

DYNAMIC VS. STATIC – A KIND OF PARALLELISM IN AL-HAMAḌĀNĪ'S MAQĀMĀT

Tamás Iványi

Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest

“The detail is everything” – *Vladimir Nabokov*

As the style of elevated diction had been dominated by parallelism in the field of meaning¹ by the time the *maqāmāt* of Badī' az-Zamān al-Hamaḍānī were being written, it is not at all surprising that the style of the *maqāma* genre may best be characterized by the abundant use of parallelism where the parallel structures have a kind of simple (consonantal) rhymes – though it is to be stressed that the two phenomena were originally independent of each other². It is not our aim here to give a definition of parallelism, but it must be emphasized that in our view no difference can be stated, at least from a strictly linguistic point of view, between what may be termed as literary (or regular and voluntarily made) parallelism and parallelism occurring randomly in everyday speech or in a non-literary text. Generally speaking, that means that the linguistic analysis of the so-called “literary” or “poetic language” should always form a natural extension of the linguistic forms of the “common language”³. Parallelism means in reality very seldom the use of precisely

¹ Cf. Beeston 1974:134.

² See Beeston 1974:143 who suggests to avoid using the term *sağ'* and its European rendering, “rhymed prose”, considering them ‘somewhat dubious’ See also *id.* 1990:126ff. and Horst, Heribert. 1987:221ff. It is also to be noted that of the two most important *maqāma* authors, al-Hamaḍānī perhaps lays more emphasis on parallelism, while al-Ḥarīrī on rhyming.

³ This is the question of whether poetic language should be analyzed on a ‘different level’ from non-poetic language (Abu Deeb 1990:379-380), or as a ‘deviation’ from it (Ricoeur 1986:136ff).

synonymous members (words or syntagms)⁴. The parallel line does not simply repeat what has been said, but enriches it, deepens it, transforms it by adding fresh nuances and bringing in new elements, renders it more concrete and vivid and telling – that is, it generates new (contextual) semantic reality from the lexical (word) meanings of its components⁵. The purpose of parallelism then, like the general purpose of imagery, is to transfer the usual perception of an object into the sphere of a new perception – that is, *to make a unique semantic modification*⁶.

⁴ Beeston, though speaks about “straight semantic synonymity” as one of the main features of parallelism in his fundamental article on the theme (1974:134-135), reveals in the actual analyses much more in the couplets than simple and mechanic synonymity. Alter 1985:10, speaking about Biblical Hebrew verses, states that “literary expression (though thrives on parallelism) abhors complete parallelism, just as language resists true synonymity, usage almost always introducing small wedges of difference between closely akin terms.”

⁵ The remarks of P. A. Boodberg on parallelistic couplets in Chinese poetry (Boodberg, 1954, cited by Jakobson 1966:402) may be cited here to illustrate our point of view: the function of the second line of a couplet is, he argues, “to give us the clue for the construction of the first. Parallelism is not merely a stylistic device of formularistic syntactical duplication; it is intended to achieve a result reminiscent of binocular vision, the superimposition of two syntactical images in order to endow them with solidity and depth, the repetition of the pattern having the effect of binding together syntagms that appear at first rather loosely aligned.”

Jurij Lotman’s words about poetry (Lotman 1977:126-127) also applies to Arabic belle-lettristic prose: “Strictly speaking, unconditional repetition is impossible in poetry. The repetition of a word in a text, as a rule, does not mean the mechanical repetition of a concept. Most often it points to a more complex, albeit unified, semantic context.”

⁶ This operation was nicely perceived two centuries ago by J. G. Herder (1784:23) that “the two [parallel] members strengthen then heighten, empower each other.” Shklovsky (1965:21) defines this process as follows: “The perception of disharmony in a harmonious context is important in parallelism. The purpose of parallelism, like the general purpose of imagery, is to transfer the usual perception of an object into the sphere of a new perception – that is, *to make a unique semantic modification*”.

There are several types of semantic modification in Badī' az-Zamān al-Ḥamadānī's *maqāmāt*⁷. There are some seemingly straight synonymous balancing phrases the members of which, however, appear to have a special type of semantic difference:

- (1) (*fa-ḡā'altu*) *anfīhi wa-utbituhu* * *wa-unkiruhu wa-ka'annī a'rifuhu* (reject/D; prove/D * refuse to acknowledge/S; know/S)⁸
- (2) *yansitu wa-ka'annahu yafham* * *wa-yaskutu wa-ka'annahu lā ya'lam* (listen/D; comprehend/D * be silent/S; know/S)

In the above two examples there are always at least two lexical elements with similar or quasi-synonymous meanings, but at a closer look we may become aware of a significant (though not necessarily self-evident) difference. One of the couplets always refers to a condition, that is, it is *static*; while the other implies movement or action, that is, it is *dynamic*. Or, more precisely: non-static, because state can more easily be defined than dynamism. The words *anfā*, *atbata* and *anṣata* and *fahima* represent an action or process necessary to reach a state or condition while the words *ankara*, *arafa*, *sakata* and *'alima* express the condition or state itself⁹. The formation of the sense of a sentence or better

⁷ Only the Beirut edition of Muḥammad 'Abduh was used. The examples cited in this paper are only a fragment of the many hundreds of cases of semantic parallelism in the text. The results of a complete analysis of the text and a list of different types of semantic parallelism will be presented at the 2nd Shaban Memorial Conference in Exeter, September 1994.

