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A Transtextual View on the "Underworld Vision of an Assyrian Prince"

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Mesopotamian Medicine and Magic

Studies in Honor of Markham J. Geller

Edited by

Strahil V. Panayotov
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with the assistance of

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CHAPTER 5

A Transtextual View on the "Underworld Vision of an Assyrian Prince"

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One of the most interesting pieces of Neo-Assyrian literature is the tablet VAT 10057, the so-called "Underworld Vision of an Assyrian Prince" (henceforth UWV).[1] Though clearly rooted in the age-old tradition of netherworld travels in Mesopotamian literature,[2] the UWV is one of the most innovative "Trans-Texts" of the 1st millennium Assyrian scribal culture.[3] It transcends the boundaries of texts commonly understood by modern researchers as "literature"[4] (in the broader sense of *belles lettres*) by utilizing the format and content

1 Previous editions and translations of the text have been offered by Ebeling 1931, 5–9; von Soden 1936 (with inferior photos of the tablet); see also Heidel 1963, 132–136; Speiser 1950, 109–110; Labat 1970, 94–97; Foster 2005, 832–839. The latest published edition is that of Livingstone 1989, 68–76 (*SAA* 3 32); a more recent edition can be found in the 2010 MA thesis of Nele Diekmann (2010, 70–88; including autograph). Another autograph is available in the dissertation of Anmar Abdulillah Fadhil (2012). For this paper I used Fadhil's autograph of the tablet beside some photos of VAT 10057 which I could take in the Vorderasiatisches Museum Berlin. I would like to thank Prof. Joachim Marzahn for his permission to examine and photograph the tablet.

2 Sanders 2009, 151–152. It is not feasible to discuss here all possible transtextual connections especially to 1st millennium texts like Ištar's Descent and Nergal & Ereškigal, but significant text-text-connections will be indicated whenever necessary.

3 The poetologic terminology used in this paper is based on the "Theory of Transtextuality" by Gérard Genette (1997a, 1–7): Transtextuality is in essence (p. 1) "[…] all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts." The transtextual discourse itself consists of five (sub-)types, namely intertextualtity, paratextuality, metatextuality, hypertextuality and architextuality. Genette defines the important fourth type of Hypertextuality in turn as follows (p. 5): "By hypertextuality I mean any relationship uniting a text B (which I call the *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (which I call the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary" and the hypertext itself as (p. 7) "[…] any text derived from a previous text either through a simple transformation, which I simply call from now on *transformation*, or through indirect transformation, which I shall label *imitation*." Cf. also Genette 1997a, 7–30. On architextuality see Genette 1992, on paratextuality Genette 1997b.

4 As no discussion of what "literature" might be for any given literate society is intended here,

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of the so-called "Göttertypentext" (henceforth GTT)[5] thereby becoming somewhat different than thematically similar pieces like *ludlul bēl nēmeqi*. One should note that a transtextual poetic behaviour comparable to that of the UWV is only rarely seen in other cuneiform cultures.[6] By integrating the format of the GTT into the UVW's text, the latter's composer wove an "epistemic" or maybe even "philosophical" discourse into a narrative.[7] In the following, I want to discuss some aspects of a particular passage of that narrative, i.e. UWV: rev. 2–10. While that section surely was not the only reason for creating the text, it can be viewed as a very elegant and special micro-statement embedded in its bigger narrative framework. The main goal of the passage under discussion is to show that it is generally possible to recognize and describe ontological phenomena. More specifically, it deals with the identification of Death as a mentally graspable and describable discourse. It is my distinct pleasure to gratefully dedicate this study to my dear teacher and doctoral advisor Mark Geller, whose never-ending quest for knowledge inspires his students each day anew. Thank you, Mark, for all your kindness, understanding and especially your patience.

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the reader interested in literature theory is invited to have a look at the essay-collections Todorov 1995 and Kimmich, Renner and Stiegler 2003; cf. also the respective lemmata in Nünning 2001 with further reading.

5 Von Soden 1936, 3; see also Sanders 2009, 156–158 and 161; Diekmann 2010, 39–41.

6 Some other instances of an integration of "Göttertypentext"-like passages into a narrative framework can be found, e.g. in Gudea Cyl. A: v 13–16 (Livingstone 2007, 93) and Gilg. 7: 165–171.

7 A classic modern example of an epistemic/scientific debate interwoven into a narrative is the well-known discussion on the nature of the whale in Herman Melville's "Moby-Dick". One finds there an evaluating summary of the then current natural history of marine mammals given in the course of the narrative. This discussion is intradiegetically triggered, but does not impact the course of the narrative greatly and clearly has an extradiegetic addressee, namely the reader of the novel. Similar poetics can also be found in most of the novels by Jules Verne, e.g. in "20 000 Leagues under the Sea", "From the Earth to the Moon", "Trip around the Moon", "The Mysterious Island", "Journey to the Center of the Earth" and others.

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The "Underworld Vision of an Assyrian Prince"—A Short Summary of the Text

Since the publication of the still largely reliable[8] edition of VAT 10057 by Wolfram von Soden,[9] the UWV was understood for quite some time as a piece of Neo-Assyrian "literary propaganda".[10] Unfortunately, no other texts comparable to the UWV from ancient Mesopotamia are known, which makes a generic debate of it quite complicated.[11] Yet the poetic make-up of the UWV is, at first glance, identifiable as something special and uncommon in Neo-Assyrian literature.[12] Seth Sanders, building on earlier works by Helge Kvanvig, proposed an understanding of the UWV as the literary "archetype" of an emerging ANE genre of "prophetic underworld visions", whose mode of communication he identified to be a "religious" one.[13] While one can agree with Sanders' understanding of the UWV as a text concerned with what we would nowadays deem "religious matters" presented in the corresponding language, one should also note that such an understanding of the UWV is only one aspect of its interpretation.[14] For instance, Sanders' assumptions are not adequately applicable to a description of the poetics of rev. ls. 2–10 of the text. Concerning these poetics, one should rather speak of a "cognitively oriented" mode of communication or an "epistemic" register of this part of the UWV, though with such a proposition one is likely to perpetuate the implicit dichotomy of religious vs. non-religious qualifications. Among the first things that a participant of Mark's classes on Babylonian medicine learns is that in Ancient Mesopotamia "religious" and "non-religious" discourses were in general much more entangled with and permeating each other than they are today, and certainly this counts for the UWV as well.[15] It is therefore more useful to first study the underlying poetics of rev.

8 Fadhil 2012, 170.

9 Von Soden 1936, 6–7.

10 On the historical background and subsequent scholarly debate of that proposition see Sanders 2009, 153–156 and 161; cf. Diekmann 2010, 16–21.

