

THE POWER OF PARALLELISM

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The aim of this article is to illustrate how powerful a tool parallelism can be. To do so the first part of the article will expound the nature of parallelism, as developed by Jakobson (1981). The second part will offer an analysis of a short extract of five lines from Act V Sc. 1 of Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice where parallelism constitutes the principal linguistic constructional device, deployed with extreme frequency, and accounting in great measure for the intensity of the effects of Bassanio's renowned speech.

1. The nature of foregrounding and parallelism

Foregrounding is the general linguistic technique by which a marked linguistic expression is produced in order to make that expression convey a different meaning from the meaning that its synonymic, 'equivalent' unmarked construction would have conveyed.

This preliminary definition immediately requires explanatory extensions.

First, by "linguistic expression" and "linguistic construction" is meant any verbal and non-verbal device, or rather set of devices, employed by communicants to create a message. On the one hand, there exist the devices made available by code: phonology, graphology, grammar and semantics. On the other hand there are the myriad of devices made available by other linguistic and non-linguistic sources – pragmatics being in the vanguard for its richness, proxemics being a cogent instantiation of a non-verbal device.

Clearly, a set of devices is always at work in any utterance, for grammar, graphology (written texts) or phonology (spoken texts), pragmatics, genre conventions, cultural norms, to mention but a few, are concurrently at work in any utterance, interacting in a variety of sophisticated, complex ways.

Second, by 'unmarked' is meant the 'standard' or 'normal' linguistic form generally employed to convey a given concept or

message in a given speech community. In Standard English, this corresponds, at a most basic level, to the active SVO (subject-verb-object) construction for the affirmative: 'Max kissed Elisabeth'. The 'marked' alternative would be 'Elisabeth was kissed by Max'. In 'normal' circumstances, where no particular emphasis is intended, the unmarked construction is generally employed.

Note that my deployment of the term 'standard' has no 'prescriptive' implication, no idea of 'correctness'. It is more of a statistical fact, one of use: people generally express a given meaning in a given form in a given language, language variety or idiolect. They have been 'taught' to do so. It is a cultural fact.

When, instead, something 'more' or something 'different' is intended than, to keep to our original illustration, the expression of the concept that human being *a* carried out action *b* on human being *c*, (i.e. more than what is conveyed by the literal meaning of the unmarked form 'Max kissed Elisabeth'), then a 'variation' of the unmarked form can be employed. For instance, the passive may be employed when the focus of interest is not on the agent (Max) but on the patient (Elisabeth), to use Halliday's (Halliday and Matthiessen: 2004) terminology. Stated differently, while the conceptual or ideational content is identical in the active and passive forms, the communicative value attributed to the single items of information constituting the concept/message changes. In the passive format, the noun phrase "Elisabeth" is signaled as being more important than the noun phrase "Max" by dint of its realizing the function grammatical subject and the pragmatic status 'theme' (Halliday and Matthiessen: 2004) and by virtue of being located in first position in the sentence (graphology), in contrast to the active form, where "Max" is signaled as being more important information by dint of the very same three linguistic criteria or devices.

Note that foregrounding does not tell us *why* a given form assigns a different set of values to the information in that given expression. That is to say, it does not tell us what the message conveyed by the 'deviant' form is. It only tells us that in that part of the text we must look for some meaning which goes beyond the literal. To seek that answer one must employ the same inferential

The Power of Parallelism

engine one employs in processing any linguistic expression (Douthwaite: 2000; Sperber & Wilson).

The next question is: how is foregrounding achieved? Two basic techniques may be employed: deviation and parallelism.

Perception is an extremely rapid process (Douthwaite 1990). This must be so if we are to survive in the 'hostile', multi-faceted, ever-changing, ambiguous world which surrounds us. Just think of crossing the street in the rush hour in a big town. This task which we seemingly carry out effortlessly and without conscious reflection is, instead, a typically complex task since there are hundreds of signals reaching the body at any second in time. Furthermore, the brain takes time to process a signal. Hence, the brain cannot handle all the incoming signals. Thus, it has developed strategies to cut down the number of signals it must process to avoid being overloaded and consequently grinding to a halt.

One essential premise of the strategies that have been developed is the assumption of a 'normal' world. When we cross a road in England we assume that cars will be driving on the left. This helps us cut down the number of signals to be processed by eliminating unlikely alternatives, such as the cars coming from the right constituting an immediate danger, since I can predict that those coming from the left will be the first to pose a threat to my life. Those coming from the right will become dangerous once I reach the center of the road. Furthermore, the brain ignores signals which are not relevant to the achievement of the goal in hand, such as the colours and makes of the vehicles going by, the number of people standing near me and walking by, and what they are wearing. Ridiculous as this example might seem, it nevertheless constitutes a true and accurate picture of perception. Life consists of a myriad of 'minute' signals of great importance, their relative importance depending on our pre-set goal. A feeling of increased heat might flag the danger of my hand going too near the gas or a pan I do not know is hot. This helps account for why processing is unconscious, automatic. We attribute little importance to those 'normal, everyday signals, such as cars driving on the left hand side of the road, (bar when we have to cross the road).

The result, as Shklovsky pointed out, is one of habituation. We create standard reactions (responses to problems, such as crossing the road, getting dressed, eating), and these desensitize us to the world. We begin taking things for granted, from the 'small' things such as the light coming on every time I touch the switch to the 'big' things such as my wife and child loving me. This makes me appreciate the world less (going to that beach two hundred miles away from home becomes less exhilarating) and also makes me less alert to changes in the world. It makes me 'conservative', less 'active', less 'critical'.

Again following Shklovsky, to avoid habituation the solution lies in 'impeding' standard processes of perception, in the first instance by attracting attention in order to slow down perception, make it more conscious and oblige the brain to ponder over what is happening.

The basic technique standardly employed to achieve this goal is deviation, that is to say, deliberately committing a 'mistake' (i.e. doing something 'non-standard'), since the unusual, the unexpected, attract our conscious attention and interrupt standard processing. For instance, when I walk onto the beach in mid-August wearing my swimming trunks nobody takes any notice of me because I am abiding by standard practice. If, instead, I walk into the classroom in mid-January to deliver a lesson wearing only my swimming trunks, then people will stop whatever they are doing and stare, wondering what on earth is happening. Stated differently, normal processing is interrupted and the perceiver seeks the cause of the unusual behavior he has encountered. He asks himself if the teacher has gone mad, if carnival has come early that year, and so forth. He thus attributes far greater importance to that signal (the teacher's dress mode) than the signal would have received had it been produced in a context in which it was 'expected' behaviour (the beach in summer).

Parallelism (some form of linguistic repetition in two or more parts of the text, as will be illustrated in part 2) is the second technique that may be employed to produce foregrounding. In actual fact parallelism is a sub-division of deviation, since one is taught at school not to repeat but to use some synonymic form. Using

The Power of Parallelism

parallelism conveys the author's intention to draw the reader's conscious attention to two (or more) parts of the text because they are related in some indirect, implicit, non-literal way. The meaning of the two parts is non-literal and is greater than the sum of the two parts interpreted independently.

