Revision -- the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction--is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival.¹

There was a woman in the land of Uz whose name was Johannah. Blameless and upright, she "feared God and turned away from evil" (1:1). A wealthy and honored woman, Johannah was loved by her family, friends and community. So righteous was she that she offered sacrifices on behalf of her children just in case they had sinned inadvertently (1:5).

Even God admired Johannah's righteousness, bragging about it to the heavenly court. But one of the heavenly messengers known as the satan objected. Johannah's loyalty was the simple consequence of God's gifts to her; remove them and she "will curse you to your face." Unwilling or unable to resist the satan's challenge, God places her in his hands.

Back on earth multiple calamities afflict Johannah. She loses her property, her wealth, and her children. To all this she responds, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord (1:21). But the satan is still not convinced of her loyalty. He tries again to make her curse God by afflicting her with "loathsome sores" from her head to her foot (2:7). Then even her husband colludes with the satan by urging her to curse God and die (2:9). To all this Johannah responds, "Shall we receive good from the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" (2:10).
In numbing pain Johannah repairs to the ash heap where three friends come to comfort her. They weep and mourn. They sit with her in silence for seven days and seven nights for her "suffering was very great" (2:13).

But after a week of mourning Johannah changes. She curses the day of her birth, "Let the day perish wherein I was born" (3:3). Better to have died in the womb than to live to face these horrors (3:11-19). Her new experience of affliction makes her ask why anyone suffers, why tormented people are given life at all? (3:20-23).

Johannah's angry lamentations evoke torrents of anxious words from her friends. Eleah speaks first (cc 4-5). In her view, Johannah's predicament follows two interconnected principles: God rewards the good and punishes the wicked, and people cause their own suffering. Johannah's circumstances are "the chastening of the Almighty" (5:17), a warning for which she should be grateful. Were Eleah in Johannah's shoes, she "would seek God and to God would I commit my cause" (5:8). Eleah reminds Johannah that she was once a preacher of the same theology herself, an instructor and comforter of many (4:3-6). Now Johannah should preach to herself.

More acerbic than Eleah, Bildah (c 8) argues that God is just and never causes innocent suffering. If Johannah's children have died, they must have sinned (8:4), and because of the ancient notion of corporate responsibility, Johannah, too, is implicated (8:13). She advises Johannah to turn to God, who
"will yet fill your mouth with laughter and your lips with shouting" (8:21).

Zophah, the third friend, mocks Johannah and attacks her directly (c 11). From her perspective, Johannah's complaints are babbling nonsense, "a multitude of words", and Johannah's torments, less than she deserves (11:6). Though again the principle of divine justice is at stake, Zophah claims that God's ways are incomprehensible to humans. "Can you find out the deep things of God?" (11:7).

Because God eludes human comprehension, Johannah's tirades are blasphemous. And though no one can know the mind of God, ironically Zophah knows. She knows, for example, that God recognizes the worthlessness of certain people (11:11). She knows that if Johannah would set her heart aright and "put iniquity far away", then security and joy would return and "life will be brighter than the noonday" (11:17).

That the "pastoral counselling" of her friends brings Johannah no comfort is hardly surprising. Her sad and angry monologues (cc 6-7; 9-10; 12-14; 16-17; 19-21; 23-24; 26-27), expose the spiritual and psychological dimensions of her suffering, not the least of which is her sense of betrayal by her friends (6:15-16). She tries valiantly to accept their point of view, begging them to show her where she has gone wrong. Then, at least knowledgeable of her crimes, she would gain peace of mind. Their explanations of her suffering seem no more than lies to her. "I have understanding as well as you," she shouts, "I am
not inferior to you" (12:3).

But neither can Johannah explain her suffering. Although she knows that her friends' theology does not explain her reality, she cannot produce an alternative. The fact of her relative innocence is her starting point, and that fact conflicts with the evidence of the disasters that have befallen her. Her suffering is compounded by its meaningless. Having lost a theological vision in which to place it, she has no way of accepting it and learning from it. Since she knows she is not the source of her suffering, her only solution is to blame God.

The arrows of the Almighty are in me, my spirit drinks their poison; the terrors of God are arrayed against me" (6:4). God causes her undoing. "Thou dost hunt me like a lion and again work wonders against me" (10:16).

