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KNOWLEDGE, SUFFERING AND THE PERFORMANCE OF WISDOM IN SOLON'S *ELEGY TO THE MUSES* AND THE BABYLONIAN *POEM OF THE RIGHTEOUS SUFFERER*

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This article offers a comparative reading of Solon's *Elegy to the Muses* (fragment 13 West) and the Babylonian *Poem of the Righteous Sufferer*, focusing on the interplay of literary form and theological content. It argues that in both poems, shifts in the identity and perspective of the poetic voice enable the speaker to act out, or perform, a particular vision of humanity and its relationship with the divine. The comparative analysis improves our understanding of both texts, showing for instance that Solon's elegy is a highly sophisticated attempt to articulate a coherent vision of divine justice and the human condition. It also sheds light on the particular modes in which ancient literature and theology interact in different contexts, and how this interaction could affect audiences.

1. Introduction

This article offers a comparative analysis of Babylonian and Greek poetry and theology. It focuses on two works: the *Poem of the Righteous Sufferer* or *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi*, 'let me praise the lord of wisdom', usually dated to the late second millennium BCE, and the so-called *Elegy to the Muses* (fragment 13 West), probably composed in the sixth century BCE by the Athenian statesman and poet Solon.[1] I am not concerned with tracing relations of historical influence between the poems or their respective contexts, even though this

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1 On the date and historical context of *Ludlul* see e.g. Beaulieu (2007), Annus and Lenzi (2010) xvi–xix and Oshima (2014) 14–73. On Solon see e.g. Blok and Lardinois (2006) and Noussia-Fantuzzi (2010) 3–77.

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might well be a legitimate and potentially fruitful line of inquiry.[2] Instead, I propose to read them together as works of literature and theology, focusing on the ways in which they interweave literary form and a particular interpretation of the relationship between human life and the divine.[3] More specifically, I shall try to show that in the two poems, shifts in the identity and perspective of the poetic voice play a central role in theological argumentation, enabling the speaker to act out, or perform, a vision of humanity and the divine in a way that could intersect with, and potentially inflect, the beliefs and opinions of individuals. I am interested, in a broader sense, in what this can tell us about the relationship between literature and religion, understood not only – as often in classical scholarship – as cultic or ritual practice, but as a 'flexible and inclusive mass of beliefs, representations and practices' which included literary and philosophical texts and approaches.[4]

My analysis is founded on a number of similarities between the two works, not only in thematic content, but in the ways in which this content is approached, formulated and communicated to audiences. Both *Ludlul* and the *Elegy to the Muses* reflect on fundamental questions of theology – concerning divine justice, human suffering and the possibility of knowledge and wisdom – within the framework of elaborate poetic structures, marked by sophisticated language and style. In this sense, they operate both as vehicles for theological thought, and as literary artefacts, and each of these dimensions is conditioned by the other; thus, I shall argue, it is precisely their 'literariness' that enables

2 Blok and Krul (2017) have recently argued that Solon drew inspiration from the Near East for some of his legal reforms, and posit a possible connection between his political poetry (frr. 4 and 36 W) and Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions (624–33). They suggest that such intellectual exchanges could have occurred within 'the multicultural setting of the eastern Mediterranean trade in which Solon appears to have been active' (633; see 634–6 with further bibliography, and on contacts between Greeks and Assyria in the period, Rollinger (2017) with bibliography). One might speculate that the rich tradition of Mesopotamian religious literature (including *Ludlul*) circulating at the time would have undergone a similar process of transmission. The extant copies of *Ludlul* all date to the Neo-Assyrian or Neo-Babylonian periods (eighth to mid-sixth centuries BCE), and have been found in a wide variety of locations, from Babylon to Assyria and the Neo-Assyrian outpost of Sultantepe in Anatolia (see Oshima (2014) 5–6, 377–9). It is plausible, therefore, that the poem was still being read and studied in large parts of the eastern Mediterranean during Solon's lifetime. Solon was of course famous for his travels to Egypt, Cyprus and Lydia (see e.g. Noussia-Fantuzzi (2010) 7–8 and 297–305 on Solon frr. 19 and 28 W), which ancient sources attribute both to trading interests and to the pursuit of wisdom and knowledge: see e.g. Hdt. 1.29–30, Pl. *Ti.* 20d–25e and *Criti.* 113a, [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 11.

3 I use the term 'theology' here in one of the stronger senses suggested by Eidinow *et al.* (2016) 3–4, as signifying 'determinate and explicit expressions of particular beliefs about gods' (4). Because of the nature of the two poems analysed in this article, I shall focus particularly (but not exclusively) on the ethical dimension of theological discourse, that which concerns beliefs about the relationship between the gods and human life (rather than simply the nature of the divine itself). For further, recent, discussions of theology and belief in the context of ancient Greek religion see e.g. Kindt (2015) and Harrison (2015).

4 Tor (2017) 2. Over the last few decades, scholarship on Greek religion and literature has been characterised by a pervasive tendency to separate cult and ritual (the so-called 'lived religion') from literary and philosophical theologies, which have been relegated to the status of purely artificial constructs with little or no bearing on Greek religious life (see Kindt (2016) 24–8 on this phenomenon). My analysis builds on a number of recent contributions which have challenged such categorisations of Greek religion, and called for a more textured approach to the question of the relationship between religion, literature and philosophy: see notably Harrison (2007), Gagné (2015), Kindt (2016), Tor (2017), and from a comparative perspective, Metcalf (2015).

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the two poems to engage their audiences and shape their perspective, and thereby to fulfil their didactic and religious objectives.[5]

I suggest, then, that the two works lend themselves well to a close comparative reading because – beyond bare thematic parallels, and despite significant differences – they both instantiate, and shed light on, particular modes in which ancient literature and theology can interact, and how this interaction could affect audiences.[6] As I attempt to show throughout the article, moreover, while the two poems clearly derive many aspects of their formal structure and theological discourse from their respective literary and intellectual contexts, they modify and deploy these in specific and striking ways, so that both may be considered as unique, particularly sophisticated, representatives of their respective traditions.

We shall see that this approach yields insights into both texts, and particularly Solon's poem, which presents interpretative difficulties and has been a source of much controversy in scholarship, with some doubting its coherence and even its integrity.[7] Yet the kind of reading attempted here also has much wider implications, particularly for our understanding of literature and religion, and the relationship between them, in archaic Greece and Mesopotamia. Thus, I shall argue that analysing *Ludlul* and the *Elegy to the Muses* side by side can, among other things, contribute to a reconsideration of the theological dimension of archaic Greek poetry. Further, I shall suggest that such a reading encourages us partly to close the distance, both real and perceived, between the two poems and their respective contexts; in this way, it can contribute to the wider project of re-examining the relationship between Greece and Mesopotamia and their place in the ancient Mediterranean world.[8] I begin with an analysis of the hymn to Marduk in *Ludlul*, and then move to the *Elegy to the Muses*, following which I look at the two poems together.

5 My analysis builds on, and modifies, the work of Budelmann and Phillips (2018) 9–15, who offer a valuable outline of the ways in which the concept of 'literature' can be fruitfully applied to Greek poetry. Particularly useful for my purposes is their emphasis on the literary artefact as something that can 'jolt' or 'transform' the audience's perspective (10–13); see also e.g. Johnston (2015) on the power of literature (in this case, 'mythical narration') to 'bring about a change in its audience' (185).

