Writing in the recent Naphtali Lewis Festschrift, Cyrus Gordon discussed the phenomenon of "Janus parallelism." He wrote:

The subtleties of parallel structure in ancient Near East literatures are many, so many that centuries of intensive analysis of the Old Testament have not yet uncovered all of them in the Bible. One kind of parallelism is quite ingenious, for it hinges on the use of a single word with two entirely different meanings: one meaning paralleling what precedes, and the other meaning, what follows.1

Gordon cited an excellent example, Cant 2:12:

The blossoms appear in the land,
The time of zamir has arrived,
The voice of the turtledove is heard in our land.

The word zamir can mean either "pruning season" or "music." In this case, it means both. Gordon commented: "The poet knew how to exploit the double meaning of zamir. Retrospectively it parallels the first member of the tristich pertaining to the growth of the soil; proleptically it parallels the final member pertaining to song."2

A second example of Janus parallelism may be seen in Gen 49:26a:3

The blessings of your father surpass
The blessings of your father surpass
The delight of the eternal hills.

In this tristich, horei is to be translated both “my progenitors of old” (when pointed as in MT) and “mountains of old” (when pointed אביה as in Tg. Onqelos, which translated אביה as אביה, “my fathers,” and by KJV, few is to be translated as מדר, "mountains of old." Its familial connotation resumes אביה in the first stich and its topographic connotation anticipates מדר in the third stich.
The second meaning was recognized by the LXX, which translated ὑπὸ χάλκου as ὀρέων μονίμων, “steadfast mountains,” by Rashbam, who wrote 1:2, “The blessings of your father ... surpass the blessings of the mountains,” and more recently by RSV and several other English renderings.

An attempt to combine the two connotations of ὑπὸ χάλκου may be exhibited in the Tg. Yerushalmi. It translated Gen 49:26a as follows:

May the blessings of your father be added to the blessings Wherewith Abraham and Isaac who are like mountains blessed you, And to the blessings of the four mothers who are like hills, Sarah and Rebekah, Rachel and Leah.

The patriarchs Abraham and Isaac are equated with סמואליים, “mountains,” and the four matriarchs are equated with נררים, “hills.” The second of these comparisons was probably facilitated by נו in the Urtext. The first of these equations may have been an ingenious attempt by the Aramaic translator to deal with the two meanings of the Hebrew ὑπὸ χάλκου. The familial connotation is embodied in נררים, the topographic connotation is embodied in סמואליים, and the “equal sign” is represented by דְּרָמְיָם, “who are like.”

The attempt by some scholars to emend the text is unnecessary. In so doing, they fail to see one of the beautiful subtleties of Hebrew poetry. As Gordon concluded, “The skillful exploitation of twin meanings, providing through a single word twofold parallelism, is artistry of a high order.”

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2Ibid., 59–60.
3The Masoretes divide the verse after נררים and connect דְּרָמְיָם and סמואליים with a maqêph. The division here is that which appears in BHK.
4The use of הֹלֵם to represent ā presents no problem. Cf. C. H. Gordon, “Hebrew Language,” IDBSup, 394, where he stated, “Occasionally Ashkenazic pronunciation preserves ancient features. The rendering of every qames as o is corroborated by matres lectionis in texts from Talmudic Babylonia in which יֵשׁ is spelled יִשָׂה, יִשָׂו is spelled יִשָׂו, יַעֲלָה is spelled יַעֲלָה, etc.” For Biblical examples, cf. יֵשׁ in Josh 6:13, יִשָׂו in Josh 20:8, 21:27, יֵשׁ in 1 Sam 27:4, יִשָׂו in Jer 9:7, and יֵשׁ in Ezek 34:25.
5A similar polysemy may occur in Amos 1:13:

The first line is generally translated “for their ripping open the pregnant women of Gilead,” but a second, simultaneous translation, “for their storming (or invading) the mountains of Gilead,” is also possible. Although “mountains” never appears as נְפִיִּים in Hebrew, contextually this second translation makes sense. Gilead is a mountainous region and the second line refers to the Ammonites expanding their border. The two ways of capturing Gilead are to depopulate it, as implied in the translation, “for their ripping open the pregnant women of Gilead,” and to occupy it, as implied in the translation, “for their storming (or invading) the mountains of Gilead.” This
simultaneous double meaning of the stich is facilitated by the ambiguous nature of the
biconsonantal root רָמָא.

E.g., E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (AB; Garden City: Doubleday, 1964) 363, 369–70, who emended
the first stich to read וּרְמָא וּרְמָא, and thus translated, “Blessings of grain
stalk and blossom, Blessings of mountains eternal. The delights of hills everlasting.”

Gordon, “New Directions,” 60.