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THE BOOK OF JOB AS A DRAMA: INTERPRETATION POSSIBILITIES*

The Book of Job is one of the most influential and powerful works of the ancient literature. William Whedbee accurately defines the main challenge for any interpretation of the text: “The Book of Job like all other literary masterpieces, has the power to evoke radically diverse interpretations.”¹ The perspectives used to interpret the text are various: from literary theories and linguistics through theology, philosophy and psychology. The methodology differs also depending on the attitude to the final form of the text. Some commentators use the literary critical methodology, which consider stages of redactions and historical changes in interpreting the text.² Other scholars focus on the last version of the text, rather than appealing to its origins, edited by many authors.³ Whedbee summarizes this attitude in such a way: „That The Book of Job experienced several stages is no doubt true, but the fact does not exempt the interpreter from responsibility of coming to grips with the book’s final form.”⁴ Recently, postmodern interpreters proposed another way of treating the meaning of the book. Many of them claim that the text has no defined meaning, holding that the lack of sense is an advantage of the text. Dirk

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* A part of the theses of this essay has been already depicted in a non-academic, popular form in a Polish Theatre magazine *Teatr*. See Agata SZEPE, “Odwoluję, co powiedziałem,” *Teatr* 2018, no. 5 (Spring 2018): 54–58.

¹ William WHEDBEE, *The Bible and the comic vision* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008, 1998), 221.

² For a literary critical commentary see e.g. Jakub SLAWIK, *Hiob przed Bogiem* (Warszawa: Chrześcijańska Akademia Teologiczna, 2010).

³ E.g. Sholome Michael GELBER, *Job stands up: The Biblical text of the book of Job arranged for the theater* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1975), 34.

⁴ W. WHEDBEE, *The Bible and the comic vision*, 221.

Geeraerts remarks: „whereas a more moderate approach shows how the tension in the text contributes to meaning rather than subverting it, the more radical form of postmodern interpretation takes its starting-point in the absence of a definitive interpretation, and dialectally turns this absence into the very message of the text: the impossibility of arriving at an ultimate meaning is the meaning of the text.”⁵ In my essay I will discuss the final version of the text, trying to understand its meaning rather than rejecting it.

As Gianfranco Ravasi notices, grasping the sense of The Book of Job is both “easy and impossible.”⁶ According to Ravasi it is easy to “grasp a fundamental perspective of the text,” but at the same time it is “impossible to reduce the free, various and complex reality” presented in the book, “to a fixed form.”⁷ The same difficulty appears when we try to grasp the structure of The Book of Job and compare it with literary theories. Whedbee notices: “No part of the interpretation of Job is more clouded with uncertainty than the identification of genre. The parallels offered do not quite fit, and most scholars end up by concluding that Job belongs to no literary category: it simply is!”⁸ Regardless of literary, philosophical, linguistic or theological perspective, a variety of terms such as poem, dialogue, treatise, parable or drama are used imprecisely and ambiguously even by the same author.⁹ Sometimes, looking for ‘the real Book of Job’ means rejecting those parts of the book that do not fit the features of a genre or literary form as proposed by scholars.¹⁰ Ravasi quotes Camby describing the structure of the book as a “literary rainbow.”¹¹ According to Ravasi, various literary genres are used intentionally, depending on the situation and moment of the plot.¹² It is important to realize the variety of structure of the text. However,

⁵ Dirk GEERAERTS. “Caught in a web or irony: Job and his embarrassed God,” in *Job 28. Cognition in Context*, ed. Ellen Van Wolde (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2003), 37.

⁶ Gianfranco RAVASI, *Hiob: Dramat Boga i człowieka*, part 1, trans. Barbara Rzepka (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Salwator, 2004), 116. Author’s translation from Polish: “Biorąc pod uwagę wielowątkowy, a mimo to jednolity charakter dzieła, określenie podstawowego i ukrytego celu ‘Hioba’ jest jednocześnie łatwe i niemożliwe.”

⁷ *Ibid.* Author’s translation from Polish: “Jest łatwe, ponieważ można szybko uchwycić pewną fundamentalną perspektywę, która łączy Księgę Hioba z mądrością heterodoksyjną. Ale jest też niemożliwe, ponieważ nie można do sztywnej formy zredukować rzeczywistości, która ze swej natury jest wolna, różnorodna, złożona jak życie i tajemnicza jak Bóg i człowiek.”

⁸ W. WHEDBEE, *The Bible and the comic vision*, 221.

⁹ For various suggestions on defining the genre of the Book of Job with an interesting but not finite list of proposals see e.g.: G. RAVASI, *Hiob: Dramat Boga i człowieka*, part 1, 48–55.

¹⁰ J.W. WHEDBEE. *The Bible and the comic vision*, 222.

¹¹ G. RAVASI, *Hiob: Dramat Boga i człowieka*, part 1, 54. Author’s translation from Polish: “literacka tęcza.”