Thus, foregrounding is a technique to draw the reader's attention to a certain portion (or portions) of the text to indicate that something 'special' is happening there, that that part of the text 'means' more than what it conveys at a literal level.

Foregrounding does not, however, tell us how to interpret the deviation. To do that, the entire inferential engine mentioned above must be put into action. It should nevertheless be noted that in many cases the type of deviation used may provide a strong clue as to the meaning the deviation intends to convey.

Deviation may be realized by bending or breaking any type of rule – linguistic or non-linguistic. The passive consists of bending the rule. An utterance such as 'Black is beautiful' (Douthwaite: 2000) breaks a grammatical rule. Swearing in church breaks a social rule. Thus deviation is a question more of degree than of absolutes. It ranges from codified foregrounding, namely structures defined by the code as marked, as was our example of the passive voice, to structures which are totally deviant, as in the sentence "Marry I will not".

Interpreting foregrounding consists of three stages. The first stage consists in recognizing that the text contains a given deviation. The second consists in identifying the precise linguistic nature of the foregrounding technique employed, since this might well provide a clue aiding interpretation. The third is interpreting the instantiation of foregrounding in the text in context.

Let me illustrate the interpretative process using an instantiation of codified foregrounding.

[1a] Joseph stole the money.

[1b] It was Joseph who stole the money.

The preliminary point to note is that the quantity and quality of information in sentences 1a and 1b is identical (as is the case with the active versus passive forms of a sentence). Both sentences ‘contain’ three concepts (an agent, a process and a goal) and the locutionary force (Austin) of both sentences is identical. Stated differently, there is no semantic difference between the two sentences. However, in this case there is a radical syntactic difference between the two examples and what must be accounted for is what difference in meaning this radical structural difference gives rise to in communication.

1a is an unmarked sentence and 1b a marked variant termed a ‘cleft sentence’. The unmarked, or kernel, sentence is realised by a main clause which in turn is realized by three phrases. Since the three clause constituents are at the same level in the rankscale (Douthwaite 2000) then they are of equal value, i.e. the three phrases have equal informative weight, bar the subject which, by grammatical definition and secondly because in this case it performs the pragmatic function of theme (see above), is slightly more important as information than the other two phrases.

In [1b], the cleft variant, the syntactic structure changes. It consists of two clauses, the main clause and a rankshifted relative clause (“who stole the money”), embedded in the main clause and postmodifying (hence specifying) the head of the noun phrase “Joseph”. By definition, situating information in a clause which has been rankshifted down (i.e. downgraded) signifies attributing less importance to that information compared to conveying that same information at a higher level in the rankscale (viz. a non-rankshifted clause, as is 1a). Furthermore, a postmodifier conveys information which is less important than the head of the phrase it modifies, thereby diminishing the importance of the information it conveys compared to the rest of the information in the main clause even further.

Hence, the kernel sentence conveys three important pieces of information – an agent (“Joseph”), a material process (“stole”) and a goal or patient (“the money”), all of which have approximately the same value as information. Instead the ‘deviant’ version signals that

The Power of Parallelism

the two pieces of information concerning the material process and the goal are far less important than the information concerning the agent since the two have been placed in a downgraded clause.

Note that it is a question of speaker choice – the speaker chose to express his message in one linguistic form rather than in another, with consequences to meaning. To again put it with Shklovsky, speaker choice is “motivated”.

If we now turn to the high level constituents in the main clause of the kernel sentence – “It was Joseph” – then we find it is composed of three constituents. “It” is technically termed ‘anticipatory it’ and represents a ‘dummy subject’ since it is semantically empty (just as a pacifier is ‘empty’, its function being to give the baby the impression that food is being given to it in order to calm it down), and is merely a ‘structural prop’ since a finite verb phrase requires a subject in English. The ‘real’ subject comes later – “Joseph”. Hence the first constituent is informationally void. The second constituent - the verb phrase – is a copula, and again almost informationally void, as may be seen by considering the two sentences 2a and 3a:

[2a] Stephen is rich.

[2b] Stephen rich.*

[3a] Stephen poisoned his rich father.

[3b] Stephen his rich father.*

The copula in 2a can be omitted without any substantial loss of meaning since the information it conveys is readily recoverable from the rest of the clause, as in 2b, whereas deleting the lexical verb “murdered” from 3a would render the sentence 3b incomprehensible, demonstrating that all three informative elements (agent, process and goal) are important. This leads us to the conclusion that in the clause “It was Joseph” there is only one constituent which conveys any information – “Joseph”. Hence the importance of the real agent has been increased compared to the other two constituents in the clause. The cleft sentence thus produces a dual syntactic operation. Two concepts have their

informative power diminished by being ‘relegated’ to a rankshifted (relative) clause while concurrently the informative power of the third concept has been increased by being the only piece of ‘real’ information in the (non-rankshifted) main clause of which it is a constituent.

The second syntactic operation – that of constructing a clause where only one constituent has any informative value – is bolstered by phonology, for the noun phrase “Joseph” receives nuclear stress showing it is the focus of the clause (hence the most important information in that clause).

Having shown how value accrues to information which differs from the value that that same information would standardly be attributed were the linguistic structure to be unmarked, we now turn to interpreting the utterance. Broadly speaking, the standard, unmarked version has three equally important informative elements whereas the non-standard cleft version has only one important informative element, which is consequently heavily stressed.

The ‘standard’ use to which a cleft sentence is put in communication is that of (strong) denial accompanied by (strong) counter-proposal. The prototypical use of this construction may be illustrated by my previous example of a mini-conversation between A and B:

[4a] John stole the money.

[4b] It was Joseph who stole the money.

In conclusion, while the quality and quantity of the information are the same in both unmarked and marked versions, the unmarked versions 1a and 4a affirm the existence of a given state of affairs while the marked versions of the same statements forcefully deny that given state of affairs exists and affirm the existence of a different state of affairs. Let us now briefly examine the fully deviant example introduced above (with apologies to Shakespeare and sweet Kate – *The Taming of the Shrew*):

[5] Marry I will never!

The Power of Parallelism

This utterance violates standard word order (syntagmatic order) in Standard English, as comparison with the ‘normal form shows: “I will never marry”. In the deviant utterance the lexical verb has been fronted (i.e. dislocated left to sentence-initial position). Thus it comes to ‘illegally’ occupy informationally strong graphologically first and pragmatically thematic position, thereby attributing great emphasis to the concept it expresses. However, dislocating the lexical verb leaves the negative adverb in sentence-final position, which Halliday dubs ‘end focus’, namely the final slot in the sentence or clause which by dint of being the final element receives greater emphasis than the other constituents in the sentence/clause, (bar the constituent occupying thematic position, which is standardly the subject in an English sentence/clause), emphasis which in an unmarked sentence it would not receive.