But that is not all. God is beyond reach. Besides intrusive, pernicious involvement in human life, Johannah accuses God of shunning personal encounter. Against God's capricious dealings, human beings are completely powerless (9:3). Like a tyrannical dictator, God deflects questions and brooks no interference (9:11-12). Even if Johannah succeeded in contacting this aloof being, she would never believe that God was listening to her (9:16). Communication between them has become impossible.

Yet Johannah has no recourse but to demand a hearing from her torturer. Despite the impasse between them, her only hope is to gain a meeting with God who alone is capable of relieving her pain. Rather than being silenced and intimidated by divine power, she grows more angry and more insistent, and in her anger
she finds the courage to confront her persecutor, no matter the cost. "Behold God will slay me; I have no hope; yet I will defend my ways to his face" (13:15).

At the end of two more cycles of speeches (cc 15-21 and cc 22-27) Johannah sums up her case (cc 29-31). Nostalgically she recalls "the days when God watched over me; when his lamp shone upon my head, and by his light I walked through darkness", "when the friendship of God was upon my tent", "my steps were washed with milk" (29:2,3,4,6). But now "God has cast me into the mire" (30:19). Divine cruelty has replaced friendship.

In a series of legal oaths (c 31), she reiterates her innocence. Perhaps her oaths attempt to trap God. If her claims of innocence are not true, if she is guilty, then God must execute the curses. If she is innocent, God can remain silent, do nothing, but inaction would also be an answer, an indirect vindication. When God does act, however, it is not to curse Johannah, but to meet her face to face.

From the midst of the storm God speaks to Johannah with a sharp rebuke, as if to an equal.

Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? I will question you and you shall declare to me" (32:2-3). Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements--surely you know... Or who shut in the sea with doors, when it burst forth from the womb? Have you commanded the morning or caused the dawn to know its place? Can you hunt the prey for the lion? Do you know how the mountain goats bring forth? Do you give the horse his might? (38:4,8,12,19,39:1,19).

Proceeding from inanimate to animate creation, God parades the
secrets of the world before Johannah for her response. Does she know these things? Does she understand the unfathomable secrets of the universe? Of course, she does not; on these matters Johannah is a know-nothing.

Quieted, humbled, she responds like the submissive figure at the beginning of the story. "Behold I am of small account; what shall I answer thee?" (40:4). Compared to the wonders of God's creation, she is, indeed, of small account. Her troubles seem of little importance, and she silences herself.

God's speech neither curses nor condemns Johannah, but neither does it address her misery. Instead, God has changed the subject from her suffering to the wonders of the universe. Before the vastness of creation Johannah can only stand in awe. She seems to have been put in her creaturely place. Because God's authority is reasserted, some interpreters think, therefore, that book ends here, that the second dialogue is a later addition. Instead, it is the heart of the matter.

In the second speech from the storm (40:6-41:34), God again challenges Johannah. This time the subject of challenge narrows from the universe itself to two creatures within it, the Behemoth (40:15-24) and the Leviathan (41:1-34). In the ancient world these mythical monsters symbolized the chaos and wickedness that haunt human life on land and on sea. Symbolically, they portray the forces which threaten to destroy the harmony and beauty of the world described in God's first speech.

God asks Johannah if she has the power to control these
fierce monsters. For God they are playthings, domesticated and compliant, and because God controls the forces of chaos and death, they cannot run rampant over the earth. "Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine" (42:11). They belong in the universe even though Johannah has no knowledge of their purpose and no power to control them. To these revelations she responds, "I have uttered what I did not understand" (42:3). But it is not merely Johannah's knowledge of the universe that is affected in this exchange, her eyes are opened in another respect.

I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees thee; therefore, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes (42:5-6).

She sees God face to face and she relinquishes her claim to be right.

The story's epilogue (42:7-17) is clear and crisp. God rebukes Johannah's friends, "for you have not spoken of me what is right" (42:7). Were it not for Johannah's intercession on their behalf, the friends would perish. Moreover, God announces that Johannah has spoken correctly, and then God restores her wealth, family and honor even greater than before. She lives to a ripe old age with many children. Her offspring, particularly her daughters, are blessed by the great heritage they receive from her.

