

SCHIZOPHRENIA AND THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING IN THE *LUDLUL* HYMN TO MARDUK

BY

Michela PICCIN and Martin WORTHINGTON*

A Lucio Milano, con stima e affetto.

But mercy is above this sceptred sway;
It is enthronèd in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute to God himself.

W. Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, Act IV Scene 1

Among the many cultural puzzles left us by the Akkadian-speaking world, one of the most intriguing is that of how the gods behave, and why. A glaring example is Ishtar in *Gilgamesh*, so mercurial it is hard to be sure whether the audience was supposed to come away with an overall impression of her character, or whether her different roles in the story were never meant to represent any sort of meaningful whole.¹

Questions about the character and behaviour of the gods may of course end up being unanswerable – Leo Oppenheim, who entitled a chapter section *Why a « Mesopotamian Religion » should not be written*,² would probably have been pessimistic about them. And sure enough, since the gods are ultimately a means of rationalising and dealing with the imponderables of life on earth, it is natural that they should be somewhat imponderable themselves. Nonetheless, from time to time it is possible to detect glimmers of sense in our sources, and it is an exercise of this type which we propose to undertake here. We will argue that the portrait of Marduk in the hymn at the start of the Babylonian poem of the righteous sufferer, *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*, is less perplexing than is sometimes thought; and that, once the tenor and mechanisms of Marduk's characterisation are recognised, the logic of the hymn's overall structure becomes apparent, with implications for how the hymn conceptualises the problem of suffering in relation to Marduk's character.

Ludlul bēl nēmeqi (*Ludlul* for short) is known only from manuscripts of the first millennium BC, and was perhaps composed in the late second. The poem has recently become available in the very useful SAACT edition of Ammar Annus and Alan Lenzi,³ and we will be basing ourselves on their text, with occasional modifications. Our translations are also indebted to theirs, as well as to those of Foster (2005: 394–396) and George/Al-Rawi (1998: 194–195). The hymn which we will be studying makes up the first 40 verses of the poem. Like much of Babylonian poetry, its verses are all syntactically complete, and fall into couplets and quatrains.

1. THE PROBLEMS

In several respects, the hymn makes for rather disorienting reading. It opens by declaring the intention to praise Marduk, but – on what grounds is he being praised? The ensuing verses contain as many references to Marduk's

* The first author realised that the hymn could be analysed simultaneously in terms of persuading the audience and Marduk himself, observed that in most cases the sequence was wrath-mercy, and saw that the “external organs” were associated with wrath, “internal” ones with mercy. The remainder of the ideas presented here stem from the second author, who is also responsible for the translation in the Appendix.

1. For the idea that Ištar's character in *Gilgamesh* is something of a hotch-potch resulting from a process of change and accretion, see Tigay (1982: 244).

2. Oppenheim, 1964, first section in chapter IV.

3. Annus & Lenzi (2010). See also the Addendum at end of this paper, on Oshima (2014).

wrath as they do to his mercy. For instance, in verse two « he is angry by night, he is relenting in daytime ».⁴ Several scholars therefore hold that Marduk is being praised as much for his wrath as for his mercy: Bill Moran maintained that the hymn « celebrates the wrath and mercy of Marduk »,⁵ while Takayoshi Oshima has the hymn offer « praise to Marduk as an angry god ».⁶ Of course we must always be open to the possibility of Babylonian *Eigenbegrifflichkeit*, but the idea that the hymn should praise Marduk's wrath is perplexing.

A second problem centres on Marduk's character, and what the hymn's audience is supposed to make of it: is Marduk a wrathful god, or a merciful one? Or can he not make up his mind? Of course, wrath and mercy are, in a sense, complementary: one can only be merciful when there is cause for wrath. But nonetheless, many analysts have recognised that the hymn's relentless alternation of one with the other is peculiar. Thus Ammar Annus and Alan Lenzi note that « one might see caprice in this catena of emotional contrasts »,⁷ while Hermann Spieckermann speaks of an « unvorhersehbaren Stimmungsschwung ».⁸ To put it crudely, Marduk comes across as schizophrenic. One explanation is that his ability to switch between wrath and mercy at whim is evidence of his supreme power.⁹ While this may well be part of the picture, we will see there is more.

Finally, the organisation of the hymn as a whole is opaque: (a) the first seven quatrains are taken up with references to wrath and mercy; (b) the eighth talks about Marduk being incomprehensible, even to the other gods; (c) the ninth spends two verses on his mercy, and a further two saying that he cannot be forced into relenting without his consent; finally, (d) the tenth quatrain voices the proselytising intentions of the ostensible author of the hymn. The function of the eighth and ninth quatrains within the overall thought structure is far from clear. We shall suggest an interpretation which accounts for them, and gives the whole hymn a strong degree of cohesiveness.

2. MARDUK'S TRUE NATURE

We begin by discussing a purely formal feature of the hymn: from verse 5 to 28, references to Marduk's wrath and mercy occupy alternate verses. In particular, wrath (in odd-numbered verses) precedes mercy (in even-numbered ones).

This tendency in the hymn has already been noted by other scholars,¹⁰ but because it appeared to be vitiated by several exceptions, the pattern did not attract much attention. We will propose some new readings, through which the pattern becomes perfectly regular. Two instances are involved:

Ludlul I 19-20

iddud-ma ri-ma-šu ú-KAN-ni (var. *ri-ma-a-MU ú-kan-na*)

u ki-i a-ra-aḫ bu-ú-ri ittanashara arkīšu

To date, *ú-KAN-ni* has been interpreted as a form of *kanû* D « to cherish », and *ri-ma-šu* has usually been taken as meaning something like « darling » (from *rāmu* « to love »).¹¹ The variant *ri-ma-a-MU* is left unaccounted for. Our solution is to suppose that the couplet originally ran thus:

4. Moran (2002: 192-193) noted that the polarity in this verse is made all the sharper by the imagery, since in Iraq night turns into day quite suddenly.

