels with you” or “whoever dwells with you,” and על יֵרָגֶיק 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 יֵרָג יִמ Mī ḡār ʾittāḵ 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: יָוֶה יֶתֶם בֵּבַר בְּבְּרֵי בְּבְּרֵי בְּבְּרֵי בְּבְּרֵי בְּבְּרֵי בְּבְּרֵי בְּבְּרֵי בְּבְּרֵי בְּבְּרֵי בְּבְּרֵי בְּבְּרֵי בְּבְּרֵי בְּבְּרֵי בְּבְּרֵי בְּבְּרֵי בְּבְּרֵי בְּבְּרֵי בְּבְּרֵי בְּבְּרֵי בְּבְּרֵי bēbōqēr šēḵār yirdōp̄ ū mə-ʾaḥārē ḇan-nɛšɛp̄ yayīn yaḏlīqēm “woe to those who rise early in the morning that they may chase strong drink; who tarry late into the evening that

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\(^{22}\) HALOT, s.v. “רוּגּ I, II, III.”


\(^{24}\) With Rashi.


\(^{26}\) 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 בֵּֽמָּ–ēm, instead of the third person plural verbal ending פֹּֽעָל–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 קַלָדּ dālaq is polysemous meaning both “pursue” and “inflame.”

Authors also can employ a strategy of delayed comprehension across narrative units. Duane Christensen’s example from Jonah is representative. As he informs us, Jonah’s proclamation that humans and animals עְרִי–לַא ʾal yirʿū “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 chiastic structure of the chapter as a whole. Christensen similarly points to the narrator’s ambiguous comment in Gen 37:2 that Joseph רֹחַбит עֲרָל יָחֶא–תֶא וַיַּכְוָֽה הַנָּא rōʿɛh ʾɛṯ ʾɛḥāw baṣ-ṣoʾn, 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 תֶכָפְּהֶנ nɛhpāḵɛṯ” (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 תֶכָפְּהֶנ nɛhpāḵɛṯ in Yahweh’s prophecy does not mean “will be overthrown,” but rather “will be turned around,” as in “repent” (already b. Sanh 89b). Yet it is not until we reach the end of Jonah 3 that we realize this.

27. HALOT, s.v. “qal I, II.” The polysemy was discussed by Yellin, “Polysemy in the Bible,” 6–7.
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. 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. 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.


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, notariqueton, and hendiadic paronomasia. Parasonance employs some, but not all, of the consonants that comprise one word in another. Notariqueton 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

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 “unknown phrases, strange verses in a new speech which does not pass, free from repetition.”

An inscription in the temple of Hathor at Dendera is equally fascinating. It reads: “Lady of heaven, mistress of all the gods.” Of particular interest are the nouns “lady” and “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.

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. 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.” Lexical lists embodied scribal knowledge and power and provided the raw materials for literary compositions and commentaries.

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.

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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.  

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. 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. 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). Even if lexical lists were not transmitted in writing, some form of oral

43. Note that the two lexemes for “moth” found in parallelism in Isa 51:8, i.e., סָס sās and שָׁﬠ ʿăš, 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 לארשׂי,” 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
5. Conclusions

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.

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: we-šōmēa ʿli yiškān betαh we-'ša’ānān mip-pahāḏ rā’āh “he who obeys me shall dwell securely, and shall be quiet without fear of evil.” Note how the homoeopropheron between we-šōmēa, yiškān, and we-'ša’ānān 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 malku-sarru. 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.”


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 Hammuna’s Masorah to the Masorah Magna,” in The Massorah Magna: Part One, Massoretic Dictionary or the Massorah in Alphabetic 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 (עַמָּשׁ šāmaʿ) and the noun (ןַנֲאַשׁ šaʾănan), or the verbal prefix of the second verb (ןַכָּשׁ šāḵan), because only the triliteral roots are meaningful to make the repetition of the first consonant šin (שׁ) effective. While such features are morphemically meaningful, they are poetically insignificant.

