

Paratext

The Fuzzy Edges of Literature

Papers Presented at the second Annual Colloquium
of the Research Programme History of Literature,
Institute of Culture and History,
University of Amsterdam.

Amsterdam 30 - 31 January 2003.

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Institute of Culture and History
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2004

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Suspension of Disbelief in Parmenides' Poem

Introduction

In this paper I will deal with a specific old Greek text written in the 5th century BC: Parmenides' Poem.¹ I will look at its poem (DK28 B1, 1-23), which will turn out to have much in common with other works of art and philosophy that offer a liminal space to their audience: a zone leading from the everyday world into the world of the work. The audience of Parmenides' Poem is invited after the poem to grasp a new concept: Being — what-is, what always is, was and will be, what never changes and shows no differences. Parmenides' Poem, like many works of art and philosophy, leaves its audience in doubt about what they regard as obvious and offers them another way of looking at the world.

A poem can offer us a new way of looking if we achieve *aesthetic distance* from our world,² if we achieve *suspension of disbelief*, to use Coleridge's famous description, and enter the world of the poem.³ Gadamer (1960) has described our way of dealing with a literary text in terms of participation in a serious game.⁴ Walton (1990) describes what can happen to us when we enter the frame of a work of art in terms of participation in a 'game of make-believe'.⁵

Helping us to get inside the world of the text and to start playing the game is one of the functions of a poem. According to ancient rhetoric, the poem is the place of the *captatio benevolentiae*, where the author tries to make his public *attentus, benevolus, docilis* ('attentive', 'well-disposed', 'willing to learn').⁶ The poem can be regarded as the bridge that must lead the audience into the main text,⁷ the threshold between the everyday world and the

¹ Which I refer to sometimes only as the Poem.

² Cf. Jauss, H. R., 'Levels of Identification of Hero and Audience', *New Literary History* 5 (1973-4), 283-317; "...aesthetic distance on the part of the spectator: that is... a negation of the immediate interests of his everyday life" (p. 286).

³ The transportation into the fictional world will, of course, never be complete; in fact we take with us our 'prejudices', our knowledge of other texts and a certain awareness that the world into which we have been transported is different from the everyday world. Iser, W., *The Act of Reading. A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, London and Henley, 1978 (original: *Der Akt des Lesens. Theorie ästhetischer Wirkung*, 1976) on p. 37 questions even the desirability of the suspension of disbelief, if that involves a complete disappearance of the beliefs of the reader.

⁴ Gadamer, H.G. 1960, *Wahrheit und Methode*, Tübingen.

⁵ When we are in the game of make-believe we may feel, e.g. *fictional fear* if a snake is ready to spit its poison against the screen that separates its world from ours, either at the cinema or in the zoo. (Walton, K. L., 1990, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*. On the Foundations of the Representational Arts, Cambridge (Mass.), London, 1990, p. 241ff).

⁶ Quintilianus, *Inst. Orat.* IV.1.5.

⁷ On ancient rhetorical opinions about the function of a poem and their application to Parmenides, see Mansfeld, J., 1994, *The Rhetoric in the Poem of Parmenides*, in Bertelli, L., e. Domini, P., a cura di, *Filosofia, Politica, Retorica. Intersezioni possibili*, Milano, 1994, pp. 9-10.

world of the text,⁸ the strategy that must catch the attention of the audience and not let them turn away from the text.

The poem occupies a zone between the everyday world and the text. Genette⁹ describes this zone, which he calls *paratext*, as a: 'threshold, or—a word Borges used apropos of a preface—a “vestibule” that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back. It is an “undefined zone” between the inside and the outside ... a zone not only of transition but also of transaction: a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence that—whether well or poorly understood and achieved—is at the service of a better reception for the text...’ Our poem belongs to that period ‘from Homer to Rabelais’ that Genette calls ‘prehistory’,¹⁰ when ‘for obvious material reasons the prefatorial function is taken on by the opening lines or pages of the text’, i.e. the paratext is not typographically separated from the main text, but we can recognize it as a paratext because of its function. Even if our poem dates from well before the appearance of the book as we know it, its paratextual function is essentially the same as that of a typographically separated paratext, i.e. in Genette’s concluding words: ‘the paratext provides an airlock that helps the reader pass without too much respiratory difficulty from one world to the other...’¹¹