Stated differently, fronting the lexical verb assigns greater emphasis to the verb that it would normally have in the sentence but at the same time that operation also produces a by-product, that of creating a new focal point in the sentence, the negator, through its coming to occupy end focus. Thus, with regard to interpretation, the lexical verb and the negator become extremely important information-wise. The effect is thus to underscore the concept of the speaker having absolutely no intention whatsoever of marrying by placing great stress on the words “marry” and “never”.

In addition, the emphasis created by the syntactic device of dislocation is bolstered by an unusual intonation pattern. The sentence starts in high key (instead of mid key, as is ‘normally’ the case), drops to low key (signaling lesser importance), then ends on high key (instead of low). High key is accompanied by greater volume and greater length, thereby increasing the greater emphasis bestowed upon constituents by syntax even further.

We have thus seen how a ‘non-standard’ construction, or ‘deviation’, can create a message which is different from that conveyed by the standard construction despite the fact that the surface meaning of the two constructions is identical. The same applies to instances where parallelism operates. Extra, non-literal

meaning is created by deploying a construction exhibiting parallelism compared to one where parallelism is absent.

2. Parallelism in *The Merchant of Venice*

2.1 Background to the scene

Bassanio has been able to court the rich heiress Portia in Belmonte by using the funds supplied to him by his good friend the Venetian merchant, Antonio, and is successful in his venture to wed Portia. In order to help his friend Bassanio, Antonio has lent him money despite all his funds having been invested in mercantile ventures, this state of affairs having obliged Antonio to, in his turn, borrow the money he has lent Bassanio from the Jew, Shylock. Shylock has made Antonio promise he will forfeit a pound of his flesh should he fail to honour his debt. Antonio's ships are all reported as having sunk, leaving Antonio a ruined man. Shylock insists on having his forfeit of a pound of Antonio's flesh, though Portia offers to compensate Shylock with ten times the amount Antonio owes Shylock. Since Shylock, the Jew, hates Antonio, the rich Christian, he stubbornly refuses to accept compensation in money. When Bassanio discovers this he immediately returns to Venice, leaving his newly-wed wife alone, in order to try to help Antonio. Before Bassanio leaves Portia, she entrusts Bassanio with a ring, saying

This house, these servants, and this same myself,
Are yours, my lord's. I give them with this ring,
Which when you part from, lose, or give away,
Let it presage the ruin of your love,
And be my vantage to exclaim on you.
(Act III, Sc. 2)

In extracting this promise from Bassanio, Portia has actually set a trap for her spouse to test his worth. Unbeknown to all except her maid Nerissa, Portia disguises herself as a male lawyer named Balthazar and goes to the Venetian court where she brilliantly and

The Power of Parallelism

successfully defends Antonio against Shylock, saving the former's life. When Bassanio asks Balthazar what payment he wishes in exchange for his precious services, Balthazar refuses money, however much he is offered, and asks Bassanio 'only' for the ring which, lo and behold, Portia has given him. Terror-stricken, Bassanio desperately pleads with Balthazar to accept some other form of recompense. When Balthazar stubbornly refuses, Bassanio is obliged to give the former the ring, since Balthazar has, after all, saved the life of his best friend and benefactor. Portia hurries home and changes back into her real clothes, preceding Bassanio's arrival. The latter is in a high state of apprehension, for he must now explain to Portia why he has done the only thing she had asked him not to do, not knowing, of course, that Balthazar is actually Portia in disguise. The mini-text I will now analyse is thus the first part of Bassanio's explanation-justification of his apparently untrustworthy behavior which risks forfeiting Portia's hard-won love.

2.2 Analysis of the mini-text

If you did know to whom I gave the ring,
If you did know for whom I gave the ring,
And would conceive for what I gave the ring,
And how unwillingly I gave the ring,
When naught would be accepted but the ring,
You would abate the strength of your displeasure.

The text is realized by a single sentence. The most palpable feature at first glance is that the first five lines end with the verbatim repetition of the noun phrase "the ring" (parallelism realized by graphological, phonological, lexical and syntactic repetition – direct object at line end, thus in salient, emphatic end focus). What this striking feature of five lines out of six ending in exactly the same way makes us reflect on is why this should be so from a structural standpoint. This leads to the realisation that those first five lines apparently (and also actually, in one sense) constitute one syntactic

unit by dint of being clauses which are in a position of subordination to the clause realised in the final line, another syntactic unit, constituting the main clause of the sentence. Furthermore, the lines are written in characteristic Shakespearean iambic pentameters. Lines 1-5 are all regular, whereas the phonological patterning is broken in the sixth line, which has 11 syllables (thanks to the three syllables of “displeasure” – an extra unstressed syllable ending the word: ‘dis-**PLEA**-sure’) in opposition to the regular ten syllables of the first five lines.

Hence, at the highest level of abstraction, the text is divided into two parts: subordinate clauses-main clause.

The second feature to note is that all five lines of the first section thus identified, (i.e. identified as subordinate clauses), begin with conjunctions: “if”, “and” and “when”, (‘hence’ they are subordinate clauses, the coordinating conjunction conjoining subordinate clauses), while the final line begins with a noun phrase realized by a pronoun and functioning as subject of the clause. This characteristic confirms the subdivision of the text into two parts.

It should further be noted that in the subordinate clauses the function subject is realized only twice and is therefore not a distinguishing feature in the creation of this macro instance of parallelism. The phenomenon of variation within parallel units is termed ‘internal deviation’. Namely, within a global or higher-level or macro-instance of parallelism, there may exist one or more deviations from the global linguistic pattern creating that (macro) instance of parallelism.

This applies to the second feature noted in the preceding paragraph: all first five lines begin with a conjunction, but within that global linguistic pattern there are ‘variants’ (internal deviations) – two lines starting with “if”, (a subordinating conjunction), two with “and”, (a coordinating conjunction), and one with “when” (another, but different, subordinating conjunction), suggesting further internal subdivisions, a constructional point I develop in the next paragraph.

The third feature to note is that the noun phrase “the ring” is preceded four times out of five by the same subject “I” and by the

The Power of Parallelism

same lexical verb “gave”, while in the fifth line the lexical verb preceding the noun phrase “the ring” is “accepted” and the subject is realized by the noun phrase “naught”. Thus the fifth line within this sub-section exhibits two ‘internal deviations’ from the previous four. This creates a further sub-division within this first part.

Stated differently, the first five lines – the five subordinate clauses – constituting the first of the two major sections of the extract consist in their turn of two sub-sections: the first four lines forming the first sub-section and the fifth line forming the second sub-section of the first five lines.