6 Thus, I adopt the kind of approach espoused by George (2012), 232–41, North and Worthington (2012), Haubold (2013) and (2014), Canevaro (2014) and Stocker (2017), all of whom compare specific aspects of a variety of texts of different literatures, attempting to read them on their own terms rather than focusing on questions of origins and influences. This type of analysis can be traced to the discipline of comparative (or 'world') literature, and notably in the principle of a 'level playing field where no culture . . . is deemed a priori more important than any other' (Haubold (2013) 3; on 'world literature' see e.g. Damrosch (2009) and Domínguez, Saussy and Villanueva (2015) 156–67).

7 See e.g. Versnel (2011) 202: 'The question of coherence . . . has been, still is, and no doubt will continue to be an inexhaustible source of dispute'; see further 201–7 for an outline of scholarly approaches to this issue, and less tendentiously, Noussia-Fantuzzi (2010) 127–39.

8 The 'recontextualisation' of traditionally dominant perspectives is a major aim of comparative literature: see Haubold (2013) 4.

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2. The hymn to Marduk in *Ludlul*: suffering, salvation and wisdom

Ludlul bēl nēmeqi consists for the most part of a narrative told in the first person by a man named Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan.[9] Over the course of five (or possibly four) tablets of around 120 lines each,[10] he tells the story of how he was suddenly and inexplicably struck by a series of grievous evils, before being restored to his former status through the merciful intervention of the god Marduk, which is announced in a series of dreams. In the final tablet, the speaker travels to Esagil, the temple of Marduk in Babylon, where he takes part in a thanksgiving ritual. To some extent, *Ludlul* is a hybrid of various literary and intellectual forms, which it assimilates and fuses into a highly sophisticated whole. Several of the poem's formal and thematic characteristics – not least its principal 'sufferer' motif – are found, *mutatis mutandis*, in various types of prayers, incantations and hymns.[11] Its structure is also paralleled in a number of shorter, similarly composite poems, some of them much older – forerunners include Sumerian texts such as the so-called *Man and his God* and the song of Innana and Išme-Dagan, and the Babylonian *Man and his God*.[12] *Ludlul* can therefore be said to belong to a long tradition; as Oshima notes, its 'key elements … were already in existence when the poem was composed in the Kassite period'.[13] I hope it will become clear, however, that *Ludlul* deploys these traditional elements in a unique manner, particularly in its interweaving of literary form and theological content.

The poem begins with a more or less self-contained hymn of praise to Marduk (1.1–40) which plays a central role in the establishment of the speaker's poetic authority, and has a programmatic function in the overall architecture of the work.[14] The opening lines are of particular importance in this respect (1.1–4):[15]

9 On Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan, apparently a historical figure of the Kassite period (late second millennium BC), see Lambert (1960) 21–2, Annus and Lenzi (2010) xvi–xix, Oshima (2014) 14–19.

10 Editors previously assumed that the poem comprised four tablets (see e.g. Lambert (1960) 21), but this has been challenged by Oshima, who argues instead that there were five (Oshima (2014) 6–9); see Lenzi (2017) 182 for further discussion.

11 See for instance the lengthy prayer to Marduk in Oshima (2011) 137–90, and the so-called diĝir-šà-dab$_{(5)}$-ba prayers, which are aimed at pacifying an angry god or goddess (on which see Jaques (2015)). For discussion of the similarities and parallels between prayers and texts such as *Ludlul* see Jaques (2015) esp. 4–9, Lenzi (2015b), Oshima (2017) 404–9. On hymns see n. 14 below.

12 On the Sumerian and Babylonian *Man and his God* see Oshima (2014) 19–24 with further references; on the song of Innana and Išme-Dagan, Ludwig and Metcalf (2017). Another similar composition in Akkadian, closer in date to our poem, is the text known as *Ugaritica* 5, 162, on which see Cohen (2013) 165–75 (and Oshima (2014) 24–5 on its relationship to *Ludlul*). Klein (2006) and Jaques (2015) 5 offer helpful overviews, in schematic terms, of the various generic components constituting the two *Man and his God* poems; for an analysis of *Ludlul* emphasising its composite nature and aesthetic see Pongratz-Leisten (2010).

13 Oshima (2014) 24.

14 In form and content, the passage is strongly reminiscent of hymns: compare e.g. the *Hymn to Šamaš* in Lambert (1960) 121–38 or the Old Babylonian *Hymn to Ištar A* in Lenzi (2011) 111–30; see in general Metcalf (2015) 15–78, focusing on Sumerian and Old Babylonian hymns. Hymnic material is often deployed in other genres (as in *Ludlul*): see e.g. the opening of the song of Innana and Išme-Dagan in Ludwig and Metcalf (2017), or the lengthy celebration of Marduk closing *Enūma Eliš*.

15 I generally follow the text and translation of Oshima (2014), but have sometimes modified it using Annus and Lenzi (2010) and Piccin and Worthington (2015).

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lud-lul be-lu né-me-qí ilu (DINGIR) *muš-*[*ta-lum*]
e-ziz mu-ši mu-up-pa-šìr ur-r[*i*]
marduk (AMAR.UTU) *be-lu né-me-qí ilu* (DINGIR) *muš-ta-lum*
e-ziz mu-ši mu-up-pa-šìr ur-ri

Let me praise the lord of wisdom, the jud[icious] god, angry by night, relenting by day. Marduk, the lord of wisdom, the judicious god, angry by night, relenting by day.

Marduk is twice called 'lord of wisdom', an attribute which he and other gods are given elsewhere in Mesopotamian literature,[16] but which is especially salient in the context of the poem. The word *nēmequ* – much like the Greek σοφία, which is used at Solon 13.52 W to describe the technical skills and knowledge of the poet – may denote wisdom generally as well as the skills and abilities associated with the various spheres of human endeavour and knowledge, such as ritual, science, writing and art.[17] It has been suggested recently that the word here refers to Marduk's role in the poem as divine arbiter of universal justice.[18] Yet wisdom is not merely the god's possession; as Lenzi notes, the attribute *bēl nēmeqi* also identifies him as its dispenser.[19] The idea that humans receive wisdom from the gods is attested often in ancient Near Eastern literature and elsewhere;[20] for instance, in a royal inscription – closely related thematically, and possibly also chronologically, to our poem – the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar I is said to have received splendid wisdom (Sumerian nam-kù-zu) from Marduk.[21] Returning to *Ludlul*, one may argue that when the speaker praises Marduk as *bēl nēmeqi*, he is referring not only to the god's superior wisdom, but also to his ability or propensity to bestow it upon humans. In that sense, we might read the opening lines as alluding to the speaker's own claim to *nēmequ*. As he establishes personal contact with Marduk through his praise (*ludlul*, 1.1), he presents himself implicitly as the beneficiary of superior insight and skills which will enable him to provide instruction, to 'teach the people' ([*l*]*u-šal-mid-ma nišī* (UN.MEŠ), 1.39; see below).[22] In this way, even as he intones his respectful and emphatic praise of

16 Cf. *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* s.v. *nēmequ* c) 2'.

17 See e.g. Denning-Bolle (1987) 219–20, Beaulieu (2007) 3–4, 18.

18 Oshima (2014) 169.

19 Lenzi (2011) 486; see also e.g. Sitzler (1995) 88.

20 See e.g. Foster (2005) 33, Beaulieu (2007) 18: 'Wisdom originated with gods and bringers of culture, who imparted it to humans.'