See similarly Prov 5:3: תֶפֹנְו הָנְפֹטִּיתּ יֵתְפִשׂ הָרָז nōp̄ ēṯ tiṭṭōp̄ nāh śip̄ ṯē zārāh “for the lips of a foreign woman drip honey.” Homoioteleuton obtains between תֶפֹנ תֶפֹnōp̄ ēṯ and יֵתְפִשׂ śip̄ ṯē and anagrammatic paronomasia occurs between תֶפֹnōp̄ ēṯ and תֶפֹnōp̄ ēṯ. Note, however, that the yod (י) marking the construct state of יֵתְפִשׂ śip̄ ṯē “lips of” is not counted as the final consonant contributing to homoioteleuton, because it serves as a vowel marker. Moreover, the phrase תֶפֹnōp̄ ēṯ “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 תפנ n–p–t and פרט n–ṭ–p.47

Isaiah’s prophecy concerning the Valley of Vision also demonstrates this: בְּשָׁרַפְּהָו תֹשׁוּ וּתָשׁוּ הָרְﬠָשַּׁה wǝ-hap-pārāšīm šōṯ šāṯū haš-šāʿrāh “and the horsemen set themselves in array at the gate” (Isa 22:7). Homoeopropheron between the infinitive absolute construction תֹשׁוּ וּתָשׁוּ šōṯ šāṯū “set themselves in array” and הָרְﬠָשַּׁה haš-šāʿrāh “the gate” does not count the definite article. In addition, parasonance between בְּשָׁרַפְּהָו hap-pārāšīm “the horsemen” and הָרְﬠָשַּׁה haš-šāʿrāh “the gate” disregards the nominal plural ending שׁ-ימ. There is also the case of homoioteleuton in the description of Nebuchadnezzar’s transformation: יִהוֹרְפִטְוַו ןיִרְפִּיצְכ wǝ-ṭip̄ rōhī ḵǝ-ṣippǝrīn “and his nails (became) like birds’ (talons)” (Dan 4:30). Note how neither the copula וֹ wǝ, masculine suffix יִהוֹ ohī, preposition ב b, nor the masculine plural ending שׁ-ינ 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 בֶּרֶחַבּםֶכיֵרוּחַבּ ba-ḥɛrɛḇ baḥūrēḵɛm “(I killed) with the sword your young men” in Amos 4:10, the words יִתָּצָמ māṣāʾṯī “I have found” and וּנֶּצְמַּאְת ṯǝʾamṣɛnnū “will strengthen them” in Ps 89:21–22, and בֶּרֶקְבּ bǝ-qɛrɛḇ “inside” and םיִרָקְבַּל lab-bǝq ɛrīm “mornings” in Ps 101:7–8. The phrase in Amos ignores the plural nominal suffix שׁ-ים. The two verbs in Ps 89 do not count the verbal affixes יִתָּצָמ and וּנֶּצְמַּאְת, nor pronominal suffix וּנּ nnū. In Ps 101, the anagram is achieved despite the prepositions ב b and ל l, and nominal plural ending שׁ-ים.

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.
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.\footnote{Hallo, “Scurrilous Etymologies,” 773.} 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.\footnote{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 ו and א in the Hebrew Bible,” \textit{JSOT} 39 (2014): 121–37.} 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.\footnote{The same can be said of some Ugaritic texts. See Noegel, “Kirtu’s Allusive Dream.”}

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
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. The former was an erudite matter between masters and pupils, and sometimes committed to commentaries. 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. 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. The importance of this is perhaps most obvious in paronomasia that has an onomatopoetic 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/, /θ/, and /k/ again and again. Elsewhere the prophet characterizes the mutterings of necromancers as birds’ chirping by repeating the emphatic affricate /ṣ/ (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. 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 kiššûtu “strength” (4.2.6). Egyptian bards appear to have enjoyed using the sign pḥ “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 אַפָּה אַפָּת pāḥaḏ wā-p̄aḥat wā-p̄āḥ “terror, pit, and a snare,” which occurs in Isa 24:17, Jer 48:43, and in abbreviated form as אַפָּה pāḥaḏ wā-p̄aḥat in Lam 3:47. One also finds numerous cases of paronomasia between the roots מ-š-l “rule” and מ-š-l “parable,”58 the roots מ-š ל-š “shame,” י-š כ-š “wither,” and ל-š ל-š “clothe,”59 and between the roots י-š כ-š “turn, return,” י-š כ-š “sit, dwell,” and ה-š כ-š “take captive.”60 Other common cases involve the use of ס-ג 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.