5. Moran (2002: 193).

6. Oshima (2011: 50). See further p. 51: « The structure of the praise of Marduk in *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi* Tablet I gives a very strong impression that one cannot understand Marduk without considering both of these opposing aspects. Probably this is the reason why the author of *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi* praises not only Marduk's mercy and wisdom but also his anger ».

7. Annus & Lenzi (2010, p. XIX).

8. Spieckermann (1998: 331): « Marduk kann den Tod bringen und wieder ins Leben zurückführen. Das eine wie das andere geschieht unberechenbar. Der unvorhersehbare Stimmungsschwung der Gottheit bestimmt den ganzen hymnischen Passus ».

9. Annus & Lenzi (2010) view the alternating references to Marduk's wrath and mercy as underscoring « his unique divine prerogative » (p. XIX), i.e. that he is « powerful, inscrutable and without peer; he may therefore do as he wishes » (p. XX).

10. Oshima (2011: 51) writes that « Each couplet of the first forty lines of Tablet I of *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi* presents two opposing pictures of Marduk – on the one hand, the image of a furious god whose anger is devastating and, on the other, that of a merciful god who drives away misfortune and brings prosperity ». For Lambert (1995: 32), the couplets “have always the same theme: severity, then goodness”, or “first savage, but later relenting” (p. 33). We owe this reference to Enrique Jiménez). The exceptions (which we will argue to be only apparent) are not noted or discussed.

11. Al-Rawi & George (1998): « he hurries to treat his *darling* tenderly, like a cow with a calf he keeps following him around ». Annus & Lenzi (2010): « he hastens to treat his beloved (?) kindly, and like a cow with a calf, he is ever attentive ». See Addendum.

iddud-ma rīmāniš uganna
u kī arah būri ittanashara arkīšu

He hastens to butt like a wild bull,
 like a cow with a calf, he is ever attentive (lit. always turning behind himself).

We view *ri-ma-MU* as representing *ri-ma-niš_x*, with *MU* having the value *niš_x* thanks to its being a logogram for the word *nīšu* « life ». As for *ri-ma-šu*, we follow Ben Foster in presuming this to be a transmitter's variant spelling of *ri-ma-šú*, this in turn being an error of sign similarity for *ri-ma-niš* (the signs which represent *šú* and *nīš* both consist in two wedges).¹² The advantages of interpreting the verses thus are that a pleasing symmetry is gained, with bovine imagery in both, and that the variant in -*MU* is accounted for.

The second instance is at verse 27:

Ludlul I 27-28:
muš-MAN-DI [riḫ]iṣti Adad miḫiṣti Erra
musallim ili u ištari šabbasūti

The one who magnifies the [devastat]ion of Adad, the strike of Erra,
 (but also) the one who (later) reconciles god and goddess enraged.

Previous translators read *muš-MAN-DI* as *muš-man-ḫi*, ŠD participle of *maḫû* « to be slight, scanty ».¹⁴ This would make Marduk one who, in his mercy, diminishes the afflictions wrought by Adad and Erra. There is, however, a phonological difficulty: though not absolutely impossible, nasalisation of unvoiced consonants (here: *ḫ* > *nt*) is extremely rare in Akkadian (GAG § 32c). We propose to read *muš-mìn-di*, ŠD participle of *mādu* « to be much », with nasalisation of *dd* > *nd*.¹⁵ Marduk would thus be the wrathful augments of Adad and Erra's hurts, so the couplet would fit the usual pattern of wrath preceding mercy.

If the interpretations proposed above be accepted, then the pattern of wrath preceding mercy extends from verses 2 to 28, without exception. This, we suggest, is of some importance for how the hymn works: in our view it means that the verses in the couplets are not only connected by the idea of « but »¹⁶ (Marduk if wrathful, but he is also merciful), but more specifically by the idea of « but then » (Marduk is wrathful, but *then* he is merciful),¹⁷ with the arrangement of verses implying that wrath and mercy are connected in a temporal sequence.

The hymn's alternations of wrath and mercy thus serve to tell us that Marduk's anger always ends, giving way to his gentleness. This, in turn, is a point about Marduk's true character: however painful and terrible, his anger is transient; his true nature, the one he will always return to in the end, is to be calm and merciful.¹⁸

In this interpretation, the hymn does not « praise Marduk as an angry god »,¹⁹ nor does it « celebrat[e] the wrath and mercy of Marduk ».²⁰ His anger is indeed mentioned, even described with vivid imagery and elevated language. But it does not (v. 37 notwithstanding) feature as something praiseworthy in its own right, or as an « equal partner » with mercy. Rather, the praise goes to Marduk's propensity to *calm* his anger – in other words, to the mercifulness of his true nature.²¹

12. Foster (1981: 189). The variant in -*MU* was not available to Foster, as it first appeared in the edition of Al-Rawi & George (1998: 192).

14. Annus & Lenzi: « who makes slight (?) the [devastat]ion (?) of Adad, the blow of Erra, *but* who reconciles *one's* enraged god and goddess ». See Addendum.

15. See now also Oshima (2014: 184), proposing to read *mid¹* (BE!), and noting that it can be difficult to distinguish *MAN* from *BE*.