21 See Frame (1995) 25 §5, Beaulieu (2007) 6–7, Oshima (2014) 45–7.

22 This aspect of the poet-speaker's self-presentation can be related to his status as a scholar: see e.g. Richardson (2015) 101: 'a degree of access to written knowledge might be dependent on understanding it as revealed wisdom, which invites us to think of the scholar in the role of theologue; or on his innate powers of wisdom, simply to "know", "recognize", or "reveal" (*idû*/*lamādu*; also *mudû*, "wise"), all of which implies prior knowledge as the important pre-condition for interpreting for the unknowing.' On *Ludlul* and Babylonian scholarship see e.g. Beaulieu (2007) and Lenzi (2012) and (2015a).

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Marduk, the speaker discreetly sets himself up as a skilled composer, performer and teacher: a sage whose wisdom comes directly from his contact with the divine.

The nature of the wisdom which the speaker has acquired from the god is indicated already in the hymn, which is dominated by a sequence of regularly alternating verses reflecting Marduk's character and its ramifications for the world at large. Marduk is depicted as a god whose temperament oscillates between destructive anger and saving mercy.[23] The changing nature of his character is embedded not only in the almost mechanical organisation of the verse (anger and then mercy within a single verse in 1.2, 4 and 33–4,[24] and then in an ABAB pattern in the subsequent quatrains), but also in the use of images from the natural world which give the lines a universal quality: the shift from Marduk's anger to his relenting is as inevitable as the cycle of night and day (1, 4)[25] and the changes in the force of the wind and the water (5–7). The same pattern is then extended to all human life: death and salvation (13–14), suffering and healing (21–2, 25–6, 33–6), punishment and forgiveness (17–20, 23–4) all alternate according to a cosmic principle which reflects the changes in the god's temper. Marduk's sovereignty covers every sphere of the natural and human world; every event, decision and action taking place among humans and other gods can be traced back to him. Even if suffering and salvation are outwardly caused by other humans, gods or demons, these turn out to be intermediaries of, or secondary to, Marduk's authority (15–16, 23–8), as nothing happens without his intervention (35–6).[26] His universal influence is intimately linked to his superior perceptive abilities: he can see what is in the mind of the other gods (and presumably of humans as well), and is thus able to anticipate and control their thoughts and actions (29, 31). Conversely, however, it is not possible for other gods to know the way (*alaktu*) or learn (*lamādu*) the plan (*ṭēmu*) of Marduk (30, 32). That this restriction applies to humans is confirmed by 2.36–8, where the speaker laments the inscrutability not only of Marduk, but of all the gods: no human can learn (*lamādu*) their plan (*ṭēmu*), their counsel (*milku*) or their way (*alaktu*).[27]

The hymn's final quatrain (37–40) is introduced by a first-person precative (*lušāpi*, 'let me proclaim', 37; see also *lušalmidma*, 39) which links the passage to the opening lines in ring

23 Thus the point here is not simply that it is in Marduk's nature to be both angry and merciful, but also that his anger is always followed by mercy – there is a temporal relationship between the two states. In this sense I would follow Piccin and Worthington (2015) 115. For a parallel see the opening of the prayer to Marduk in Oshima (2011) 137–90.

24 Albertz (2003) 89.

25 On the implications of the images of day and night see the sensitive comments of Moran (1983) 256–8, who also provides parallels. See below on the wind and storm imagery in Solon 13 W.

26 See e.g. Albertz (2003) 92, Oshima (2014) 34–9, 282.

27 On the meaning of 1.30, 32 and 2.36–8 (and specifically of the semantically close terms *alaktu*, *ṭēmu* and *milku*) see Lenzi (2011) 493–4 and Oshima (2014) 185, 193, 243–8. On the inscrutability of the gods compare e.g. the following passage from the *Babylonian Theodicy* (256–7): [*l*]*i-ib-bi ili* (DINGIR) *ki-ma qé-reb šamê* (AN^{e}) *né-si-ma* | [*l*]*e-é-a-us-su šup-šu-qat-ma nišū* (UN.MEŠ) *la lam-da*, 'the divine mind, like the centre of the heavens, is remote; knowledge of it is difficult, the masses do not know it' (tr. Lambert); further examples at Oshima (2017) 410–14.

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composition.[28] The speaker again announces his intention to glorify Marduk, but this time he connects his ability and willingness to praise the god with his personal experience (37–40):

lu-šá-pi ug-gat-su šá ki-ma nu-ú-ni a-ku-lu ru-šum-tú
i-nu-nam-ma za-mar ki-i ú-bal-li-ṭu mi-tu-tu
[l]u-šal-mid-ma nišī (UN.MEŠ) *qit-ru-ba gu-ma-al-šin*
ḫ̮i-is-sà-as-su da-me-eq-tú [x (x)]-*ši-na lit-bal*

Let me proclaim his anger, I who ate mud like a fish when quickly he granted favour to me, just as he revived the dead. Let me teach the people how near his mercy is. May his favourable concern carry away their [sin].[29]

The speaker himself has been the victim and then the beneficiary of the changing nature of Marduk's temper: he was made to 'eat mud like a fish', but was eventually saved by the god's favour. It is through this direct experience of suffering and release, culminating in his being brought back to life by Marduk, that the speaker has acquired the insights into the workings and nature of the divine which he develops in the hymn. He has learned that the evils which strike humans are not the product of arbitrary chance;[30] rather, they form part of a regular pattern of alternation between suffering and release which is reflective of the oscillation between Marduk's wrath and relenting. Because we cannot, as humans, understand the ways of the divine, the workings of this pattern of change elude us: we cannot necessarily perceive why, how or when we will suffer. Yet the fact – confirmed by the speaker's own experience – that even the most grievous pain is followed by salvation demonstrates the fundamentally orderly nature of the world administered by Marduk. Suffering is an inevitable and unpredictable part of human life, but we can place our hope in the god, whose mercy is always forthcoming.[31] For this we must be grateful, and the hymn opening the poem – as well as the thanksgiving prayer and ritual closing it – exemplifies the proper attitude to the divine.[32] By praising Marduk, the speaker acknowledges the god's power and his own corresponding helplessness, and is thereby

28 Albertz (2003) 89, Lenzi (2011) 495 and (2015b) 74.

29 On the meaning and reconstruction of this passage see George and Al Rawi (1998) 195, 198, Lenzi (2011) 495–6, Oshima (2014) 186–7. At 37 ('I who ate mud like a fish') I have followed George and Al Rawi and Lenzi rather than Oshima; at 40, Annus and Lenzi (2010) and Lenzi (2011) 496 print ⸢*ar*⸣-*na-ši-na*, 'their sin', but cf. Lenzi (2017) 183. Whatever the missing word is, scholars generally agree that it must have to do with sin or suffering (cf. e.g. Oshima (2014) 187).

