

Paradigms of literary analysis of the Book of Books

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Abstract

The article is an attempt to answer the question to what extent the philological method, based on rhetorical, narrative, semiotic and intertextual paradigms, broadens the perspective of research into the literariness of the Bible. Using a hermeneutic-genological optic, the author analyses models of biblical reading on four levels: structure, axiology, stylistics and pragmatics.

The Bible, a compendium of universal truths and social interactions, is an inexhaustible source of inspiration for subsequent generations. The above-formulated thesis is confirmed by the constantly growing number of translations of sacred texts into foreign languages, reprints of existing translations, the development of biblical sciences, and the undiminished emotional nature of biblical disputes. The entire Bible has been translated into nearly four hundred languages, and selected books into some 2300 languages. Although there are some 6500 languages and dialects worldwide, complete translations cover more than 90 percent of the world's population. The Book of Books, one of the most perfect products of human material and spiritual activity, requires its readers to view the texts contained on its pages also from the perspective of the paradigms of literary hermeneutics, because

The mediated, indirect, compromising, pluralistic character of hermeneutic methods in the human sciences seems to offer the relatively best chance

of gradually overcoming the methodological impasse and its concomitant threats to freedom of research and freedom of expression¹.

Hermeneutics (Greek word *ἑρμηνεύω hermēneuō* – translate, interpret, discover the meaning) sees itself as the art of interpretation. Once limited primarily to the interpretation of texts, in the 20th century it took the form of a philosophy striving for universality, emphasizing understanding and interpretation as basic features of human existence. For over two thousand years, millions have preached, pondered and meditated on the biblical texts. Meticulous work on the text has always brought to light new aspects or exposed millennia-old errors.

The entire biblical world differs from our present not only in images, which makes the interpretation of the Book of Books even more difficult. The biblical writers described everything they experienced, but from a perspective largely alien to us. In Genesis 1:6, the biblical writer can confidently speak of the vault that Yahweh created. We know precisely that the firmament in the biblical sense does not exist. The blue that rises above our heads is not a stretched blue cloth or something of the sort, but a luminous phenomenon that can be compared to the greenness of clear water. A Bible written in „yesterday’s“ language is read by today’s man and applies „tomorrow’s“ categories of thought to the reading. Hence, the most varied difficulties arise. To address them, it is useful to read the books of the Bible from a philological perspective. In the linguistic layer of the canonical text, we have a great amplitude, a wide scale of voice covering all human possibilities of feeling: from a whisper to a shout, from sadness to joy, from doubt to hope against all hope. For the biblical message is not contained in abstract words and thoughts. These always occur in all humanising concreteness. Biblical poetics resembles an uninterrupted dialogue. One voice bumps into another, responds to the first. Another prompts, submits a thought to the next.

By understanding what the other person is saying to us, we also understand them. Our personal perception is directed directly towards what has been said in words, indirectly also towards their author. Man has been formed in such a way that he does not come to an understanding with another being if he does not constantly speak with him „about something“ and understand „something“ that he is saying. This elementary law also applies to the philologist, the lover of words and scientific discussion, who, in exploring the literary structure of the Bible, draws on the paradigms of exegesis developed in the more than 2,000-year history of the study of the Book of Books.

¹ D. Heck, *Hermeneutyka i filologia*, [in:] *W stronę hermeneutyki kultury*, ed. T. Tisończyk, A. Waśko, Kraków 2013, p. 27.

Rhetorical paradigm. The overarching aim of the rhetorical research strategy is to read the persuasive power of the biblical text. First, the rhetorical problem and situation are defined, as they are the main motivations for the birth of a particular discourse. The next findings concern the boundaries of the content area to be studied. Based on the concrete text, a reconstruction of the selection of the arguments that determine the argumentation takes place. An overview of the essential literary elements makes it possible to distinguish the smallest components of the analysed text and to determine whether the persuasive power of the linguistic message is based on highlighting the personality of the biblical author, whether he wants to put the addressees into a certain state, or whether, finally, the discourse is based on logical proof. The introduction (*introductio*) is intended to establish contact with the addressees of the message and introduce them to the subject matter being addressed. This is followed by a concise and clear presentation of the supposition and a recounting of the main ideas (*expositio*). The penultimate stage includes the citation of the actual proof (*argumentatio*). The speech concludes with a review of the evidence and rationale cited (*recapitulatio*).