¹² *Ibid.*

appealing to the tools of literary theories is useful and often inevitable. Looking closely on the composition of the Book of Job we can notice that its basic structure is either characteristic of drama or can be situated in the context of theory of drama.¹³

The Book of Job consists of a Prologue, dialogical part and an Epilogue.¹⁴ As in a Greek tragedy in the Prologue the number of actors is limited.¹⁵ Whybray notices: “The Prologue has only three principal characters, and in each scene only two of these are involved: Yahweh and the Satan (1:6–12; 2:1–8), the messenger and Job (Job. 2:13–19), Job and his wife (2:9–10).”¹⁶ In the main part of the book there is no narrator. The narrator’s view do not influence the reader’s reception of characters statements and actions. The plot focuses on one main motif: the story of Job’s life. There are no episodes which do not influence the main plot directly. The text contains phases characteristic of drama: exposition of the topic in the Prologue, a plot development in the dialogue between Job and his friends, a culminative moment of God’s revelation which leads to a denouement in the Epilogue. The space of the plot is limited—it is set in the land of Uz, moving only twice to a mysterious place where God meets with “the sons of God” (Job. 1:6).¹⁷ Emotional tension and a conflict between opposed wishes belong also to the characteri-

¹³ Drama features on the grounds of: *Słownik terminów literackich*, ed. Janusz Sławiński, (Wrocław, Warszawa, Kraków, Gdańsk, Łódź: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1988), 235. In my work I focused on the literary theory of drama. For comprehensive research on the potential of The Book of Job to be adapted on the stage see thesis by Sheila YARIV (2005): שילה, יריב. ספר איוב - ניתוח תיאטרוני. עבודת גמר (מ"א)--אוניברסיטת תל אביב. תל אביב: חמו"ל 2005.

¹⁴ Such a division of the composition of the text proposes e.g. Ravasi in his edition of the Book of Job with commentary, see Gianfranco RAVASI, *Hiob: Dramat Boga i człowieka, part 2*, trans. Krzysztof Stopa (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Salwator, 2005). Czesław Jakubiec also divides the text on the Prolog, the main part with monologues and dialogues and the Epilog (at the same time not situating the text in a context of drama theory), see Czesław JAKUBIEC, *Księga Hioba. Wstęp, przekład z oryginału, komentarz, ekskursy* (Poznań, Warszawa: Pallottinum, 1974), 27.

¹⁵ On the other hand, Sholome Michael Gelber highlights how The Book of Job differs from an ancient Greek tragedy: there are not three classical, Aristotelian unities (unity of action, place and time), there is no destiny (in the Greek way of defining it) and the image character of God differs from Greek gods. See S.M. GELBER, *Job stands up*.

¹⁶ Norman WHYBRAY, *Job* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008), 11.

¹⁷ Many authors call such as Whybray it “a heavenly court where subordinate heavenly beings [...] participate in the making or implementation of divine decisions.” R.N. WHYBRAY, *Job*, 13. By contrast, Alfred Walls places it on the Earth: “However, I think it is certain that Scene I, Act I, and Scene I, Act II are not in heaven, but on the earth. The expression ‘sons of God’ refers to good men, and not to angels or heavenly councilors. It is improbable that Satan, or any evil being, could so wantonly invade heaven on any evil errand.” Alfred WALLS, *The oldest drama in the world. The Book of Job. Arranged in dramatic form with elucidations* (New York, Cincinnati: Hunt & Eaton; Cranton & Stowe, 1891), 16.

stic features of a drama. The text highlights not only an inner conflict of the main character but also presents different opinions on various matters such as the character of God, the nature of justice and the purpose of suffering.

Obviously, seeing the Book of Job as a drama is neither a new nor a novel approach. The term drama with various consequences to the interpretation is used in the context of The Book of Job among others by such authors as Gianfranco Ravasi,¹⁸ Horace Kallen,¹⁹ Carl Gustav Jung,²⁰ William Whedbee,²¹ Charles Aked,²² Dariusz Iwański,²³ Bernhard Klinger,²⁴ Sylvia Scholnick²⁵ or Alfred Walls.²⁶ In my essay I would like to highlight the consequences of a drama interpretation of the Book of Job, often missed by the non-dramatic approaches.

I claim that theory of drama provides tools to explain apparent contradictions of the Book of Job, neither with a need of ignoring some parts of the book nor accepting the postmodern assumption, that the text has no meaning. As an example can be used the seeming incoherence of narrative Prolog and Job's later statements. In my contention, recognizing consistently the basic structure of the text as a dramatic structure creates new interpretation possibilities. Keeping in mind that the text is a "literary rainbow" and especially in the stylistic and linguistic layer²⁷ outreaches definitions of the genres, I will focus on the tools provided by the theory of drama, dealing with some aspects of the text.