⁸ In defining the dynamic or static character of a word or expression mainly the *Lisān al-'arab* was used, beside taking into consideration the usual textual contexts of the words in question.

The *Lisān* states the difference between *naṣā* and *ankara* in the following way: *naṣā aš-šay' tanahḥā; al-inkār al-ḡubūd wa-l-munkar hīlāf al-mā'rūf*. For the sake of brevity references to *Lisān* have been left out from the paper in the following.

⁹ Naturally, both terms denote relative attribute, and a static meaning can be regarded as relatively dynamic in another relation. If, for example, *'arafa* and *'alima* were to be contrasted with each other, the first would be considered active while the other its static counterpart. In this case, however, *'arafa* contrasts with *atbata* and in this pair the latter has a more action type meaning.

to say text(ual unit) does not end with the choice of the appropriate words – that is, sentence meaning is not simply the outcome of the meanings of its word components¹⁰. So here the seemingly synonymous words obtain special shades of meaning when confronted with each other by way of coupling them in balanced phrases.

The conjunction of two words having almost the same meaning except for one semantic feature (*static vs. dynamic*), or a small bunch of features, serves to designate their common semantic field or common set of semantic features. This can also be considered neutralization with regard to the semantic feature in question, since the new semantic unit resulting from the conjunction will certainly be neutral as to static or dynamic characteristics¹¹.

Let us consider now some parallelistic word pairs which are used quite commonly and so they can be considered as common language expressions¹²:

- (3) *taraktuhu wa-nšaraftu* (I left/S him and departed/D)
 (4) *fiṭna wa-dakā* (intelligence/D and cleverness/S)

¹⁰ See, for example, Ricoeur's opinion (1986:129ff): "Taken in isolation, the word still has only a potential meaning, made up of the sum of its partial meanings, themselves defined by the types of contexts in which they can participate. They have actual meaning only in a given sentence, that is to say, in an instance of discourse".

¹¹ A. F. L. Beeston deals in his fundamental book, *The Arabic Language Today* with slightly similar cases of lexical couplets. He says (p.112) "Arabic has been alleged to be unusually rich in synonyms, but it is doubtful whether it is exceptional in this respect. Most cases of alleged synonymy are at best partial, and this is a phenomenon of all languages. What is unusual about Arabic is the extent to which this phenomenon is countered by the device of hendiadys: the use of two words with different but overlapping semantic spectra to denote the area of overlap". Then he takes use of the rule of logical conjunction, pointing out, that such expressions like *ḥukm wa-qaḍā*' and *ḥukm wa-sulṭān* "are in no way tautological, as they would illusorily appear to be ... they represent a single concept" – eliminating those meanings or shades of meaning which are not common in the two lexemes.

¹² As a matter of fact, they have been taken from Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's *al-Ayyām* (4-7, occurring many times) and from al-Hamaḍānī's *maqāmāt* (3, where it occurs two times), but each of them can be encountered in today's newspaper language, too.

- (5) *ḥass wa-šū'ūr* (perception/*D* and consciousness/*S*)¹³
 (6) *gumūd wa-ibhām* (obscureness/*S* and ambiguity/*D*)
 (7) *mut'aban maktūdān* (tired/*S* and overworked/*D*)
 (8) *bi-mašāqqatin wa-ḡahdin* (with hardship/*S* and great efforts/*D*)

They seem to be made up of conventionally fixed (synonymous) pairs. But if we try to analyze further these pairs we find that the members of these formulae can be differentiated from each other according to various semantic attributes, one of which is the feature *dynamic vs. static*. One of the pairs, usually the first, expresses a dynamic version of about the same bundle of semantic features of which the other is a static variant. In these examples *taraka*, *ḏakā'*, *šū'ūr*, *gumūd*, *mut'ab* and *mašāqqa* may be considered as *static*, while on the other side *inšarafa*, *fiṭna*, *ḥass*, *ibhām*, *maktūd* and *ḡahd* may rightfully be labelled as *dynamic*. The difference in meaning between the two members may extend, however, to more than one semantic features. The extended use of these and similar pairs of expressions in the Classical and Modern Literary Arabic (and not only in the literature, but in everyday usage, too) indicates that this device may be more than simply a rhetoric device and also points to the basically linguistic (and not stylistic) roots of the phenomenon we called here semantic conjunction.