16. Which several translators have sought to bring out by inserting the word « but »: Foster (2005: 394, verse 6); Annus & Lenzi (2010: 31-32 in many verses, italic).

17. Thus also Lenzi (2011: 483): « Marduk's anger and mercy... are praised thematically but the hymn also sets up a serial relationship between the two, especially clear in lines 2 and 4: Marduk's wrath is followed by his mercy ».

18. This idea was already hinted at by Moran (2002: 194): « But if his mercy is unpredictable, it is also certain. In this hymn, we clearly find... the certainty of mercy and forgiveness ». Lambert (2013: 480) is less precise: "in time the mood passes".

19. Oshima (2011: 50). See further footnote 6.

20. Moran (2002: 193).

21. Annus & Lenzi (2010) view the alternating references to Marduk's wrath and mercy as underscoring « his unique divine prerogative » (p. XIX) (see fn. 9). They nonetheless envisage that the hymn « confidently assumes his benevolent intention » (p. XIX).

3. THE MEANING OF *MUŠTĀLU*

The idea that the hymn wants to characterise Marduk as a god who, for all his moments of ire, is ultimately and essentially benevolent, finds corroboration in the last word of the very first verse, namely *muštālu*:

Ludlul I 1:
ludlul bēl nēmeqi ilu muštālum

Morphologically, *muštālu* is a Gt (reciprocal or reflexive) participle of *šālu* « to ask ». Super-literally it is « the one who asks himself/others », and usually it means something like « thoughtful, considerate, judicious », etc. Translators of *Ludlul* generally render it in this vein.²² This, of course, sits well with the epithet « lord of wisdom » earlier in the verse.

But the word *muštālu* possesses a further nuance, belonging –at least in modern translation– to a different semantic sphere. This additional nuance can be detected by considering a verse in another poem which glorifies Marduk, namely the Babylonian poem of creation (*Enūma eliš*).²³

Enūma Eliš VI 137:
meršakuš'u ez(zi)z u muštāl sabus u tayyār
Meršakuš'u (i.e. Marduk) is furious and *muštālu*, wrathful and merciful.

The verse's symmetrical structure makes it evident that *muštālu* is, on the one hand, a synonym of *tayyāru* « merciful », and, on the other hand, an opposite of *ez(zi)z* and *sabus*, which both mean something like « angry, wrathful ». In other words, *muštālu* can mean something tantamount to « merciful ».²⁴

That Marduk should be described with a word which can mean « merciful » in the very first verse of the hymn is surely no accident. We attribute to it a programmatic function, of setting the tone for what follows.²⁵

4. MERCY AS AN « INNER » QUALITY

The notion that Marduk is an essentially merciful and benevolent deity finds reflection in another feature of the hymn. Namely, there is a tendency to connect Marduk's inner organs with mercy, and his outer parts with wrath:

INNER ORGANS

mussahḫir karassu kabattašu tayyārat
His « stomach » is favourable, his « liver » is forgiving. (v. 8)

OUTER PARTS

īnuššu ina karašē ušatbe maqtu
With his eye he raises the fallen one from disaster. (v. 14)

ša nakbat qātīšu lā inaššū šamā'ū
rittūš rabbāti ukaššu mīta

Though the heavens cannot bear the weight of his hands,
he rescues the dead with his gentle hands. (vv. 9-10)

22. Horowitz & Lambert (2002: 244): « deliberative »; Biggs (1975: 148): « deliberative »; Labat (1970: 329): « avisé »; Römer & von Soden (1990: 114): « umsichtig »; Annus & Lenzi (2010: 31): « circumspect ». Note Foster (2005: 394): « solicitous » (perhaps inspired by the meaning « full of concern » in CAD M/2 283b, where it is not applied to *Ludlul*). This is closer to the meaning suggested by us.

23. Edited by Kämmerer & Metzler (2012: 273); Lambert (2013: 118). *Ee VI 137* was already connected with *Ludlul I 1* by Moran (2002: 192). Moran translates *muštālu* as « judicious », but in his discussion he stretches this word's meaning to something quite close to mercy: « 'Judicious god'... asserts that Marduk has the mind and will to heal... Judiciousness checks anger... It is a quality of the mind that, like mercy, eventually saves ». He does not mention the structure of *Ee VI 137*.

24. See already Lambert (1995: 33), translating the *muštāl* of *Ee VI 137* as «relenting». It would be a complex matter to determine how these two senses of *muštālu*, « considerate » and « merciful », were related in the mind of Babylonians. Were they regarded as indissoluble? Or as two sides of the same coin? Or as two different meanings possessed by the same word? The proximity to *nēmequ* « wisdom » and considerations arising later in this paper would suggest that we are at least looking at meanings which were regarded as very closely related, but we do not propose to resolve this issue. See also Moran (2002), cited in fn. 23.

25. This interpretation reinforces the view of Moran (1983: 258a) that « The opening quatrain is the essence of the entire poem ».

BOTH MENTIONED TOGETHER

ana kī kabtat qāssu libbašu rēmēnī

ana kī gaṣṣū kakkūšu kabattašu mušneššat

As heavy as his hand is, his heart is merciful,
as murderous as his weapons are, his « liver » is life-giving. (vv. 33-34)

There is a distinction between the ‘outer’ and ‘inner’ groups: while Marduk’s external parts (eye and hand) can be both wrathful and merciful, the internal organs –heart, liver, stomach– are only associated with his mercy. The contrast is strongest in verses 33 and 34, which both contrast a merciful inner organ (*libbu* « heart », *kabattu* « liver ») with a menacing external attribute (*rittu* « hand », *kakku* « weapon »).