According to the Prolog, Job is a just and upright man, avoiding evil. One day Satan challenges God by saying, that if he is allowed to test Job, Job

¹⁸ G. RAVASI, *Hiob: Dramat Boga i człowieka, part 1*; IDEM, *Hiob: Dramat Boga i człowieka, part 2*.

¹⁹ An influential interpretation of the Book of Job as a tragedy, often criticized by later scholars for a too narrow attitude, is presented by Horace Meyer Kallen. See Horace Meyer KALLEN, *The book of Job as a Greek tragedy* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1959). Referring to the basic structure of the Book of Job as a structure of a drama in a sense of a general literary form, I will not define it specifically as a tragedy of another dramatic genre.

²⁰ Carl Gustav JUNG, "Answer to Job," in *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, ed. Gerhard Adler and R F C Hull (New Jersey: Bollingen Series XX, 1958).

²¹ J. William Whedbee presented the most complete interpretation of The Book of Job as a comedy. See J.W. WHEDBEE, *The Bible and the comic vision*.

²² Charles F. AKED, *The divine drama of Job* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1913).

²³ Dariusz IWAŃSKI, *Hiob dla odważnych* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK, 2011).

²⁴ Bernhard KLINGER, *Im und durch das Leiden lernen. Das Buch Ijob als Drama* (Hamburg: Philo, 2007).

²⁵ Sylvia HUBERMAN SCHOLNICK, "Lawsuit drama in the book of Job," PhD Diss., Brandeis University, University Microfilms, 1976.

²⁶ A. WALLS, *The oldest drama in the world*.

²⁷ About a poetic form of the language in the Book of Job see e.g. C. JAKUBIEC, *Księga Hioba. Wstęp, przekład z oryginału, komentarz, ekskursy*, 24.

will curse God. God allows Satan to test Job. In one moment the main character loses his family, property and health. In the Prolog the narrator describes Job as an ideal figure twice. After the sequence of tragedies happen to Job, he insists that: “In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong” (Job. 1:22).²⁸ Little bit later, when the main character loses his health, he confirms his statement: “In all this Job did not sin with his lips” (Job. 2:10). However, the main character’s later rebellious statements contradict the narrator’s assertions expressed in Prolog. In fact, Job does charge God with wrongdoing and he does it through what he says. In the dialogic part the main character accuses God of doing injustice, of favoring the designs of the wicked (Job. 10:2–3) and—supposedly—also of taking pleasure in it. Satan’s predictions prove to be correct: Job does charge God with wrongdoing. The reward and God’s triumph that can be observed in the Epilog seem to be unjustified.

The epic approach usually assumes that the narrator’s statements truly describe the reality of the text and the characters’ attitudes. If the narrator says that a hero refrains from accusing God, we expect that this character’s actions will confirm it unless narrator informs us that something has changed. The theory of drama explains why narrator’s claims might be contradicted by what we can read later in the text. To grasp the inner changes of the main character, instead of following an omniscient narrator, we have to follow the sequence of presented events, positioning all claims in the context in which they are said. Let’s see some examples.

The first scene shows the main character’s positive features of character. Although at the beginning Job is blessed by God, his personal situation changes after series of events presented in two analogically constructed compositions: Job. 1:6-22 and Job. 2:1-10. Each of them begins with a conversation between God and Satan (Job. 1:6-7; 2:1–2). In both scenes God focuses on Job’s integrity (Job. 1:8; 2:3), while Satan indicates its reasons (Job. 1:9-10; 2:4) and provides conditions (J 1:11; 2:5) under which Job undoubtedly will curse God (Job. 1:11; 2:5). God allows Satan (Job. 1:12; 2:6) to inflict suffering on Job. Under new unfavorable conditions Job’s attitude remains inflexible. At least during the Prolog.

Between the Prolog and the dialogic part an easily underestimated scene is included. This is a week’s period of silence after Job’s friends’ arrival.

²⁸ If not marked otherwise, the quotation come from The English Standard Version Bible. “The Book of Job,” in *The English Standard Version Bible. Containing the Old and New Testaments with Apocrypha* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

The silence is expressed here in two different ways. Firstly, it is said that none of Job's friends says a word during seven days and seven nights. Secondly, details of the scene are passed in silence. Although in comparison with the previous series of misfortunes, the silent period lasts quite long, it is summarized only by a single sentence. Therefore, the scene is easy to overlook.²⁹ Yet, the silent scene is important, because it separates an objective narrative perspective of the Prolog from the part of subjective monologs. From this moment the main character will rebel against God instead of accepting His will.