The prophetic books of the Old Testament, the Acts of the Apostles and the letters of Paul of Tarsus prove the existence of the so-called rhetorical genology. It includes the deliberative genre, used in speeches of a political nature, which were usually delivered during popular assemblies. The orator, presenting his own position at that time, tried to gain the approval of the audience for the views he was proclaiming. Moreover, the demonstrative speech should be considered one of the basic rhetorical genres. The main motivation for its formulation are occasional speeches on the occasion of important festivals and celebrations for the community.

Another rhetorical genre (*vide* excerpts from Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy) concerns speeches of a juridical nature and usually refers to specific provisions of the law, offences against it. It also concerns defensive or accusatory speeches, the impact of which determines the level of punishment set by the judge. A critical component of such speeches is thoughtful argumentation.

The sermon is also an important rhetorical genre for biblical authors. Due to its thematic and structural qualities, and because of its great power to influence its audience, it quickly became one of the primary forms of exposition and dissemination of sacred content. The Sermon on the Mount in the account of Matthew 5:1-7, 28 and Luke 6:17-49 is regarded as its model.

Letters have also become popular. Their effectiveness is demonstrated primarily by the level of argumentation used. Obligatory prerequisites in this case are inquisitiveness and interest on the part of the listeners or readers

in the subject matter covered by a particular statement. Familiarity with the linguistic forms used by the biblical authors is also important for the reception of this content. The persuasive power of biblical accounts is perceived intuitively, subconsciously, going by the rhetoric available to people of the ancient middle class.

Biblical rhetoric is characterised by concreteness and matter-of-factness in the construction of descriptions, varied parallelisms and symmetry in the construction of the individual parts of the message. A noticeable dissonance occurs in the area of the way logical relationships are expressed with a symmetrical arrangement of units, with lexical repetitions between them². Structural components include: a term (denoted in the text by a specific word); a member (a discourse element concealing two to five terms); a segment (having one to three members); an excerpt (a passage containing one to three segments); a part (a subset containing one to three excerpts), a pericope (an arrangement of one or more parts); a sequence (a section of a work comprising one or more pericopes); a section (a *factoire* made up of one or more sequences); a book (a batch made up of one or more sections).

The process of rhetorical analysis of a biblical pericope is formed by four stages. The first is marked by the reading of the text in its original form. Repeated reading makes it possible to grasp the connections and relationships that occur between the various elements of the text's structure. The second stage of explication is realised by creating a kind of matrix highlighting the construction of a given biblical passage. On the basis of the elaborated schema, an appropriate commentary on the analysed content can be formulated. The third phase, which is particularly important for understanding the biblical message of the text, is connected with the perception of a given passage in relation to identical or thematically similar texts. Classifying the message under examination into a set of parallel texts enables the reader to correctly interpret the meanings contained therein.

An undoubted advantage of the rhetorical method is that it highlights the craftsmanship and literary talent of the biblical authors. A close inspection of the structural space of the work makes it possible to discover the perfection and precision of the author's artistic craftsmanship. The parcellation of the text into smaller units makes it easier for researchers to formulate conclusions about the process of constitution of the unitary message. The integrity in terms of the composition of the discourse gives rise to statements about the coherent character of the biblical accounts, realising the intention of their creators.

² R. Meynet, *Wprowadzenie do hebrajskiej retoryki biblijnej*, transl. K. Łukowicz, T. Kot, Kraków 2001, p. 186.