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 י-ם in Jeremiah,” 381, who also notes the same paronomasia in the Aramaic Sefire inscription.
for both “dwell” and “fear,” or הלג g-l-h for “reveal” and “exile,” sometimes in a paronomastic relationship with ליג g-y-l “rejoice.” 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.” Repetition and variation, parallelism, and chiasmus can occur within and between lines, but also as part of larger narrative programs. Lists of ten that highlight the importance of the seventh and tenth items also can inform compositional structures. Authors can

62. Landy, Hosea, 128.
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. And antanaclasis 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, and on a macro level we find it operating as “narrative ambiguity.” Strategies that involve deception obtain on the lexical and line level, but also across narratives. As research continues on these devices, I aver that it will be useful to consider whether they obtain on multiple levels.

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. Such is the case in Esau’s statement about Jacob in Gen 27:36:

70. I also wonder whether there might be a conceptual overlap between the use of contronyms and merisms.
“Wordplay” in Ancient Near Eastern Texts

He has deceived me these two times:
he took away my birthright,
and behold, now he has taken away my blessing.

Here בּוֹקֵרָתִי “my birthright” paronomastically (anagrammatically) and chiastically matches בּירָקָתִי “my blessing” in the next stich. See similarly Ps 147:15:

He sends out his commandment upon earth,
his word runs swiftly.

Abetting the chiasmus here is homoioteleuton between אָרֶץ “earth” in the first stich and יָרָעַס “runs” in the second.

Antanaclasis also can form an inclusio. Thus, in Hos 11:5, the verb שָׁבַע means “return” at the start of the first stich, and “repent” at the end of the second, forming a linguistic bookend: “No! They return [שָׁבַע yāšūḇ] to the land of Egypt, and Assyria is their king, because they refuse to repent [לֹא-שָׁבַע lā-šūḇ].”

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. The numbering of poetic stanzas (ḥw.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.
Moreover, some passages testify to the virtuosity of poets who employ multiple devices simultaneously. Such is the case with Prov 30:33:

\[
\text{kī mīṣ hālāḇ yōṣīʾ ḥemʾāh ū-mīṣ āp̄ yōṣīʾ ḏām ū-mīṣ ūmīṣ }
\]

which means “churn” in the first case, “wring” in the second, and “force, oppress” in the last (cf. ham-mīṣ in Isa 16:4). The repetition of mīṣ also displays parasonance with the three-fold use of the verb yōṣīʾ “bring forth.” When used with blood, the repeated sounds /m/ and /ṣ/ recall the verb māṣāh “drain (blood)” (cf. Lev 1:15, 5:9). The passage’s focus on the “source” of anger, also suggests that one hear ḥemʾāh “source.” More antanaclasis occurs between āp̄ “nose” and ēp̄ “appayīm “anger” (lit. “noses”—also a clever use of a body part. The noun ūmīṣ māṣāh means both “blood” and “homicide.” In addition, the noun ēmʾāh “curd” suggests ḥamāh “anger” (Dan 3:13, 3:19 [ēmʾāh ēmʾāh]). 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. 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

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 PARONO-MASIA 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 epexegesis (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,” *JS* 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, only a few studies pay attention to the treatment of Hebrew literary devices, and they focus almost entirely on the LXX.  


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. 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 הָמְﬠַר raʿmāh?
Do you make him quiver like locusts, his majestic snorting (spreading) terror?

On the one hand, the noun הָמְﬠַר raʿmāh suggests the meaning “thunder,” or by expansion “terror.” On the other, the form appears to be the Hebrew equivalent of the Arabic رَمَع raʿim “mane.” 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 אָפְקוּתּ tūq̄āʾ, both “strength” and “anger (terror?),” while the Vulgate renders ad sensum with hinnitum “neighing.” However, the Syriac tries to capture both senses of the Hebrew by taking a compromise approach with אָנּ־אָפְקָע zynʾ “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 אָנּ־הָדוּחָאםֶכָל־הָדִיחʾāḥūḏāh nāʾ lāḵɛm ḥīḏāh “let me put a riddle to you” with προβαλῶ ὑµῖν προβλῆµα (Judg 14:12). He also points out that, though