Parmenides’ audience will certainly have some ‘respiratory difficulty’, when, after the poem, they are asked to step into the world of Being: a world without death, birth and change looks very different from the world in which the audience feels at home. Metaphysics has something in common with fiction: it is another world and the audience must be seduced into it—and helped to breathe when they are inside. A feature of the poem that is relevant for the help it offers in preparing the audience for the topic of the main text is its meter. A beginning in dactylic hexameters arouses expectations related to the genre of the Poem: it will be a source of truth and education, like epic and didactic poetry, which are written in dactylic hexameters. We do not know if it will be either a truth about the heroes of the past (Homer), about the genealogy of the gods and the justice of Zeus (Hesiod), about the true nature of god and the potential of human mind (Xenophanes), or a new kind of truth. But, of course, the dactylic

⁸ I.e., in the words of Morhange, J.-L. 1995, ‘Incipit narratifs. L’entrée du lecteur dans l’univers de la fiction’, *Poétique*, 26, (1995) p. 387, the “stratégies rhétoriques d’incipit” that help the reader ‘... à franchir le seuil — ou, pour parler avec grandiloquence, l’abîme ontologique — qui sépare l’univers de la fiction de celui de sa vie quotidienne...’

⁹ Genette, G. 1997, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, Cambridge (original: *Seuils*, 1987), p. 2.

¹⁰ Genette, *Paratexts*, p. 163.

¹¹ Genette, *Paratexts*, p. 408.

hexameters are also the first signal that we have entered another frame. The meter of Homer, Hesiod and Xenophanes signals the passage from everyday speech to something different.

We will look at the following features of the poem that help our passage into the frame of the Poem:

1. *Gradual unfolding, partial unfolding and surprise*. These strategies create suspense that involves us in the Poem. The narrative begins ‘on the road’ and we miss fundamental information (e.g. goal of the journey, identity of the traveller). New information makes some aspects of the journey clearer but also raises new questions.
2. *Crossed thresholds* (e.g. gates) and other *signals of discontinuity* between the two worlds. They bring us deeper and deeper into the Poem.
3. *The protagonist*. The presence of a protagonist in the narrative can induce the audience to identify with him, and therefore get involved in the Poem. Identification is helped by the fact that the protagonist speaks in the first person singular and focalises the journey; that he is in danger; that he has recognisable and positive characteristics; that he is authoritative. Once the audience has identified with the protagonist, they will feel addressed when the goddess, after the poem, makes an appeal to the ‘I’ that becomes a ‘you’. Then they, too, will feel spurred to follow her advice and try to focus on Being: what is and never changes.

Gradual and partial unfolding and surprise

Many features of the journey told by the traveller can arouse suspense, which is obviously a valuable instrument to catch the attention of the audience, to keep it and to stimulate their concentration and willingness to hear more.

Suspense can be created by means of *gradual unfolding, partial unfolding and surprise*. *Gradual unfolding* occurs when expectation is aroused and then slowly satisfied; *partial unfolding* occurs when expectation is created and then only partially satisfied; *surprise* occurs when the audience is confronted with something completely different from their expectation: this asks for attention and creates new expectations and new tensions.

Gradual unfolding, partial unfolding and surprise occur both on the level of the macrostructure of the poem, i.e. on the level of the succession of macrounits into which we can divide the text, and on the microstructure: within the units. I will present the travel-narrative of the poem divided into five macrounits, i.e. portions of text that show internal thematic

coherence and yield a well-arranged travel-narrative thanks to their succession. Let us look at the five macrounits and at the suspense that they create on the macro and microlevel.

Unit 1. B 1, 1-5. *Introduction of the traveller and the guides*. The protagonist portrays himself as being on a chariot led by mares on a journey on the way of the goddess.

B1, 1-5. The mares that carry me as far as my intention may reach conveyed [me], since they made me go leading [me] on the famous route of the god[less] that carries [along all the cities] the man who knows:

along that road I was carried, for along that road very sensible mares carried me drawing the chariot and the girls led the way

The protagonist tells us that mares carry him as far as his desire reaches. This can happen since they bring him along the famous way of a divinity. This way leads the man who knows everywhere. We do not know anything about this traveller yet, but we learn to respect him: if he was not a man who knows, he could never have been there. And he is not simply there. He enjoys the guidance of the mares that carry his chariot, and we learn that they are very sensible. Also some girls are there and show the way. Who are they? Where is this chariot going along the way of a divine being?