Narrative paradigm. In the literary interpretation of a canonical text, narrative strategy plays an important role. Paul Ricoeur, reflecting on Aristotle's argument about the formal structure of Greek tragedy, concluded that its model can be adapted to all kinds of stories, including biblical ones³. In the literary interpretation of a canonical text, narrative strategy plays an important role. Reflecting on Aristotle's argument about the formal structure of Greek tragedy, Paul Ricoeur concluded that its model can be adapted to all kinds of stories, including biblical ones. For the narrative of a story is determined by a sequence of events, interactions, transformations of time, situation, space, which *mutatis mutandis* allows the story to be separated from description. The requirement for narrative is fulfilled by mythical stories, symbolic stories (cf. Genesis), historical stories, texts with a didactic and chronicle-biographical slant, paraboles⁴. The narrative paradigm encompasses the constitutive elements of a particular character's speech, the events unfolding, the topography, the chronology. It facilitates the tracing of the various textual signals and stylistic techniques used by the narrator to lead the reader to certain conclusions. Among the stylistic figures used by the authors of the Book of Books, we find extensional structures: amplifications, anadiplosis, anaphora, ellipsis, epiphora, etymological figures, paranomasias, doubling, repetition, zeugma; substitutive structures: antonomasias, emphases, hyperboles, metaphors, metonymies, synecdoches, synonyms; argumentative structures: analogies, antecedents, antitheses, apostrophes, dialogisms, exclauses, rhetorical questions, enumerative sentences.

The characterisation of the literary characters present in a given statement follows a specific premise. All of the individuals appearing in the extract are presented. The determination of the number of people taking part in a given story is accompanied by a division into leading and supporting characters. Assigning roles to the appearing characters, in turn, makes it possible to determine what positions they represent – individual or collective protagonists. Attention is also paid to the semantics of the anthroponymy used in a given biblical pericope and indicates the basic information resource for evaluating and classifying the characters in the story. An essential source of knowledge is the direct opinions formulated by the authors of the biblical accounts. The reader gathers a great deal of information about the nature and character of the persons appearing in the work on the basis of an analysis of the statements and conduct of the characters themselves. Biblical characters, the primary narrative subjects of a sacred text, embody moral values and

³ Z. Pawłowski, *Hermeneutyczna metoda opowiadania we współczesnej egzegezie*, „Collectanea Theologica” 1992, fasc. 1, p. 8.

⁴ S. Szymik, *Metoda narracyjna jako propozycja dialogu z tekstem*, [in:] *Język Biblii. Od słuchania do rozumienia*, ed. W. Pikor, Kielce 2005, p. 13.

attitudes. Their correct identification is of critical importance for the correct interpretation of the message of the Book of Books.

The foundation of the narrative paradigm is the exposition, the schematic presentation of the initial constellation of events, on the basis of which subsequent episodes are created, the description of further fates, the course of events in the story. At this stage, it is not uncommon for the plot of the work to meander, implying the introduction of an element of novelty, e.g. another character, plot or problem. The climax, the climax of the argument, should be considered the most important component of the biblical narrative scheme. After it, the plot takes a sudden turn. Fundamental changes concern the position in which a particular protagonist of the story finds himself, e.g. the transition from a positive to a negative situation, from a state of ignorance to knowledge. Many biblical stories are characterised by a suspension of the action of the speech. In order to arouse the reader's curiosity, biblical authors use a variety of tricks: redundancies to highlight certain elements of the text, to emphasise the importance of the message; gradual progression of the events presented; interruptions designed to upset or interrupt the action of the story; returning in the course of the narrative to elements previously mentioned.