30 See Lenzi (2012) 41: 'The emotional contrast developed throughout the opening hymn . . . is not proof of Marduk's capricious character.' So also Moran (2002) 192 and Gerhards (2011) 120–1.

31 See Gerhards (2011) 125: 'Die Marduktheologie des Hymnus kann als Einladung verstanden werden, angesichts der Schwierigkeiten und Ungewissheiten, die durch ein Versagen der tradierten Kommunikationswege zwischen Göttern und Menschen entstehen können, auf den mächtigen Marduk zu vertrauen, und das ohne Einsicht in seine Pläne, die für Götter und Menschen unverständlich sind, und auch dann, wenn Marduk als zürnender Gott erfahren wird.' See also Albertz (2003) 93 and Piccin and Worthington (2015) 121 on the hymn as bringing comfort and encouraging trust in the god.

32 See e.g. Lenzi (2011) 483.

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able to entreat the god to take pity on other sufferers. The way in which we read *ḫissatu dameqtu*, 'favourable prayer', 'mention', or 'understanding', 'cognisance', at line 40 may be significant in this respect. Piccin and Worthington suggest taking it as referring to the hymn itself (as a prayer).[33] In this way, it would underline the potential ritual efficacy of the poem: the speaker hopes that his emphatic praise of Marduk, informed by his own god-granted wisdom, will hasten the salvation of his fellow humans, and encourage them to follow his example. We might also emphasise the cognitive connotation of the word and its relationship to the verb *ḫasāsu*, 'be conscious of', 'think', 'remember'. Thus the line could perhaps be read as referring to the understanding or memory of the god which the poem will impart to its audience, and which will help to bring it to salvation.[34] In either case, the speaker, assuming a position of authority and knowledge based on his direct experience of Marduk's wrath and mercy, shares his wisdom with his audience by presenting himself to them as a man who exhibits the correct attitude to the god.[35]

3. Solon's *Elegy to the Muses*: poetic knowledge and the limits of human reason

The *Elegy to the Muses* is made up of thirty-eight elegiac couplets dealing with the place of humans in the world and their relationship with the divine. In its diction and thematic concerns, the poem echoes a number of earlier and broadly contemporary works, such as Hesiod's *Works and Days* and the *Theognidea*.[36] An opening prayer leads on to a disquisition on the nature of wealth and divine justice (7–32), after which the speaker turns to humans, their hopes and desires and the deficiencies of their perception (33–62). The poem concludes with a short passage about the power of fate and the gods (63–76), the ultimate dispensers of good, evil and retribution, which strikes clueless humans in

33 Piccin and Worthington (2015) 121.

34 In this sense, the poet would be playing a role similar to the poetic persona in the *Elegy to the Muses* (see section 3 below), who associates himself explicitly with the Muses and Memory. Hence we might conceivably see the use of *ḫissatu* as approximating the idea of 'recalling the god' discussed by Metcalf (2015) 141–3, though as he notes, the Muses of Greek poetry remain unique in their combining the roles of 'patrons of poetry and gods of memory' (143). The idea of 'not forgetting' Marduk occurs, for instance, in *Ugaritica* 5, 162, l. 25: [*ša l*]*a mašê Marduk ša dalāli Marduk*, 'Marduk must not be forgotten! Marduk is to be praised!' (tr. Cohen; further parallels in *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* s.v. *mašû* A, 1 d)). Compare also Babylonian *Man and his God*, 56–7: *aḫ-re-ti-iš* u_4*-mi la ta-ma-aš-šu-ú il-*[*ka*] | *ba-ni-ka ki ta-da-am-mi-qú-nim a-at-ta*, 'you must never, till the end of time, forget [your] god your creator, now that you are favoured' (tr. Foster).

35 See Haubold (forthcoming), who shows that the sufferer's direct, physical experience of Marduk's wrath is key to the acquisition of knowledge, and thus to the poem's didactic function and effectiveness following the failure of conventional teaching. The close personal relationship between Marduk and the sufferer following the latter's salvation is also emphasised by Pongratz-Leisten (2010) 152–7.

36 On Solon and Hesiod see e.g. Irwin (2005) 155–98, Koning (2010) 172–5, now also Almeida (2018); see Manuwald (1989) 11–12 and 22–5 on Hesiod and Solon fr. 13 W specifically. On Solon and the *Theognidea* see e.g. Gagné (2013) 249–74.

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apparently arbitrary fashion. The prayer which opens the poem provides a parallel of sorts to the appeal to Marduk as 'lord of wisdom' at the beginning of *Ludlul* (13.1–4 W):[37]

Μνημοσύνης καὶ Ζηνὸς Ὀλυμπίου ἀγλαὰ τέκνα,
Μοῦσαι Πιερίδες, κλῦτέ μοι εὐχομένῳ
ὄλβον μοι πρὸς θεῶν μακάρων δότε καὶ πρὸς ἁπάντων
ἀνθρώπων αἰεὶ δόξαν ἔχειν ἀγαθήν.

Resplendent daughters of Memory and Olympian Zeus, Pierian Muses, hearken to my prayer. Grant that I have prosperity from the blessed gods and a good reputation always from all men.

The speaker immediately establishes personal contact with the divine, requesting the benevolent intervention of the Muses in his pursuit of prosperity. The presence of the Muses in this particular context appears somewhat surprising at first glance,[38] but they do play an important, if largely implicit, role in defining the identity of the poetic voice.[39] By associating himself with them and with their parents, the speaker not only makes a claim to superiority in oral, symposiastic composition and performance;[40] he also locates himself on a higher epistemic plane which allows him insights into time and justice, the respective spheres of Memory and Zeus.[41] In Gagné's words, 'through his memory, [the poet] brings back echoes of divine knowledge to the world of men in order to make them remember the right path ... and to inspire their virtue, their ἀρετή.'[42] As in *Ludlul*, the speaker characterises himself as a sage, whose divinely granted skills allow him partially to access higher truths, and to convey them to his audience.

It is this knowledge and memory which enable the poet to sing of transgression and divine justice, as he does following the prayer. We saw above that in the hymn at *Ludlul* 1.1–40, the wise speaker was able accurately to depict the workings of Marduk's sovereignty; similarly, the poet in the *Elegy to the Muses* is able to provide his audience with a panoramic vision of divine justice and of its *telos* (17), its end or fulfilment, which

37 Text and translation are based on Gerber (1999).

38 This is often noted, and it is a major point of interpretation of the poem (see e.g. Manuwald (1989) 9–10, Stoddard (2002) 152–3, Blaise (2005) 32, Noussia-Fantuzzi (2010) 127–31, Semenzato (2017) 157–9), to which I return below. The Muses are associated with prosperity at Hes. *Theog.* 96–7.

39 See Gagné (2013) 233: 'The invocation to the Muses shows us the *persona* of the locutor-poet defining his character and his authority.'

40 See Blaise (2005) 28: 'Solon ... se met dans la position du poète d'une culture orale, pour laquelle la mémoire est essentielle en ce que, d'un point de vue technique, elle permet l'improvisation, en tant que réservoir de formules.' See also Mülke (2002) 244 and Noussia-Fantuzzi (2010) 130.