5. Conclusions

the Old Greek does not render the repetition of consonants in לֵכֹאָהֵמ אָצָי לָכֲאַמ mē-hā-ʾōḵēl yāṣāʾ maʾăḵāl “out of the eater, something to eat,” Codex Vaticanus is more successful. It translates: τί βρωτὸν ἐξῆλθεν 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: ייִפְּדָלְשׁ הָלְסִדְקָא הַדִּלְכָּא “a thousand will fall from your side.” The LXX responds in kind to the repeated ב /p/ and ל /l/ by translating “side” with κλίτους and “one thousand” with χιλίας.84 See also the homoeopropheron created by the repeated פ /p/ and ל /l/ in Ps 104:12: “The birds (יִפּוּ ʿōp̄) of heaven dwell with them, from among the foliage (םִיאָפֳﬠ ʿop̄ āʾyīm) 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 (הָוַּח ḫawwāh), because she is the mother of all living (יָח ḥāy).”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 (הָרֵﬠְבַת taḇʿērāh), because the fire of Yahweh burned (הָרֲﬠָב bāʿărāh) among them.” The LXX captures the paronomastic link between the name of the town and the verb “burn” by using Εμπυρισμός “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 (וּכְּבִיַּו way-yiḇkū). And they called the name of that place Bochim (םיִכֹבּ bōḵīm).” Again, rather than transliterate the name of the town, the LXX has opted to translate it, employing Ἐκλαυσαν “they wept” and Κλαυθ ṯῶνες “Weepings” to capture the connection.89

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84. Backfish, “Transformation in Translation,” 80. She also notes the presence of ייִפְּדָלְשׁ ʾōp̄el “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.
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.
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 epexegesis in an effort to capture the text’s multivalence. 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. 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.

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 סדא ʾāḏām “human/Adam” and עמדא ʾăḏāmāh “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 Literature.*
5. Conclusions

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).” 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.”

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## FIGURE 2. POLYSEMOUS DEVICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Polysemous Device</th>
<th>Sumerian</th>
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FIGURE 3. PARONOMASTIC DEVICES

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<td>πολύσηµος “polysemy”</td>
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<td>νοταριόν “notariqon”</td>
<td>Athanasius <em>Apologia ad Constantium imperatorem</em> 2035.011 (fourth ca. CE); Johannes Chrysostum, <em>Ad Innocentium papam</em> 2062.094 (fourth–fifth ca. CE)</td>
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<td>ἀντανάκλασις “antanaclasis”</td>
<td>Quintilian, uses “contraria significatio,” <em>Inst.</em> 9.3.68 (first ca. CE). Greek occurs in the Scholast to Apollonius Rhodius, <em>Argonautica</em> 1.746 (fifteenth ca. CE)</td>
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“Wordplay” in Ancient Near Eastern Texts


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Bibliography


Bibliography


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378

“Wordplay” in Ancient Near Eastern Texts


“Wordplay” in Ancient Near Eastern Texts


“Wordplay” in Ancient Near Eastern Texts

“Wordplay” in Ancient Near Eastern Texts


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“Wordplay” in Ancient Near Eastern Texts

Rivista di storia, ambienti e culture del Vicino Oriente Antico 16 (2019): 159–82.


## ANCIENT SOURCE INDEX

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Source</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Akkadian</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Annals of Sargon II</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>Curse of Akkade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARMT 26, Letter from Mari 9–21</td>
<td>65–67</td>
<td>Cuthah Legend</td>
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<td><strong>Atra-ḫasis Epic</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1.39–40</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>Descent of Ishtar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.74–77</td>
<td>274</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1.159–161</td>
<td>274</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1.223–224</td>
<td>102</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.225–226</td>
<td>133–34</td>
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<td>3.viii.9–17</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Dialogue of Saggil-kinnam-ubbib</td>
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<td>1.101–102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Counsels of Wisdom</strong></td>
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<td>38</td>
<td>141</td>
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<td>81–83</td>
<td>141</td>
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<td>37–38</td>
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<td>254–55</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### “Wordplay” in Ancient Near Eastern Texts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phrase/Text</th>
<th>Pages</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.83–84</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>Instructions of Amenemope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.95–96</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>5.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.121</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>11.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.145–146</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epic of Gilgamesh</td>
<td></td>
<td>12.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>12.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.35–36</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.37–39</td>
<td>251–52</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>14.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.130–132</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>14.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.180</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>15.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.186</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>14.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.192, 195</td>
<td>88, 243</td>
<td>16.1–6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>248–49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.i.7–14</td>
<td>119–20</td>
<td>22.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.iv.37, 44</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>22.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.iii.23</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>22.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.133</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>22.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.222, 226</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>22.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.211</td>
<td>58</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>5.134–135</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>Instructions of Shuruppak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.42–43</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.46–50</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.141–144</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>Legend of Sargon, King of Battle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.14</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>recto 16–17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.25–27</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>verso 17–18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.43–47</td>
<td>80, 197</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epic of Zimri-Lim</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hymn to the God Shamash</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36–37</td>
<td>254</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97–98</td>
<td>157, 171</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>136–137</td>
<td>254</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>163</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>Maqlû</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>165</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>1.126–130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>178–181</td>
<td>243–44</td>
<td>Marduk’s Address to Demons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>180</td>
<td>273–74</td>
<td>King’s Prism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inanna and Ebiḫ</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>41–44</td>
<td>79–80</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

