The Book of Job as Drama

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The article examines an interpretation possibility to read the book of Job as a drama. 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.

Keywords: The Book of Job, Drama, literary genre, Prolog, monologue, narrator, stream of consciousness

The Book of Job is similar to other works of Great Literature: everybody knows them, only a few have ever read them, even fewer – have read them all the way through. According to common knowledge Job is a just and upright man, avoiding evil. Blessed by God, he is wealthy and has a big family. One day Satan challenges God by saying, that if he is allowed to test Job, Job will curse God. God insists that it will not happen and allows Satan to test Job. In one moment the main character loses his family, property and health. Facing so many tragedies Job remains inflexible. Rewarding Job's stability, God triumphs over Satan whose predictions prove to be wrong. This is exactly what we read. *In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong*[1] (J 1,22; J 2.10) narrative Prolog assures us. Well… not exactly. In the same book, the same perfect character accuses God of doing injustice, of favoring the designs of the wicked (J 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 seem to be unjustified.

What explains the paradox? Many people would just say that the text is a compilation and therefore it is inconsistent. However, if we take the trouble to read the text carefully, we find that the text has its own inner logic. It is my contention that the logic may be unlocked by reading it as drama and interpreting it according to the principles of drama.

Scholars do not agree what literary genre the Book of Job represents. In fact, terms such as a poem, dialogue, treatise, parable or a drama are used imprecisely and ambiguously even by the same author. I will discuss the question of a genre later, because of its consequences to interpretation. In my view, only by reading the Book of Job as a drama, can we explain all the paradoxes mentioned above. 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 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

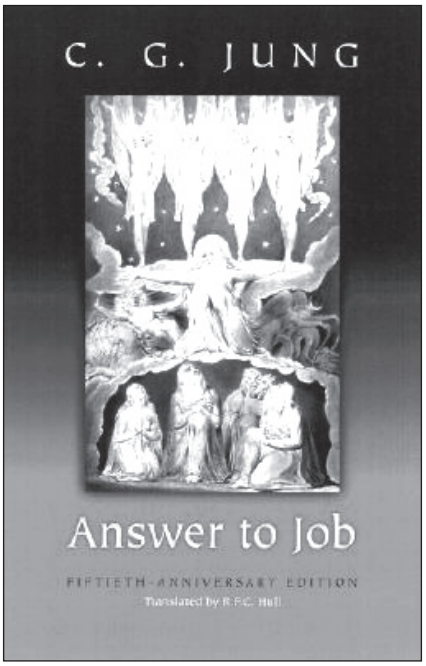
that his invincible servant will stand the test of time. Furthermore, the drama approach points to innovative features of the ancient work. Treating each character as an individual dramatic hero we see the uniqueness of Job's style in comparison to his friends. Full of paradoxes, a combination of theses and antitheses, a subjective sense of time and a highly emotional approach, Job's monologues draw close to a modern stream of consciousness monologue.

The seeming incoherence of narrative Prolog and Job's later statements can be easily reconciled by recognizing what time of the drama plot they belong. 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* (J.1, 22). Little bit later, when the main character loses his health, he confirms his statement: *In all this Job did not sin with his lips.* (J.2, 10). However, the main character's 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. 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 a narrator's claims might be contradicted by what we can read later in the text.

Drama events happen in a permanently changing present. It means that each of the characters' statements refers only to the situation in which it was said. No character is omniscient; no character knows the further plot. To grasp the inner changes of the main character 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: J.1,6-22 and J.2,1-10. Each of them begins with a conversation between God and Satan (J.1,6-7, J.2,1-2). In both scenes God focuses on Job's integrity (J.1,8, Hi.2,3), while Satan indicates its reasons (J.1,9-10, J.2,4) and provides conditions (J.1,11, J.2,5) under which Job undoubtedly will curse God (J.1,11, J.2,5). God allows Satan (J.1,12, J.2,6) to inflict suffering on Job. Under new unfavorable conditions Job's attitude remains inflexible. At least during the Prolog.