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

The purposes of this article are: to claim the story of Job for women by actually making it a woman's story; to show that the biblical account of Job contains a prototypical or symbolic story
that is women's story; to challenge the view among some feminists that biblical literature is so thoroughly patriarchal that it cannot serve women in our struggles to be free, powerful human beings.

The hermeneutical starting point of this reflection is not the Book of Job. It is my life and the lives of many women—friends, students, colleagues, and women of whose lives I have only read or heard—from which I begin. From this living anthology of stories patterns emerge, patterns that I also find in the Book of Job: movement from silence to "envoicement", from death to life, from search to resolution, from impasse to new vision. Of course, the hermetical circle affects this claim, for I do not know if I would have named women's experiences in this way were I not already deeply grasped by the this exquisite and subversive literature.

Several analytical processes are involved in this reflection, one of the literature and others of women's experiences, and each must be accomplished separately to respect its specificity and integrity. In this article, however, my primary concern is with the points of convergence among the stories. I discuss, first, the literary evidence that supports my reading of the Book of Job. Then I present ways in which Job's, or Johannah's story, as I will continue to call her, evokes and parallels the experiences of contemporary feminist believing women. Finally, I discuss the hermeneutical process pursued in this reflection.
Before beginning it must be noted that the Book of Job is not feminist literature. The only women who appear in it are Job's wife (2:9-10), Wisdom Woman (c 28), and Job's daughters (42:14-15), none of whom are treated particularly well. Nor have interpretations of the book included women. Of the myriad interpretations and retellings of the story over the centuries, the only one to include any reference to the lives of women, to my knowledge, is Elizabeth Cady Stanton's.

INTERPRETATION OF THE BOOK

Interpretation of this most complex book depends upon one's understanding of its structure. The major literary units are: the prologue, cc 1-2; speeches of Johannah and friends, cc 3-37; dialogue between God and Johannah, 38-42:6; epilogue, 42:7-17. Though these literary units are easily identified in the book, the relationships among them are not. The prologue and epilogue, for instance, are prose folk tale that frames the body of the book which is poetry and in which the characters change drastically from their portrayal in the prose. Another structural difficulty is that dialogue between God and Johannah ignores her suffering that heretofore appeared as the central concern of the book. These and other unsettling discrepancies are deliberate literary devices, designed to entangle the reader in the ambiguities of Johannah's sufferings and to prevent arrival at overly facile solutions to her predicament. Any reading of the book, therefore, yields implications, possibilities, and likelihoods, not didactic teachings.
For Johannah, the most agonizing question throughout the book is why she suffers, and by extension, why innocent people suffer? The intense pain and emotion that the subject creates for the characters, as well as the amount of attention given to the question by the prologue, by the friends, and by Johannah suggest that it is the main subject of the book, but it is not. The book's most authoritative speaker never addresses Johannah's suffering. Though the book offers three interpretations of suffering—the prologue's, the friends' and Johannah's—none are satisfactory, and the only one who can explain things refrains from doing so. This short-circuiting of the reader's expectations indicates that innocent suffering is not the book's principal interest but rather is the reality that gives rise to another dilemma. The real subject of the book is the relationship between God and humans. Paralleling the book's three explanations of human suffering are four ways to characterize divine-human relationship.

In the prologue, the satan describes the relationship between God and Johannah in mercenary terms. God buys the friendship of Johannah by giving gifts; Johannah is loyal to God only as a consumer of gifts. If gifts are withdrawn, she will turn away and curse the Giver. In the satan's estimate, true mutuality between God and humans is impossible. The Book itself, however, discredits this interpretation. The satan does not reappear after the prologue because he is proved wrong in the first two chapters. Johannah never curses God.
The view of divine human relationship promoted by the friends is equally inadequate. According to them, whether or not there can be divine-human exchange hinges entirely upon the moral correctness of human behavior. If Johannah treats God properly, if she lives according to the law and refrains from sin, then God will love her and bless her with every good thing. Again mutuality is impossible. On the one hand, Johannah must be perfect before God will accept her; on the other, God has no choice in responding to her except to execute exacting justice upon her. The friends, therefore, eliminate freedom, mutuality and surprise from the interaction between God and humans.