A significant element of the narrative paradigm is the analysis of the temporal and spatial categories of a given statement. This involves establishing the sequence of events that occurred and categorising the tenses used by the biblical author into narrated time (reality measured in seconds, minutes, hours, years) and narrative time (the duration of a particular narrative). The two tenses are linked by a series of correlations and references evident in the narrative's diarised passages. Descriptions of all kinds, concerning, for example, the appearance of characters, places, events, are to be seen as factors constituting not the time of the story but the time of the story. The presence of temporal gaps and gaps in the analysed text has a crucial impact on the establishment of the boundaries of the defined realities. Their fulfilment, often spanning a period of hundreds or thousands of years, is done within narrative time, and story time is limited by the use of ellipsis usually to a report of a few seconds. The importance of the event determines the time space allotted to the account of it. The higher the value of the fact described, the more extensive in content and rich in detail the description. This slows down or stops altogether relative to the time of the events⁵.

In the narrative paradigm, an analysis concerning the categories of author and narrator also has an important place. With regard to the creator of

⁵ W. Rakocy, *Metoda narracyjna w interpretacji tekstu biblijnego*, „Ruch Biblijny i Liturgiczny” 1995, nr 3, p. 164.

the work, a systematisation is applied that allows the viewer to distinguish between the real author (the real character) and the implicit author (the creator whose image is implied by the text of the work itself). The narrator, who is a creation called into action by the author, is not always a representation of the author's worldview. There is often a dissonance between these positions in order to emphasise a particular issue more strongly or to maintain objectivity in the view of an issue. In the text, the narrator acts as an intermediary between the author of the work and its audience. The wide spectrum of perceptions available to the narrator mobilises the viewer to be constantly active and involved in the process of interpreting a literary work. Correctly establishing the perspective of the statement of the „narrative instance“ brings the researcher much closer to understanding the actual message of the text. In turn, the answer to the question concerning the status of the reader of the text is of unquestionable importance for the narrative descriptor. The typology of audience includes: the addressee, the real reader and the implicit reader. The addressee inscribed in the text, taking into account its habitat of life, is directly addressed by the author. The real reader becomes familiar with the account, while the implicit reader is suggested by the narrative⁶.

The narrative paradigm certainly enriches the art of reading the biblical text. It puts biblical exegesis on the right track through a thorough analysis of the represented world of the canonical work. It not only enables the reader to correctly read the meanings contained in the Book of Books, but also facilitates the grasp of the coherence of individual canonical texts.

Semiotic paradigm. The origins of the semiotic paradigm lie in the deliberations of ancient and medieval philosophers. The date of its proper birth should be linked to the work of Ferdinand de Saussure. In the semiotic model, a sign consisting of plans of expression and content makes it possible to understand both words, small textual units and extended phrases, such as allegories. The model proposed by the Swiss linguist is based on three pillars: syntactic analysis (establishes the relationships between the words of a text), semantic analysis (shows the relationships between individual words and the objects they denote), and pragmatic analysis (determines the interactions between the word and its recipient).

In syntactic analysis, attention is paid to the linguistic formation of the text, with particular attention paid to the relations occurring between specific components of the linguistic system, once their presence in the text has been established. In addition, rules are established to enable the use of particular elements of language in a given utterance. The target point of the research processes undertaken becomes the characterisation of the structure of the

⁶ J. Czerski, *Metodologia Nowego Testamentu*, Opole 1997, p. 183sq.

message, the extraction of second-order thematic structures from the text, and the verification of the coherence of the analysed text. The syntactic strategy of the Bible is formed by several operations: specifying the boundaries of the textual unit subjected to analysis; developing a register of the nomenclature used in a given utterance; determining the parts of speech, grammatical forms occurring in a given message; studying sentence construction, strategies of their combination; determining the style and segmentation of a given text. The text in the form of a dissociated unit, deprived of its proper textual environment, constitutes the basis for the subsequent stages of analysis. The most important issue in this case remains the thoughtful, rational way of separating the fragment so that it still remains a coherent literary structure. The degree of risk is reduced in this case by careful reading. A close inspection of the textual unit makes it possible to identify the specific elements of the statement that mark the boundaries of the message, namely the introduction and the conclusion. The caesura of the text is indicated by modifications concerning changes in characters, places, situations, time, themes.