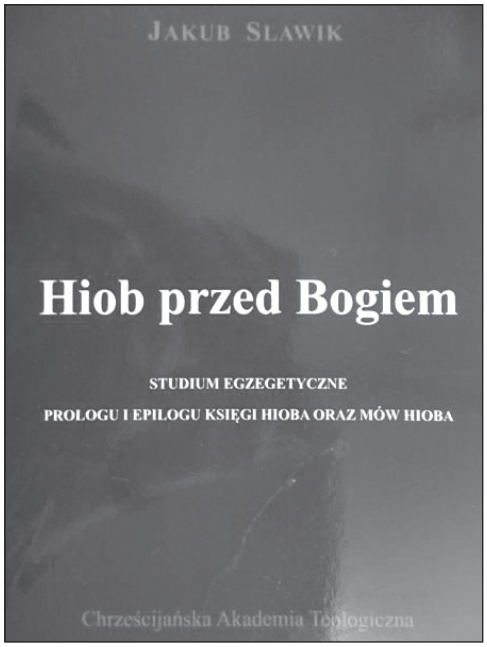
Between the Prolog and the dialogic part an easily underestimated scene is included. This is a week's period of silence after Job's friends' arrival. The silence is expressed here in two different ways. Firstly, it is



said that none of Job's friends say 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.[2] 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.* (J.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.* (J. 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. (J.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 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.* (J.10,9-12). Jung describes 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.*[3] God's present action leads main character to new conclusion.

Job suggests that 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.* (J.10,13-14). On another occasion Job claims that God waited till this moment to punish him for sins from his youth. (J.13,26). God's love could be illusory: contingent upon Job's perfect behavior. Job thinks not only about Gods actions, but also about His motivations. Wanting strongly to humiliate main character, Almighty waited simply for the right moment, when He could explain his action by Jobs 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*[4]. Indeed, Job talks about God's emotional sphere. Nevertheless, it seems that he thinks that 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?* (J..10,2-3) His rhetorical question includes strong implications: God does despise the work of his hands and 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 seem to take an incomprehensible pleasure in tormenting an innocent man.*[5] Job suggest that God is unjust not only to the main character. He is also responsible for the evil, actively supporting wrongdoing: If all this example did not show clearly enough that Job accuses God of wrongdoing, Gods statements will leave no doubts about it.

In the Epilog God calls Job his accuser: *Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer it. (*J.40,2). Dariusz Iwański seems to overlook this, when he claims: *Interestingly, the main character is never and nowhere reprimanded for his apparent "hardihood"*[6]. 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*[7]. 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 totally different light.

The scene of discussion between God and Satan radically changes Job's fate. Carl Gustav Jung calls it a kind of bet[8], 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.* (J.1,11;2,5). Yet, God doesn't appear at the end of the book as a looser. Thorough analyze of the very scene leads to conclusion that is 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*[9] 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 stage God decides:"Right, I allow you [Satan] to test him [Job], but you will see: he will remain faithful to me!".*[10] Quite opposite to both Iwański's and Jung's suggestions: God didn't *listen to Satan's insinuations against his better judgment*[11] and did not take a liberty of *divine wager*[12]. 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 book.

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 will be taken ill. Sequence of misfortunes emphasizes narrator's claims about Jobs 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 books 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 everything in its totality; therefore, among other things, he is total justice, and also its total opposite.*[13] Jung's comment describes well God's image, arising from Job's emotional style. Nevertheless, only the main character express 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. 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 characters guilt and o innocence or about men's condition. They *depict the multitudinous thoughts and feelings which pass through the mind*[14] similarly to the modern *stream of consciousness*[15] monologues. Although using this 19-th century's term to describe an ancient work would be an archaism, 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.* (J.7,3-4). On the other hand he feels that his live 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* (J.9,25-26). Also his opinions 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.* (J.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.* (J.27,13.16-17) In one monologue Job claims that he sinned and therefore Almighty punished him by suffering: *If I sin, what do I do to you, you watcher of mankind?*[16] (J.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.* (J.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. (J.13,15-16). Jobs 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.

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.*[17] Instead of conclusion in rational dialogue, the reader receives a *dramatic climax*[18] 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.*[19] The only conclusion seems to be another paradox. Having heard Almighty's words, Job says: *I take back everything I said* [20] (J.42,6). This statement leads to a surprising change on a metalinguistic

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 (J.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 Almighty. Ignoring the dramatic structure leads to an interpretation in which some aspects of this image are missed.

The genre of drama is unusual for the biblical style. Apart from The book of Job it is only represented by the Song of 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 genres. The examples show that the question of genre plays a crucial role, entailing specific implications for the interpretation.