11 Cf. Sanders 2009, 156.

12 Sanders 2009, 151–153.

13 Sanders 2009, 161.

14 When Sanders mentions a "religious" mode of communication of the UWV, one is tempted to open a can of worms on the issue of what a "religious" mode truly might be—or on the follow-up question if such a distinctive labeling is not simply an artefact of modern scholarly discourse.

15 That same notion is also upheld by Livingstone (2007, 102–103) and Pongratz-Leisten (2014, 527–529).

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2–10 of the UWV before labeling this multilayered and multifacetted text as "propagandistic", "religious" or otherwise.

The tablet VAT 10057 itself is badly preserved on the obverse, so that only a handful of stringent elements of the story can be worked out. The protagonist of the text, a certain character named Kummay,[16] was most likely an Assyrian prince, or at least belonged to the larger household of the king (cf. rev. 13', 26 and 32). However, Kummay seems to have occupied a higher position in the Neo-Assyrian administration, a function which granted him direct access to the divinatory practices carried out at the Assyrian court and contact with the "wise/learned[17] bookkeepers" (*šassukkū enqūtu*), also called the "secretkeepers" of the ruling class (*nāṣir pirišti bēlī-šun*); obv. 2–3. It looks as if Kummay was concerned with the appointments of magnates and provincial governors (obv. 4). Maybe overwhelmed by the weight of his duties he became unreasonable and "forgot the godly splendors" (obv. 6), so that "in the weariness of his heart, that was clothed in fear, he became negligent although in his heart he planned to do good" (obv. 7). Before the text becomes largely illegible, we learn that Kummay amassed treasures in his storehouses like "tar and bitumen that comes up from the ground" (obv. 8–11).[18] The following fragmentary passages indicate that Kummay always tried to be full of hope but one day got overwhelmed by a series of sudden unfortunate events. (obv. 14–16). He wanders the streets of his town alone and crying when the first thoughts about the underworld occur to him—yet those were seemingly not destined for him by the gods (obv. 17–23).[19] Planning to descend to the netherworld,[20] Kummay

16 On the name cf. Sanders 2009, 156–157 with fns. 16–17 as well as the entry "Kummāiu" in *PNA* 2/1, 636–637; regarding the transcription of the PN I follow Sanders 2009 (ibid.). On the date of composition of the UWV and question of Kummay's identity see Sanders 2009, 159–165; cf. on the same issues also Diekmann 2010, 16–21; von Soden 1936, 7–8; Livingstone 1989, xxviii, and Foster 2005, 832–833; cf. Zgoll 2006, 239–240 and 328.

17 Cf. Diekmann 2010, 70 and 79–80.

18 The motif of (black) pitch, tar or bitumen occurs twice more in the text (obv. 9, rev. 10), as well as further plain or metaphorical references to other geo-materials like dust and clay (obv. 10, rev. 31). This is clearly connected to the general chtonic setting of the text. For the general significance of clay and ceramic metaphors and similes in ancient Mesopotamia see Foster 2010 with further literature.

19 This passage is strongly reminiscent of *ludlul bēl nēmeqi* and, to a lesser extent, the "Babylonian Theodicy". Cf. for example Kummay's state as narrated on the obv. of UWV with the description of Šubši-mešre-Šakkan's condition in the first two tablets of *ludlul*. On the transtextual aspects of *ludlul* see Pongratz-Leisten 2010.

20 On this topos as a metaphor for a sort of a death prediction in Udug-ḫul see Sanders 2009, 157 fn. 18 with further literature.

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enters a temple. Here he ritually prepares for the induction of a dream vision by arranging censers as well as by some further (unfortunately lost) preliminary activities (obv. 27–29).[21] A first prayer of Kummay is (maybe deceitfully, cf. obv. 32 [*ina*ʔ *šap*]*tēʔ tušši*) answered by the underworld goddess Allatu, but the text is very fragmentary here (obv. 32–34). Finally, Ereškigal, the queen of the netherworld, appears to him in a dream (MÁŠ.GE$_6$ = *šuttu*). She first asks for his wishes, but then refuses to answer him because in his request Kummay had ignored Šamaš, the god of justice, and turned directly to her instead (obv. 35–36). Kummay awakens, crying like a dove, and curses his dream (obv. 37). Once more he prays to Ereškigal and her spouse Nergal, again asking them to "open up the face of the secret" for him (obv. 38–40). This little narrative cliffhanger concludes the obverse, the reverse of the tablet is much better preserved.[22]

On the reverse the narrative is taken up by a description of how Kummay fell asleep again. He dreams once more, but *in* that dream he now receives a "night vision" (*tabrīt mūši*).[23] Pongratz-Leisten, Zgoll and Sanders have right-

21 One should be careful not to mingle Kummay's first and second attempt to induce a dream vision into one event, as it has happened in Sanders 2009, 157. As far as one can infer from the text, the preparations of the second attempt consisted only of a single prayer to Ereškigal and Nergal which remains somewhat cryptic due to the condition of the tablet. Note Zgoll 2006, 328, who suggests in a comparative overview on weeping as a means of dream induction that Kummay's crying in obv. 37 should also be counted as a kind of ritualistic paraphernalia.

22 It is pivotal to note that the line count for the obverse has never been right. There is an additional line (here preliminarily called *23) between obv. 23 and 24, that has been wrongly mixed up with obv. 23 in previous editions (Livingstone 1989, 70 and von Soden 1936, 14; also see Foster 2005, 834). The clue lies in counting the preserved beginnings and ends of lines from obv. 23 onward. It can be noticed that there are 18 lines remaining, and not only 17 as previously assumed. Due to this, there must be another line between lines obv. 23 and obv. 24, whose beginning is lost and that therefore was not recognized as a line of its own. A corrected transliteration of the lines in question and the resulting re-arrangement of the latter halves of the remaining lines of the obverse lead to the following, still preliminary reading: [23] [...]-*ú-ti i-na* KI-*tim šá* ˹*la*˺ [.....]-*kab-ti ù ši-pir* [*ni*]-*kil-ti it-ti nam-ṣa-ri-šú ir*-X-[..... *ikʔ*]-*tal-du ka-ri*-[...] [*23+1=24] **[...] *qé-re-et* ˹LUGAL˺ʔ ˹*ma*˺-*ka-le-e* GAL^{MEŠ} *nap-ḫar* [...] DU TUKU / UR** [*25] [...]-˹*ú*˺-*šú* ḪUL^{MEŠ} UGU DINGIR(-)˹X˺(-) [.....] X X-*ta la ši-im-ti-šú* É [...] X X X [..... *ta-ma*]*r-ti* [*26] [...].