This further sub-division is confirmed by diverse other linguistic characteristics. First, as we will see later, the fifth line is not, strictly speaking, a subordinate clause, (though it is in a position of subordination to another clause), whereas the four previous lines do all realise the function subordinate clause (i.e. clauses in a position of subordination to the main clause). Second, line five contains the negator “naught”, the only negative noun in the extract, thereby distinguishing it from the rest of the text. (Being an adverb, “unwillingly” does not belong to the same word class as “naught”. For the time being we may therefore classify it as ‘different’ from the negator, thereby confirming the role of “naught” as an internal deviation.) Third, and an extension of the first point, namely that line five also differs semantically from the previous four because the lexical verb deployed is “accepted”, while the lexical verb employed in the first four lines is “gave”, pinpoints the third difference between the first four lines and the fifth: the fact that “accepted” is the result of “gave” indicates a change in agent from giver to receiver. Fourth, yet another difference between the two sub-sections, and connected to the third difference, is that the lexical verb in line five is in the passive voice whereas the lexical verb in the first four lines is in the active voice. Fifth, and finally, in line five the deployment of the passive has brought about the suppression of the agent (a point I will take up when talking about vagueness below).

Nevertheless, it should be noticed that the lexemes ‘give’ and ‘accept’ belong to the same semantic field, thus ‘uniting’ the first five lines rather than dividing them.

To anticipate a crucial global point concerning the nature of the writing, one fundamental trait of the text is that there is a continual dual and opposite linguistic process at work – on the one hand the text is continuously subdivided into smaller parallel units, (i.e. into separate units), through internal deviation, as we saw above with our two examples of internal deviation, while on the other hand those very same units are ‘united’ to each other through the parallel linguistic features they share. Thus in the first subsection of the extract, consisting of lines 1-5, lines 1-4 are divided from line 5 by a difference in lexical verbs, voice, and presence/absence of the agent, while at the same time they are united by the fact that both lexical verbs belong to the same semantic field.

Such an operation is possible because of the nature of language and communication. An utterance is realized by the concurrent operation of a myriad of linguistic devices. Such devices may work together to produce a single message or to convey multiple messages. Multiple messages need not be coherent - they may be contradictory, or counterposed, as hypothesized by Bakhtinian with his concepts of polyphony and dual voice.

This underlying trait of dividing and concurrently uniting through the deployment of parallelism is central to the message Bassanio is attempting to convey. As will be underlined later, this is an operation of linguistic mimicry.

This ‘divisive’ feature of ‘opposing’ verbs (in this specific case) brought to the surface another linguistic characteristic of the text, namely the one and only instantiation of the passive voice, which in its turn brought about the discovery of the suppression of the agent. Indeed, as we will see, the suppression of a myriad of linguistic constituents is another global feature of the text, with far-reaching constructional consequences and effects.

In the case of line 5, the deletion of the subject is “motivated” (in the Russian Formalist sense of the term – Douthwaite 2000) in two ways. The first is technical: it enables the construction of

The Power of Parallelism

linguistic parallelism. Note the alternative if the active had been employed: ‘He would accept naught but the ring’. This would have had many consequences, including the transformation of the clause from subordinate to main, the disappearance of the initial conjunction and the introduction of the subject pronoun “he” in first position, thus making the construction similar (hence parallel) to the last line, and thereby creating a radically different (and somewhat contradictory) *overall* division of the extract, with section one consisting of the first four lines and section two of the final two lines, which is obviously counter-intuitive:

He would accept naught but the ring,
You would abate the strength of your displeasure.

The second “motive” is communicative. The entire conversation between Bassanio and Portia in Act V Sc. 1 is based on a ‘deceit’, (albeit a well-intentioned ‘deceit’, since women were not allowed to plead in court); namely Bassanio does not know the “civil doctor” to whom he gave the ring entrusted him by Portia as a marriage pledge with the stricture never to “part” from it, “lose” it or “give it away” (Act III, Sc. 2) was not the male lawyer Balthazar but was in actual fact the rich female heiress and wife Portia who had disguised herself as lawyer Balthazar. Hence, suppression of the agent of the action of the act of accepting parallels (i.e. mimics) Bassanio’s ignorance of the real identity of Balthazar. It also conveys Bassanio’s interpretation of the event as justification: the identity of the agent is not important; what is important is that the act carried out by the agent, which consisted of the saving of his friend Antonio’s life; this action was so important that the reward Bassanio was asked for as recompense could not be refused.

To move to a higher plane of generalization for one moment and anticipate a macro-point, or theme, of the play which I will touch on later, suppression of the agent, and the ‘deceit’ this embodies, also mimics gender roles and the questioning of those roles in the play – the fact that women are denied the opportunity to play certain roles in society by dint of their gender.

The vastness and importance of the macro-constructural device of employing one or more linguistic elements in an utterance which unite and another or other, (or even the same), linguistic elements which divide may be confirmed and developed by returning to the second major feature outlined above, namely that the first five lines all begin with a conjunction. It must be realized that, as implied earlier, this linguistic trait is actually a *collection* of three characteristics: there is an overall feature – a conjunction in line-initial position ‘uniting’ the first five lines – which, concurrently, exhibits internal deviation – two subordinating conjunctions in line-initial position, “if”, followed by two coordinating conjunctions, “and”, followed by another, but different, subordinating conjunction, “when”. Shakespeare is here deploying both word class (and lexical selection), sequencing (word class order – subordinating, coordinating, subordinating) and number (two, two one) to create patterning within the higher-order pattern.

This specific example further contributes to demonstrating the manifest fact that there is heavy patterning within patterns, as the analysis will continuously bring to light. As the argument proceeds, what we shall discover is that the feature of patterns within patterns progressively breaks the text down into ulterior, smaller subsections, a crucial macro characteristic of the text.

Thus, the extract begins with two virtually identical lines, and the similarity between lines progressively decreases until the final macro-contrast – the move from subordinate clause to main clause – is made.

However, dense *internal patterning* (patterns within patterns) is accompanied by dense *cross-patterning* through the six lines. By cross patterning I mean that a given feature which typifies a given subsection may also be found in one or more other different subsections creating yet another parallel relationship, one which cuts across units which have already been identified as parallel. Examples of this macro-characteristic abound in the excerpt and the effects will be explained as we encounter them.

So far, we have identified macro-constructural features and devices: progressive subdivision achieved by internal patterning and

The Power of Parallelism

cross-patterning, hence the use of multiple linguistic devices to create both cohesion and division. We may now continue our journey into uncovering the specific linguistic features of the extract.

We have already seen that the first subsection of five lines can be further sub-divided into two sections: the first four lines and the fifth. However, that first subsection can, ‘alternatively’ and concurrently, in its turn be divided into three subsections (internal patterning): i) the first two lines, ii) the third and fourth lines, iii) the fifth line.

If you did know to whom I gave the ring,
If you did know for whom I gave the ring,

The only difference between the first two lines is between the two prepositions that govern the prepositional phrases: “to” and “for”. Bar one word, the first two lines constitute literal repetition, hence a sub-section on their own.