The question of genre is so important, because of the consequences to interpretation. Anna Świderkówna, classifies the text as a dialogue. Being a *rational discourse*, dialogue presents characters with precisely opinion, who through a discussion reach a consensus on an important issue[21]. Świderkówna presents various Job's statements, even contradictory with each other. But presenting the text as a dialogue, she tries to structurize them logically, missing its paradoxical style, differing from friends' coherent worldview. The inner logic of dialogue imposes clear, univocal answers on questions presented in the text. Presenting the Book of Job as a poem[22] 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. The poematic approach excludes dynamic character of the Book of Job, and, thus, changes in Job's posture. Many drama interpretations stop in a halfway.

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*[23], 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 looser, 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 book of Job as a drama enables to resolve seemingly incoherence's of the text and to notice the unique and percussive style features. 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 deepen personalities, rather than a set of human types, possible to describe by one sentence. This refers to the 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. The Book of Job enables us to look broader. To discover the power of drama. And notice that the ancient drama is

not limited to the Greek version. Maybe there is still much to discover, in spite of hundreds of commentaries about the Book of Job, covering libraries' shelves. The power of literature do not depend on calling it great or not. The feeling of astonishment after reading might me more helpful hint about its greatness.

Note:

1. If not marked otherwise, all the Bible quotations are from English Standard Version
2. See e.g. how Søren Kierkegaard describes the role of silence in Abraham's travel to Moriah before the offering of Isaac. Kierkegaard Søren, *Bojaźń i drżenie. Choroba na śmierć*, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa 1982
3. Jung Carl Gustaw, *Aswer to Job*, [in:] "The Collected Works of C. G. Jung", volume 11, Bollingen Series XX: 1958, p. 561
4. Therein, p. 560
5. Świderkówna Anna, *Rozmowy o Biblii*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 1994, p. 232 Translation from Polish mine. *Ów Bóg – dobry, święty, mądry i sprawiedliwy – zdaje się znajdować jakąś niezrozumiałą przyjemność w znęcaniu się nad człowiekiem niewinnym.*
6. Iwański Dariusz, Hiob dla odważnych, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, Toruń 2011, p. 36. Translation from Polish mine. *Co ciekawe, główny bohater nigdy i nigdzie nie zostaje skarcony za swoją rzekomą „zuchwałość"*
7. Slawik Jakub, Hiob przed Bogiem, Chrześcijańska Akademia Teologiczna, Warszawa 2010,p .710. Translation from Polish mine. *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*
8. Jung Carl Gustaw, *Aswer to Job*, [in:] "The Collected Works of C. G. Jung", volume 11, Bollingen Series XX: 1958, p. 579
9. World English Bible
10. Iwański Dariusz, Hiob dla odważnych, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, Toruń 2011, str. 63. Translation from Polish mine. *Kolejnym etapem jest decyzja Boga, który oświadcza: „Dobrze, pozwalam ci wystawić go na próbę, ale zobaczysz, że pozostanie mi wierny!*
11. Jung Carl Gustaw, *Aswer to Job*, [in:] "The Collected Works of C. G. Jung", volume 11, Bollingen Series XX: 1958, 579
12. Therein, p. 582
13. Jung Carl Gustaw, *Aswer to Job*, [in:] "The Collected Works of C. G. Jung", volume 11, Bollingen Series XX: 1958, p. 567, 574
14. Fragment of stream of consciousness definition in: J. A. Cuddon, A Dictionary of Literary Terms. (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books,1984), p.660-1
15. Strumień świadomości w: Słownik terminów literackich Janusz Sławiński, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław 1988, str.488
16. King James Version: *I have sinned; what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men?*
17. Slawik Jakub, Hiob przed Bogiem, Chrześcijańska Akademia Teologiczna, Warszawa 2010, p.738-739. Translation from Polish mine. 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.*
18. Jung Carl Gustaw, *Aswer to Job*, [in:] "The Collected Works of C. G. Jung", volume 11, Bollingen Series XX: 1958, p. 584
19. Świderkówna Anna, *Rozmowy o Biblii,* Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 1994, str. 239. Translation from Polish mine. *Poznał, jak wielka przepaść dzieli wszelkie ludzkie spekulacje od doświadczenia bezpośredniego spotkania z Bogiem.*
20. New Living Translation.
21. *Słownik terminów literackich* Janusz Sławiński, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław 1988, str. 90
22. Among others, Francois Chripaz Interpress The book of Job as a poem. Chirpaz Francois, *Księga Hioba. Poemat o nadziei,* W drodze, Poznań 1999
23. Iwański Dariusz, *Hiob dla odważnych,* Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, Toruń 2011, str. 36

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