23 I translate and emend rev. 1 of UWV as: "[Kum]may lay down to sleep and saw a night-vision in his dream: T[o the netherworld], the House [of ...] I was taken as captive. I beheld his˺ terrifying splendour [...]." I do not follow the option chosen by Livingstone (1989, 71) who disconnects the words "in his dream" from the preceding sentence and treats them as a free floating introductory phrase introducing Kummay's report. The different translation

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fully stressed the authoritative meaning of such a "night vision" (MÁŠ.GE$_6$ = *tabrīt mūši*) in contrast to the more "ordinary", usually non-revelatory dream (*šuttu*).[24] A "night vision" was commonly understood as a true and reliable message from the gods. Note also that the text's voice changes from 3rd to 1st person for the duration of Kummay's "night vision". This poetic move creates an atmosphere of "authenticity", for it somehow suggests that a real dream vision has been incorporated into the text of the UWV. Yet, such a suspicion remains unprovable, and the change in voice might only be due to a specific poetic strategy of the author of the UWV to enhance the suspense of the passage *without* actually having an account of a thematically similar dream-vision at hand. However, should there have been some hypotextual reality behind that night vision of Kummay, any supposed original oral or written report obviously was

proposed here can be justified by other Neo-Assyrian occurrences of *tabrīt mūši* listed in Butler 1998, 31, which are all taking place WITHIN a *šuttu*. On the same matter see also the following footnote.

24 See Oppenheim 1956; Butler 1998; Pongratz-Leisten 1999, 102; Sanders 2009, 158 with fn. 20; Zgoll 2006, 69–70; see also Brown 2006, 102–103. Both Oppenheim (1956, 201 and 225) and Butler (1998, 31–32) are taking the expression *tabrīt mūši* as a synonym for *šuttu*, a seemingly reasonable conclusion judging from *malku* = *šarru* 3: 53–55 (as cited by Butler 1998, 32), which gives at least three equations for *šuttu* (*tabrīt mūši, madrû, munāmātum*/*munattu*). Yet, the UWV makes it clear, at least in my point of view, that the *tabrīt mūši* differs from a *šuttu*. First of all, the *tabrīt mūši* mentioned there is received by Kummay IN a *šuttu*. The same applies to the other examples cited by Butler (1998, 31), where the *tabrīt mūši* is always received WITHIN a *šuttu*. Secondly, Kummay sees things in that *tabrīt mūši* that he has not seen in his earlier *šuttu*. While the first *šuttu* admittedly has brought him into contact with a supernatural entity (Allatum), his desire to see the netherworld crudely comes true only in the *tabrīt mūši* of his second *šuttu*. And lastly, all presently known NA references to *tabrīt mūši* (cf. Butler 1998, 31) are either connected to a goddess (Ištar, Allatum, Ereškigal; yet in the UWV there is an additional involvement of a male god, namely Nergal), a prayer to one (Ištar; in the UWV to Allatum and then Ereškigal plus again Nergal), or both, while a plain *šuttu* was not depending on any such preparations. Therefore, one might consider that while *malku* = *šarru* 3: 53 suggests on the surface a synonymity between *šuttu* and *tabrīt mūši*, it seems more likely that one should understand that entry more along the lines of *tabrīt mūši* = (a [special] type of) a *šuttu*, as indicated by the two following lines *malku* = *šarru* 3: 54–55. From the scanty evidence for *tabrīt mūši* it seems quite likely that a *tabrīt mūši* was perceived as a somewhat more significant divinatory event within a dream (or as a special kind of divinatory dream involving some divine action), which got subsumed in *malku* = *šarru* under the category *šuttu* in the same way as one might label "The Lord of the Rings", "My first ABC" and the Bible as "books".

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worked over heavily by the author of the UWV, as one can deduce, for example, from the high degree of transtextual density of the parts of the text narrated in the 1st person.[25]

At the beginning of his "night vision" Kummay finds himself captive in the netherworld, where he beholds a terrifying glamour (rev. 1). Then he sees and describes 16 of the underworld's inhabitants (rev. 2–10), the last entity being portrayed in rev. 10 as separated from the others by an interposed total of "15 gods [...] present" in the preceding line. This crucial passage will be discussed in thorough detail in the next section of this paper. What follows then was labelled as a "theophanic" scene by Sanders: Kummay beholds the god Nergal sitting on his throne, armed with maces, lightnings flashing around him and the Anunnaki kneeling to his right and left.[26] The netherworld is full of ghostly silence when Nergal grasps Kummay at the forelock and pulls him near to his throne. Kummay is overwhelmed by Nergal's divine splendour and kisses his feet (rev. 11–15). Nonetheless, Nergal wants to kill Kummay but before carrying out his plan he is placated by the more benevolent god Išum (rev. 16–17).[27] Nergal then addresses Kummay and accuses him of having insulted his beloved wife Ereškigal. As a penalty he condemns Kummay to eternal sleeplessness due to constant sorrows, upheavals and violence against him (rev. 18–21).[28] Additionally, Nergal shows Kummay the body of his royal progenitor (*zārû-ka*, "your begetter") which lies buried in the netherworld. This dead king is sometimes regarded as Sennacherib, for it is mentioned in the same passage that he received the divine command to build the *akītu*-house (rev. 22–28).[29] The text ends with Kummay's awakening (here the voice changes again to the 3rd person), after which he runs out to the streets screaming, and in pains praises Nergal and Ereškigal before the population of the land of Assur (rev. 29–32). In the course of this, very exquisite poetic imagery is used to describe Kummay's distress in an almost Homeric manner,[30] including a simile of our now very terrified protagonist with a copulating, belching and farting young boar.[31]

25 See on that matter in general very convincingly Zgoll 2006, 20–22.

26 See Sanders 2009, 159 and 162.

27 Cf. Sanders 2009, 159.

28 Regarding those lines and Kummay's identification with an Assyrian prince by von Soden see the discussion by Diekmann 2010, 19–20.

29 See fn. 5 for literature.

30 Diekmann 2010, 41 quoting Bucelatti 1976, 66.

31 It is noteworthy that while the context of rev. 30 clearly suggests a reading of the sign IM as TU_{15} = "wind" (cf. Livingstone 1989, 76) an additional meaning of IM = "clay" is at least present due to the polyvalency of the logogram (on the inherent polyvalency of cuneiform

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In a narratively quite twisted, self-referential afterthought the scribe of *SAA* 3 32 states that he himself was personally very impressed by Kummay's story. He mentions his own former crime of receiving bribes, and attributes any future deed of his to the sole command of Nergal and Ereškigal. The text concludes with a report of the same scribe on how he then made his way to the royal residence, where he recited Kummay's tale to (inhabitants of) the palace "as his own release-ritual (*namburbi*)" (rev. 33–35).[32]

Some Aspects of the Transtextual Poetics of UWV Rev. 2–10

Although the UWV is admittedly a unique text with no existing comparable parallels, it still is dependent on a number of identifiable hypotexts, older texts which have been worked into it. While it is not feasible to provide one single designation for the whole of the UWV, one can at least label various allusions to other texts to a satisfying degree by using the theory of transtextuality as laid out by Genette 1997a.