41 See, for instance, Hom. *Il.* 2.484–7 (on which see n. 61 below) and Pind. *Pae.* 6.54–7: ἀλλά – παρθένοι γάρ, ἴσατ [ε], Μο[ῖ]σαι, | πάντα, κε[λαι]νεφεῖ σὺν πατρὶ Μναμοσ[ύν]ᾳ τε | τοῦτον ἔσχετ[ε τεθ]μόν – | κλῦτε νῦν· ('But – since, virgin Muses, you know all things: you possess this prerogative, along with the dark-clouded father [Zeus] and Mnemosyne – listen now!' (tr. Rutherford)).

42 Gagné (2013) 233.

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normally remains hidden to humans.[43] In this way, he demonstrates that Zeus's vengeance (τίσις, 25, 29, 31) – depicted at length in a beautiful storm simile (17–25) recalling a number of passages from epic – [44] does not strike at random, but operates in a wide temporal sequence which human perception cannot encompass. The pursuit of wealth – in which the speaker himself claims to be engaged (χρήματα δ' ἱμείρω, 'I long to have money', 7) – can in itself constitute, or lead to, transgression. When granted by the gods, wealth can be beneficial and lasting (9–10), but when acquired unjustly (ἀδίκως, 7) and 'venerated with violence' ([πλοῦτον] ὃν δ' ἄνδρες τιμῶσιν ὑφ' ὕβριος, 11), it quickly becomes mixed with *atē*, the process combining disaster and the god-sent delusion leading to it.[45] Zeus, who 'watches over every outcome' (πάντων ἐφορᾷ τέλος, 17), sometimes punishes such crimes swiftly (29); yet divine justice can also take its time: sometimes, it is the transgressor's progeny who, though innocent (ἀναίτιοι, 31), pay for an ancient crime.[46] Retribution always comes in the end (8), and with it the 'revelation' of a transgression which had remained hidden or forgotten (27–8):

αἰεὶ δ' οὔ ἑ λέληθε διαμπερές, ὅστις ἀλιτρὸν
θυμὸν ἔχει, πάντως δ' ἐς τέλος ἐξεφάνη·

> Anyone who has a sinful heart never escapes [Zeus's] notice, and in the end he is assuredly revealed.

Just as the god 'reveals' the transgressive nature of an individual's behaviour,[47] so the poet can expose what is hidden. Events which seem insignificant or pass unnoticed, and apparently undeserved prosperity or arbitrary suffering, are all shown in fact to participate in the fulfilment of a broader, underlying pattern of divine justice involving the entirety of the temporal spectrum. Like the speaker of *Ludlul*, the poet in the first half of the *Elegy to the Muses* can unveil the fundamentally orderly nature of the world ruled by Zeus.

Even the poet's skills and knowledge, however, are not equated with absolute, unfettered access to the higher epistemic realm of the gods. The second half of the poem powerfully

43 See Gagné (2013) 234: 'The cycles of divine justice move beyond the scope of individual human life, but the poet's memory can perceive their shape. It lays the principles of divine time before our eyes, the slow wheels of a universal ordered law of divine retribution that moves beyond our grasp.'

44 See esp. *Il*. 16.384–93; also e.g. *Il*. 13.795–801 and 16.297–302. For the relationship between Solon's storm and these passages see Noussia-Fantuzzi (2010) 157–8.

45 On *atē* in general see Cairns (2012) and (2013b) and Sommerstein (2013); in Solon's poem specifically, see Manuwald (1989) 17–18 n. 66, Noussia-Fantuzzi (2010) 154.

46 On 'ancestral fault' in the poem see esp. Gagné (2013) 226–49.

47 Compare e.g. Hes. *Op*. 266–73 (with Irwin (2005) 179) and Pind. *Ol*. 1.64. For a Near Eastern parallel, see e.g. lines 104–8 of the prayer to Marduk in Oshima (2011) 137–90: *man-nu la i-ḫi-ṭu a-tar la i[ḫ-ta-ṭi]* | *man-nu ša it-ta-aṣ-ṣa-ru la ir-šu-u ḫi-ṭi-tu* | *a-a-ú šá it-ta-ḫi-[ṭ]ù gíl-la-tú la ub-lam* | *la i-da-nim-m[a šèr-t]uš-ši-na la na-aṭ-la* | *šá dam-qat ù [mas]-kàt ilu* (DINGIR) *muš-kal-lim*, 'Who did not watch enough and has not s[inned]? Who was so watchful that he has incurred no sin? Which one is there who was so careful (and) carries no guilt? People do not know their invisible [faults], a god reveals what is good and what is bad' (tr. based on Oshima (2011) and Foster (2005)). For further examples of the idea that no human is born without sin see Oshima (2017) 410–13.

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exposes the limits of human reason and power (see below); yet this is already a central aspect of the first part, and one which is of great importance to our understanding of the opening prayer. In lines 9–32, the poet is able to reveal the workings of divine justice as if from the gods' perspective,[48] yet he does not tell his audience if there is any way to avoid incurring the gods' wrath. Solon does identify a human fault as the root of divine retribution, and develops it in the mechanism of the so-called 'archaic chain' which connects prosperity, greed, arrogance, delusion and disaster.[49] However, the guarantee that punishment always comes in response to a human transgression, and therefore that the 'just' order the world shall in the end be restored, does not provide any security. The problem lies partly in the unpredictability of the fulfilment of divine justice, signalled throughout the passage by a cluster of words emphasising sudden or quick action: *atē* comes swiftly (ταχέως, 13) upon humans and Zeus strikes suddenly (ἐξαπίνης, 17), like the wind which quickly (αἶψα, 18) scatters the clouds.[50] The victims of divine retribution, and particularly those who suffer for the crimes of their ancestors, have no way of knowing when and how the god will strike them. Further, the poet's statement at lines 7–8 makes it clear that transgressions are not always committed willingly or consciously:

χρήματα δ' ἱμείρω μὲν ἔχειν, ἀδίκως δὲ πεπᾶσθαι
οὐκ ἐθέλω· πάντως ὕστερον ἦλθε δίκη.

I long to have money, but I am unwilling to possess it unjustly, for retribution assuredly comes later.

The lines pick up on the initial prayer (ὄλβον μοι ... δότε, 'grant [that] I [have] prosperity', 3), whether or not one understands ὄλβος and χρήματα as synonymous.[51] The speaker asks for prosperity from the gods, and then discloses his desire for money, but recognises that the pursuit of wealth is inherently risky, even for the wise poet whom he impersonates. He is able to distinguish conceptually between 'good' and 'bad' wealth, but there is no guarantee that he will be successful in his bid to achieve divinely sanctioned prosperity; rather, if he acquires or receives wealth, it might turn out to be an

48 Nesselrath (1992) 96: 'aus göttlicher Perspektive'.

49 For the term 'archaic chain' see Fisher (1992) 72 and Cairns (2013b) xvi and xlv n. 37; on the phenomenon in Solon specifically see e.g. Noussia-Fantuzzi (2010) 154 and 197. For further examples of the archaic chain (in a variety of formulations) see e.g. Solon 4.34–5 and 6.3–4 W, Thgn. 41–52, 605–6, 693–4 and 1157–8, Pind. *Ol.* 13.10 and *Pyth.* 2.25–30, Aesch. *Ag.* 367–89 and 750–71, Hdt. 8.77, Soph. *OT* 873–91.