Great harm is done to Johannah by this lopsided theology. Its pervasiveness in her environment magnifies her suffering and deafens her friends to the depth of her anguish. It is, however, precisely the collapse of her friend's theology that plunges Johannah into an abyss of misery. Her pain seems utterly senseless. Unable to interpret it, she can neither accept nor escape it. With the demise of her view of the world, she assumes that her relationship with God has also fallen into ruin like a building under demolition. Without provocation, God turns against her to terrify and torture her. God is the culprit, the friend-turned-enemy, with vicious intentions toward humanity. Divine-human friendship is impossible to Johannah because God is unfaithful.

When in the storm God meets Johannah, God speaks to her and Johannah speaks back. The One who created, ordered, and made
beautiful the universe meets her, appears to her, speaks with her. Altogether different from Johannah's description, God is the Creator, Sustainer, and Protector of life, and God meets her as an equal.

The power of the Creator penetrates and shapes the deepest secrets of the world. She sends the dawn to its post to light the world with pinks and reds, transforming it like sealing wax imprinted with hills and valleys of gold (38:14). The father of the rain and the mother of the ice (38:28-29), she "tilts the waterskins of the heavens" to make it rain upon the dust (38:37). Even the cry of the young ravens is not too insignificant to gain her attention. And the Creator of this exquisite beauty and harmony also tames and controls the mythic monsters who proudly threaten to destroy its inhabitants and return the earth to chaos.

The God of the Storm is a free God whose range of concerns both includes and transcends human beings. Divine governance of the world exhibits care for and understanding of every creature. Johannah is among these. Neither superior nor inferior to other creatures, she is part of an interconnected and harmonious reality; she sees God with her own eyes; she relates to God in freedom, without constraint. She neither controls God nor is controlled by God. According to the dialogue between God and Johannah, divine-human relationship is a relationship of freedom, mutuality and surprising grace. This is the main interest of the book.
The effect of God's questions upon Johannah is to evoke her repentance. The text does not say why or of what she repents. It could be that she no longer sees herself as innocent in the face of God's majesty. That seems unlikely, however, since the reader knows she is innocent. Instead, the text implies that she repents of what she has said about God. "I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees thee; therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes" (~2:6). Her former knowledge of God had been shallow, gathered from the testimony of others. God's rebuke was right about her; she spoke "without knowledge" (38:2). An experience of theophany, of encounter with God, is the reason Johannah repents.

The Book explores several approaches to the problem of divine-human relationship and, for important theological reasons, discards all but one. Both the satan and the friends trap God and humans in the relationship. Johannah liberates God but makes humans victims of God's malevolent freedom. But God, in the thick of the storm, releases both of them into freedom and genuine mutuality. Because even in her darkest moments Johannah never abandons the possibility of that mutuality, God restores her. Though she accuses God of infidelity, Johannah's anger at God is a vehicle of her loyalty. She never accepts the ash heap and never allows God to discard her. She demands a meeting to set the record straight. When the two finally meet and speak to one another "face to face", the books' conflicts are resolved; the drama is over. All that remains is the denouement provided
by the epilogue.

In the epilogue, Johannah's human relationships are also transformed. Because of her intercession on behalf of her friends, God restores them to favor (42:8-9). Johannah regains her place in the community and among her family. She receives new children, and her daughters, usually a liability in the ancient world, receive special inheritances because of her.

JOHANNAH AND WOMEN TODAY

Johannah's story evokes the stories of contemporary women around the globe. From a feminist perspective, the most striking feature of Johannah's characterization in the book's prologue is neither her righteousness nor her patience; it is her lack of questions. She is portrayed as a woman of complete passivity who recites rote prayers of submission, while everyone and everything dear is ripped from her. She is a folk tale character, a figure unreachable and unemulable. Johannah is us.

Most feminists remember living in a time of prologue, indeed, slip back into prologue, when our voices are not our own, when we are silent or speak only in the words of the fathers, even as we ignore the pain and rage accumulating in our hearts. Like Johannah we have been caught in a plot of others invention in which secret conspiracies determine our fate.

The prologue never addresses Johannah's inner suffering, focusing, instead, upon the physical calamities that befall her, but the poetry concentrates on the spiritual and psychological dimensions of her tragedy. The pain of women, in all its
variety, parallels Johannah's. It is both physical and spiritual, external and internal. Johannah's loss of children, honor, and wealth evokes the hunger, poverty, and homelessness of women and their terror for their children. Her suffering conjures up illiterate and silenced woman, women without political, economic, or religious voice, women who see their lives and hopes demeaned, or who do not dare even to hope, women who never claim their talents, or claiming them, are excluded from arenas in which to use them.