a) *The Hypertextual Relation between UWV and GTT*

The main discussion of this paper does not aim at offering an over-arching conclusion with regard to the whole of the UWV, but is concerned only with one small subsection of the text, rev. 2–10. In this particular passage our protagonist Kummay describes the entities he sees in the netherworld on his way to Nergal's throne. As already noted by von Soden, those lines employ a specific structure whose content and syntactical organization is derived from the format of the GTT,[33] edited in 1953 by Franz Köcher.[34] The GTT describes the appearance of

signs in general see Maul 1999 and Pearce 2006). Both the motives of clay and wind are connected to a broader thematic complex revolving around the nothingness of humanity or the human condition, as can be deduced from various myths and epics. On the symbolism of clay see Foster 2010, 141–153; for wind as a motif of naught see Streck 1999, 91 and 101; for the latter cf. also Gilg. (Yale) 4: 8, the 1st millenium trope *ana šāri turru*, "to turn into wind = to annihilate", and the UWV itself, rev. 27.

32 For the most recent discussion of the audience of Neo-Assyrian royal narratives (both pictorial and textual) see Liverani 2014; Siddall 2013, 133–149 and Pongratz-Leisten 2013 with further reading.

33 Von Soden 1936, 3; also see Sanders 2009, 161; cf. Diekmann 2010, 39–41.

34 Köcher 1953. The GTT is not to be confused with the God Type Texts (cf. for those Livingstone 2007, 92–112 and Livingstone 1989, 92–102), which equalize body elements of one single divine entity, also organized from head to heel, in a seemingly "esoteric" manner with organic and anorganic materials, animals, plants, artifacts and other divine beings.

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divine statuettes in short nominal and stative sentences following a fairly standardized scheme of presentation that runs *de capite ad calcem*, from head to heel.[35] The exemplar we have at hand claims in the colophon to be a faithfully checked copy of an "original from Babylon" (GTT: vi 37–40), which allows us to deduce a traditionally significant and thereby somewhat authoritative status of the GTT at the time it was imported to Assyria.[36] Let us take a look at some examples (in translation):

1.a) *GTT: i 17′–25′; Illab*[...][37]

> 17′ The head is the head of a *kissugu*-fish. 18′ The face is that of a human being, the cheek is ad[orned]. 19′ The ears are that of a dog, his han[ds are that of a human being]. 20′ (??)[38] 21′ Around his neck a colar is placed. 22′ He is [carrying] a *š*[*ibi*]*rru*-weapon. 23′ Fro[m his] he[ad] to his waist (lit.: "belt") he is human. 24′ Fr[o]m [his] wais[t (lit.: "belt") to ... he is ...]. 25′ His name is Illab [...].

1.b) *GTT: i 51′–ii 10;* d*Ninurta*

> i 51′ The head (carries) a horn and a p[olos?]. 52′ The face is huma[n]. 53′ He has cheeks. 54′ He has a *parsasu*-headdress. 55′ His hands are human. 56′ [His right hand?] is lifte[d up?] on high [...].[39] 57′ The *meṭṭu*-weapon [...]. 58′ In h[is] left (hand) [...]. 59′ The lead-rope of [...] 60′ and he carries a [...]. 61′ With a (broad) sash [made of the leather?] of a lamb
>
> ---
>
> ii 1 [he is] covered [at his breast].[40] 2 He is [g]irded [with a belt]. 3 He is ["b]ound" with a [s]c[arf]?. 4 The [b]od[y] is human. 5 The garment [...] 6 His r[ight] foot is 7 exposed 6 f[ro]m his [...] onwards 7 and stands (firm).

35 Additionally, each entry is separated from the others by line dividers, although a description of one entity could transgress column limits (cf. example 1.b).

36 On that topic see Lenzi 2008a; Lenzi 2008b; Lenzi 2013; cf. Lambert 1957; Lambert 1962; Lambert 1996 [1963]; Elman 1975; Pongratz-Leisten 1999; Beaulieu 2007.

37 Köcher 1953, 60 argues that the lack of divine determinative before the name in GTT: i 25′ excludes an identification of this being with (d)*Il*(*l*)*abrat*.

38 GTT: i 20′ reads BUR.ZI.ŠÀ.ʳGÁLˀ.LA, yet the meaning of this expression remains unclear. Köcher 1953, 85 does not agree with Deimel's translation given in *ŠL* 349, 18, yet cannot offer any alternative.

39 Cf. Köcher 1953, 87.

40 On those two lines see Köcher 1953, 87–88.

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> [8] His left foot and (*both*) leg(*s*) is (*are*) exposed and [9] with his feet he is trampling on the An[zû]-bird. [10] His name is Ninurta.

1.c) *GTT: iv 23–33;* ^{d}*Šērum*

> [23] The turban of the head (is that) of [a …]. [24] He has the horns of a bovine. [25] The hair [26] is falling [25] from [his] h[orns] [26] down onto his back. [27] The face is human. [28] The cheek is adorned. [29] He has wings. [30] His front pair of feet are that of a bovine. [31] His body is (that of) a lion. [32] He is walking on four ⟨⟨pairs of⟩⟩ feet. [33] His name is Šērum.

For comparison we will now examine some descriptions of divine beings given in the UWV. The main difference is that while the GTT is commonly accepted as describing divine statuettes (cf. the colophon in vi 37), the UWV uses the same style to describe entities seen in a dream. That means that on the one hand it lacks the immediate material *signifié* of the GTT, but on the other hand it introduces an eye-witness *signifiant* who (allegedly) based his descriptions on personal experience (UWV: rev. 2, *āmur*, "I saw"). Nonetheless, it is safe to say that both the GTT and the UWV endeavour to get a grasp of aspects of a divine appearance (and thereby of the respective divine qualities) by employing a similar descriptive scheme, as can be seen in the following examples:[41]

2.a) *UWV: rev. 4;* ^{d}ALAD.ḪUL *and* ^{d}*Alluḫappu*

> The Evil Genius had a human head and hands, was crowned with a tiara and had the hands of an eagle / a "lametation bird".[42] With the left foot he was trampling on a crocodile. *Alluḫappu* had the head of a lion, his four ⟨⟨pairs of⟩⟩ hands and feet were hum[an].

2.b) *UWV: rev. 5;* SAG.ḪUL.ḪA.ZA (*"Upholder of Evil"*) *and* ^{d}*Ḫumuṭ-tabal* (*"Take away quickly!"*)

> The Upholder of Evil had the head of a bird. His wings were spread out and he flew here and there. His hands and feet were human. ^{d}*Ḫumuṭ-tabal*, the ferryman of the netherworld, had the head of the Anzû-bird, his four ⟨⟨pairs of⟩⟩ hands and fe[et were …].