50 See Nesselrath (1992) 96: 'Zeus ... wird sicher nach Unrechttun eingreifen – aber nicht dann, wenn man es (als ein mit göttlicher Vergeltung rechnender Mensch) erwarten könnte, sondern ... unerwartet und mit plötzlicher Wucht.' As Manuwald (1989) 11 notes, the sudden and unexpected character of Zeus's vengeance in Solon's poem marks a significant departure from Hesiod's *Works and Days*. Spieckermann (1998) 331 n. 8 and Moran (2002) 194 note that in *Ludlul*, the changes in Marduk's moods, and consequently the alternation between bad and good in human life, are also characterised by a suddenness (1.17–19, 38) which makes them difficult to predict or avoid.

51 See e.g. Allen (1949) 51–2, Noussia-Fantuzzi (2010) 144–6.

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unjust possession which warrants divine punishment.[52] That is why the poet's claim to superior poetic insight and memory is embedded in the particular invocation which opens the poem: he asks for guidance in his pursuit of prosperity, because he knows that it cannot be achieved or be secure without the help of the Muses who, by virtue of their association with Memory and Zeus, possess knowledge about the past, present and future,[53] and divine justice.[54] By praying to the gods, and putting the fulfilment of his wish in their hands, he implicitly recognises their superior knowledge and his concomitant weakness as a human being, thereby displaying proper deference towards the divine and exhibiting another facet of his wisdom.[55] In this way, too, he offers his audience a demonstration of the proper attitude to adopt towards wealth and the gods.

4. Human suffering and the performance of wisdom in *Ludlul* and the *Elegy to the Muses*

So far, I have argued that the poetic speakers of both works define themselves as sages endowed with divinely granted knowledge and wisdom, and present themselves as acting out this wisdom in a hymn of praise and a prayer respectively, thereby exhibiting the correct attitude towards the god. In their opening appeals to the divine, therefore, these poet-sages set themselves apart from their audience as figures whose authority is heightened by their privileged relationship to the gods; yet at the same time they include themselves in the collective by pointing to the partial nature of their knowledge, and the universal and exemplary nature of their experience. Thus, in both works, the poetic speaker is simultaneously a figure of superior authority and knowledge, and a short-sighted human who is entirely dependent on the god. In the final part of the article, I shall try to show that this double perspective is deployed more extensively in the two poems, creating striking dramatic effects which contribute powerfully to their respective theological argumentation.

Both works are marked by a major shift in perspective which occurs at a critical juncture, marked more or less clearly in the text. I begin once again with *Ludlul* (I.41–4):

52 It might be argued in this connection that in Solon's description of 'bad' wealth at line 11, the idea of 'honouring' wealth 'with violence' (τιμῶσιν ὑφ' ὕβριος) is itself suggestive of a misjudgement which we can associate with the limits inherent to human reason as well as with the particular state of mind implied in *hybris*. Solon's discussion of wealth and divine punishment at lines 7–13 echoes Hesiod's at *Op*. 320–6, a passage which draws a similar distinction between 'good' and 'bad' wealth, but with less emphasis on the difficulty for humans of distinguishing between the two (although see *Op*. 323–4: gain (κέρδος) deceives the minds of humans (νόον ἐξαπατήσει | ἀνθρώπων), recalling *atē* in Solon); a similar point is made by Stoddard (2002) 166, see Noussia-Fantuzzi (2010) 148 for further discussion and parallels.

53 See e.g. Hes. *Theog*. 38.

54 Manuwald (1989) 20: 'Damit der Betende Reichtum von seiten der Götter erlange, müssen ihm die Musen aufgrund ihres weiterreichenden Wissens einen hinlänglichen Einblick in die Konsequenzen seines Tuns und in die nicht zu überschreitenden Grenzen seines Zieles geben, damit das Streben ohne Fehler bleibt, der sich rächt.' See also Nesselrath (1992) 104.

55 See, similarly, Manuwald (1989) 19.

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iš-tu u_4*-mi be-lí i-ni-na-an-ni*
ù qar-ra-du ᵈ*marduk* (AMAR.UTU) *is-bu-su itti* (KI)*-ia*
id-da-an-ni ilī (DINGIR-MU) *šá-da-a-šú i-li*
ip-par-ku ᵈ*iš-ta-ri i-bé-eš a-ḫi-tum*

From the day the lord punished me, and the hero Marduk became angry with me, my god rejected me and went up to his mountain, my goddess departed and moved away.[56]

The speaker moves from the self-contained hymn to Marduk (1.1–40) to narrating the events which took place from the 'day' (*ūmu*) on which the god became angry with him and punished him.[57] The persona of the poet-sage shifts from singing a universal hymn of praise from his own present, enlightened, perspective, to depicting himself in the past, before he gained a deeper understanding of Marduk's sovereignty. This shift is clearly signalled by the repeated use, from 1.43, of the preterite to depict past events:[58] whereas in the hymn the poet-sage had been able to perceive the cyclical nature of the departure and return of the personal gods as a reflection of Marduk's anger and his relenting (15–16), at lines 43ff. the sufferer can only see one pole of this process of alternation, and describes it in absolute terms: 'my god rejected me', 'my goddess deserted and moved away' (43, 44), and so on. From this point on, the speaker portrays himself as a frail and blind human being who can only passively experience events, because any action he takes (including calling on seers, lamenters and exorcists) is in vain. He is a victim of grievous suffering which he will not be able to understand until he is saved. Marduk – whom the audience already know to be the cause of the sufferer's downfall – is not mentioned again until the third tablet; the sufferer of the narrative,

56 For a different reading of line 41 (which does not affect my argument here) see Lenzi (2012) 43 n. 18, and contra Oshima (2014) 188.

57 The Sumerian *Man and his God* and the song of Innana and Išme-Dagan also move from a hymnic opening to narrative, but neither goes as far, or achieves the same effect, as *Ludlul*. The former opens with a short exhortation to celebrate the god ('a person should steadfastly proclaim the exaltedness of his god', 1); this is followed by a narrative of suffering and salvation (10–132), after which the exhortation is taken up once more in ring composition ('the young man steadfastly proclaims the exaltedness of his god', 134 (tr. ETCSL)). In the latter, the hymnic opening (1–59) is longer, but does not seem to foreshadow the goddess's merciful intervention at the end (as far can be judged from the fragmentary text, the passage strongly emphasises Innana's destructiveness, foregrounding her anger later in the narrative (77–90)). In *Ugaritica* 5, 162, by contrast, the narrative moves into a celebration of Marduk (from line 25) without a shift in perspective: the sufferer is now cured, and has learned that the god is both cruel and merciful (interestingly, the sufferer's salvation is foreshadowed at lines 13–16, but it is hard to measure the significance of this since a large section of the poem is missing at the beginning). Changes in focalisation are also common in these texts, which oscillate between narratives in the third person and monologues in the first person singular (see e.g. the shifts at the Babylonian *Man and his God* 10–12 and 48, or the Sumerian *Man and his God* 25, 120 and 137). Yet the narrator is not marked as particularly knowledgeable or omniscient as compared to the first-person sufferer.