We propose the following interpretation. As often, the terms *libbu*, *kabattu* and *karšu* do not simply represent anatomical organs (« heart », « liver » and « stomach »), they are also seats of intangible attributes such as character, volition and personality. They can all, somewhat roughly, be translated with a word like « mind ».²⁶ Thus, as the hymn presents things, Marduk’s will (or mind, or character) is only ever benevolent, while his wrath only ever issues from his « lesser » parts, such as his hand. There is an implicit suggestion that Marduk’s true character is to be always merciful, and that his wrath springs from « lesser » parts, almost of its own accord (i.e. almost without him wanting it).

At the level of pure logic, this gives rise to a paradox. Since the « lesser parts » are by definition subordinate to instructions emanating from the seat of will, it must always be the latter which is responsible for Marduk’s actions, whether benevolent or wrathful. In this sense, the dichotomy between internal and external, or « higher » and « lesser » body parts, ceases to be meaningful. While we acknowledge the truth of this, we do not attach much importance to it. The hymn’s strategy is to circumvent the paradox, to hide it out of view, and simply to foster associations between Marduk’s innermost character and his benevolence, to reinforce the idea that his true nature is to be kind and good; while relegating his wrath to peripheral parts, to suggest it is not an essential attribute of his character.

5. THE EIGHTH AND NINTH QUATRAINS

The eighth quatrain declares in no uncertain terms that the will of Marduk cannot be fathomed:

Ludlul I 29–32

bēlu mimma libbi ilī ibarri

mannāma ina ilī alaktašu ul īde

Marduk mimma libbi ilī ibarri

ilu ayyūm-ma ul ilammad tēššu

The Lord, he sees everything in the heart of the gods,

(whereas) none among the gods knows his way.

Marduk, he sees everything in the heart of the gods,

(whereas) no god can learn his counsel.

Why assert that Marduk is so difficult to comprehend? And why do so at this particular juncture? We suggest that the intent is, so to speak, to guard against the dangers of reductivism. Since the hymn has stressed over and again that Marduk is an essentially kindly god, the audience might get the idea that they now understand him – his will, his character, his nature – in full. As this supposition would be presumptuous and disrespectful, the hymn includes a quatrain to remind us that, though we may be certain that Marduk is ultimately a kindly god, we should not presume to understand him completely; and that, though the foregoing verses have told us something important and true about him, they do not claim to have got to the bottom of his mysteries.

The ninth quatrain falls into two couplets, which address two separate points:

Ludlul I 33-36

ana kī kabtat qāssu libbašu rēmēnī

ana kī gaṣṣū kakkūšu kabattašu mušneššat

ša lā libbišu mannu miḥiṣtašu lišapših

ela kabtatišu ayyū lišālil qāssu

26. Though cf. Steinert (2012: 232-233), arguing for a holistic perception of the person in Ancient Mesopotamia, in which physical and mental (*psychisch*) aspects of the person were perceived as an ensemble. While this may well be true of the majority of contexts, our hymn plays on what is after all an intuitive distinction.

As heavy as his hand is, his heart is merciful,
 as murderous as his weapons are, his « liver » is life-giving.
 Without his « heart », who can assuage his blow?
 But for his « liver », who can *stay* his hand?

The first couplet, discussed in § 4, essentially summarises the characterisation of Marduk in quatrains 1–7: for all his seeming anger, he is an ultimately kindly god who will always relent in the end. The point is reinforced by the clear contrasts between the mercifulness of his « higher organs » (*libbu* and *kabattu*, both meaning something like « mind ») and the menace of his « lesser parts » (hand and weapon).

We see the second couplet as fulfilling several functions. The first thing to note is that it again refers to *libbu* and *kabattu* (here in its literary by-form *kabtatu*), linking it to the first couplet and therefore giving symmetry and cohesion to the quatrain as a whole. Secondly, by highlighting the fact that Marduk cannot be manipulated into doing things against his will, it hearkens back to the preceding (eighth) quatrain, which was devoted to the complexity and inscrutability of Marduk's character. Thus the ninth quatrain, in its two halves, summarises all preceding quatrains.

The second couplet may also be doing something subtle. Baruch Spinoza wrote that *determinatio negatio est*, determination is negation. Many philosophers have built on this idea that stating one thing calls to mind its opposite.²⁷ For example, inherent in the declaration « I will never rebel against the king » is the idea that rebellion can and might be done. In certain contexts such a statement could, by virtue of this, acquire seditious undertones, the very use of the key word « to rebel » sufficing to override the negation which accompanies it. Something similar may be happening with our couplet: we are told that nobody can manipulate Marduk into being merciful, but the very fact of saying this instils the thought in the audience that it might be possible. Indeed, we would suggest that the hymn as a whole has precisely this aim: reciting it, with Marduk presumably listening, reminds the god of his true nature, politely suggesting that « now » might be a good time to display his true colours, and relent.²⁸ This interpretation gives a whole new meaning to verse 40, discussed in § 7.

6. FORMAL COMPLEXITY MIRRORING COMPLEXITY OF CHARACTER?

As is well known,²⁹ and indeed self-evident, the hymn exhibits a high degree of formal complexity, with virtuosic deployment of parallelism, and an abundance of rare words. Of course on some level this complexity has an aesthetic function, making the hymn more pleasant and interesting to learn, hear and recite as a work of verbal artistry. But as a work about the character of Marduk, and one which, we have suggested, is concerned to point out that Marduk's character is complex, and cannot « just » be boiled down to his being ultimately merciful, it is worth entertaining the idea that the formal complexities in the hymn are a tribute to the complexity of Marduk himself.