With regard to effect, two linguistic characteristics are crucial here. First, reference is opaque. Indeed, the reference remains opaque throughout Bassanio’s speech, deliberately so for rhetorical effect, namely to achieve a climax. Secondly, opacity teams up with Gricean implicature (1989), for, with a knowledge of co-text, namely what has happened in the play so far, it is sufficient for the audience to hear the ‘opaque’ first two lines to understand that Bassanio is implying that what Portia deems a ‘negative’ action on his part is actually defensible, justifiable, positive. Namely, the illocutionary force of his lines (or macro-message) is that of rejecting Portia’s accusation of betrayal, infidelity, unreliability. The actual absence of a participant (the suppression of the identity of the person with whom or for whom Bassanio supposedly betrayed from the linguistic construction Bassanio deploys) embodies or mirrors the concept of lack of importance of that participant in order to focus the receiver’s attention on the cause rather than on the causer. There is also a third effect, a contextual one, namely the setting up of an opposition between the two opaque referents which the

audience know are Antonio, Bassanio's friend who lent Bassanio the money to go and woo Portia, and Balthazar, the lawyer who defended Antonio, saving him his life. This, of course, helps set up the irony of the scene: Bassanio wishes to reveal the truth at the end of his speech for emotional and argumentative effect, while the audience, and Portia, already know that Balthazar is not Balthazar but Portia herself and who the two referents of the two prepositional phrases ("to whom", "for whom") are. Thus poor Bassanio being in the dark about the general situation is able to confidently deploy his rhetoric to what he hopes will be great effect, while Portia and the audience smile inwardly at his plight.

Opacity is further exploited through the deployment of the phonological system. Nuclear stress is given to the pronoun "whom" in both lines through greater volume, higher pitch and greater length. This effect is increased because attention is further drawn to the two pronouns through the contrast in prepositions which introduce the word – as we have seen, the only difference between the two lines. Expectations are heightened so the delaying effect is more powerful in creating the climax which comes in line six (to anticipate the argument).

We now turn to lines 3-4:

And would conceive for what I gave the ring,
And how unwillingly I gave the ring,

These two lines together form a unit because they are introduced by the (same) coordinating conjunction "And", contrasting with the previous two subordinating conjunctions. They too exhibit the verbatim repetition of "I gave the ring". They thus constitute the second subsection in this threefold division.

However, there are also important and arresting differences between line three and line four, (viz. internal deviations), despite the fact they form a unit (through parallelism).

Line four is noticeably shorter, due to the fact that there is no verb phrase, (deletion again, i.e parallelism), Secondly, line four has no prepositional phrase as a clause constituent. Thirdly, line four

The Power of Parallelism

contains an adverb phrase (“how unwillingly”), a syntactic category which none of the preceding three lines contain. Fourthly, line four also contains a “Wh-” word, but this word begins with the letter “h” (“how”) and not the letter “w” (“whom”, twice and “what”), as do the preceding three lines.

Several points ensue from the observations in the previous paragraph. First and foremost, as mentioned above, the extract starts with almost verbatim parallelism, but as Bassanio’s speech proceeds, the differences between lines become greater, despite the persistence of intensive parallelism. The first major function of progressive differentiation within the first part of the extraction is to pave the way for the climax of the second section, the main clause, which constitutes the key point, or punch-line, of Bassanio’s message. Second, the specific differences pinpointed will lead to the identification of new parallel structures. Third, these latter instantiations of parallelism will consist of cross-patterning, hence their treatment will be delayed for one moment while we complete our analysis of the division of the first part of the text into three subsections: lines 1-2, lines 3-4, and finally line 5, to which we now return:

When naught would be accepted but the ring,

Here the features of i) constituting a subordinate clause, ii) beginning with a conjunction, and iii) ending with “the ring” clearly make this line a component of the first part of the overarching subdivision of the sentence into subordinate clause and main clause. However, there are striking differences between this line and the preceding four, a sufficient number of which have already been identified to justify the conclusion that line five thus forms the third of the tri-partite division of the first sub-section.

Thus, so far, we have identified three major subdivisions:

- a) lines 1-5 and line 6 – the highest level of generalization, the overall basic structure;
- b) lines 1-5 divided into i) lines 1-4 and ii) line 5; iii) line 6;

c) lines 1-5- divided into i) lines 1-2, ii) lines 3-4, iii) and line 5;
iv) line 6;

In other terms, we have identified heavy internal patterning within patterns, constituting a complex structure. We now turn to cross-patterning – features which belong to one of these subdivisions and which characterize that sub-division, but are also employed in another, in a different or ‘alien’, sub-division.

We have seen that lines one and two form a unit and lines three and four form a unit.

However, the first three lines are also related:

If you did know to whom I gave the ring,
If you did know for whom I gave the ring,
And would conceive for what I gave the ring,

The linguistic characteristics they share include: i) beginning with a conjunction, ii) the embedded clause “I gave the ring” in final position” iii) a prepositional phrase of two words preceding the final embedded clause, (‘preceding’ on the syntagmatic axis, since, structurally speaking, the prepositional phrase is actually a constituent of the embedded clause), the two words being the preposition and a relative pronoun (or a “Wh-” word to put it with pedagogical grammar, which has the advantage here of drawing our attention to the novel point that alliteration is one of the mechanisms employed to achieve parallelism in this specific case, as well as in other cases), iv) the verb phrases are realized by an auxiliary verb and a lexical verb, v) three synonyms: “know” (twice) and “conceive” – not only are they synonyms, but they also create the same global implicature of the extract: if you ‘understand’ what I am saying (the explicit part of the message), then you will accept my explanation (the implicit part of the message, or conversational implicature of the final line, in Gricean terms).

We may here add that the major division into two parts (subordinate clauses introduced by conjunctions followed by the main clause) thus embodies the *modus ponens* form of expounding

The Power of Parallelism

what the speaker believes is a valid argument. For what Bassanio is doing here is, indeed, presenting a 'logical' argument to persuade his interlocutor, the irony being that he is reduplicating – without success – the same task Portia had carried out - successfully - earlier in defence of Antonio when the task is (in one sense) redundant since Portia knows full well Bassanio is right, since Balthazar was Portia in disguise.

Indeed, viewed in the light of the action of the play, this scene is parallel to Antonio's 'trial' scene. Both Bassanio and Balthasar/Portia argue a case. The *modus ponens* mode of Bassanio's speech thus mimics a trial scene. However, while Portia wins her case, Bassanio loses his, in a world where females were generally excluded from the public sphere. This constitutes an important social comment on the author's part.

This macro example of parallelism thus takes us far beyond the relatively narrow confines of the extract we are analyzing, bringing up the vast issue of gender inequality in *The Merchant of Venice*. A discussion of this theme would take us to an even higher level of generalization which goes beyond the scope of this essay, the ramifications of this issue in the play having taken up many studies. (See, for instance, Adelman, Coolidge, Hyman, Kahn, Newman, Patterson, Traub.) The key point I wish to make is that parallelism occurs at all levels, and the instantiation I have just identified is at the macro-level of plot. We therefore return to the linguistic analysis of parallelism in the target extract.