58 See Foster (1983) 126.

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unlike the speaker and his audience, is in the dark. From this point until the final salvation, the poet represents his former self as a paradigm of human limitations and suffering in which the audience can recognise themselves, and perhaps experience pity.[59] In this way, the poet of *Ludlul* is able to act out, or perform, the process through which he was saved and acquired the god-granted wisdom he displays in the opening hymn, in a way that involves the audience and strengthens his theological authority.

A similar change in perspective (though without the movement from present to past) occurs in the *Elegy to the Muses*. The opening prayer, with its clearly marked first person singular (2, 3, 7, 8), had given way to an analysis of divine justice from the higher perspective of the gods (9–32). Then, at line 33, there is a sudden shift into the first person plural (Solon 13.33–6 W):

> θνητοὶ δ' ὧδε νοέομεν ὁμῶς ἀγαθός τε κακός τε,
> †ἐν δηνην† αὐτὸς δόξαν ἕκαστος ἔχει,
> πρὶν τι παθεῖν· τότε δ' αὖτις ὀδύρεται· ἄχρι δὲ τούτου
> χάσκοντες κούφαις ἐλπίσι τερπόμεθα.

And thus we mortals, whatever our estate, think that the expectation which each one has [is progressing well?] until he suffers some mishap, and then afterwards he wails. But until then we take eager delight in empty hopes.[60]

The poet-sage merges his authoritative voice into the collective voice of humankind and the audience, thereby achieving a significant change of focalisation.[61] Whereas in the

59 On the exemplary nature of Šubši-mešrê-Šakkan's suffering see e.g. Spieckermann (1998) 332 and Lenzi (2015b) 97. See also Moran (2002) 186: the poem's protagonist is 'Mesopotamian Everyman'. Note, however, that for Moran this means that the sufferer exemplifies 'conventional personal religion' as opposed to the 'new religion' of Marduk (187), which he discovers when the god saves him. Whether or not one agrees with this interpretation, Moran is right to note that from 1.41 onwards 'the narrative reflects the sufferer's perception of his problem *at the time of his suffering*' (187; emphasis original), whereas the opening hymn in fact represents 'his last thoughts' (191).

60 The text of line 34 is corrupt. Most commentators agree that the missing words probably refer to a 'positive expectation … that characterizes all of mankind's hopes for the future' (Noussia-Fantuzzi (2010) 169). Thus Gerber's translation reflects Büchner and Theiler's emendation εὖ ῥεῖν, 'progresses well', which is printed by West in his text of the poem and described by Manuwald (1989) 13 n. 52 as 'erwägenswert'.

61 On the poem's two 'voices' see Loeffler (1993) 25–7, Stoddard (2002), Blaise (2005) 29, Gagné (2013) 229–30, 234–6. The first person plural is regularly employed in archaic and classical Greek poetry to embrace the mortal condition, often in explicit contrast to that of the gods: see e.g. *Hom. Hymn Dem.* 147–8 and 216–17, Mimnermus fr. 2 W, Semon. fr. 1 W, Thgn. 141–2, Pind. *Ol.* 2.30–3, *Pyth.* 10.27–8, *Nem.* 6.1–7, 7.2–5 and 54–6, *Isthm.* 7.40–4 (see Neumann-Hartmann (2005) 157). Solon 13 W is, I think, unique for the suddenness and dramatic effectiveness with which it deploys this plural, and for the way in which the change of perspective is woven into the poem's larger structure and theological content. Yet two passages seem to me particularly interesting in this respect: Pind. *Nem.* 11.41–8 (which dramatises the inaccessibility of the future and the dangers associated with human hope and desires, suddenly seen through a first-person plural perspective from 44); and Hom. *Il.* 2.484–7, a passage introducing the Catalogue of Ships, in which the Homeric narrator suddenly shifts into the first person plural, and including himself among ignorant, short-sighted mortals, asks the all-knowing Muses to remind him of the names of the Greek chieftains. See e.g. Graziosi (2013) 12–13:

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preceding lines the poet had adopted a higher perspective to reveal the patterns of justice at work in the world, he now observes it through normal human eyes.[62] The concrete 'reality' of the gods is replaced by mere 'appearance' (δόξα, 34; see also δοκεῖ, 39, 42), which is all that human perception or *nous* (νοέομεν, 33) can grasp.[63] The speaker thus acknowledges the fact that although the world is fundamentally just and orderly – as was demonstrated at 9–32 – we, as humans, do not experience it as such because of our limited perspective. To quote Nesselrath, the change of perspective at line 33 exposes 'the great discrepancy between a "cosmic system of retribution" and humans' first-hand experience and perception of it.'[64] Because of the deficiencies of their understanding, humans experience suffering (whether or not it is 'just' or deserved) as an unpredictable and arbitrary reversal, the negation of hopes or expectations which turn out to have been empty or 'light'.[65] In the rest of the passage (37–62), the poet illustrates this idea with a series of examples of humans thinking and hoping to improve their condition, when in fact none of them (even seers, doctors and poets, 51–2) are ultimately in control of their existence.[66] He then steers the audience back to the theme of money which began the poem, but this time with an emphatic first person plural (ἡμέων, 72),[67] and ends by asserting with renewed emphasis that the pursuit of prosperity, like every endeavour, is inherently risky (65), because although the gods grant wealth to humans (74), they do not provide any guidance on how to avoid falling into transgression, *atē* and suffering (71–5). In the end, Zeus's punishment inevitably appears arbitrary, striking now one man, and then another (ἄλλοτε ἄλλος, 76). Thus, by shifting his perspective from an elevated, quasi-divine vision to that of a first person plural encompassing the audience and humanity as a whole, the poet is able to expose the bleakness of the human condition which forms the dark obverse of the orderly sphere of divine justice.[68]

From the turning points which I have analysed above (Solon 13.33 W and *Ludlul* I.43), the two poems' respective audiences are presented with a *mise en scène* of human frailty and short-

'What the poet thus constructs is a simple hierarchy: vision, knowledge, and divinity ("you") stand above hearing, ignorance, and mortality ("we"). The remarkable thing about this passage is that the poet momentarily places himself among his audience of ordinary mortals. He too claims to be condemned to listening, even if what follows ... is the most astounding feat of singing.' For a recent reading of the passage see Semenzato (2017) 20–30.

62 See Nesselrath (1992) 98, Noussia-Fantuzzi (2010) 167–8.

63 See Gagné (2013) 234: 'Instead of the *mnēmosynē* of the poet, the knowledge of the collective "We" is defined by the verb *noeomen*, "we think"', and 235: 'the *noos* of men at line 33, the group's perception of the world, is not able to grasp anything beyond mere appearances, beyond *doxa*'.

64 '[Die] grosse Diskrepanz zwischen einem "kosmischen Vergeltungssystem" und dem, was der Mensch davon am eigenen Leib erlebt und überhaupt wahrnehmen kann', Nesselrath (1992) 98 (tr. mine).