Having approved God's will, Job is now questioning His wisdom, justice and kindness. Firstly, he shows God as an unjust judge, presenting false evidence and unfairly sentencing Job to suffer. To "accuse God with wrongdoing" Job uses metaphor of court case. Describing God, he says: "How then can I answer him, choosing my words with him? Though I am in the right, I cannot answer him; I must appeal for mercy to my accuser. [...] For he crushes me with a tempest and multiplies my wounds without cause; [...] If it is a contest of strength, behold, he is mighty! If it is a matter of justice, who can summon him? Though I am in the right, my own mouth would condemn me; though I am blameless, he would prove me perverse" (Job. 9:14–15.17.19–20). Job is at this moment certain that God will never admit to being wrong: "I become afraid of all my suffering, for I know you will not hold me innocent." (Job. 9,28). Being conscious of his innocence, main character pleads guilty. Job describes his repentance and acceptance of God's will as a confession forced by unjust Judge out of him through suffering.

Job suffers even more, when he realizes Who treated him unfairly: "For he is not a man, as I am, that I might answer him, that we should come to trial together. There is no arbiter between us, who might lay his hand on us both" (Job. 9:32–33). Being only human, even the most frightful earthly tyrant has to respect higher, heavenly authority. But whom should ask for help a person unjustly treated by God? Job feels deceived, because he always thought that the Almighty cares for him: "Remember that you have made me like clay; and will you return me to the dust? Did you not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese? You clothed me with skin and flesh, and knit me together with bones and sinews. You have granted me life and steadfast love, and your care has preserved my spirit" (Job. 10:9–12). Jung describes

²⁹ Compare e.g. how Søren Kierkegaard describes the role of silence in Abraham's travel to Moriah before the offering of Isaac. Søren KIERKEGAARD, *Bojaźń i drżenie. Choroba na śmierć*, trans. Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1982).

this shock, identifying with the main character's feelings: „In this way I hope to act as a voice for many who feel the same way as I do, and to give expression to the shattering emotion which the unvarnished spectacle of divine savagery and ruthlessness produces in us.”³⁰ God's present action leads the main character to new conclusion.

Job suggests that the Almighty never honestly cared for him. He just waited for the right moment to destroy him: “Yet these things you hid in your heart; I know that this was your purpose. If I sin, you watch me and do not acquit me of my iniquity” (Job. 10:13–14). On another occasion Job claims that God waited till this moment to punish him for sins from his youth. (Job. 13:26). God's love could be illusory: contingent upon Job's perfect behavior. Job thinks not only about God's actions, but also about His motivations. Wanting strongly to humiliate main character, the Almighty waited simply for the right moment, when He could explain his action by Job's sin. Asking again and again why God acts in such a manner, Job thinks about His emotions. The conclusion is again pessimistic.

According to Jung the Book of Job contains “the picture of a God who knew no moderation in his emotions and suffered precisely from this lack of moderation. He himself admitted that he was eaten up with rage and jealousy and that this knowledge was painful to him.”³¹ Indeed, Job talks about God's emotional sphere. Nevertheless, it seems that he thinks that the Almighty takes pleasure in human suffering, rather than suffers himself. Job claims: “I will say to God, Do not condemn me; let me know why you contend against me. Does it seem good to you to oppress, to despise the work of your hands and favor the designs of the wicked?” (Job. 10:2–3). His rhetorical question includes strong implications: God does despise the work of his hands and does favor the designs of the wicked. The question arises only about taking pleasure in it. Anna Świderkówna expresses it in this way: “This good, holy, wise and just God seems to take an incomprehensible pleasure in tormenting an innocent man.”³² Job suggests that God is unjust not only to the main character. He is also responsible for the evil, actively supporting wrongdoing: All these examples show that in the main part of the text Job accuses God of wrongdoing. Job's vision as a God's accuser is supported additionally by the Almighty's comment in the Epilog.

³⁰ C.G. JUNG. “Aswer to Job,” 561.

³¹ Ibid., 560.

³² Anna ŚWIDERKÓWNA, *Rozmowy o Biblii* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1994), 232. Author's translation from Polish: “Ów Bóg – dobry, święty, mądry i sprawiedliwy – zdaje się znajdować jakąś niezrozumiałą przyjemność w znęcaniu się nad człowiekiem niewinnym.”

In the Epilog God calls Job his accuser: “Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer it” (Job. 40:2). Dariusz Iwański seems to overlook this, when he claims: “Interestingly, the main character is never and nowhere reprimanded for his apparent ‘hardihood’.”³³ Truly, during dramatic series of disasters: loss of property, children’s death, outset of disease, Job remains unwavering. This is the period to which narrator’s statement about Job’s innocence refer. But afterwards the days of silent suffering as well as “months of emptiness” (J 7:3) elapse. As Jakub Slawik states: “As early as in prolog can be noticed, that Job’s reaction changes gradually [...] Without what he said, arguing with friends, this character would be banal, psychologically untrue.”³⁴ Job becomes rebellious in the main part of the drama. This kind of change not only tells us about inner transformation of the main character, but also specifies consequence of previous discussion between God and Satan. Having noticed them, one can see this scene in a different light.