Thus, we have identified another 'parallel unit', lines 1-3. However, these three lines also exhibit internal deviation. First, as we have already seen, line three differs from lines 1-2 because the lexical verb is different (even if it does belong to the same semantic field). As stated earlier, different linguistic mechanisms employed in the same utterance can lead to different communicative results, and even viewing the same item in its different functions can lead to different results, as is the case here. Second, the tenses are different: lines 1-2 are in the past simple, line three in the present conditional. Third, in the first two lines the function grammatical subject is realized in the superordinate clause, while in the superordinate

clause in line three the function subject is suppressed. Fourth, lines 1-2 begin with a subordinating conjunction, line three with a coordinating conjunction. The reader will have noted that a number of these points have been made previously. The key point here, however, is not the identification of the linguistic mechanisms *per se*, but the variety of textual and communicative uses each instantiation of each mechanism is put to, since this enables the receiver to comprehend the intensity of the overlap, namely the extensiveness of internal patterning and of cross-patterning. I will, from now on, try to reduce repetition to a functional minimum, relying on the reader to take previous points as given.

Additionally, these specific differences lead to the discovery of both obvious and unsuspected similarities creating a new parallel unit – lines 2-3:

If you did **know** **for** **whom** I gave the ring,
And would **conceive** **for** **what** I gave the ring,

The three similarities highlighted by the colour scheme have already been expounded. What is important, however, is that they also exemplify the phenomenon of deletion (in this case through ellipsis), since line 3 actually ‘hides’

If you did **know** **for** whom I gave the ring,
[And] **If** you would **conceive** **for** what I gave the ring,

Namely, the presence of the coordinating conjunction “And” in line three is a linguistic ‘trick’, hiding the further ‘trick’ that the subordinating conjunction “if” has been suppressed, as has the verb phrase “would conceive”.

Having uncovered this linguistic fact, we may now argue that in the ‘restored’ version, the coordinating conjunction “and” could be omitted without any loss of or addition to semantic meaning, and the common features rendering lines 2-3 parallel would almost double (from four common characteristics to seven), as would verbatim repetition (from six words to eight words, an increase of 33%).

The Power of Parallelism

Stated differently, in one sense, Shakespeare is pulling the structural wool over our eyes through suppression hiding the most intense linguistic feature exploited in this extract: parallelism. This would appear to be contradictory: if I wish to establish cross-connections, then the more instantiations of parallelism I employ the more cross-connections I establish. Yet here is Shakespeare diminishing the ‘visible’ use of the very device that forms the key to his strategy here. I will develop this aspect further below.

Line four may also be considered a unit in its own right for one very simple, and even surprising, reason, given that we are taking examining a ‘poetic’ text, one written in blank verse – this is the only line where standard word order is not respected. “And how unwillingly I gave the ring” is a marked construction conveying great emphasis in *lieu* of the unemphatic standard version ‘I gave the ring extremely unwillingly’. Emphasis is achieved by fronting the adverbial phrase “how unwillingly”. (I will return to this point later.)

Lines 4-5 may also be seen as constituting a unit.

And how unwillingly I gave the ring,
When naught would be accepted but the ring,

In addition to conjunction, alliteration, (letter “w”), and literal repetition, the most important linguistic trait making of the two lines one unit is the fact that line 5 is actually the subordinate clause to line 4, (i.e. line 4 is the superordinate clause and line 5 is in a relationship of subordination to it) as the following transformation shows:

I gave the ring extremely unwillingly,
When (since) naught would be accepted but the ring,

Indeed, one might even make out a case for hypothesizing the first four lines as multiple realization of the subordinate clause and the fifth line as the subordinate clause of all four subordinate clauses represented by lines 1-4.

However, the matter is complicated further by lines two and three being related by dint of the verbatim repetition of the preposition “for”.

Thus there are cross-overs between lines one, two and three, and a further cross-over between lines two and three. These overlie the three basic “strong” patterns listed above, rendering the picture far more complex than the initial picture described with the three basic patterns.

Developing this analysis further, lines 2-4 may also be considered as forming a unit:

And would conceive for what I gave the ring,
And how unwillingly I gave the ring,
When naught would be accepted but the ring,

The colour scheme shows that lines 3-5 share three linguistic features in common; conjunction (“And”, “When”), alliteration (“w”), and literal repetition (“the ring”). However, the scheme also shows that lines 3 and 5 share a further two characteristics in common – they both have a verb phrase in the conditional tense (though one is active, the other passive), they both exhibit lexical verbs in the superordinate clause which are not “gave”, thus making a unit of lines 3 and 5.

What the last few examples illustrate is dense cross-patterning at work. Indeed, I have not identified all the examples of parallelism in the text. For instance, in the major examples I ignored the phenomenon of alliteration, which the last example treated above uncovers as being a further important symbolizing device – each of lines 3-5 exhibits two instances of word play on the letter “w”. One might further note that the progressive modifications of the propositional phrases in lines 1-3 and their ‘brother’ adverbial phrase in line 4 constitute yet another linguistic trait creating parallelism and that the lines exhibit internal deviation:

If you did know to whom I gave the ring,
If you did know for whom I gave the ring,

The Power of Parallelism

And would conceive **for what** I gave the ring,
And **how unwillingly** I gave the ring,

In lines 1 and 2, the prepositional complement is realized in both cases by the lexeme “whom”. Instead, in lines 2 and 3 the prepositional complement is realized by “whom” and “what” respectively, a slightly weaker link since in place of verbatim repetition we find repetition of word class. However, the link between lines 2 and 3 is reinforced by verbatim repetition of the preposition “for” in opposition to the preposition “to” in line 1. Instead, in line 4 the prepositional phrase is transformed into an adverb phrase, “how unwillingly”, with the “wh-” word being realised by the lexeme “how”, which, although different a word, nevertheless belongs to the “wh-” word class and contains the letter “w”, albeit as final letter and not initial letter. Thus the parallelism is solid. This is an important fact because all four lines thus appear to have an identical or extremely similar construction:

“Wh-” phrase + I gave the ring

This is an important linguistic fact, because one is induced by this ‘linguistic act’ into believing that parallelism accounts for the sequencing, when, in actual fact, the difference in line 4, with the absence of the prepositional phrase, is brought about by the selection of an emphatic expression employing the linguistic device of fronting (Douthwaite 2000) which serves the communicative purpose at hand. Stated differently, what we have here is another linguistic ‘trick’. Or, if one prefers, extreme mastery over the language translated into an extraordinarily sophisticated and complex text.

Such sophisticated skill is also borne out by the operation of deletion, an important constructional device I drew attention to earlier. Indeed, if one were to ‘reinstate’ a number of the linguistic items that have been suppressed in order to ‘standardise’ the Shakespeare’s original (hence, ‘de-poeticise’ it), then the result

would be something like this (the words signaled in red being those that have been ‘restored’ in the process of normalisation):

If you did know **the person** to whom I gave the ring,
If you did know **the person** for whom I gave the ring,
If you would conceive for what **reason** I gave the ring,
And **if you would conceive** how unwillingly I gave the ring,
When naught would be accepted but the ring,
You would abate the strength of your displeasure.