65 On hope in this passage, and the archaic and classical Greek conception of hope in general, see Theunissen (2002) 307–95 and Cairns (2016).

66 See e.g. Stoddard (2002) 162.

67 Solon 13.71–6 W is repeated almost *verbatim* in Thgn. 227–32, again with the emphatic first person plural (ἡμέων, Thgn. 228), but with significant differences: see Gagné (2013) 254–7.

68 See Irwin (2005) 132–51 and Allan (2018) for different perspectives on Solon's use of persona.

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sightedness, achieved in *Ludlul* by the representation of the speaker's own past experience of suffering and ignorance of the gods' designs, and in the *Elegy to the Muses* by the poet's adoption of the deficient perspective of the human collective. These fluctuations in the voice and perspective of the poems' respective personae create dramatic effects whereby the chasm separating gods from humans and the unpredictability of seemingly arbitrary suffering are performed rather than simply described. The figure of the poet-sage is merged into another persona, that of the frail, bewildered human being at the mercy of divine reversal, in whom audience members can recognise themselves and reflect on their own human limitations and relationship with the gods. The two poems, therefore, deploy comparable literary mechanisms for their own specific theological ends.

5. Conclusion

I have tried to show that *Ludlul* and the *Elegy to the Muses* use shifts in the voice and perspective of the poetic speaker to perform a particular vision of the world, in which the fragility and suffering characterising human life are accommodated in the framework of a divine order which, although cruel and impenetrable, is essentially just. By alternating between the personae of wise poet-sage and frail, short-sighted human, the two poets are able to illuminate the question of suffering and divine justice from differing but complementary angles, involving audience members and allowing them access to profound insights into the nature of the divine and the workings of the world. In *Ludlul*, the speaker, presenting himself successively as a poet-sage endowed with god-granted authority and as a bewildered human being with whom the audience can identify, is able to demonstrate Marduk's justice, and the inevitability of his mercy even in the darkest of times. In the *Elegy to the Muses*, Solon, combining the perspectives of a poet-sage and of ordinary humans, is able to reveal the jarring disjunction between the essential justice of divine punishment and the fact that humans, because of their short-sightedness and weakness, can only experience it as unpredictable, arbitrary reversal. Both poets also exemplify and act out the correct response to the divine order of the world, which involves acknowledging the gods' superiority through prayer and praise, and putting one's fate in their hands. At the same time, the comparison highlights a profound theological difference between the two texts: in Solon, adopting the correct attitude to the gods might ensure a measure of prosperity, but there is no guarantee; in *Ludlul*, the sufferer's salvation provides more concrete hope that human life might be transfigured by divine intervention.

In both works, literary sophistication is integral to the articulation and successful communication of theological arguments. Poetry functions in part as an 'agent of religious thought'[69] which has the potential to operate a change in the audience's perspective and beliefs; and it does so in part through the use of intricate literary and

69 Gagné (2015) 84.

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dramatic devices. In this sense, the comparison between the *Elegy to the Muses* and *Ludlul* sheds valuable light on the ways in which literature and theology overlap and interact in ancient Greece and Mesopotamia. From a classicist's perspective, this offers an alternative to scholarly approaches which ignore or downplay the theological dimension of Greek literature, or seek to exclude it from the study of religion.

A further, more localised, benefit of the comparative analysis offered above is that it yields a better understanding of Solon's poem: reading the *Elegy to the Muses* together with *Ludlul* – specifically the key passages where the speaker's perspective shifts – helps us to reconstruct the logic underlying the overall structure of the work, and particularly the relationship between the two sections separated by lines 33–6. Thus, my interpretation suggests that the poem should be seen as an intricate, highly sophisticated attempt to articulate a coherent vision of divine justice and the human condition, rather than as 'a chain of motifs, entirely devoid of formal conjunctive or disjunctive signals or allusions'.[70]

Finally, the comparison attempted here has implications for our understanding of Greek and Mesopotamian literature, and the relationship between them. The differences between the *Elegy to the Muses* and *Ludlul* and their respective contexts should not be underestimated – the former was probably composed for performance in a sympotic setting and became popular throughout antiquity,[71] while the latter, whether or not it was initially performed,[72] is thought to have circulated in largely closed scholarly circles.[73] Yet a comparative reading suggests that they do have a number of common features, notably in their approach to, and formulation of, the great theological questions of divine justice, alternation and human suffering. We might attribute these similarities to shared human

70 Versnel (2011) 211; see in general 201–12.

71 Gagné (2013) 227 calls it 'one of the most influential poems of the later archaic period on later antiquity'. It was widely alluded to and parodied, for instance in tragedy, lyric and parodic poetry; it is even quoted on a late sixth-century dedication to Heracles from southern Italy (see Noussia-Fantuzzi (2010) 146; I am grateful to Emilio Rosamilia for bringing this to my attention). On the reception of Solon see Nagy and Noussia-Fantuzzi (2015).

72 The question is difficult to determine. *Ludlul* does describe a public ritual which appears to include some form of performance: the final tablet depicts a ceremony of thanksgiving at the temple of Marduk in Babylon, with singing and a public banquet (5.40–120). Although this does not in itself provide evidence of an actual performance (and one must be cautious in extracting such information from the text itself), we might speculate that these scenes are reflective of an actual ritual including recitation of the poem itself, or of something resembling it. Oshima (2014) 28–34 argues that *Ludlul* began life as 'a praise-offering prayer' (32) in which the sufferer 'publicly recounted his ordeal and redemption … to the people in the main street of Babylon' (30). Ziegler (2015) 241 similarly suggests that the poem was intended to express the sufferer's gratitude to Marduk for saving him. The performance of the hymns of praise to Marduk beginning and ending the poem could thus have formed part of the sufferer's 'ritual reintegration' (Spieckermann (1998) 332, 337) within the community. On the broader question of the performance and oral transmission of Mesopotamian literature see e.g. West (1997) 593–602, Metcalf (2015) 143–6, Currie (2016) 28–9 and 164 and Lardinois (2017) 4–7.

73 Most scholars see the poem as part of a hermetic corpus of wisdom literature which was 'addressed at a small audience of scholars only' (van der Toorn (2003) 58), a particular problem being the restricted accessibility of cuneiform literature (on which see e.g. Haubold (2013) 9–10). See, however, the sensible comments of Richardson (2015) 97–8.

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patterns of thought and modes of representing the world and the gods,[74] and to the (related) fact that both texts – like much Greek and Mesopotamian literature – are universal in orientation, largely eschewing strict identification with a precise historical moment.[75] The comparison encourages us to reflect on what these poems and their respective contexts have in common; in this sense, it offers further grounds to think of ancient Greece – and foundational figures such as Solon – less as a unique, isolated phenomenon than in terms of what it shares with other cultures in the Mediterranean and beyond.

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74 On the relationship between thought-patterns and narrative structure in Greek literature and beyond see Cairns (2014).

75 See Haubold (2013) 19: the universal orientation of ancient Mesopotamian and Greek epic is suggestive of 'a convergence in tone and theme which reflects the shared intuition that human life, and the divine cosmos around us, must be fundamentally the same for all people on earth'.

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