The scene of discussion between God and Satan radically changes Job’s fate. Carl Gustav Jung calls it a kind of bet,³⁵ other authors, even if they don’t express it directly, seem to think similarly. Iwański’s concept about God’s total approval to Job’s statements can be a consequence of the same presupposition. If interpreting discussion with Satan as a bet, the fact that Job “charged God with wrongdoing,” would lead to God’s failure in this bet. After all, the subject of this bet would be Satan’s twice repeated challenge: “he [Job] will curse you to your face” (Job. 1:11; 2:5). Yet, God doesn’t appear at the end of the book as a loser. Thorough analyze of the very scene leads to conclusion that it should be described rather as an unsuccessfully attempt to make a bet.

Everything begins like a bet: Satan provokes God by putting a thesis: Job “will renounce” (Job. 1:11)³⁶ God and provides condition under which it would happen. After that God, as an adversary should put a contrary thesis: no, under this conditions Job will not renounce me. Nothing like this happens, though Dariusz Iwański puts such a words into Job’s mouth: “At the further

³³ D. IWAŃSKI, *Hiob dla odważnych*, 36. Author’s translation from Polish: “Co ciekawe, główny bohater nigdy i nigdzie nie zostaje skarcony za swoją rzekomą ‘zuchwałość’”.

³⁴ J. SLAWIK, *Hiob przed Bogiem*, 710. Author’s translation from Polish: “Już w prologu można zaobserwować, że reakcja Hioba stopniowo ulega zmianie. [...] Bez tego, co powiedział, spierając się z przyjaciółmi, jego postać jawiłaby się jako bardzo płaska, psychologicznie wręcz nieprawdziwa.”

³⁵ C.G. JUNG, “Aswer to Job,” 579.

³⁶ World English Bible.

stage God decides: ‘Right, I allow you [Satan] to test him [Job], but you will see: he will remain faithful to me!’³⁷ Quite opposite to both Iwański’s and Jung’s suggestions: God didn’t “listen to Satan’s insinuations against his better judgment”³⁸ and did not take a liberty of “divine wager.”³⁹ He allows to inflict pain on Job, yet, does not say that he will not broke down. Like a screenwriter he allows spectators to follow action, without spoiling further part of the plot.

Instead of starting a bet and waiting for resolution, God and Satan start a psychological game. Firstly, Satan claims that after losing family and property, Job will rebel against God. Job’s inflexible attitude forces Satan to rephrase condition under which Job should accuse God: he will do it if he is taken ill. Sequence of misfortunes emphasizes narrator’s claims about Job’s constant innocence at this stage of the story. In contrast to the main character, God in this scene seems not to be constant and unchanged. He plays active role in the drama, transforming his actions in the presence of changeable conditions. He forbids Satan from inflicting physical pain on Job in the first scene, but allows him to send an illness on the protagonist in the second. Consequently, when in the second scene God sets down condition to Satan: “only spare his life,” we cannot be sure whether God will change his mind again. In this context, when Job tells about his near death, this is not a figment of his imagination but a real possibility. Resigning from simplified interpretation in which an ideal man withstands testing, frustrates Satan’s win in a bet and is rewarded by God, the text gives a chance to notice each character complex personality and unique worldviews, shown in dialogical part.

One can learn many important information about heroes from narrative Prolog, but their character, emotions and beliefs can be only discovered by reading their statements. Typically for a drama, none of this view is privileged. Deprived from omniscient narrator’s perspective one cannot generalize one of the hero’s opinion to the whole book’s message, because drama work doesn’t show directly what is the best attitude. Jung’s opinion about the image of God, presented in The Book of Job can be used as an example of such a simplification: “Yahweh is not split but is an antinomy—a totality of inner opposites—and this is the indispensable condition for his tremendous dynamism, his omniscience and omnipotence. [...] He is every-

³⁷ D. IWAŃSKI, *Hiob dla odważnych*, 63. Author’s translation from Polish: “Kolejnym etapem jest decyzja Boga, który oświadcza: „Dobrze, pozwalam ci wystawić go na próbę, ale zobaczysz, że pozostanie mi wierny!”

³⁸ C.G. JUNG, “Aswer to Job,” 579.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 582.

thing in its totality; therefore, among other things, he is total justice, and also its total opposite.”⁴⁰ Jung’s comment describes well God’s image, arising from Job’s emotional style. Nevertheless, only the main character expresses himself in such a way, full of paradoxes. His friend’s monologues depict a consistent *Weltanschauung* with clear statements about God, justice, sin, guilt and punishment.