The next stage of syntactic analysis involves compiling a dictionary of terms used in the biblical text. The dictionary makes it possible to determine the level of frequency of certain terms, word compounds, helps to delineate the thematic area addressed by the author, as well as to characterise his writing technique and the phenotype of the work. The high frequency of the use of given words in the text, the use of stylistic techniques (amplification, inclusion, interpolation, parallelism, polysemy, number patterns) are, in the case of hagiographers, procedures of an intentional nature. They most often serve them to highlight a particular detail or to emphasise a particular problem.

The syntactic category identifies the parts of speech and grammatical forms present in a biblical pericope. For example, the predominance of personal pronouns in the text highlights its important communicative-performative function⁷. A detailed analysis of sentence construction, the ways in which they are combined, the study of all kinds of changes occurring in the area of the positioning of individual components of the sentence structure makes it possible to formulate correct determinations of the issue and purpose of the work. A sentence in the shape of an ordered word structure gives its members a specific meaning. Correct conjunction enhances the power of the message.

The semantic approach aims at correctly reading the meanings of the individual linguistic signs (words, concepts) appearing in the text, and the elaborate literary constructions of the Bible (sentences, pericopes, books). The perception of a concrete text that is semantically coherent and finite de-

⁷ Ibidem, p. 127sq.

monstrates that there are different kinds of contingencies between its constituent parts. The construction of the message is therefore the aftermath of the interdependencies taking place between the elements of the utterance under study. These interrelationships include: implication, hierarchical ordering of individual sentence factoids in the text, ambiguity, synonymy, antonymy, heteronomy, referred to in the case of words with similar meaning.

In the context of considering the semantic analysis of the biblical text, it is also worth mentioning the existence of a semantic field. This term encompasses a set of concepts that have common attributes. In order for the phenomenon of a semantic field to exist, any selected element located in the area of this linguistic structure should exhibit the parameter of identity with the rest of its components. Therefore, one of the basic operations carried out during the study of the semantics of a sacred text is to draw up a semantic register consisting of concepts and contents separated from the text on the basis of the criterion of analogy. The common features exhibited by each set of terms are sometimes referred to by linguists as lines of meaning. Defining the situation, identifying the subject and object of the action, specifying the time and place of the event, and establishing the contexts make it possible to formulate more detailed conclusions regarding the semantics of the text.

Pragmatic analysis of biblical messages is used to identify the communicative functions of the text enabling communication with the reader. This is because the main task of a written text, conceived in terms of a coherent and closed linguistic construction, is to influence the reader. With the help of the linguistic system, it becomes possible to transmit information between the sender of a message and its recipient. Advocates of the pragmatic method of explicating the Book of Books make the object of research the way in which a given utterance determines the direction of a potential reader's reading, hence they attempt to establish the intention and legitimacy of the message's constitution. The strategy of explicating sacred content is primarily concerned with the dynamic function of the utterance. The pragmatic approach with regard to biblical studies mainly serves the purpose of exploring the meaning of individual canonical texts. It establishes not only the sense of the individual terms present in the utterance, but also the intention of the entire discourse. The pragmatic approach fulfils an amplifying role in relation to the semantic method, complementing and often – enriching it.

The reader is able to determine the strategies used by hagiographers to evoke emotions in the addressees of the texts they created. The requests, decrees or advice appearing in them fulfil a directive function. With one clarification regarding court decisions, considered as representative declarations. Obliging functions are fulfilled by acts of communication in the form of oa-

ths, declarations or vows. All forms of acknowledgements, affirmations and excuses are assumed to exemplify the expressive function. The declarative function, on the other hand, refers to messages whose articulation is associated with a change of situation, such as a declaration of war.