Several points emerge from this synthetic text. Although Shakespeare has created an incredible number of parallel structures in such a short text, he has actually deliberately diminished the number of parallelisms that it could have contained, eliminating rather obvious instantiations, to boot, ‘obvious’ when a scholar examines the text critically and in depth. Lines 3 and 4 are the most important instantiation of this phenomenon, for the suppression of “if you” in line 3 and “if you would conceive” in line 4 clearly masks the fact that the first four lines are all subordinate clauses to the main clause. Such suppression also helps hide the fact that line five is not a subordinate clause to the main clause. The form in which lines 1-4 appear, (achieved through deletion), induce one to hypothesise line five as being parallel to lines 1-4, hence a subordinate to the main clause, while the reconstruction of the text demonstrates line 5 is actually subordinate to lines 1-4.

Suppression in general may be hypothesized as performing three major functions in the extract. First, it contributes to the general flow identified above of gradual, increasing differentiation between the lines. Secondly, it suppresses material which is less important information from the standpoint of the message to be conveyed. Third, the ‘restored’ version would totally ruin the blank verse scheme, as I illustrate below. To show how this works, however, we must turn to one area of language which I have only touched on fleetingly, phonology. Indeed, the thrust of this article is parallelism. However, parallelism does not work alone. Time and space do not permit full treatment of parallelism, let alone of the myriad of other

The Power of Parallelism

devices deployed in the text. Hence other devices are treated only when crucial to the point at hand.

The first example is the ‘suppression’ of the noun ‘reason’ in line 3. This would obviously upset the equilibrium of the final part of the first three lines which consists of:

prepositional phrase realized by preposition plus “wh-” word, followed by “I gave the ring”.

The inclusion of the lexeme “reason” would therefore destroy the equilibrium created by syntax, number of syllables, rhythm and stress pattern. (I deal with intonation below.) The same stricture applies to the non-inclusion of “the person” in lines 1 and 2. Furthermore, the expression “the person” is informationally redundant since it is highly unlikely that Bassanio will have given the ring to a dog, and even less so to an inanimate object such as a book or a car, an option which the text implicitly excludes in any case through the deployment of the lexeme “whom”.

All first five lines consist of five unstressed syllables followed by five stressed syllables, (iambic pentameter), while the final line consists of eleven syllables. This scheme thus reflects the most basic sub-division of the text – lines 1-5 (subordinate clauses) and line 6 (main clause, which being more important than the subordinate clause by grammatical definition also contains an extra syllable, thereby exploiting the cognitive metaphor SIZE IS IMPORTANCE. Syllabic parallelism presumably accounts for choices such as “did know” as opposed to the regular form of the past simple and the non-use of the lexeme ‘person’ in line 1.

The function of the sound scheme (intonation pattern) is to highlight important parts of the message. Here, the first two lines perform the most crucial task of all (aided and abetted by the syntax, by verbatim repetition, and so forth):

If you did know **to WHOM** I gave the ring,
If you did know **for WHOM** I gave the ring,

The only difference in the first two lines lies in the selection of preposition. The lines thus exploit the general principle that what changes is more important than what remains identical. Hence, the prepositional phrase is signaled as constituting the most important information. In speech this is conveyed by the intonation pattern – a short pause before the preposition then nuclear stress (i.e the focus) falling on the “wh-” word through a rising tone to high pitch, together with an increase in both volume and length. This clearly sets up a contrast between the two referents. It immediately begins to build up the climax, both through the semantic content and through the *modus ponens* format (‘If you knew *x* you would not get angry ...’), demonstrating how vague reference plays an important role in building up a climax through suppression of information.

This point takes us to pragmatics, and in particular to the exploitation of the Gricean maxims of quantity and manner (sub-maxim: be orderly). In fact, the elimination of ambiguity through supplying the identity of the referents (the Gricean quantity maxim) would make the entire speech fall absolutely flat, destroying the climax, as in the following synthetic reconstruction:

If you did know I gave the ring to Balthazar,
If you did know I gave the ring for Antonio,
If you would conceive I gave the ring to Balthazar for having
saved Antonio’s life,
If you would conceive how unwillingly I gave the ring,
Because Balthazar would accept naught but the ring.

This synthetic version of the original speech has already totally failed at line three, if not at line 1, since line 3 should in fact be line 1 (Gricean manner maxim, sub-maxim: be orderly) for it conveys the basic message, rendering lines 1 and 2 redundant (Gricean quantity. Secondly, if one begins to be explicit in one’s communicative style, then line 4 is no longer acceptable, for it remains inexplicit as well as pragmatically inefficacious, (it violates the Gricean manner, sub-maxims: avoid obscurity/ambiguity), since the information it contains should constitute a premise and not a

The Power of Parallelism

post-hoc justification. Finally, line four also interrupts the information flow, (Gricean manner maxim, sub-maxim: be orderly), for logically speaking, line 5 is the justification for line four. Stated differently, in an explicit, formal argument, lines 1 and 2 would disappear and lines 3-5 would appear in the order 5-3-4: 'Because Balthazar had saved Antonio's life and because he would accept no payment but the ring, I gave him the ring unwillingly'.

Stated differently, an explicit version would provide the explanation succinctly and clearly, (Gricean quantity and manner maxims), and, above all, unemotionally (appropriacy to context – a formal or legal argumentative style would be appropriate. On appropriacy to context, see Douthwaite 2000.)

Instead, the inexplicit Shakespearean version has many high-level textual and psychological functions. First, it creates interest by arousing curiosity, precisely because it delays revealing the relevant information, providing it piecemeal so that the listener is obliged to pay attention and ask herself what the point is, thereby preventing an immediate explosion the second she discovers her husband has done the one thing he should not have done. Second, it involves the audience more through the emotional delivery and the emotions expressed. Third and fourth, expressing emotion has two major functions: to demonstrate a high degree of commitment to what the speaker is saying, that is to say, to transmit to the hearer the enormous importance to the speaker of the concept he/she is conveying through those very words and to testify to the truth of his words. Given human make-up, a sterilized, unemotional, rational presentation would fail to affect the audience so deeply.

The penultimate point I wish to make is that while there is a very strong contrast between part A (lines 1-5) and part B (line 6) of the text, nevertheless, cross-patterning also characterizes the two parts: i) the subject pronoun "you" appears twice in part A and once in part B; ii) the present conditional also appears twice in part A and once in part B; iii) two 'negative' words appear in part A ("unwillingly", "naught"), and one in part B ("displeasure", having greater affinity with "unwillingly" both lexemes are negators by dint of a negative prefix); iv) the repetition of the modal auxiliary

“would” automatically means duplication of alliteration of the letter “w”. Four instances of parallelism in seven words is no mean linguistic feat.

Thus, just as section A exhibits division and unity, so the relationship between part A and part B also exhibits division and unity.