We see no way at present of proving or disproving this idea, so we will content ourselves with giving examples of the elements of formal complexity which we have in mind, leaving it to future discussion (and comparison with other works) to evaluate our suggested connection between formal complexity and the complexity of Marduk.

6.1 Variability in the structure of couplets

Some couplets are made up of verses with exactly the same structure:

zaqtā niṭātušu | usahhalā zūmra
pašhū šindūšu | uballaṭū namtara (vv. 21-22)
 His blows are sharp, they pierce the body,
 his bandages are soothing, they revive the dead one.³⁰

Thus also verses 33-34 (translated above):

27. See e.g. the survey by Melamed (2012).

28. Cf. Zgoll (2003: 282) on Ištar as a goddess who “für die Existenz und das Wohl der Menschen angerufen werden konnte und angerufen werden wollte”.

29. See e.g. Moran (2002: 193); Lenzi (2011: 484).

30. From the context, *namtaru* (usually the name or type of an underworld demon/god) looks like it should simply mean « dead person ». Given the hymns's use of very rare words, we deem it painless enough to suppose that it does indeed have that meaning here.

ana kī kabtat qāssu | libbašu rēmēnī
ana kī gaššū kakkūšu | kabattašu mušneššat

On other occasions (and in fact more often), however, the structure varies:

ša kīma ūmi meḥē lamû uggassu
u kī mānit šērēti zāqšu ṭābu (vv. 5-6)
 though he is surrounded by (or: enjoys ?) his anger like a raging storm,
 (afterwards) his sufflation is as pleasant as a morning breeze.

In the above instance, both verses depend on the relative *ša* and, in our interpretation, they both contain a stative of which Marduk is the subject.³¹ The position of stative (*lamû*, *ṭābu*) and subject (*uggassu*, *zāqšu*) is reversed.

uzzuššu lā mahār abābu rūbšu
mussahhīr karassu kabattašu tayyārat (vv. 7-8)
 His rage is irresistible, a flood is his fury,
 (but) his stomach is kindly, relenting is his liver.

Here the verses have the structure ABBA/BAAB (subject predicate predicate subject/predicate subject subject predicate).³² The symmetries are reinforced by the fact that all four subjects end with *-šu* « his ».

The following case is slightly more complex than the two above:

mušmīndi [riḥ]iṣti Adad miḥiṣti Erra
musallim ili u ištari šabbasūti (vv. 27-28)
 He who augments the inundation of Adad and the strike of Erra,
 he who appeases god and goddess ever so angry.

Here, in one sense, both verses have exactly the same structure: a *mu*-participle in the *status constructus* is followed by two dependents. But the differences in the detail (dependent as one word or two; presence/absence of *u*; presence/absence of adjective) give the two verses a different feel and a different « rhythm » (inasmuch as the two dependents occupy two beats in verse 27, whereas they are probably squashed into one beat in verse 28).³³

These examples show how variable the couplet structures in *Ludlul* are, and how much is made of playing with different manifestations of parallelism.

6.2 Variability in the structure of quatrains

Just as the relations between the verses of a couplet vary, so there is variation in how quatrains are put together.

Give or take slight lexical and other variations, quatrains I, III and VIII basically consist in the repetition of a couplet:

<p>Quatrain I (vv. 1 – 4) <i>ludlul bēl nēmeqi ilu muštālu</i> <i>eziz māši muppašir urri</i> <i>Marduk bēl nēmeqi ilu muštālu</i> <i>eziz māši muppašir urri</i></p>	<p>Quatrain III (vv. 9 – 12) <i>ša nakbat qātīšu lā inaššū šamā'ū</i> <i>rittūš rabbāti ukaššu mīta</i> <i>Marduk ša nakbat qātīšu lā inaššū šamā'ū</i> <i>rabbāti rittāšu ukaššu mīta</i></p>	<p>Quatrain VIII (vv. 29 – 32) <i>bēlu mīmma libbi ilī ibarri</i> <i>mannāma ina ilī alaktašu ul īde</i> <i>Marduk mīmma libbi ilī ibarri</i> <i>ilu ayyūmma ul ilammaḍ ṭeššū</i></p>
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Even in the above examples, which are basically of the same kind, we see minor variations (especially in quatrain VIII).

6.3 A « ghost » quatrain

The apogee of virtuosity in the deployment of parallelism is reached in quatrains six (vv. 21–24) and seven (vv. 25–28):

31. The subject of *lamû* can hardly be *uggassu* « his wrath » – this being feminine, we would need *lamât*. The same applies to the difficult *na-mu-ú* in verse 5. It is hard to know whether this is a corruption of *lamû*, or whether *lamû* is an ancient emendation of obscure *na-mu-ú*. Thinking along the latter lines, it is not out of the question for *na-mu-ú* to represent *na'û*, which could be related to the rare verb *nu'û* « to amuse », discovered by S. Parpola (*apud* Lapinkivi, 2010, 99 *ad lin.* 130). The sense would be something like « who enjoys his anger like an angry storm ». At present it is hard to tell.

32. In view of the symmetry, we suppose that *uzzuššu* (properly a locative form) is simply used as nominative, possibly for added stylistic elegance. Cf. equivalent cases listed by Lambert (2013: 38).

33. It is just conceivable that verse 28 is a four-beater, in which case the two dependents would be separated by the caesura. There would still be a significant rhythmic difference vis-à-vis 27.