41 Translations follow Livingstone 1989, 71–72.

42 Cf. Livingstone 1986, 71, footnote commentary to rev. 4.

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2.c) UWV: rev. 7; ^{d}*Māmītu,* ^{d}*Nedu (*^{d}*Pītu) and mimma lemnu (“Total Evil”)*

> The (deified) Oath had the head of a goat. His hands and feet were human. Nedu, the porter of the netherworld, had the head of a lion. His hands were human. His feet were those of a bird. Total Evil had 2 heads. One was the head of a lion, the second was the head of a [...].

As noted before, the UWV employs a textual scheme that appears to be an abbreviated and partially inverted version of the one used in the GTT.[43] While the latter offers more descriptive points and sometimes even goes into minute detail, the UWV just describes head, hands and feet (possibly plus one or two additional features) of an entity seen in a dream. Further, while the GTT gives a being's name only after the description of its appearance, the UWV does so first, and then proceeds to the description of the entity. Using Gérard Genette's theory of transtextuality, one can understand this part of the UWV as a hypertext to the GTT, more precisely as a transposition of it (same macro-content, but different structure),[44] which was created by the poetic means of translongating, here: reductive clearance,[45] a rearrangement of the hypotext's structure,[46] a transstylization by employment of the respective idiolect[47] and punctual additions[48] to the imported features (cf. the addition of *āmur* "I saw" in rev. 2).

b) ***The Intertextual Connections to the Epic of Gilgameš***

Besides the GTT, there are plenty more hypotexts for the UWV.[49] I want to focus on just one of these, the Epic of Gilgameš. For instance, one minor transtextual connection concerns the *šabbiṭu*, a scepter-like weapon wielded by Nergal in UWV: rev. 15. Such a *šabbiṭu* occurs only twice more in the cuneiform literature we know today, in Gilg. 12: 19 and 39.[50] A general, quite obvious thematic con-

43 See fn. 16 for literature.

44 See Genette 1997a, 9–47 for a definition and types of textual translongations.

45 Genette 1997a, 313–318.

46 Genette 1997a, 98; cf. on that also Hurowitz 2009, 133–135 (introducing the term "Zeidel-Prinzip" for a chiastic rearrangement of a hypotext into a hypertext).

47 Genette 1997a, 103–111 and 309–313.

48 Genette 1997a, 353–358.

49 Besides the already mentioned pieces *ludlul bēl nēmeqi* and the Babylonian Theodicy one can find minor transtextual connections with Assyrian royal inscriptions (e.g. UWV: rev. 10 and Esh. 1019: 22–23), though this might in most cases be due to a shared "open pictorial language" (on the latter see Stierle 1985), or a shared idiolect, as can be seen in UWV: rev. 22–26, a passage clearly relying on the evolved idiolect of NA royal narratives.

50 Cf. Diekmann 2010, 85 (only a reference to one other occurrence of the *šabbiṭu*, given mis-

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gruity between the two texts is the shared concern of both narratives with the netherworld and with the phenomenon of Death.[51] Besides this broader thematic overlap, a transtextual analysis also shows that the Epic of Gilgameš is a direct hypotext for the UWV concerning that very aspect, i.e., Death. First of all, one should note the appearance of a strange figure with a specific status in (respectively, with specific connections to) the netherworld hierarchy in Gilg. 7: 165–188 and UWV: rev. 10.[52] In both instances, the figure under discussion appears in a dream (Gilg. 7: 165, a *šuttu*/*šunātu* and UWV: rev. 1, MÁŠ.GE$_6$ = *tabrīt mūši*).

takenly as Gilg. 12: 20). Both in the UWV and Gilg. 12, the *šabbiṭu* is part of a larger complex of "Crime and Punishment". In Gilg. 12: 19, Gilgameš advises Enkidu amongst other things not to carry a *šabbiṭu* in his hands while descending to the netherworld, yet in Gilg. 12: 39 we learn that Enkidu did not pay heed to any of the instructions given to him, and, beside various other transgressions, indeed took a *šabbiṭu* along with him while venturing down into the realm of the dead. All of this leads to Enkidu being prohibited to re-emerge from the netherworld. Enkidu and Kummay alike are transgressors of the netherworld's entry regulations, a crime that calls for severe disciplinary measures. In Enkidu's case, the *šabbiṭu* is involved in the initial transgression and thereby at least contributes to his punishment, while in the UWV the *šabbiṭu* is Nergal's instrument of choice for punishing that puny interloper Kummay. The 12th tablet of the Epic of Gilgameš was well known in Assyria by the time the UWV was presumably written, cf. for example Nabû-zuqup-kēna's copy of Gilg. 12 (see Frahm 1999; George 2003, 54; Frahm 2005). Following Frahm 1999 (passim) and Frahm 2005 (passim), the respective tablet was written on the 27th of Du'uzu (VI) 705 B.C., presumably very shortly after Nabû-zuqup-kēna had learned about the death of Sargon II on the battlefield in Anatolia. This scribal work of his also coincided with the "day of release" of the 1st millenium Dumuzi-festival celebrated from the 26th to the 29th of Du'uzu in Assyria and Babylonia. The copy itself might have served both ritualistic and divinatory needs, as it could well have been recited on that very festival, and at the same time might have helped Nabû-zuqup-kēna to learn about the status of Sargon's *eṭemmu* which could not enter the netherworld because of the king's body having been left on the battlefield unburied.

51 Cf. Gilg. 7–11(12).

52 I do not agree with the proposition of Streck (1999, 65, 130, 173–175 and 188) that this entity is the personification of Death (at least not for the UWV, where Death himself appears in anthropomorphic form in rev. 3). Although this very figure now under discussion does not perform any action at all in the UWV, its special status is made clear by the fact that its description is deliberately separated from those of the previously presented divine beings in rev. 2–9 by a preceding summarizing formula (^{9} [...] *In all*, 15 gods were present. I saw them and saluted (them) in prayer. ^{10} There was one man [...]). Additionally, the UWV's description of the entity in question is immediately followed by a description of Nergal on his throne. This fact might imply a further special connection between those two beings, but at least clearly hints again at a special status of the discussed entity.

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Gilg. 7: 168–185[53]

> [168] There was one man (*ištēn eṭlu*), his expression was grim (*ukkulu pānu-šu*). [169] His face was like that of an Anzû-bird (*ana ša anzê pānu-šu mašlu*). [170] His hands were the paws of a lion, his claws an eagle's talons. [171] … [172] I struck him, so he sprung back like a skipping rope, [173] he struck me and capsized me like a raft. [174] Like a wild bull he trampled over me, [175] poison he [*spattered over*][54] my body. [176–181] … [182] [He struck] me, he turned me into a dove, [183] he bound my arms like (the wings of) a bird, [184] to lead me captive to the house of darkness, the seat of Irkalla.