Compared to Job’s chaotic thoughts, his friends’ statements can be reduced to several arguments, compatible with a religious idea of retribution, formulated in many other places in the Old Testament.⁴¹ According to them every just man is rewarded by God (Job. 4:7; 5:10–11.15–16; 8:20–21; 34:28; 36:5–7), whereas every sinner is punished (Job. 4:8–11; 5:2–5.12–14; 8:3–4.8–19.22; 11:10–11.20; 15:16–35; 18:5–21; 20:4–29; 22:16–20; 34:10–11; 34:19–27.30; 36:6–7.12–14). The moral condition (Job. 4:12–21; 15:14–15; 25:4–6) and the situation (Job. 5:6–7) of all mankind are very bad. Therefore, nobody can be sure that he is innocent. If somebody suffers, he is punished by God in such a way (Job. 33:13–21; 36:8–10.15). The natural reaction of a sinner should be repentance. God will then forgive his sins and reinstate his previous happiness (Job. 33:23–30; 36:11).

Talking about Job, his friends build analogies to their system of beliefs. When the main character’s life was pious, God supported him (Job. 4:1–4). Because he sinned (and he continues sinning) (Job. 4:5–6; 22:4–9) God punished him (Job. 22:10–11). He should repent (Job. 5:8.17; 8,5; 22:21–22; 36:19–21) and God will bless him again (Job. 5:18–26; 8:6–7; 11:13–19; 22:23–30). The main character is wrong, because he does not want to confess his sins (Job. 8:2; 11:2–9; 15:4–13; 22:12–15; 33:8–12; 34:2–9; 36:16). Keeping in mind that each of character presents a unique perspective, we see the uniqueness of Job’s style in comparison to his friends.

Contradictory opinions appear irregularly in different parts of Job’s monologue. They do not lead to any clear conclusion about God, main character’s guilt and innocence or about men’s condition. They “depict the multitudinous thoughts and feelings which pass through the mind”⁴² similarly to the modern “stream of consciousness”⁴³ monologues. Although using this 19th century’s term to describe an ancient work would be an archaism,

⁴⁰ C.G. JUNG, “Aswer to Job,” 567, 574.

⁴¹ About the idea of retribution in a biblical sense see e.g. C. JAKUBIEC, *Księga Hioba. Wstęp, przekład z oryginału, komentarz, ekskursy*, 247–251.

⁴² Fragment of stream of consciousness definition in J.A. CUDDON, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984), 660–661.

⁴³ The stream of consciousness, see also J. SŁAWIŃSKI, *Słownik terminów literackich*, 488.

similar style of Job's monologues and the stream of consciousness show the uniqueness and innovation of The Book of Job. Firstly, the main character refers not to objective measures of time, but to a subjective sense of time. On one hand, he feels that the suffering time passes very slowly: "so I am allotted months of emptiness, and nights of misery are apportioned to me. When I lie down I say, 'When shall I arise?' But the night is long, and I am full of tossing till the dawn" (Job. 7:3–4). On the other hand he feels that his life quickly elapses: "My days are swifter than a runner; they flee away; they see no good. They go by like skiffs of reed, like an eagle swooping on the prey" (Job. 9:25–26). His opinions also compose a very subjective set of thoughts.

In contradiction to his friends, main character's opinions are full of paradoxes, creating a chaotic mix of emotional expression rather than logical argumentation or coherent worldview. For example, he gives counterarguments to friends' thesis that sinners are punished by God: "Why do the wicked live, reach old age, and grow mighty in power? Their offspring are established in their presence, and their descendants before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear, and no rod of God is upon them" (Job. 21:7–9). His argumentation isn't consistent, though; in the same monologue he says quite the opposite: "This is the portion of a wicked man with God, and the heritage that oppressors receive from the Almighty: [...] Though he heaps up silver like dust, and pile up clothing like clay, he may pile it up, but the righteous will wear it, and the innocent will divide the silver" (Job. 27:13. 16–17) In one monologue Job claims that he sinned and therefore the Almighty punished him by suffering: "If I sin, what do I do to you, you watcher of mankind?"⁴⁴ (Job. 7:20). In other he says on the contrary that he is innocent: "Behold, I have prepared my case; I know that I shall be in the right" (Job. 13:18). As mentioned above, he accuses God of wrongdoing, but at the same time he expresses absolute trust in God: "Though he slay me, I will hope in him; yet I will argue my ways to his face. This will be my salvation, that the godless shall not come before him" (Job. 13:15–16). Job's opinion changes incessantly, leading to no constructive conclusion. Imitating the way of human's thinking, Job's style adequately conveys dilemmas and emotions of a man in a tragic situation of innocent suffering. For a durable change of posture instead of permanent emotional swifts the reader has to wait till the culminating point of the drama.

⁴⁴ King James Version: "I have sinned; what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men?"

As Jakub Slawik says: “If J was treated as a treatise, a sages’ discussion, it would have to disappoint, because all the positive-answer possibilities are used, yet, the answer is not found. And possibly, it could not be found.”⁴⁵ Instead of conclusion in rational dialogue, the reader receives a “dramatic climax”⁴⁶ happening when God decides to meet with Job. According to Anna Świderkówna he “learned, how big precipice separates all the human’s speculation from experiencing meeting God directly.”⁴⁷ The only conclusion seems to be another paradox. Having heard the Almighty’s words, Job says: “I take back everything I said” (Job. 42:6).⁴⁸ This statement leads to a surprising change on a metalinguistic level.