Intertextual paradigm. Following Mikhail Bakhtin's views on the dialogic nature of writing and the ambivalence of writing, and cultural texts absorbing and transforming other texts into a mosaic of quotations⁸, Julia Kristeva coined the capacious term „intertextuality”. Gérard Genette used a semantically more capacious category – „transtextuality” – and gave five varieties of it: intertextuality (the appearance of a text in a text by means of allusion, quotation, plagiarism); paratextuality (the location of elements of the primary text in a location particular to the derived text, e.g. preface, afterword, title, subtitle of the work); metatextuality (the location of elements of the primary text in a location specific to the secondary text, e.g. preface, afterword, title, subtitle); metatextuality (a discursive statement, which deals with elements of the primary text that are foreign to the secondary text, and which takes place within the secondary text); hypertextuality (the relationship between the hypertext and the hypotext); archetextuality (which relates the relation of the hypertext to the norms and rules concerning the construction of texts in earlier centuries)⁹.

The intertextual paradigm largely facilitates the exegesis of biblical texts. We are speaking here primarily of two constitutive intertextual relations. The first concerns the relationship: the message given by the author – the message read by the recipient. The second concerns the relationship between the later text and the original. These relations arise through repetition of sentences, text fragments or motifs. Another determinant of the intertextual relation-

⁸ „Dialogicality in Bakhtin's work defines writing simultaneously as a subjective act and a communicative event or, better, as intertextuality; when confronted with this dialogicality, the notion of „person-subject of writing” gradually blurs to give way to the notion of „ambivalence of writing”. [...] The term „ambivalence” implies the inclusion of history (society) in the text and of the text in history; for the writer, it is one thing. Speaking of the „two ways that meet in the story”, Bakhtin thinks of writing as a reading of the found literary output, of the text as an absorption of another text and a response to that text” (J. Kristeva, *Słowo, dialog i powieść*, transl. W. Grajewski, [in:] *Bakhtin. Dialog – język – kultura*, ed. E. Czaplewicz, E. Kasperki, Warszawa 1983, p. 396, 398).

⁹ G. Genette, *Palimpsesty. Literatura drugiego stopnia*, transl. A. Milecki, [in:] *Współczesna teoria badań literackich za granicą. Antologia*, ed. H. Markiewicz, Kraków 1992, p. 322.

ship is the transmutation of textual members, repeated during the writing of a new text¹⁰.

An important element of intertextual analysis is constituted by intertextual signals, i.e. authorial cues addressed to the reader to indicate the nature of the reference. The number and nature of the signals present in the text are adapted to the perceptual level of the reader. Intertextual signals in the canonical writings are realised through the use of various means of expression, to name but a few: characteristic opening and closing formulas of the work, allusions, quotations, emphasising the similarities between particular characters or events of the secondary text and the original, evoking characters taken from other biblical books in order to identify with the attitude they represent or to oppose a certain behaviour. The nature of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments can be described using intertextual models: the unity of the two parts of the canonical text, the key issues and concepts, the historio-salvation. Gerhard F. Hasel, professor of Old Testament and biblical theology, stated:

The unity of the Bible of the two Testaments is rooted in the certainty that it is inspired by the Holy Spirit himself. The unity and continuity of the two Testaments is clearly revealed because their existence is the work of the same three divine Persons. [...] The careful interpreter of the Bible will avoid the widespread practice of emphasising diversity to the extent of disturbing the inner deep unity of Holy Scripture¹¹.

The findings of identical causal power for the apparently autonomous parts of the sacred work set the stage for its interpretation. Despite their apparent autonomy, the Old and New Testaments form a coherent whole. Coherence is implied by the fact that there are rules of complementation, continuation and completion between the individual biblical texts. New Testament content is contained within the pages of the Old Covenant. The Old Testament has its justification and explanation in the books of the New Testament, and this fact is confirmed by the description of the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies in the pages of the New Testament. References, quotations, typologies make it possible to define specific characters, objects, events of the Old Testament as prefigurations of characters, objects, events in the New Testament. Despite the diversity of issues and terms, the Testaments unite the ideas of creation, vocation, covenant into a harmonious whole.