UWV: rev. 10[55]

> There was one man (*ištēn eṭlu*), his body black as pitch (*zumur-šu kīma ittê ṣalim*). His face was like that of an Anzû-bird (*ana ša anzî pānu-šu mašlu*). He was clad in red armor. In his left hand he carried a bow, in his right hand he wielded a sword. With his left f[oot (lit.: "pair of feet")] he [tr]am[pled on] a sna[ke].

UWV: rev. 10 clearly derives from Gilg. 7: 168–185.[56] The transtextual means employed are the usage of citation[57] (*ištēn eṭlu*) and allusions achieved by slight thematic (shared, but differently expressed detail of the motif of dark physical

53 Translation follows George 2003, 642–645.

54 Cf. Maul 2005, 106.

55 Translation follows Livingstone 1989, 72.

56 Sanders 2009, 158–159 with fn. 20. Yet, one has to be careful with his identification, as ingenious as it is, for hands and feet of this entity are described differently in both texts—while it has the paws of a lion and the talons of an eagle in Gilg. 7: 170, no such indication is given in UWV: rev. 10, where it is carrying a bow and a sword in his (supposedly human) hands. Also, what is "very dark" (without reference to a comparable phenomenon of darkness) in Gilg. 7 is only the face of the entity, while in the UWV its whole body is as black as bitumen (which, of course, might also be an intensification). Yet, one is tempted to interpret the description in Gilg. 7 in a more "moral" and non-referential context (cf. also *AHw* s.v. *ekēlu* G for the usage of this verb in emotional expressions), while UWV gives a much more descriptive, i.e. referential, account of the physical features of that being. Additionally, a (supposedly non-pejorative) descriptive comparison of a black colour of skin to bitumen can also be found in an inscription of Esarhaddon (Esh. 1019: 23), when Taharqa's family is described: [*šá*] *ki-ma šá-šú-ma* GIM ESIR *ṣal-mu* UZU^{MEŠ}-*šú*-[*nu* …], "[Who]se skin/flesh, like his, was as black as pitch […];" cf. Leichty 2001, 305.

57 On the intertextuality "citation" see Genette 1993, 10–11 with further readings.

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features of the *eṭlu* in hypo- and hypertext)[58] and "orthographic" or phonetic transformations (Gilg. 7: 169 *ana ša anzê* vs. UWV: rev. 10 *ana ša anzî*).[59] The two examples alone should suffice to conclude that the scribe of the UWV was well acquainted with the Epic of Gilgameš.

Yet, another transtextual connection between UWV and the Epic of Gilgameš is even more significant. As noted above, the main connection of the UWV with the Epic of Gilgameš is the shared theme of Death. In both texts, the protagonists struggle to understand more of the posthumous sphere of Death and the netherworld. While descriptions of the underworld are well attested in cuneiform literature, texts dealing with the nature of Death himself are rare. The Epic of Gilgameš offers both, a tour of the netherworld in Tablet 12, and a statement on the nature of Death in an explicit denial of a possibility of perceiving Death in any sensory or mental way,[60] as related to Gilgameš by Utnapištim in Tablet 10 of the Epic:[61]

Gilg. 10: 304–307 and 316–318[62]

> [304] No one sees Death, [305] no one sees the face [of Death], [306] no one [hears] the voice of Death: [307] (yet) savage Death is the one who hacks man down … [316] The abducted and the dead, how alike they are! [317] They cannot draw the picture of Death. [318] The dead do not greet man in the land (var.: Mortal man is imprisoned …).

The UWV is the other text which also deals with both of those topics. It offers yet one more description of the netherworld (UWV: rev. 1–28), and like the Epic of Gilgameš it has something significant and very different to say about Death.

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58 On the inter-/hypertextuality "allusion" and its various forms see Genette 1993, 10–11 and passim.

59 Due to the fact that Gilg. 7: 165–188 and UWV: rev. 10 have slightly different narrative settings (*šuttu*/*šunātu* vs. *tabrīt mūši*), one could also qualify this second hypertextual process more precisely as a "heterodiegetic transformation" (see Genette 1993, 403–423), achieved by a "(transstylizing) substitution" (cf. Genette 1993, 309–313 and 372–375).

60 Cf. Streck 1999, 131–132 with further reading.

61 According to Maul 2005, 108 it might be possible that Death is either metaphorically or literally acting in Gilg. 7: 261 by laying down Enkidu on his own death-bed; but cf. differently George 2003, 647 and 852 (with reference to MB Gilg. Megiddo: rev. 11′). In any case, there is no explicit description of Death in the Epic, although Maul's reading of Gilg. 7: 261 would ultimately suggest an underlying common, maybe anthropomorphic notion of Death.

62 Translation follows George 2003, 696–697 with fn. 17.

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In order to elucidate the latter point, we have to go back to the entities seen by Kummay on his way to Nergal's throne. Among them is Death whose description is given in the authoritative format of the GTT:

UWV: rev. 3[63]

> [...] Dea[th] had the head of a *mušḫuššu*-dragon. His hands were human, his ⌜feet⌝ (were those of a) ⌜X⌝ [...].[64]

While Utnapištim claims a general impossibility to describe Death as a key condition of humanity, the author of the UWV has transgressed that statement in quite a laconic and sober way. With his description of Death in the epistemic descriptive format known from the "Göttertypentext", he takes up a clear counter-position to the Gilgameš Epic, cleverly blending both hypotexts together in a very elegant way.[65]

Comparative Interpretation

The hypotextual constellation of the UWV clearly points to a "narrative representation of knowledge". As curious as it may sound, the poetic set-up of this remarkable text can therefore be compared to the poetics of modern science fiction literature (henceforth SF).[66] In the last part of this paper I want to focus

63 Translation follows Livingstone 1989, 71.

64 There is another, older text which describes body parts of Death, that is Udug-ḫul 4: 125′: šu úš-a-kam gìri úš-a-kam umbin ḫu-rí-in^{mušen}-ka / *qa-at mu-ú-tu*$_4$ *še-*[*e*]*-pi mu-ú-tú* [*ṣu-pur ú-ri-in-ni*], "The hand and the feet of Death are an eagle's talons;" cf. Geller 2016, 155.

65 As we have already seen, the UWV has alluded to the Epic of Gilgameš before (even twice), so there are no grounds to claim that the Epic did not influence the description of Death in the UWV. The GTT still are the dominant hypotext for UWV: rev. 3, but with the double allusion to the Epic of Gilgameš earlier in the text it is clear that the Epic must almost inadvertently be considered as an (at least thematically) equally important hypotext. The Epic delivered the hypertextual topic, which in turn was contaminated by the author of the UWV with the format of the more dominant hypotext of the GTT, creating a so-called "Single-Text-Contamination" (see Genette 1993, 359–360).