In few words main character cancels everything he said before. Composition and inner logic of the text is questioned by a suggestion that Job’s monologues are unnecessary. Yet, Job’s opinion is only one side of the dramatic dialogue. Another character presents a different point of view. God says that only Job said truth about Him (Job. 42:7). Contradictory opinions open various interpretation possibilities, because superior narrative view does not tell us directly, which opinion should we follow. Paradox of contradictory opinions about Job’s wisdom reflect analogically paradoxical style of main character’s statements. These two opinions can be also interpreted on two different levels. Job notices that his own wisdom is superficial, while God considers not only what Job says, but also his inner, deep motivations. The drama gives different perspectives on God’s image instead of defining coherently His features. What seems to be most coherent is that Job’s meeting with God changed his life and his way of thinking. And indeed, this is more than enough. Presenting different points of view, avoiding too logical answers on existential questions and showing God in action instead of building His univocal theological image, the structure of drama reflects this unconventional image of the Almighty. Ignoring the dramatic structure leads to an interpretation in which some aspects of this image are missed.

The literary form of drama is unusual for the biblical style. Apart from *The Book of Job* the structure of a drama is only represented by the *Song of*

⁴⁵ J. SŁAWIK, *Hiob przed Bogiem*, 738–739. Author’s translation from Polish: “Gdyby Hi traktować jako traktat, dyskusję prowadzoną w gronie mędrców, musiałaby rozczarowywać. Wyczerpane zostają bowiem wszystkie możliwości uzyskania pozytywnej odpowiedzi na problem cierpienia, a odpowiedź nie zostaje i pewnie nie może być odnaleziona.”

⁴⁶ C.G. JUNG, “Answer to Job,” 584.

⁴⁷ A. ŚWIDERKÓWNA, *Rozmowy o Biblii*, 239. Author’s translation from Polish: “Poznał, jak wielka przepaść dzieli wszelkie ludzkie spekulacje od doświadczenia bezpośredniego spotkania z Bogiem.”

⁴⁸ New Living Translation.

Salomon. Despite different approaches: symbolic, or literally most academics treat the features of drama as a base for further Songs of Salomon's interpretations. On the other hand, the Book of Job is often related to another literary forms, mostly various epic genres. The examples show that the question of literary form plays a crucial role, entailing specific implications for the interpretation. A close reading of some of interpretations displays this problem.

Many scholars turn to various epic genres to describe the structure of the Book of Job. For example, Anna Świderkówna, a Polish scholar, classifies the text as a dialogue. As a rational discourse, dialogue presents characters with accurate opinions. Through a discussion, they should reach a consensus on an important issue. Świderkówna presents a variety of Job's statements, even those which are contradictory with each other. But presenting the text as a dialogue, she tries to structure the opinions logically, missing its paradoxical style, which differs from Job's friends' coherent worldview. The inner logic of the dialogue imposes clear, univocal answers on questions presented in the text. Presenting the Book of Job as a poem⁴⁹ leads to similar consequences. Although 'a poem' can be a very capacious term, this genre often includes didactic elements or presents a philosophical doctrine. It is usually composed of static elements rather than dynamical.⁵⁰ The poem approach excludes the dynamic character of The Book of Job, and, thus, changes in Job's own stance. Many drama interpretations also stop halfway, missing to use the full potential of the drama theory in interpreting the composition and the structure of the text. Calling The Book of Job a drama, Dariusz Iwański shows God's discussion with Satan as a bet. Consequently, he tries to portray Job as an undefeated "super hero,"⁵¹ because only this enables God to win this bet. Only Jung presents clearly consequences of the "bet-approach". In his interpretation Satan triumphs over God. Being a bad loser, the Almighty bombards Job with the questions. God's victory presented in Epilogue is only an illusion, a well-hidden failure. If it really is a failure, it is also perfectly hidden from the reader.

Treating consequently the structure of The Book of Job as a dramatic structure enables to resolve seemingly incoherence of the text and to notice the unique and percussive style features. Keeping in mind that in drama events happen in a permanently changing present, we are able to explain why Job does charge God with wrongdoing, although the narrator claims

⁴⁹ The Book of Job as a poem, see e.g. François CHIRPAZ, *Księga Hioba. Poemat o nadziei*, trans. Alina Merdas (Poznań: W drodze, 1999).

⁵⁰ Poem features on the grounds of *Słownik terminów literackich*, ed. J. Sławiński.