¹⁰ J. Kaczmarek, *Analiza intertekstualna Apokalipsy. Metodologia i przykład zastosowania*, „Warszawskie Studia Teologiczne” 2000, t. 13, p. 107.

¹¹ G. F. Hasel, *Ogólne zasady interpretacji Biblii*, transl. J. Kauc, Warszawa 2001, p. 11.

An attempt to capture salvific events in a historical dimension, to show the similarities and correspondences between the story of Jesus of Nazareth and universal history should be considered a feature of the historiosal model. The fate of Christ cannot be considered in isolation from the history recorded in the Old Testament books, for it is not only its continuation but also its fulfilment.

An intertextual reading of the canonical text is supported by the nature and extent of the influence of the ancient civilisations of the Mediterranean, North Africa and Asia on the process of shaping the final form of the Book of Books. Its authors were profoundly influenced by the Persian, Egyptian, Greek and Roman cultures. They drew on the rich cultural heritage of neighbouring countries. They considered it an overriding task to seek answers to questions related to the origin, legitimacy of the existence of the world and people. The nature of these influences, however, is based not only on the mechanical reproduction of information commonly known and available to the ancient community, but on the addition of original content. Many typically Eastern elements entered the Bible. Where we look in the descriptive language of Europe – we encounter images. The place of logic is taken by unrelated dialectics. Hagiographers embedded in the ancient image of the world take it uncritically, as if it were something taken for granted. Here we experience tangibly the human nature of the word, and thus the contingencies of the „here and now“.

The creation story contained in the opening pages of the Bible shows numerous and clear parallels with mythological accounts of the origins of the world. At this point it is worth emphasising the artistic skill of the anonymous author of the Book of Genesis, who draws on the literary achievements of a polytheistic religious system and builds an original picture of the course of the creation of earthly reality on the basis of a mythical account.

The mythical provenance can be seen in the act of creating a woman from a man's rib. In Sumerian literature, there are expressions using the symbolism of the „rib“. In biblical authors, it appears in a colloquial sense and serves to unify the differences between the two sexes, to give them equal dignity. The intertextual nature of the Bible is also evidenced by the image of the Garden of Eden perpetuated in the pages of the canonical books. Moreover, a topos taken from Mesopotamian culture are the figures of cherubim, mediators between the sacred and the profane. A motif taken from ancient polytheistic literature is also that of the serpent. The motif of the Flood was popular in ancient writing. Before its inclusion in Genesis, it had previously found a rich presentation in Mesopotamian literature. In spite of the clear affinities with the literary output of neighbouring cultures, the biblical texts produced at

that time must be regarded as original works. Undeniably, their authors were subject to various influences from polytheistic religions. However, the nature of the influences must be considered a value of the texts they produced. Indeed, the value of a recited mythical story is determined by its veracity.

The Bible contains a variety of literary genres and forms that is difficult to comprehend. However, it is not only their great number that amazes us, but above all how different they are and how differently they create reality. We will not find today a book containing at the same time a novel, a historical account, prophecies, a collection of songs. The Bible unites literary opposites. Is it possible to come up with linguistic forms and literary content so different from each other than the cosmogony of Genesis, the love lyricism of the Song of Songs, the wisdom of Kohelet, the prophecies of Isaiah, the symbolism of the Apocalypse. Those who familiarise themselves with Old Testament sapiential literature will come to know rich collections of proverbs, rules for life and didactics. Biblical language makes its own everything that human speech can accommodate, all its depths, overtones, nuances, ambivalences, oppositions. One should not therefore ask: What did the authors of the Book of Books actually mean? Biblical language is not a garment covering scientific theses – it is the statement itself, historically and civilisationally conditioned. Likewise, today's philologist, is no more aware of the relativity of this understanding than the biblical authors, of the relativity of their own views, perceptions and judgements. The biblical authors have given us their words not as a concluding summary, a non-negotiable conclusion, but as a source of philological exploration.

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