66 Many attempts to define modern Science Fiction (SF) have been undertaken, yet most of them are genre-oriented and see modern science fiction as bound to a specific Western, post 16th/17th and 18th/19th century development of worldview (cf. Roberts 2007, 1–20; Milner 2012). Roberts (2007) understands modern science fiction in general as "distinct from theology, being natural and material where the latter is supernatural and spiritual".

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specifically on that point by utilizing some aspects of modern cultural theories regarding Science Fiction as a literary genre. Of course, the UWV is not Science Fiction in the modern sense of spaceships, aliens and Captain Kirk.[67] Yet, as will be discussed below, the poetic mechanics of UWV: rev. 1–10 resembles those of modern SF narratives to a significant degree.[68]

According to Darko Suvin, a (modern) science fiction narrative is "a fiction in which the SF element or aspect, the *novum* (something "new"), is hegemonic, that is, so central and significant that it determines the whole narrative logic—or at least the overriding narrative logic—regardless of any impurities that might be present."[69] Furthermore, SF presents its *novum* embedded in an *imaginative narrative framework*[70] using *language-codes known and understandable* to the audience.[71] Suvin defines *novum* in the following way:

His discussion of attempts to define science fiction leads him to his own interpretation of the rise of this literary phenomena: science fiction evolved as a "specific [...] version of fantastic literature: texts that adduce qualia that are not found in the real world in order to reflect certain effects back on that world", a specificity that he sees rooted in "the Protestant Reformation, and a cultural dialectic between 'Protestant' rationalist post-Copernican still bears the imprint of the cultural crisis that gave rise to its birth, and that this crisis happened to be European religious one" (Roberts 2007, 3), yet admits that it is not necessary that "a distinctively modern conception of 'science' need underlie 'science fiction', given that 'science' more broadly conceived as a non-theological mode of understanding the natural world goes back a great deal further than the nineteenth century" (Roberts 2007, 4). Roberts' approach was discussed by Milner (2012) who emphasizes that Roberts had "misrecognized the relevant cultural crisis", which he himself locates with Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* in the 18th and 19th century rather than two centuries before. Thus he concludes that "[t]he genre's foundational dialectic is therefore not that between Catholicism and Protestantism, but rather between the Enlightenment and Romanticism" (Milner 2012, 142–143). Their two positions deal exemplary with SF as a *modern genre* of literature. In contrast, this paper will understand the phenomenon generally in its "soft" variant, i.e. as a not necessarily technologically oriented poetic process, that is a historically prefigured, yet "multichronic" way or technique of writing which departs from an epistemic object as the core of a narrative.

67 On the connections between Star Trek and the Epic of Gilgameš see Heilmann and Wenskus 2006.

68 A note on SF narratives of classical times like those of Lucian and others: As I do not have the space to discuss the topic at length, I recommend on that matter in general Suvin 1979.

69 Suvin 1979, 70.

70 In modern SF, this is mostly achieved by the poetic means of a voyage or a catalyzer, cf. Suvin 1979, 71–72.

71 See in general Suvin 1979, 63ff.; cf. Aldiss and Wingrove 1986; Milner 2012; Spiegel 2008, 2007 and 2006.

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"A *novum* of cognitive innovation is a totalizing phenomenon or a relationship deviating from the author's or implied reader's norm of reality. [... It] clearly [...] is a mediating category whose explicative potency springs from its rare bridging of literary and extraliterary, fictional and empirical, formal and ideological domains, in brief form its unalienable historicity."[72] In SF, the postulation and legitimation of the *novum* is always intertwined with the current (exact or "inexact") scientific methods.[73] Still following Suvin, the introduction of the *novum* also creates *estrangement*, for the *novum* transgresses the boundaries of a general semantic field as constituted by the cultural norms of the author. Yet, unlike in "naturalistic" prose narratives those boundaries are not iconic, but allomorphic, so that the *novum* in SF does not cross merely the cultural, but "higher" ontological norms. The *novum* thereby can be considered as having *ontolytic* qualities, with the effect that the overall character of a SF narrative should be considered as an *ontolytic* one too.[74] In contrast to Suvin, Spiegel (2006, 17–20) proposes not the *estrangement*, but the suggestion of a *compatibility* of a SF narration with the reality as its most important rhetoric features: "Auf formaler Ebene macht die SF primär nicht das Vertraute fremd, sondern das Fremde vertraut." Yet some kind of estrangement (estrangement via "recontextualization") generally plays a key role in SF for Spiegel (2006, 19): "Die Verfremdungswirkung der SF beruht [...] auf der Naturalisierung des Wunderbaren." "Naturalisierung" means for Spiegel (2006, 20) "das Normalisieren des Fremden" or "das Plausibelmachen des Wunderbaren" (2006, 22), with a general *estrangement* coming about as soon as any recipient of a piece of SF becomes aware of the "recontextualization" in effect (2006, 20), meaning the realization of something formerly unknown placed into an epistemic processable context.[75]

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72 Suvin 1979, 64.

73 Suvin 1979, 64–66; cf. ibid., 66–68 for the inclusion of Humanities disciplines like sociology, linguistics and the like as an equally good or possibly even better "unexact" scientific basis for the presentation of the *novum*.

74 Following Suvin 1979, 70–71.

75 Additionally to this, Roberts (2007, 21–31) offers quite a useful "soft" description of (explicitly) ancient science fiction (ASF), at least regarding the works of classical Greek literature up to (not starting with) Lucian: "'Ancient SF' is not a single-minded or 'pure' idiom: it mediates, on the one hand, scientific speculation and *voyages imaginaires*, and, on the other, religiously conceived fable" (ibid., 29–30). In contrast to modern science fiction, ancient science fiction constitutes itself in a society where "there was no meaningful distinction between these categories ('theology' and 'science') in the first place". With Russell (1973, 72): "Both science and religious myth belong to the same range of elevated 'cosmic' subjects. They demand elaboration and magnificence, not bare factual statement."

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In UWV: 1–10 we can witness a textual behavior quite similar to the traits of SF described above. First of all, we have a *novum*: the description of Death.[76] This *novum* is represented in an imaginative framework (Kummay's "night-vision"). Furthermore, the description of Death is given in the authoritative format of the GTT, thus using a known and understandable language code. In sum, the description of Death in the UWV clearly aims at a transgressive dialogue with the Epic of Gilgameš, on the one hand acknowledging the latter's authority by integrating that special being from Gilg. 7 and the symbolism of the *šabbiṭu*-weapon in its own text, yet on the other hand contesting it at the same time in the matter of the understanding of Death.[77] All this fits nicely

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Roberts therefore understands e.g. Plutarch's περί του επιφαινόμενου τω κυκλώ της σεζήνης similarly as "a way of doing science via elaboration and invention, which is to say, it is SF" (2007, 23–26). Milner (2012) who is skeptical of such long-ranged histories of SF, misses any connection of the ancient texts discussed by Roberts (2007) to "our modern sense of science as technology". He argues that on ground of the economic and technological organization of their respective societies "[…] neither Lucian nor any other classical author could ever have imagined science as productive of technologies" (Milner 2012, 142). Contrary to Milner's "hard" understanding of SF as a modern technocratic artifact, I do not think that technologically oriented narratives are a necessary distinctive marker for the poetics of SF in antiquity—as long as the respective piece can be identified as being based on the current epistemic discourse, it similarly presents *nova* to its readers in a comprehensive way, while bringing forth Spiegel's naturalization of the miraculous by means of transferring/inscribing epistemic elements of the real world into a literary environment that corresponds to Suvin's "imaginative framework".