Unit 1. — together with unit 5. — establishes the frame for an important piece of gradual unfolding at the macrolevel: it stimulates an important question that will be resolved only in the last unit. When the travellers and the guides are introduced (unit 1.) we hear that the horses that carry the traveller bring him as far as he wishes (v.1); but we do not know for sure where the journey heads to until unit 5., when the traveller meets the goddess (v.22, see below).

Unit 2. B1, 6-10. *Speed*. There are various hints of the high speed of the journey: the axle burns, the daughters of the sun hurry

B1, 6-10. And the axle in the axle-box let go the loud sound of a pipe (*gyrtax*),

burning (burning for it was urged on by two rounded

wheels on both sides) whenever they rushed forward to convey [me]:

the Heliades, having left the houses of the Night

towards light, having pushed back the veils from their heads with their hands.

Unit 1. and 2. are an easily acceptable succession in a travel-narrative: a journey, after it has been presented, speeds up. However, this succession also creates expectation about the reason of the speed and, again, about the goal of the journey.

We hear a noise, like the one of the *gyrtax* (a musical pipe): the wheels are in fact spinning so quickly that they burn and sound. In the previous unit (1) we had heard that the girls led the way (v.5); only now (v.9) (gradual unfolding) we hear that they are the Heliades, daughters of the Sun. The girls are the daughters of the Sun and they are in a hurry, they want to proceed very swiftly. They are coming from the houses of the Night and they have pushed back the veils from their head; they have just arrived into the light and they move so quickly that the wheels of the chariot almost burn. Why are they in a hurry? What are they trying to reach? It must be very important and they do not seem to have a moment to waste.

At B1, 7 suspense is created by means of the usage of a conjunction: what I translate as 'for', in B1, 7, is *γὰρ* in Greek. A *γὰρ*-clause usually comes after a sentence that is puzzling or vague and, being so, arouses curiosity in the audience. In v.6 we just heard that the axle of the chariot makes the whistling sound of the *gyrtax* and burns. This first reference to the speed of the chariot is quite puzzling: we do not know if and why the travellers are in a hurry. By hearing something puzzling and then 'for', 'in fact' or 'because', we expect the explanation for the puzzling remark. But we receive some explanation that, instead of satisfying our curiosity, creates even more questions. In the for-clause, in fact, we do get an explanation about the axle getting hot since it is being pressed between two wheels that spin very quickly. But this explanation highlights even more the speed of the chariot without satisfying our wish to know the cause of the hurry. We get even more interested in what follows. The reasons for the speed will never get completely unfolded. Nevertheless the stress on the speed of the chariot gives us an indication of the vast distance that the travellers cover, which is functional in situating what happens after the poem very far away from the here and now.

In this unit we also find another occurrence of partial unfolding: even if we learn more about the goal of the journey, we can never be sure if the journey goes to the underworld or into the light: it depends on how we translate the Greek. 'Towards light' [*εἰς φῶς*] (v.10) can be combined with 'leaving the houses of Night' [*πρὸς αἰθέρα δόματα νοκτρῶς*] (v.9): the daughters of the Sun left the houses of Night and went into light to fetch the travellers, and subsequently all together they cross again the threshold and go into the houses of Night and further into the underworld. However 'towards light' can also be combined with 'convey' [*πέμψεν* (v.8)]: the daughters of the Sun rushed to convey the traveller towards light.

Unit 3. B1, 11-14. *Obstacle*. The journey is interrupted when the gates of Night and Day stand out and block the way: the gates are described as imposing and impossible to overcome. What makes the possibility of overcoming such an obstacle even more unlikely is the presence of the much-punishing goddess Diké in front of it, with keys in her hands.

B1, 11-14. There stand the gates of the ways of Night and Day,

enclosed by a lintel and a threshold of stone:

they, high in air, are fitted closely to a great doorframe.

And much-punishing Diké holds their keys that open and close.

Unit 2., having created more expectations about the goal by stressing the hurry, is an excellent foil for unit 3. Our expectation about the goal gets frustrated and the surprise of an obstacle involves us even more in the narrative. We 'suffer' for the delay that such an obstacle will create, assuming that the protagonist is in a hurry—or has travelled a long distance—since he travels so quickly.