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402
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Page(s)</th>
<th>Index Page(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oracle Text from Ishcali</td>
<td>1–26</td>
<td>202–3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poem of the Righteous Sufferer</td>
<td>1.2.4</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.9–13</td>
<td>135–36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.114</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sargon of Agade</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sennacherib’s Annals</td>
<td>2.1–2</td>
<td>62, 262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.24–25</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Šitti-Marduk kudurru</td>
<td>111</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Song of Erra</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1.58</td>
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<td>1.132</td>
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<td>1.150–152</td>
<td>271</td>
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<td>1.170</td>
<td>75</td>
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<td>1.182</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4.76–77</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.123–125</td>
<td>62–63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.53, 58</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>III D 5–7</td>
<td>284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Šumma Izbu</td>
<td>6.42</td>
<td>118</td>
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<td>B 29′–33′</td>
<td>80</td>
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<td>80–81</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>38, 277</td>
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<tr>
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<td>29, 35</td>
<td>273</td>
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<td>67–68</td>
<td>138</td>
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<td>72–73</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>38, 277</td>
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<td>138</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Moon Was Chosen</td>
<td>21–22</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Panammuwa</td>
<td>169</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pesher Habakkuk X11, 9</td>
<td>124</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pesher Nahum 3–4, I, 4–6</td>
<td>272</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3–4, III, 1–5</td>
<td>124</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3–4, III, 8–9</td>
<td>124</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proverbs of Ahiqar 1:89</td>
<td>164</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1 1:126, 128–129</td>
<td>116, 140</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1 1:165</td>
<td>192–93</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1 1:177</td>
<td>46</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sefire Treaty 1.A.22–23</td>
<td>265</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.A.4–6</td>
<td>260</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targum Pseudo-Jonathan 1 Sam 13:12</td>
<td>158–59</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Sam 22</td>
<td>286</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The World Trembled 6</td>
<td>110</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deir ‘Alla Inscription 7–8</td>
<td>265</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>277</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egyptian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admonitions of Ipuuer 3.12</td>
<td>172</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>58</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.5–6</td>
<td>263–64</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.13–14</td>
<td>268, 281</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>275</td>
<td></td>
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<td>14.14–15.1</td>
<td>275</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Title</th>
<th>Page(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autobiographical Eulogy of Intef-son-of-Min</td>
<td>44–45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autobiography of Ahmose 1–11</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autobiography of Ankhtifi 1a.2–3</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book of the Cow of Heaven</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book of the Dead Spell 99</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book of Thoth col. 3, l. 14–15</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronicle of Thutmosis III, Karnak 86–87</td>
<td>289–90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td>67–68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffin Texts, Spell 80 §33d</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffin Texts, Spell 1130 §465a</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complaint of Khakheperresonbe 2–3</td>
<td>311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contendings of Horus and Seth recto 1.2</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recto 3.7</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recto 4.2</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recto 5.7, 10</td>
<td>81–82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recto 6.8–12</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recto 7.4–8</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recto 9.9</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recto 10.8, 9</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recto 11.3</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recto 12.2–4</td>
<td>82–83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recto 13.9</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Destruction of Mankind</td>
<td>14–15</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispute between a Man and His Ba</td>
<td>72–75</td>
</tr>
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<td>78–80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>96–97</td>
</tr>
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<td>102–103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edwin Smith Surgical Papyrus</td>
<td>10.19–21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harper Song</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hatshepsut’s Expedition to Punt</td>
<td>49.6–7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>52.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hymn to Amun</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hymn to Amun-Ra</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1.10</td>
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<td>col. 6</td>
</tr>
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<td>Instructions of Ptahhotep</td>
<td>90–98</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>281–297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memphite Theology</td>
<td>54–55, 148–49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14b–c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
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<td>Section</td>
<td>Pages</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.25–9.1</td>
<td>171–72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.16–17</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.20</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.23–24</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poem of Victory in Honor of Ramesses III</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3–4</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2–2.3</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8–3.9</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poem on the King’s Chariot</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recto 6–14</td>