21. *zaqtā niḫātušu usaḫḫalā zumra*
 22. *pašḫū šindūšu uballaṭū namtara*
 23. *iqabbi-ma gillata ušrašši*
 24. *ina ūm išartišu uptaṭṭarū e'iltu u annu*
 25. *šū-ma utukka ra'iba ušarši*
 26. *ina tēšu ušdapparū šuruppū u ḫurbāšu*
 27. *mušmindi [riḫ]iṣti Adad miḫiṣti Erra*
 28. *musallim ili u ištari šabbasūti*

There is such a strong bond of symmetry *across* these two quatrains, between verses 23-24, and 25-26, that these four verses effectively form a secondary quatrain of their own, which straddles quatrains six and seven:

23. *iqabbi-ma gillata ušrašši*
 24. *ina ūm išartišu uptaṭṭarū e'iltu u annu*
 25. *šū-ma utukka ra'iba ušarši*
 26. *ina tēšu ušdapparū šuruppū u ḫurbāšu*

The symmetries are clear: *ušrašši* in 23 matches *ušarši* in 25 (both forms of *rašū* Š(D)), while 24 and 26 have identical structures, a feature which is enhanced by the similarity of the verbs *uptaṭṭarū* and *ušdapparū*.³⁴

6.4 Lexical variation

The hymn's use of vocabulary is very striking. Though a few words are repeated,³⁵ in general there seems to be an effort to avoid repetitions by instead using synonyms,³⁶ some of which (*ela*, *namtaru*) are quite rare.

Among nouns and adjectives, six are used to articulate notions of **rage**: *ezzu* (v. 1; v. 3); *uggatu* (v. 5; 37); *uzzu* (v. 7); *rūbu* (v. 7); *libbātu* (v. 13); *šabbašū* (v. 28); and six for notions of **mercy**: *muštālu* (vv. 1, 3), *muppašru* (vv. 2, 4), *mussaḫḫiru* (v. 8), *tayyāru* (v. 8), *rēmēnū* (v. 39), *gumālu* (v. 39). Similarly, there are two words for « **hand** »: *qātu* (vv. 9, 11, 33), *rittu* (vv. 10, 12); two for « **dead person** »: *mītu* (v. 12), *namtaru* (v. 22); and three for « **sin** »: *gillatu* (v. 23), *e'iltu* (v. 24), *annu* (*arnu*) (vv. 24, 40).

Among the verbs, *edū* and *lamādu* seem to be used with very similar meaning in verses 30 and 32. And it is noteworthy that *sahāru* is used in two different stems: *isaḫḫuršu* < *sahāru* G (v. 16), *ittanashara* < *sahāru* Ntn (v. 20).

Among grammar-words, « **as** » is conveyed by both *kīma* (v. 5) and *kī* (v. 6); « **without** » by *ša lā* (v. 35) and the rare word *ela* (v. 36). And the pronouns *mannāma* (v. 30), *ayyū* (v. 32, 36) and *mannu* (v. 35) seem to be used as equivalents of each other, with the meaning « **any(one)** ».

It is further worth noting that, when a word *is* repeated, there is usually a significant interval between the two attestations. Whereas, when a given concept needs to be referred to in nearby verses, different words are used. For example, the *zamar* « **immediately** » of verse 18 also appears in verse 38. But in the nearby verse 17, *ana surri* is used instead. Likewise, though the *uggatu* « **rage** » of verse 5 appears also in the faraway verse 37, in the nearby verse 7 two other words for « **rage** » appear. Ignoring the repetition of entire verses (11 and 12), the same applies to *qātu* « **hand** » in verses 9 and 33: the nearby verse 10 expresses « **hand** » with *rittu*.

6.5 Summary

As we noted, it cannot be proven whether the variability in structures and vocabulary is a tribute to the complexity of the character of Marduk. But even if this was not the original intention, it seems likely that it would have occurred to somebody, sometime, and informed their appreciation of the hymn.

34. It is also worth pointing to the occurrence of *-ma* in verses 23 and 25. One might wonder whether the primary function of the particle here is not so much to do something (whatever that might be) *within* the verses, as to reinforce the symmetry *between* them. The same usage might apply to verses 15-16: *ikkelemmū-ma inessū lamassu u šedulippallas-ma ana ša iskipušu ilšu isaḫḫuršu*; and also to verses 18-19: *ikkariṭ-ma zamar itār alittuš/iddud-ma rīmāniš uganna*. If so, this is a hitherto unrecognised usage of *-ma*, which deserves investigation in a wider body of sources.

35. Ignoring the instances which arise from repetition of a verse, we have the following: *arnu* 'sin' (v. 24; v. 40), *lamādu* 'learn' (vv. 32, 39), *uggatu* 'rage' (vv. 5, 37), *zamar* 'immediately' (vv. 18, 28).

36. In several cases, perhaps most glaringly *mītu* and *namtaru* (both meaning « **dead person** »), one can detect the principle identified by Foster (2009: 140) that « according to poetic convention, rarer synonyms are used after more common ones ».

7. THE LAST COUPLET

We come, finally, to the idea of persuasion: in our analysis, the hymn aims to persuade two different groups of Marduk's essential mercy and goodness. First, it wants to bring comfort to its human audience and recitants,³⁷ by persuading them that Marduk's wrath is only ever transient, and that he will always have mercy on them in the end. The ostensible author actually says as much in the final stanza:

Ludlul I 39

lušalmid-ma ništ qitruba gumālšin

I will teach the people that their pardon is nearing.