In this unit we find an example of *surprise* and its effect in creating suspense: when the journey stops after it seems to have reached its maximum speed (v.11) we are surprised. Moreover the goddess *Diké* appears: she looks dangerous (much-punishing, πολὺπόνος) and immovable in front of the gates (v.14). We are surprised to see her preventing the travellers from going further. Perhaps, we wonder, *Diké* will punish the protagonist, the 'I'. Wherever he desired to go, and even if the mares and the girls were ready to bring him there, we know from Hesiod's *Theogony* that beyond the gates of Night and Day (v.748) Tartarus ^{οὐρανὸν} Hades are situated: the place were the rebel Titans are secluded and the kingdom of the Dead. We suspect that Diké will never let the traveller in there alive. We are eager to hear more about the behaviour of Diké and whether the journey can proceed—this creates suspense and willingness to hear more.

Unit 4. B1, 15-21. *Surreal*. Suddenly the tension is relieved and the obstacle is overcome: very unexpectedly the goddess Diké proves to be easy to persuade and the doors get quickly opened.

B1, 15-21. This very goddess—speaking gently to her, by means of sweet words—the girls

succeeded in persuading cunningly, so that she pushed back the bar fastened with a iron peg

for them, quickly, from the gates; and the doors, in the doorframe,

made a yawning gap, by spreading open and

turning the bronze axles by turns in their sockets (*gyrinx*)

fixed with pegs and nails. And there the girls

led the chariot and the mares quickly through the gates along the chariot-road.

The daughters of the Sun manage to persuade the much-punishing goddess, by means of sweet words. Diké is very friendly and pushes back what kept the doors shut; the mechanism of the doors works perfectly and they immediately spread open.

Unit 4. provides the best possible step after 3., since the obstacle is overcome. The

surprise nevertheless has left us uncertain: we are afraid that something else may happen to the travellers and stop them.

4. B1, 22-24. *Goal*. The journey reaches its goal. Beyond the gates of Night and Day a goddess waits for the traveller and welcomes him.

B1, 22-24. And I was received warmly by the goddess, and with her hand

she took my right hand and spoke these words and addressed me

The protagonist can drive beyond the gates of Night and Day and beyond the yawning gap situated after the opened doors. Here we find what we realise to be the goal of the journey: the goddess, who welcomes him and addresses him.

Unit 5. conveys the happy end,¹² where some questions are answered and 'unfolded', e.g. the goal of the journey, and other are not: e.g. we never hear who is the goddess.

The suspense raised by this travel-narrative involves the audience into the Poem making them attentive and interested.

Crossed thresholds and other signals of discontinuity

A practice common to theatre, sport, religion etc. consists in marking the boundary between the everyday space and the other frame where other laws are in force. E.g. the frame of the painting divides us from the world of the painting. When the curtain rises we have Victorian England in front of us. When the referee whistles, what matters most is that our team kicks the ball into the goal of the other team. During the Christian Catholic mass at a certain stage a little bell is rung and then the priest says a formula that changes bread and wine into flesh and blood. If a grandmother says: 'Once upon a time' we are not surprised if we hear about princesses and dragons.

¹² The story will become more complex when the goddess will give him indications for another journey. I will tackle this elsewhere.

A poem does not have a frame and basically it cannot whistle. But it can, for instance, let us imagine thresholds crossed by a traveller and give us other signals of discontinuity between our world and its world. Once we are driven away from the everyday world¹³ it will be easier for us to accept what happens beyond those various thresholds: we suspect already that within the new frame other laws will be in force.¹⁴ As soon as the poem begins, even if the audience has already begun to listen or to read, it may be possible that the aesthetic distance from their everyday world has not been achieved yet. A poem can help us enter into its frame also after it has already begun. The gradualness that may characterise our entrance into the world of poetry—and that distinguishes it from the immediate entrance into e.g. a soccer match after the whistle of the referee—can be brought about by a plurality of signals of discontinuity.¹⁵ A travel-narrative is a context where a plurality of signals of discontinuity can be presented. The audience follows the traveller while he gets beyond various thresholds deeper and deeper into the frame of the work. His journey can be seen as a means of getting further and further from the here and now.