<td>271–72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>verso 1–3, 14–16</td>
<td>271–72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetical Stela of Thutmosis III</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>40, 290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>60, 244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>105, 244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23–24</td>
<td>290–91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>138–39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayer of Paheri</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15–16</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>144–145</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prophecy of Nefertiti</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24–25</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64–65</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pyramid Texts, Spell 580</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§1543–1544</td>
<td>92–93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pyramid Texts, Spell 670</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>§1978</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title of Work</td>
<td>Pages and References</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tale of Sinuhe</td>
<td>4.6, 8, 263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>106, 263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24–25</td>
<td>275, 263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56–59</td>
<td>63–64, 263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>110</td>
<td>40, 263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>110–112</td>
<td>268, 263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>189</td>
<td>281, 263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>252</td>
<td>63, 263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>276</td>
<td>106, 263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B 310</td>
<td>236, 263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tale of the Eloquent Peasant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85–86</td>
<td>257, 93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>122–123</td>
<td>274, 166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>167–168</td>
<td>67, 167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>199–201</td>
<td>172, 167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>219</td>
<td>187, 167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1 272–273</td>
<td>76, 288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1 294–96</td>
<td>76, 288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1 316</td>
<td>76, 288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>350</td>
<td>67, 288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>112, 263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>306, 263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9–10</td>
<td>57, 263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>306, 263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>306, 263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28–30</td>
<td>258, 263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>306, 263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59–60</td>
<td>60, 263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>63, 263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>60, 263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103</td>
<td>204, 263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103–108</td>
<td>252–53, 263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>106–107</td>
<td>204, 263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>124</td>
<td>63, 164, 263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>181</td>
<td>63, 211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>183</td>
<td>112, 273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>188–189</td>
<td>111–12, 211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tale of Two Brothers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>263, 211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tale of Wenamun</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>166, 93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>166, 93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>106, 93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.36–38</td>
<td>166, 93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.39–40</td>
<td>93, 93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temple of Esna</td>
<td>216, 93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theology of Hathor of Dendera</td>
<td>204, 234, 237, 311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomb of Qenamun</td>
<td>11, 263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aristotle, Poetics</td>
<td>1461a25, 233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aristotle, Rhetorica</td>
<td>1404b, 261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1410b1</td>
<td>248, 261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artemidorus Daldianus, Oneirocritica</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### “Wordplay” in Ancient Near Eastern Texts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author/Composers</th>
<th>References</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Athanasius, <em>Apologia ad Constantium imperatorem</em></td>
<td>2035.011</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demetrius Phalereus, <em>Demetrius on Style</em></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democritus, <em>Fragments</em></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dionysius of Halicarnassus, <em>Antiquitates Romanae</em></td>
<td>4.62</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johannes Chrysostom, <em>Ad Innocentium papam</em></td>
<td>2062.094</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholiasts to Apollonius Rhodius, <em>Argonautica</em></td>
<td>1.746</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hebrew</td>
<td>Ben Sira</td>
<td>4:9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4:21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6:22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8:8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13:10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15:13–30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>25:8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>40:13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>47:17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>51:13–30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>51:19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>Cicero, <em>De Divinatione</em></td>
<td>2.54.111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cicero, <em>De Oratore</em></td>
<td>2.63.256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hermogenes of Tarsus, <em>On Invention</em></td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hermogenes of Tarsus, <em>Peri Ideon</em></td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Martianus Capella, <em>Grammaticus Latinus</em></td>
<td>5.167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quintilian, <em>Institutio Oratoria</em></td>
<td>9.3.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9.3.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9.3.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rutilius Lupus, <em>de Figuris sententiarum et elocutionis</em></td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moabite</td>
<td>Mesha Stele (KAI 181)</td>
<td>1–4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12–13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>23–24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>28–29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Phoenician