Like *Ludlul* in its entirety, the hymn thus brings sufferers a message of comfort and hope.³⁸

Secondly, we suggested above that the hymn serves as a reminder to Marduk himself of his true nature, so that the very act of reciting it would be beneficial. This sheds new light on verse 40, where we learn that Marduk's *ḥissatu damiqtu* will take away the people's punishment or sin (or some other negative word):

Ludlul I, 40:

ḥissassu damiqtu [arna]šina litbal

so that his goodly mention carry away their [sin].

Perhaps *ḥissassu damiqtu*, which literally means something like « his good remembrance », refers to the hymn itself. It would then be closing with an elegant instance of self-reference.

8. CONCLUSIONS

In a note to his posthumous edition of *Enūma eliš*, Wilfred Lambert gave this summary of the “traditional Sumer-Babylonian answer” to the problem of undeserved suffering: “though a deity may inflict what seems to be unjustified punishment on a devotee, in time the mood passes and the suffering ceases” (2013: 480). In such an analysis, Mesopotamians are the passive victims of gods' whims, possessing little sense of control over their own fortunes and, beyond a general expectation that gods' moods will eventually change, little reason for hope that present crises will pass. Which sources conform to this view of the human condition needs to be established on a case-by-case basis. The opening hymn in *Ludlul* is one composition that defies the model articulated by Lambert.

The hymn gives us an encouraging portrait of Marduk's character: he may seem to alternate schizophrenically between rage and compassion, but his swings in mood are neither equal nor random. Rather, the cornerstone of the hymn's doctrine is that Marduk's true nature, the one he will always go back to, is kindly. Though he grows fiercely angry, he can always be trusted to calm down, repair the wounds he has inflicted,³⁹ and do good things by his human worshippers.

The hymn's doctrine –separate investigations would be necessary to establish how widespread it was in Marduk theology– is encapsulated in the very first verse, which proclaims Marduk as a relenting god (*ilu muštālu*). In the light of this, his alternations between anger and mercy in the ensuing verses can be understood as returns to his true character following temporary bouts of rage, which is why mercy always follows wrath (and not vice-versa). This picture of his essential nature is further reinforced by associating mercy with his higher/inner faculties, and relegating rage to his lesser/outer extremities.

That the general principle is conveyed by implicit means rather than explicit statements,⁴⁰ as often in Mesopotamian writings, does not weaken it. Therefore, the hymn guards against the presumption that Marduk is

37. On this function of praise and other elements in Akkadian prayers see Zgoll (2003: 269-271).

38. Moran (2002: 191) observes that many Babylonian prayers conclude with a promise to the gods to sing their praises if the suppliant is healed, and points out that the *Ludlul* hymn is « the fulfilment of such a promise ».

39. Indeed, one could suppose that some or all of the references to Marduk's kindly actions in the hymn should specifically be understood to refer to those he harmed while angry. The expectation of his future kindness would make his wrath all the more bearable.

40. A different prayer to Marduk includes the phrase *ša arhiš napšuru bašū ittišu* (Lambert 1959: 56, vv. 30 and 32). The translations of CAD (“whose nature it is to relent quickly”) and Lambert (“whose character is to relent quickly”) present this as an explicit characterisation of Marduk's nature, but this is not so. The super-literal translation is “together with whom there exists relenting quickly”, and if one wanted to translate loosely and use a word such as “nature” or “character”, absent from the Akkadian, it would be better done by saying “in whose nature it is to relent quickly”.

completely knowable by proclaiming his incomprehensibility in quatrain eight. The hymn's formal complexity (virtuosic parallelism, eschewal of repeated lexemes) may also be a tribute to the god's unfathomability of character.

The hymn's conception of Marduk as an essentially merciful and compassionate god is, of course, comforting to those within the reach of his scourge. Though they may suffer his wrath, they can confidently expect it to pass (and to pass soon), making it more easily bearable and less terrifyingly random. Marduk *will* relent, and when he returns to his true self, all will be well. In the light of the hymn, the problem of suffering becomes less acute.

Moreover, the hymn gives the suppliant an encouraging element of agency: reciting the hymn will remind the irate Marduk of his merciful character, diplomatically encouraging him to return to the merciful state which is his true nature. Through rhetorical sleight of hand, statements that Marduk cannot be compelled alert the audience to the possibility that, if he cannot be compelled, he can at least be coaxed and cajoled. Reciting the hymn will achieve precisely that.⁴¹

Thus, if we read between the lines, it transpires that the hymn has a lot to say about Marduk's character, the problem of suffering, and the hymn's own role vis-à-vis the two. In ingenuity, intricacy, detail and coherence, the hymn emerges as one of the most systematic expositions of theological matters which we have from Ancient Mesopotamia.