If, however, semantic conjunction of two lexical items is an acceptable linguistic means to express a single concept, parallelism containing conjunctions cannot be simply looked upon as a rather superfluous stylistic device¹⁴. So, before we would speak about tautology and a much rhetorical style in the parallelism of the *maqāmāt* and any other Arabic genre, we must at first analyze linguistically the given parallelistic struc-

¹³ Although this expression does not occur in al-Hamadānī's text, both words occur separately once:

lammā aḥassū bi-l-qissa * *wa-šarat bi-qulūbihim ḡassa* (m. *šaymarīyya*) and *wa-nisā'un qad našarna šū'urahunna* * *yadribna šudūrahunna* (m. *maṣīliyya*).

¹⁴ Roman Jakobson (1960:377) speaking about poeticalness, as the poetic function of any form of the language, says: "Poeticalness is not a supplementation of discourse with rhetorical adornment but a total re-evaluation of the discourse and of all its components whatsoever."

tures whether they have or have not real linguistic function. Of course, we are not taking now in consideration the special effect, which is reached by using unnecessarily frequently or excessively one and the same linguistic device. It seems, however, that with at least al-Hamaḍānī such is not the case. Let us consider other examples of similar nature from the “*maqāma isfahāniyya*” (no. 10 in our edition):

- (9) *atawaqqaʿu l-qāfilata kulla lamḥa * wa-atarqqabu r-rāḥilata kulla ṣubḥa* (expecting/S * looking for/D)
- (10) *wa-bī l-ḡammu l-muqīdu l-muqīmu fī fawti l-qāfila * wa-l-buʿdi ʿani r-rāḥila* (passing away/D * remoteness/S)¹⁵
- (11) *wa-anā ataṣallā nāra ṣ-ṣabri wa-ataṣallab * wa-ataqallā ʿalā ḡamri l-ḡayzi wa-ataqallab* ([in the meantime] I am warming/S myself by the fire/D of patience/S and show myself hard/S (in it) * and I am roasting/D myself on the embers/S of enragement/D and tossing and turning/D)¹⁶
- (12) *wa-laysa lī illā s-sukūtu wa ṣ-ṣabr * awi l-kalām wa-l-qabr* (silence/S; patience/D * speaking/D; being in the grave/S)¹⁷
- (13) *sabhala llāhu l-mahraḡ * wa-qarraba l-faraḡ* (way out/D * release/S)

The whole situation in this *maqāma* is built on the very sharp and manifolded contrast created between movement and rest, action and condition, that is, the semantic feature *dynamic vs. static* may be found not only in separate entities – words and expressions – but it governs the whole situation or rather a series of situations and thus the whole story. That means that from a lexical feature it has in reality become

¹⁵ The word *fawt* is many times contrasted in al-Hamaḍānī's text with the absolute static condition of death (*mawt*), while *buʿd* can be regarded as alike to death.

¹⁶ The series of static and dynamic expressions are only interrupted by the words *nār* and *ḡamr* which are used reversely, first because the verb *taṣallā* usually goes with it and secondly because the disharmony caused by this reverse usage animates the whole passage.

¹⁷ Of course, *ṣabr* can only be considered as dynamic in this context where it is contrasted with an even more static item, *qabr*.

here a textual feature¹⁸. First, the story-teller's waiting anxiously for the arrival of the caravan, then his hesitation whether he should remain among his fellow travellers or go to the prayer and his suffering during the long prayer and finally, on top of all, the appearing of an impostor, who, appealing to the extreme religiosity of the community detains him from returning back to the travellers – all these four situations are portrayed by a powerful utilization of the possibilities given by *dynamic/static* couplets. These are usually not words but whole sentences¹⁹ and the semantic parallelism is reinforced by a perfect syntactic parallelism, the word order in each of the half-lines exactly mirroring the other, with each corresponding term in the same syntactic position.

Finally, it must be emphasized that not all parallelistic couplets, of course, exhibit the parallelism of the semantic conjunction of dynamic and static lexemes or any other type of semantic conjunction. And because the comparison is between senses and not just words, there is often enough room for debate over whether a particular B-line is more dynamic than its A-line and vice versa. It is, however, a common enough feature of Arabic parallelism to make it worth asking of every parallelistic couplet whether any gain in understanding may result from applying the present concept to it. The new feature that has emerged from this study of the parallelistic couplets is not so much the identification of a particular relationship of the lines of the couplet (*dynamic vs. static* feature) as a movement towards a statement of relationships within the poetic couplet. We must also note that in most cases there is an overlapping of several heterogeneous types of parallelism (semantic, syntactic, prosodic, morphological, phonetic, and so

¹⁸ It may rightfully be supposed that it is in many cases the text or a part of it (and not one or more lexical entities) that shows *dynamic* or *static* character.