The chariot, drawn by the mares of v.1—i.e. the means of transportation by which the journey takes place and the thresholds are crossed—, can be identified with poetry itself:¹⁶ a device capable of gradually displacing us deeper and deeper into another world. Mares and chariot bring both the protagonist and us away from the here and now.¹⁷

The first signal of discontinuity is a sound. The noise of the glowing wheels, which resembles the sound of the *gyrnax* ('musical pipe', v.6), can have a ritual meaning. Kingsley

(1999) refers to accounts of incubation where some signals mark the entrance in another kind of consciousness that is neither sleep nor wake. One of these signals is the whistle of the *gyrnax*. It signals the displacement into the other frame, the one of incubation where normal laws are no longer in force: where the boundaries between death and birth, sleeping and waking are removed. While the chariot moves rapidly we hear this signal of passage into another frame.

Moreover, it seems meaningful that the text suggests to us that we hear the same noise once again when the gates open and let the traveller into the new world. The same word for musical pipe (*gyrnax*), is used at v.19 to refer to the sockets in which the bronze posts (same words for the axle of the wheels) turn when the doors are opened. When Diké removes what kept them blocked from the doors, and they spread open, the posts or axles turn in their sockets. The sockets are of bronze and the axle is also of bronze. The friction of these bronze objects must have made again a pretty loud noise, perhaps similar to the one of the *gyrnax*. The *gyrnax* is evoked by the usage of this word to refer to the sockets. In Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusai*, 487–488 we hear about a woman who wants to get out without being discovered: she puts water in the bronze hole in the threshold where the bronze post fitted. The text of Parmenides does not say anything about such strategies not to make noise, therefore we have to assume that the opening of doors, and certainly of such big doors, must have made a loud squeaky noise. We can imagine that the moment of the entrance and the crossing of the threshold had been marked again by a sound. This is the second acoustic signal of the passage to the frame of the work.¹⁸

The most crucial signal that makes clear to us that we have entered another domain is the crossing of the gate of Night and Day (v.11). An impressive threshold at the beginning of a work and the crossing of it is not only to be found in Parmenides' poem. Sometimes we are shown a threshold that is explicitly qualified as the gate of the poem, like in Pindar's *Olympian 6*, where the gate of song must get open so that the chariot in which the poet drives can enter it. However, to show a

¹³ At B1,27 we will hear explicitly that the world we hear about is far away from the paths of men.

¹⁴ Morhange, 'Inceptive narratives', 390–393 shows how some strategies that mark explicitly the boundary between everyday language and the one of the tale, like the formulas used to begin an oral tale, often do so by expressing the temporal, spatial or cosmological distance between the two worlds.

¹⁵ Gradualness in letting us into the world of a poem can also take the form of 'friction of not begun yet'. In Homer we find this. The *Iliad* begins with the words: 'Sing Muse the wrath etc.': the poem has begun, but fictionally it has not, since the Muse is only asked to sing. Pindar takes this procedure to the extreme at the beginning of *Nonan 3*: in the first thirteen verses the 'I' prays to the Muse three times to intervene, then the 'I' promises that if the Muse gives the hymn he will share it with instruments and chorus. Pindar explicitly lingers on the threshold of his song.

¹⁶ I do not want to suggest that the poem must be read as a poetical statement: the topic of the narrative of the poem is much more than poetry alone. However, I suggest that in the poem some hints are given about the function of poetry that will find confirmation when the traveller arrives at the goddess and she gives indications for another journey—a journey of the mind assisted by the guiding words of the goddess, i.e. by poetry. We will find confirmation of our suspicion that there are words that can help us cover a vast distance from the here and now: once we cover that distance we can experience and grasp things we did not regard as possible before.

¹⁷ The transportation to another place and the fact that the traveller is helped and carried is stressed in the first unit by the repetition of verbs of motion: carry, v.1; conveyed me, made me go, leading v.2; carries, v.3; was carried, carried me, v.4. What is repeated is not only the idea of motion but also the one of guidance, which will become relevant in the text after the poem. Here again we see the double function of this poem, which does not only let the audience into the poem, but prepares them also thematically for what follows. For a random example of the recurrent technique of the anticipation of the most important themes at the beginning of a literary text, cf. Dunn in Dunn, F.M. & Cole, T., *Beginnings in Classical Literature*, Cambridge (1992), about the beginning of Sophocles' *O.C.*

¹⁸ This combination of sound and threshold is not a characteristic of the poem of Parmenides' Poem alone. It is to be found also, e.g. at the beginning of the song *Hotel California*, Eagles (1976): 'On a dark desert highway cool wind in my hair warm smell of colitas rising up through the air, up ahead in the distance I saw a shimmering light, my head grew heavy, and my sight grew dim, I had to stop for the night. There she stood in the doorway, I heard the mission bell and I was thinking to myself this could be heaven or this could be hell. Then she lit up a candle and she showed me the way...'. The protagonist is travelling when he gets to the Hotel California, which can be interpreted as a symbol of death. The threshold is marked: we hear about the doorway with some lady in front of it. The 'I' doubts about heaven or hell. A bell rings and the lady lets him in and shows him the way.

threshold at the beginning of a text, to present a liminal space, is certainly not something typical of Ancient Greek poetry only.