APPENDIX: TRANSLATION OF THE HYMN

- 1 I will praise the lord of wisdom, the relenting god:
- 2 he is angry by night, (but then) he is calm by day.
- 3 Marduk, the lord of wisdom, the relenting god
- 4 he is angry at night, (but then) he is calm by day.
- 5 Though he *is surrounded by* (or: *enjoys?*) his fury like a storm,
- 6 (afterwards) his sufflation is as pleasant as a morning breeze.
- 7 His rage is irresistible, a flood is his fury,
- 8 (but then) his stomach is kindly, relenting is his liver.
- 9 Though the heavens cannot bear the weight of his hands,
- 10 he rescues the dead with his gentle hands.
- 11 Marduk – though the heavens cannot bear the weight of his hands,
- 12 He rescues the dead with his gentle hands.
- 13 Though at his wrath graves are dug,
- 14 with his eye he raises the fallen one from disaster.
- 15 He stares angrily, and protective and guardian spirits withdraw,
- 16 (but then) he looks kindly, and the god returns to the one he rejected.
- 17 His heavy punishment is instantly terrible,
- 18 (but then) he becomes merciful, and immediately turns motherly.
- 19 He *looks sharp* and butts like a wild bull,
- 20 But (then) like a mother cow he solicitously turns back.
- 21 Stinging are his blows, they stab the body,
- 22 (but then) soothing are his bandages, they revive the corpse.
- 23 He speaks and *assigns guilt*,
- 24 (but then) on the day of his offering, sin and trespass are absolved.
- 25 He it is causes (one) to suffer demons and shivers,
- 26 (but then) by his incantation chills and tremors depart.
- 27 The one who magnifies the [devast]ation of Adad, the strike of Erra,
- 28 (but also) the one who (later) reconciles god and goddess enraged.
- 29 The lord espies everything in the heart of the gods,
- 30 none [among the god]s knows his way.
- 31 Marduk espies everything in the heart of the gods
- 32 (whereas) no god can learn his counsel.
- 33 Heavy as his hand is, his heart is clement,
- 34 enraged as his weapons are, his liver is life-giving.
- 35 Without his assent (lit. heart), who could soften his blow?
- 36 Without his permission (lit. liver), who could stop his hand?

41. If we are correct in our understanding of *hissatu damiqtu* “goodly mention” as referring to the hymn, it may be no accident that the expression is somewhat oblique. Upfront disclosure of how reciting the hymn is supposed to affect Marduk might lessen its efficacy.

- 37 I will praise his rage (because it always ends): though I ate mud like a fish,
 38 soon he favoured me, *as* he revived the dead.
 39 I will teach the people that their pardon is nearing,
 40 so that his goodly mention carry away their [sin].

In verse 10, *rit-tuš rab-ba-a-ti* can hardly be a stative phrase (« his hand is soft ») – both the final *i* and the plene *a* militate against this. We thus think it must be a locative dual. We suppose that the expected form *rittāšu* has become *rittūš* (or *rittūš?*) by analogy with forms such as *libbuš*. In other words, *rittūš* : *rittāšu* = *libbuš* : *libbašu*. As for *rabbāti*, this would be an extremely rare (unique?) instance of an adjective qualifying a noun in the locative. In so sophisticated a composition as *Ludlul*, we do not believe the rarity to impugn our suggestion. The variant spelling *rab-bat*, if singular, would arise from transmitters' misunderstandings of the rare (even artificial?) dual adjective. It is probably no coincidence that the adjective used here, *rabbu* « soft », is one of the very few which are used in the locative after substantivisation (*rabbun-ma* « softly », see GAG § 66b*/AHw 934b). Another locative (*īnuššu*, note the spelling *e-nu-uš-šu* on MS ff) occurs in verse 14: « with his eye he rescues the fallen one from destruction ».

In the couplets introduced by the subordinator *ša* (vv. 5-6, 9-10 ≈ 11-12, 13-14), it seems most expedient – as already recognised by Al-Rawi and George (1998: 194) – to take this in the concessive sense identified by George (2003: 794-795): “although”. A relative pronoun (“the one who ...”) would disrupt the syntax of the whole passage.

Concessive *ša* also fits v. 37, though the relative use (“I, who ate ...”) is also possible.
 The sense of *kī* in verse 38 remains problematic.

ADDENDUM

After this article was submitted (15th May 2014), an edition of and extensive commentary on *Ludlul* appeared in *Babylonian Poems of Pious Sufferers* by Takayoshi Oshima, who in several cases reached the same conclusions as us (*uganna* in v. 19; *mādu šD* in v. 27). It was possible to take account of Oshima's work at proof stage, in October 2015. We follow it in reading *iširtu* “offering” in v. 24, and in the placement of square brackets in v. 40. Readers can refer to Oshima's work for many references to Marduk theology in other sources.

Another publication which appeared after submission is Mayer (2014)'s important review of Annus & Lenzi (2010), which *inter alia* (his p. 276) anticipates our reading *īnuššu* “with his eye” (noting that the infinitive of *ēnu* “to eye” is a possibility too). Mayer (p. 277) further comments on the placement of square brackets in line 40, and questions the restoration *riḫiṣti* in line 27.

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ABSTRACT

The Babylonian poem *ludlul bēl nēmeqi* begins with a “hymn” to the god Marduk which includes puzzlingly discordant praises of his wrath and his mercy, giving him a somewhat “schizophrenic” character. We argue that, in fact, the hymn proclaims Marduk’s true nature to be kind and good, and that this message is delivered and nuanced through elaborate structural arrangements and lexical usage. The hymn is, in its way, a work of systematic theology which explores relations between the problem of suffering and the character of the god responsible for it.

RÉSUMÉ

Le poème babylonien *ludlul bēl nēmeqi* commence avec un “hymne” au dieu Marduk, qui inclut d’une façon paradoxale l’éloge de la colère du dieu et de sa miséricorde, en lui donnant un caractère “schizophrénique”. Selon notre interprétation, l’hymne proclame en fait que la vraie nature du dieu est d’être bienveillant et miséricordieux. Ce message est transmis par des stratégies structurelles élaborées et des usages lexicaux sophistiqués. À sa façon, cet hymne est une œuvre de théologie systématique qui explore les relations entre le problème de la souffrance et le caractère du dieu qui la cause.

Michela Piccin - La’ Sapienza University, Rome.
michela.piccin@yahoo.com

Martin Worthington
Lecturer in Assyriology, University of Cambridge - Division of Archaeology
Downing St - Cambridge - CB2 3DZ