¹⁹ All this may be considered a general characteristic of parallelism as is described by Alter (1985:19) speaking about Biblical parallelism "In semantic parallelism the characteristic movement of meaning is the heightening or intensification of focusing, specification, concretization, dramatization".

on) so that no single element may be considered as purely dominant or as purely concomitant²⁰.

In conclusion, let Ibn Haldūn's wise words stand here (Rosenthal 1958 III, 193): "The secret and spirit of speech ... lie in conveying ideas. The perfect way of conveying ideas is eloquence. Eloquence is conformity of speech to the requirements of the situation. After perfect indication (of the requirements of the situation has been achieved), the word combinations ... have their different kinds of artistic embellishment. In a way, they give them the brilliance of correct speech. Such (kinds of artistic embellishment) include ornamental use of rhymed prose, the use of phrases of identical structure at the end of successive cola. The spontaneous occurrence of rhetorical figures causes no comment, because (in such case) they are no way forced, and the speech (in which they occur) cannot therefore be criticized as (linguistically) faulty. The forced and studied use of rhetorical figures leads to disregard of the basic word combinations of speech and thus destroys all basis for indication (of the meaning of speech)."

REFERENCES

A. Primary sources.

- al-Hamaḍānī, *Maqāmāt* = *Maqāmāt Abī l-Faḍl Badī' az-Zamān al-Hamaḍānī*. Commentaries by Muḥammad 'Abduh. Beirut: al-Maṭba'a al-Kāṭūlīkiyya lil-Ābā' al-Yasū'īyyīn, 1908.
- Ibn Haldūn, *Muqaddima* = Abū Zayd 'Abdarrahmān b. Muḥammad Ibn Haldūn, *al-Muqaddima*. Edited and annotated by 'Alī 'Abdal-wāḥid Wāfī, 3 vols., Cairo: Laḡnat al-Bayān al-'Arabī, 1957-58. English transl. = Rosenthal 1958.

²⁰ Cf. Hrushovski (1971:1200) on Biblical parallelism.

Lisān al-ʿarab = Abū l-Faḍl Ġamāl ad-Dīn Muḥammad b. Mukarram Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿarab*. Edited by ʿAbdallāh ʿAlī al-Kabīr, Muḥammad Aḥmad Ḥasballāh & Hāšim Muḥammad aš-Šādīlī, 6 vols., Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1981.

B. Secondary sources

- Alter, Robert. 1985. *The Art of Biblical Poetry*. New York: Basic Books.
- Beeston, A. F. L. 1970. *The Arabic Language Today*. London: Hutchinson University Library.
- . 1974. "Parallelism in Arabic Prose". *Journal of Arabic Literature* 5.134-146.
- . 1990. "Al-Hamadānī, al-Ḥarīrī and the *maqāmāt* genre". Julia Ashtiany et al. (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: ʿAbbasid Belles-Lettres*. 125-135. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Pr.
- Boodberg, P. A. 1954. "On Crypto-parallelism in Chinese Poetry". *Cedules from a Berkeley Workshop in Asiatic Philology*, nos. 001-540701. Cited in Roman Jakobson 1966:402.
- Herder, J. G. 1784. *Vom Geist der erbäischer Poesie*. Dessau.
- Horst, Heribert. 1987. "Besondere Formen der Kunstprosa". *Grundriß der arabischen Philologie*. II.: Literaturwissenschaft. 221-227. Ed. by Helmut Gätje. Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichewrt Verlag.
- Hrushovski, Benjamin. 1971. "Prosody, Hebrew". *Encyclopaedia Judaica* vol. XIII, 1200-1202. New York.
- Jakobson, Roman. 1960. "Closing Statements: Linguistics and Poetics". Thomas A. Sebeok (ed.), *Style in Language*. Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press.
- . 1966. "Grammatical Parallelism and its Russian Facet". *Language* 42.399-429.
- Lotman, Jurij. 1977. *The Structure of Artistic Text*. English transl. by Ronald Vroom. Ann Arbor, Mich.
- Ricoeur, Paul. 1986. *The Rule of Metaphor*. Transl. by Robert Czerny, with Kathleen McLaughlin John Costello, SJ. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

- Rosenthal, Franz. 1958. *Ibn Khaldûn, The Muqaddimah: An introduction to history*. 3 vols., London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. 2nd ed. with corrections and augmented bibl. (= *Bollingen Series*, 43.). Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press. 1967.
- Shklovsky, Viktor. 1965. "Art as technique". Edited by L. T. Lemon & M. J. Reis, *Russian Formalist Criticism*. Lincoln, Neb.
- Tāhā Husayn. *al-Ayyām*. Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, no date.