The same structure is to be found in films. For instance Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* begins with a messenger who has been running very hard and arrives at a gate. The gate is shut. He knocks and knocks, but the people inside do not hear him. We know that he must have something very important to tell the lord of the castle, so we get impatient. After a while we have a white fade-out and in the next image we are inside of the gate, where the messenger is in front of the lord. Now we really want to know what is the matter.

Think also of the beginning of *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll, where Alice gets into a rabbit-hole that leads into a tunnel and then she finds herself falling into a well. The fall lasts very long indeed and she can think many thoughts in the meanwhile and even fall asleep. At the end of the fall Alice gets into a long passage, then, following the White Rabbit, she finds herself in a long, low hall, with a lot of doors, all locked. She finds a key but it is too small. Looking better she finds a very small door where the key fits, but that is not larger than a rat-hole and on the other side she can see the most beautiful garden. In both these examples we do not only have a threshold but, next to the most important threshold—the gate of the castle and the rabbit-hole—the entrance into the other world is postponed, either by other passages or by the time the character we are following has to spend in front of the gate to get it open.

In Parmenides' poem, also, something similar happens. At v.18 we have another threshold to add to our collection of markers of discontinuity—the sound, the closed gate, the opening of the gate and the second sound—that let us linger in the threshold-zone between the everyday world and the one of the Poem: a yawning gap, which could in its turn also be difficult to cross.

As I said, this succession of thresholds and lingering in the poem can be seen as a way of postponing the moment when the goddess takes the word. (When she does, she begins again with a poem). This lingering and crossing of different thresholds prepares the audience for what comes next by arousing expectations for what will be beyond the threshold. The audience will accept it more easily since it takes place beyond many thresholds, i.e. far away from the here and now.

The protagonist

It will not surprise anyone to find a protagonist in the narrative of the journey. And yet the importance of this feature for our text has not been stressed enough. Even in a poem that has been described as a philosophical poem about Being, we find a character that facilitates our entering into the poem by means of identification. Identification is one of the most relevant ways in which we react to fictional characters. Identification can be easier if we have achieved the suspension of disbelief. Once we have entered the frame of a text, it will be easier for us to identify with one of the characters. On the other hand identification can bring about suspension of disbelief. If we identify with the protagonist of a text, then this text will be about us and we will be ready to participate in it.

The presence of a protagonist in a narration is fundamental, and some characteristics relative to the protagonist can make identification easier:

1. The narration is done from the perspective of the traveller, who offers to the audience direct speech about his journey.

First person singular and direct speech make the presence of the fictional character felt: there is somebody in front of us (an actor, a poet) who is both in front of us and belongs to the world of the work. Burnyeat suggests that the power of *mimesis*, i.e. direct speech of a character goes together with our sensitivity for the presence of the character: he speaks to us, he is here close to us, he is present; we must be in the same world.¹⁹

An aspect of the use of the first person singular that can help enormously in getting into the frame of the Poem is focalisation:²⁰ the audience looks through the eyes of a character, i.e. they look from within the world of the text. They are within the frame.

They soon notice that they acquire the emotional reactions of the character who focalises the situation—they are afraid if he is in danger, they hope that his wishes come true—they identify with the character.

2. The audience can get more attached to the protagonist if he is in danger. When the protagonist is in danger they feel that they want him to overcome the danger and that his

¹⁹ Burnyeat, M. F., "Art and Mimesis in Plato's Republic", *London Review of Books*, 21 May 1998, 3-9. Race, W. H., "How Greek poems begin", 13-38, in Dunn and Cole, *Beginnings*, in his survey of the formal patterns predominating in poetic introductions, categorises Parmenides' poem as belonging to the category "The narrative opening", since Parmenides tells us about his journey. However he neglects the fact that the speaker participates in the scene with which the poem begins, which would have also justified putting our poem in the category "The dramatic opening". Race mentions the potential of dramatic openings in achieving realistic effects and this is an effect that our poem can have: giving us the illusion that the protagonist of the journey is there in front of us.