⁵¹ D. IWAŃSKI, *Hiob dla odważnych*, 36.

quite the opposite. Similarly, being aware that cause-effect sequences play a crucial role in every drama we discover that God did not intend to prove to Satan that his invincible servant will stand the test of time. Furthermore, the drama approach points to innovative features of the ancient work. Treating each character as an individual dramatic hero we see the uniqueness of Job's style in comparison to his friends. Full of paradoxes, a combination of theses and antitheses, a subjective sense of time and a highly emotional approach, Job's monologues draw close to a modern stream of consciousness monologue. Narrator's statements are a starting point. Through the dialogical part main character's volatile emotions, attitudes and postures in face of extreme situation are shown. The text offers an image of deepened personalities, rather than a set of human types, possible to describe by one sentence. This refers to God, as one of the drama heroes. God's discussion with Satan cannot be interpreted simply as a bet with moralistic happy end, proving Job's inflexibility. The reader is able to observe a complicated psychological game between God and Satan. The latter provokes his opponent to accept his rules of a game, the former determines his own conditions. Limited role of narration enables to show important issues from different perspectives, inviting reader to become a participant of a discussion.

Presenting different points of view, avoiding narrowly logical answers, and, finally, revealing God in action instead of building His univocal theological image, the dramatic structure of the book presents an unconventional image of God and human beings. Understanding a text mainly as an inseparable whole, in which none of the scenes can be omitted or interpreted without referring to other elements of the text, leads to a special reader's response. The only way to grasp the meaning is to comprehend the text from the beginning to the end. According to Kierkegaard, the main motive of The Book of Job is the sense-gaining repetition. Kierkegaard understands repetition also as a process of sense-gaining through reading or admiring a work of art: "The repetition of the reading of a book, of the enjoyment of a work of art, can heighten and in a way surpass the first impression, because one [...] immerses oneself deeply in the object and appropriates it more inwardly."⁵² Interpretation of The Book of Job in a context of a drama can be one of such a repetition that results in "meaning-acquisition, increasing stores of sense."⁵³ And later can become a first step to repeat once again.

⁵² Edward F. MOONEY, "Kierkegaard's Job's Discourse: Getting Back the World." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 34 (1993), no. 3: 152.

⁵³ Ibid. In my text, I focused on the meaning of the text, without referring in detail to a wider historical, cultural or theological context. The main context of my "meaning gaining" was the

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theory of drama. For a hermeneutic commentary on different religious interpretation of "The Book of Job" and for a detailed discussion of the terms of "meaning", "interpretation" and "hermeneutic" of the text see: Maarten WISSE, *Scripture between Identity and Creativity. A Hermeneutical Theory Building upon Four Interpretations of Job* (Utrecht: Ars Disputandi, 2003).

KSIĘGA HIOBA JAKO DRAMAT — MOŻLIWOŚCI INTERPRETACJI

Streszczenie

Artykuł bada możliwości interpretacyjne struktury Księgi Hioba jako struktury dramatu. Pokazuje, że niektóre pozorne paradoksy i sprzeczności mogą być rozumiane jako wewnętrzna logika dramatu. Pozorna niespójność Prologu i późniejszych twierdzeń Hioba może być zniwelowana, gdy uważnie prześledzi się ciąg przyczynowo-skutkowy oraz będzie się rozumieć wydarzenia jako dziejące się w ciągle aktualizowanej teraźniejszości. Podejście dramatyczne pozwala widzieć spotkanie Boga i Szatana jako nieudaną próbę poczynienia zakładu. Dramat jako pozbawiony wszechwiedzącego narratora pokazuje różnorodne postawy, bez bezpośredniego wskazania, która z nich jest najlepsza. Styl wypowiedzi głównego bohatera jest pełen paradoksów i wykluczających się nawzajem stwierdzeń. Może on być porównany ze współczesną techniką literacką strumienia świadomości. Punkt kulminacyjny dramatu pokazuje trwałą zmianę w postawie bohatera i prowadzi do zaskakujących zmian na poziomie metalingwistycznym.

Słowa kluczowe: Księga Hioba; dramat; rodzaj literacki; gatunek literacki; Prolog Księgi Hioba; Epilog Księgi Hioba; monolog; narrator; strumień świadomości.

THE BOOK OF JOB AS A DRAMA: INTERPRETATION POSSIBILITIES

Summary

The article examines an interpretation possibility to read the structure of the Book of Job as a drama structure. It shows that some of the apparent paradoxes and contradictions in the text can be understood as an inner logic of a drama. The seeming incoherence of narrative Prolog and Job's later statements can be easily reconciled by following through the dramatic cause-effect sequences and seeing the events as happening in permanently changing present. The dramatic approach enables to see the meeting between God and Satan as an unsuccessfully attempt to make a bet. Deprived from omniscient narrator's perspective, the drama shows various attitudes, without pointing directly which is the best one. Full of paradoxes and contradictory statements, the main hero's style can be compared with a modern stream of consciousness. The culminating point of the drama shows a durable change in Jobs posture and leads to surprising changes on a metalinguistic level.

Key words: The Book of Job; drama; literary form; literary genre; Prolog of the Book of Job; Epilog of the Book of Job; monologue; narrator; stream of consciousness.