76 As a critical note, one might add that UWV only describes something *relatively* new. I am not following Streck (1999, 65, 130, 174 and 188) who identified the entity that appears both in Gilg. 7: 168–175 and UWV: rev. 10 as the personified Death at least for the Epic. But as mentioned above, in Udug-ḫul 4: 125′ there is a different and probably older description of Death: šu úš-a-kam gìri úš-a-kam umbin ḫu-rí-in^{mušen}-ka // *qa-at mu-ú-tu*$_4$ *še-*[*e*]*-pi mu-ú-tú* [*ṣu-pur ú-ri-in-ni*], "The hand and the feet of Death are an eagle's talons" (cf. Geller 2016, 155). As the description in Udug-ḫul 4 is different from that of the UWV, one can argue for two distinctive traditions regarding the appearance of Death.

77 A short note on the composer of the text under study: The author of the UWV appears as a torn-apart individual—all the transgressive events "witnessed" in the text are countered by himself becoming pious in the "real world". Yet, on a second thought the UWV is claimed to be the *namburbi* for the author, but was written down only AFTER he had made his way to the palace, his place of choice for expiating. One really has to admire that cunning move: The author allegedly accomplishes his own cleansing by writing down a piece of literature, yet that text openly contests age-old traditions while its main topic is a severe punishment for the attempt to gain access to knowledge not destined for mankind. Should he then not expiate again? This leaves one with a clear impression of the UWV as much more of a literary text than thought before. It strongly suggests to consider this text as nothing else than fiction—more precisely as science fiction.

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with Suvin's theory, and also Spiegel's "Naturalisierung des Wunderbaren": As Death remains shrouded in the Epic of Gilgameš, the UWV treats him as nothing special in the company of equally numinous phenomena and entities. It presents Death as perceivable in the same way, and describable with the same epistemic tools as e.g. *māmītu*, the "Oath".

In the reading just proposed, the passage under discussion is a.) clearly epistemically oriented, b.) naturalizes the miraculousness of Death by describing it in a formally correct way and c.) transfers/inscribes epistemic elements of the real world (form and content of the "Gottertypentexte" combined with the question of the descriptiveness of Death taken from the Gilgameš Epic) into a literary environment that corresponds to Suvin's "imaginative framework" (the underworld). Suvin's *novum* is encountered not only once, but twice in the UWV: Firstly in the depiction of Death, and secondly in the confession of Kummay that he does not know two of the netherworld gods by name, but is nonetheless able to give a formally correct and precise account of their features.[78] The discussion of an epistemic question and even the presentation of new epistemic objects (the unknown gods) finally creates d.) estrangement via becoming aware of the recontextualization of a *novum* (i.e. something formerly undescribable or unknown) into the formally correct describable universe of a *tabrītu*. An understanding of the UWV as the deliberate result of an epistemically oriented poetic process seems justified by this. Therefore, we suggest a reading of the UWV—at least the discussed passage—indeed as the Mesopotamian version of "Ancient Science Fiction".

As a final note, one could even take it a step further and consider a transtextual behavior like the one described above as an early testimony of Mesopotamian "ontological" thinking. The author of the UWV utilizes mimetic transtextual practices to establish and convey knowledge. By implementing established epistemic text formats, he (successfully) attempts to present author-

78 UWV: rev. 8–9: [8] [...] 2 DINGIR.MEŠ MU-*šú-nu ul i-di* 1-*en* SAG.DU ŠU.2 GÌR.2 *an-zu*.MUŠEN *ina* KAB-*šú* [ŠU.2ʾ...] [9] *šá-*[*n*]*u-ú* SAG.DU LÚ GAR AGA *a-pi-ir ina* ZAG-*šú* GIŠ.*mì-i-ṭu na-ši ina* KAB-*šú in*[*aʾ m*]*ahʾ-ri-šú* TA ŠID [X ...][8] "I did not know the names of two gods: The first had the head, hands and feet of Anzu, in his left [...]. [9] The second had the head of a human, he was crowned with a tiara, carried in his right hand a mace, in his left hand, before him ... [...]." Against Foster (2005, 832) I assume that the names were indeed unknown to Kummay, and not that the unknown gods were "so appalling that Kummay cannot even name them". Their described features (the first having head, hands and feet of Anzu, the second having a crowned human head and carrying a mace) are by no means more extraordinary than some of the features of the known gods, e.g. the two-headedness of "Total Evil".

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itative knowledge about formerly incomprehensible phenomena within an imaginary context while using a language-code known and understandable to his audience. The naturalization of formerly tabooed phenomena is thereby achieved in a way that is also consistent with Mesopotamian textual tradition. If something similar to the famous lines from Parmenides' poem "On Nature" (II, 5 and III) would have been known in the late Neo-Assyrian empire, it would pose no problem to attribute the UWV to such a school of thinking:

II

> [5] [...] ἡ δ' ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν τε καὶ ὡς χρεών ἐστι μὴ εἶναι, τὴν δή τοι φράζω παναπευθέα ἔμμεν ἀταρπόν· οὔτε γὰρ ἂν γνοίης τό γε μὴ ἐὸν—οὐ γὰρ ἀνυστόν—οὔτε φράσαις.

III

> ... τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστίν τε καὶ εἶναι.[79]

II

> [5] [...] The other, namely, that It is not, and that something must needs not be,—that, I tell thee, is a wholly untrustworthy path. For you cannot know what is not—that is impossible—nor utter it;

III

> For it is the same thing that can be thought and that can be.
>
> Translation by BURNET 1920, 129

As it unfortunately was not known in Assyria, one is only left to note the similarities between the poetic make-up of the above discussed part of the UWV and Parmenides' statement. The UWV bears witness to an emancipatory process of scholarly discussion in ancient Assyria of which we nowadays regrettably know too little and cannot venture safely beyond the point of making conjectures, however well supported they might be.

79 Diels 1897, 32–33 (Greek text and German translation); Tarán 1965, 32–44 (Greek text, English translation and commentary).

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