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Page(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Azitawadda (KAI 26)</td>
<td>A6–7 246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B12–13 247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B16–17 163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C1.7 109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilamuwa (KAI 24)</td>
<td>2–5 170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11–16 170</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Sumerian

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Page(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Class Reunion</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enheduanna, Ninmešarra</td>
<td>1–5 283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16 262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>55–56 159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gudea’s Cylinder</td>
<td>A 2.20 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B 6.21–22 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B 12.26–13.2 283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hymn to Inanana</td>
<td>14–17 176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lugulbanda Epic</td>
<td>2.87 286–87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myth of Enki and Ninḫursağa</td>
<td>250–268 101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return of Ninurta</td>
<td>92–93 248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>94–97 165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rulers of Lagash</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shulgi D (Self Praise of Shulgi)</td>
<td>216–218 165</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Ugaritic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Page(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CAT 1.1</td>
<td>i.1 94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>i.36–37 285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>i.5–6 223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>i.15–16 250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>i.7–27 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>i.8–10 258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iv.10 245, 285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iv.15–17 224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>i.4–7 275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>i.6–7 255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii.29 291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iv.r.1 291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iv.11 281</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Shulgi P b 38–39 101
Song of the Hoe 26–27 196
83–84 196–97 196
Sumerian Riddles 125–127
Tale of Enlil and Namzitarra 3 144
12–18 144–45
Tale of the Three Ox Drivers from Adab 71
Tale of the Three Ox Drivers from Adab 71
### Wordplay in Ancient Near Eastern Texts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CAT 1.4</th>
<th>iii.18 268</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>iv.1</td>
<td>291 iii.24 209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv.14–18</td>
<td>41, 178, 291 iii.29 268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv.23–25</td>
<td>223 iii.36 209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv.38–39</td>
<td>162 iv.19–22 221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v.34–55</td>
<td>291 iv.21 76, 209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vi.4–5</td>
<td>255 iv.38–39 112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vii.45–59</td>
<td>292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vii.49–52</td>
<td>179, 255–256 CAT 1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iv.14–16 222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAT 1.5</td>
<td>v.19–21 107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.7–15</td>
<td>167–68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii.6</td>
<td>234 CAT 1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v.8–9</td>
<td>208 i.12–17 222–23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vi.15</td>
<td>234 i.41–42 205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vi.18–20</td>
<td>208 i.46–48 205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vi.28–30</td>
<td>77 i.48–49 291–92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii.35–39 223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAT 1.6</td>
<td>iii.9–14 76–77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.34–36</td>
<td>223 v.12, 15, 18 264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii.30–35</td>
<td>221–22 v.21, 28, 50 264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv.1–3</td>
<td>106 v.24–25 264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv.12–14</td>
<td>106 vi.22–23 56–57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v.1–4</td>
<td>106–7 vi.35–36 90, 173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vi.14–16</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vi.16–22</td>
<td>223–224 CAT 1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii.30–45 292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAT 1.14</td>
<td>vi.30–32 258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.40–42</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.16–17</td>
<td>107 CAT 1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii.23–24</td>
<td>89–90, 173 i.13–15 107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii.23–27</td>
<td>178–79 iv.14 107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii.24–26</td>
<td>237 iv.17 107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii.27–29</td>
<td>189 iv.22 292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii.30–31</td>
<td>208 iv.23 292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii.36–42</td>
<td>208–9 iv.25–26 168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii.39–40</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii.43</td>
<td>76 CAT 1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii.45–46</td>
<td>89, 173 i.36–42 183–84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii.48</td>
<td>209 i.44–46 60, 184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii.2–4</td>
<td>209 ii.1–5 94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii.4</td>
<td>268 iii.5, 20, 34 281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii.10–12, 14–15</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAT 1.22</td>
<td>i.4–8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAT 1.22</td>
<td>i.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAT 1.23</td>
<td>33–35, 37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAT 1.23</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAT 1.23</td>
<td>48–49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAT 1.96</td>
<td>5–13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAT 1.96</td>
<td>12–13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAT 1.100</td>
<td>65–67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAT 1.100</td>
<td>73–76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAT 1.169</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAT 1.169</td>
<td>1–6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAT 1.169</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BIBLICAL SOURCE INDEX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Passage</th>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Verse(s)</th>
<th>Page(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Genesis 1:2</td>
<td>15:1</td>
<td>16:11</td>
<td>217, 234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genesis 2:6</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>17:4–5</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genesis 2:7</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>18:5</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genesis 2:16–17</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>19:21</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genesis 2:23</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>19:32</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genesis 2:25</td>
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### “Wordplay” in Ancient Near Eastern Texts

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