²⁰ Focalisation can also be achieved without the use of the first person singular, e.g. in a narrative in the third person where we are offered a *vision avoc* or in a film when a shot is taken of the eyes or face of a character and then of what they see (e.g. scared faces of the peasants in the first scene of *The Magnificent Seven* (J. Sturges 1960), and then the bandits).

quest is successful. Before they realise it, they are involved with the protagonist and in their attitude towards the poem there is no trace of *disbelief*.

3. Characteristics of the protagonist that induce the audience to identify with him are his recognisable traits, the fact that he is possibly 'good' and vaguely described. If the protagonist is not very specifically described, identification can happen easily: the audience could be him. If in a strange, fictional world, there are characters that are recognizable —i.e. they have some characteristics that we have, could have, would like to have— then that world becomes immediately more familiar and more accessible.²¹ The protagonist of Parmenides' poem is a traveller; he is looking for something. The audience can relate to this experience.

If the character has positive characteristics or at least is not worse than the audience is, then there is a greater chance that identification occurs. The protagonist is without name and without any characterisation except that he is a 'man who knows'. The audience wants to be like him, a man who knows—they like to think that also of themselves.²² There is another characteristic of the protagonist that makes the audience *willing* both to identify with him and to choose him as their model. When the protagonist speaks in the first person it can happen that they identify him with the poet who wrote the poem. I call this *fiction of autobiography*. This means that I do not try to guess anything about what was really autobiographical; but I say that *the audience* is inclined, if somebody says 'I', to believe that the experience he or she tells them about, is an experience that he or she actually had. For our Poem this is relevant since a poet who speaks in hexameter is very *authoritative* and that makes the audience more favourably disposed towards his story. Fiction of autobiography suggests also *commitment* of the poet to what he says. And this together with the prestige of the poet can induce the audience to take the 'I' as a *model* and to try to behave like him. Prestige seems to borrow its definition from its unflinching effect: it inspires desire to imitate;²³ it seems to be the characteristic of those who are taken as a model by others.²⁴

²¹ That is also why science fiction films may 'work': they portray cities that look spectacularly different: from ours and strange looking creatures, but actually, those creatures are very recognizable: they fall in love, they want power, they want to rescue those who suffer etc.

²² Cf. *The Islander on Kipley* (A. Mingella, 1999²) a film that exploits this tendency we have of identifying: first we identify with him, since we think that the protagonist is good; gradually we feel more and more uneasy, since he turns out to be someone who murders people just like that, and still we cannot help being in his shoes.

²³ Prestige has even been defined as the characteristic of those who are taken as a model by others: "la qualité de ceux qui entraînent chez les autres la propension à les imiter." (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1958, pp. 407-8).

²⁴ A modern example of fiction of autobiography inducing imitation is Madonna's song *Papa don't preach*, with its lines 'I wanna keep my baby'. The rumour was that an enormous amount of pregnant teenagers decided not to have an

The audience wants to identify with the 'I' and, when the goddess addresses him and guides him in a new journey towards an awareness of the possibility for the human mind to understand the core of reality, they will be ready to do their best.

Conclusion

Suspense, thresholds and identification and probably much more let us wish to participate in the serious game of the Poem. The suspense created in this small narrative makes us eager to hear the story. At the beginning we do not know where the protagonist is going, who he is. As we hear more information about his journey, more riddles arise. The multiple thresholds and signals of discontinuity between our world and the world of the Poem lead the audience deeper and deeper into the world of the Poem, helping the audience to achieve suspension of disbelief and to accept what will happen beyond various thresholds. This narrative of the journey told by a traveller who speaks in the first person, letting us see what happens through his eyes, involves us into the Poem. *We want* to identify with the traveller, who is a man who knows and speaks in hexameters. All this induces the audience to participate in the Poem and when the goddess takes the floor after the poem and addresses the traveller, they will also feel addressed.

abortion because of the prestige of Madonna and their desire to be like her. Keeping their baby was a consequence of their desire of imitating Madonna (not a fictitious character of one of her songs) despite the fact that she was not pregnant herself, but was just telling a story in the first person singular. The fiction of autobiography suggested to her fans that she was committed to what she sang in the first person singular.