So we come to the final major observation – the effect of such intensive and complex parallelism. I have hinted at the explanation earlier. This lies in the way the mind works, in human psychology and emotion when what is at stake is an important value, a central issue in a person’s life such as one’s job or the things a person holds nearest and dearest – deep and long-lasting personal relationships.

Poor Bassanio is rightfully dreading Portia’s reaction when she discovers he no longer has the ring she gave him, given that it represents the most important thing for her. In addition to expecting a virulent and radical reaction – Portia had threatened to dam up the river of her love for Bassanio had he not respected her wish, and Bassanio knows Portia is no weak woman – Bassanio also knows what all humans know. When something radical affects a relationship, then the consequences are not simply dire, but take an enormous amount of time to rectify, if rectification is indeed possible in the first place. Thus, if I come home to my wife who has discovered I have been unfaithful to her and say ‘Oh, it was just a fling, it only happened because I was drunk out of my head – it won’t happen again, darling’, then my (understandably) un-understanding wife is likely to only throw a few plates at my head, if I am extremely lucky. Repairing as much of the damage as one possibly can will take a lot of explaining, a great deal of self-criticism and self-dispraise, for psychological and emotional wounds take a long time to heal (my act having deeply threatened the Other’s security and identity, including her belief in her own powers of observation, analysis, judgement, her faith in the Other, her underlying ideology – the way she sees and interacts with people, to name but a few psychological traits and abilities endangered by my action). Rationality, if it be at all relevant as a strategy, will do little to help in a situation of this kind.

The Power of Parallelism

To move from psychology and emotion back to its reflection in linguistics and communication, Bassanio's selected line of argument, or strategy, thus excludes an explicit, succinct explanation of the three line type examined above. He correctly opts for opacity, gradual revelation and repetition. Boxing would be an apt metaphor. You punch your adversary several times - an uppercut to the jaw, two quick straight jabs, a left hook, another right to the jaw, then a pile driver which sends him to the floor for the count. This is parallelism, in language.

Most centrally, the great sophistication of the line structures I have tried to illustrate enable the deployment of phonology to highlight the central informational aspects to be conveyed, and the emotions Bassanio is experiencing, emotions which testify to the truthfulness of his claims and argument, for he manages to transmit both his fear and his desire and the great intensity of both emotions.

This brings us to the constant interplay of division and unity throughout his speech. On the one hand, this reflects the structure of his argument – if ... then.... On the other hand, it reflects his division between his love for his wife and his love for his friend, without whom there would have been no wedding. It reflects his desperate desire to justify his action while knowing it is in one sense wrong. It mirrors his opposed emotions of fear and desire. The constant interplay of division and unity reflects the basic contradiction in which Bassanio finds himself – he wants both worlds and cannot have both worlds – for many reasons, and the concomitant conflictual thoughts and emotions the two worlds involve.

3. Epilogue

The objective of this paper has been to demonstrate linguistic parallelism at work in a text where it is exploited with extreme intensity, as is the case with Bassanio's speech. But it would be diminishing the writing if one were not to point out that parallelism is constantly at work throughout the play at two levels.

First of all, parallelism is realized at the macro-level of plot. The ‘ploy’ (viz. textual and theatrical device) of the ring is, in fact, duplicated in another couple. Gratiano, Bassanio’s friend who has accompanied Bassanio to Belmonte, has fallen in love with Nerissa, Portia’s maid, and they too have married. Nerissa, too, has given a ring to Gratiano and made him promise never to part with it. At Antonio’s trial Nerissa, too, is disguised as a male, impersonating Balthazar/Portia’s clerk, and like Balthazar “he” too demands a ring as payment for his services, obliging Gratiano to give him/her the ring which she, Nerissa, had given Gratiano. (On interpretations of the ring as a plot device with ‘circular’ [viz. parallel] repercussions, see Kahn: 1985 and Newman: 1987. For another interpretation of ‘circularity’ in the play, see Siemon: 1970.)

Act V scene I thus consists of a delightfully comic denouement as the two women run rings round the supposedly ‘superior’ class of men. The parallel plot thus highlights the theme of gender inequality touched on above, making short shrift of women’s supposed inferiority.

Secondly, linguistic parallelism is at work at middle and low levels of generalization. The speech examined above is of parallelism at the local level. However, there are echoes (viz. parallels) throughout the play using some of the linguistic instantiations present in Bassanio’s speech. His speech does not end there, however. Portia again demonstrates her mental and linguistic prowess by thoroughly rejecting, nay demolishing Bassanio’s rhetorically well-argued speech by employing the very same linguistic tools against him.

What the preceding point shows is that the division into macro- and micro-levels should not be taken literally, as if the two were independent, watertight compartments. It will be noted that in the gender game played out in the play, Portia uses a ‘traditional’ female argument – male infidelity – to attack her ‘adversaries’. As will be seen in the last line of the quotation from Portia’s speech below in reply to Bassanio’s defence, she accuses Bassanio of giving the ring to a woman (i.e. an indirect accusation of unfaithfulness). This scuppers Bassanio totally, for a) the argument

The Power of Parallelism

evokes the culturally stereotypical image of the female in Elizabethan society, and b) this consequently deflects his attention away from the fact that Portia and Nerissa might in fact be 'different' from the conservative mental model he has of the female and which governs his behaviour toward that sex. Stated differently, Bassanio is defeated because his world view of the female is that of the traditional male, whereas Portia is much more 'in advance' of that traditional model of femininity. In yet other words, his ideology blinds him to reality. In support of my argument I might quote Valerie Traub's (2001: 135) comments on women in Elizabethan society: "Because men have only women's word for the legitimacy of their children, and because patrilineal authority is necessarily transmitted through women's reproductive bodies, men are represented as particularly susceptible to female deception". Indeed, the speech with which this paper ends is instant demonstration of Traub's thesis: Portia deliberately plays on Bassanio's fear of deception (role reversal again, since in this case he is the one accused of infidelity).

To return to the issue of rhetoric, I will leave the reader to analyse the speech herself, simply inviting her to note just how close the parallelism is to Bassanio's speech, how intense the parallelism is, and how intensely Portia's speech exudes emotion. It thus paves the way for the revelation which will come to Bassanio, and all the other males present, as a tremendous shock. An emotional shock for the male characters, and an ideological shock for players and audience at the global level, questioning as the revelation does, the entire male-female relationship¹.

If you had known the virtue of the ring,
Or half her worthiness that gave the ring,
Or your own honor to contain the ring,
You would not then have parted with the ring.

¹ I repeat that my treatment of the macro-level is indeed *en passant*, for many hypotheses have been made about gender and sexual relationships in the play, as the references provided will show.

John Douthwaite

What man is there so much unreasonable,
If you had pleased to have defended it
With any terms of zeal, wanted the modesty
To urge the thing held as a ceremony?
Nerissa teaches me what to believe:
I'll die for't but some woman had the ring.

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