Johannah's sores suggest the bruised bodies of battered, raped and abandoned women, of prostitutes, of aids sufferers and of all of us who see the female body violated in the media, on the streets, in our homes, by our churches. These sufferings are not merely the generic miseries of the human condition, of the pathologies from which all humans suffer, they are the specific diminishments, indignities and deaths that women know.

Johannah's ash heap is also our place of pain, fear and death.

And Johannah's spiritual pain elicits recognition in women's lives as well. The God of her youth with whom she believed herself intimate, turns against her and leaves her bereft. Her theology fails her; her tradition, of which she was once a missioner, denies the truth of her life. With the symbol system of her faith staggering and collapsing around her, she faces an abyss of meaninglessness, what Constance Fitzgerald calls the point of impasse, where all spiritual energy is blocked by pain, anger and incoherence.
Believing Jewish and Christian feminists face just such an impasse. Their traditions and institutions, unable to appropriate or make welcome the experience of women, not only seem indifferent to our pain, they are major contributors to it. Women see; their eyes are opened, and so, with Johannah, women have found their voices and they question. They ask why they suffer; why anyone suffers at all? They notice that the suffering of women is connected to the suffering of the poor, the homosexual, peoples of color in the northern and southern hemispheres. Above all they demand to meet and to interrogate this male god who justifies war and oppression, the lording it over of the many by the few. And these questions vex their friends, women and men alike.

Not the least of Johannah's suffering comes from her alienation from her friends. In the poetry, no real dialogue takes place among them as the cycles of speeches become spirals of misunderstanding and miscommunication. Representing prevailing theological opinion, her friends reduce her suffering to a simple equation; her suffering is her own fault. In defense of their conception of God, they cannot hear the way she understands her own reality.13

As the self-appointed revisor of the Book of Job, I might easily have given Johannah male "friends", but I chose to make them female, neither to excuse men nor to blame women, but to highlight the alienation among women and among feminists which I think create the most critical problem facing the women's
movement today. I grieve over the women who have not yet seen for themselves, who cannot or will not make the connections between their lives and the pain of other women, who try to return their sisters to silence. I mourn the alienation and separations among feminist women of different ethnic, cultural and economic groups, of different sexual orientation. Women still oppress women, or, in Bell Hook's strong expression, women "trash" women.¹⁴

As Jean Betheke Elstain puts the question, "How do we set about creating a feminist discourse that rejects domination?"¹⁵

Women's bonding has served as a key strategy in changing women's lives and affiliations, but solidarity among all women does not exist. Johannah's story provides a glimmer of hope. Once she leaves the false security of the prologue, her recognition of her own suffering enables her to form new solidarities. Her affliction creates a new lens for seeing the world and she notices the misery around her.¹⁶ Her cries go beyond herself to incorporate the anguish of all sufferers as the world's pain rushes into her being.

What saves Johannah, what makes her a heroine and a model for us, is her honesty. She maintains her integrity despite every effort to wrest it from her. She will not live falsely with any one, not her husband, not her friends, not God. Some inner blade of strength enables her to insist upon the truth even as she was pressed to settle for lies. She faces her pain in all its irrationality and randomness and this truthfulness is what gives
fire to her questions and ultimately makes possible her healing. In contrast to the submissive woman of the prologue, Johannah of the poetry grows increasingly individuated and clear, until she goes forward like a princess to meet her God. She takes her stand, she will deal only with God, then she waits. Though her interpretation of God's relationship to humans was wrong, her perception of the failure of the old theological world to explain her new reality was correct. She would not deny what she knew.

The poet Muriel Rukeyser writes "if one woman spoke the truth of her life the world would split apart". Woman have begun to speak truthfully about their experience, first to themselves, then to one another and finally to the broader world. What is missing from the Johannah story is the communities of women who have exchanged the truths of their lives, baptizing and confirming one another in the power of truth. And the world splits apart.

"I had heard of you by the hearing to the ear, but now my eyes see you." Ultimately, Johannah's story evokes women's stories because in the midst of the suffering, the broken relationships, the failed traditions, has come a new experience of God. Amidst the storms of women's lives they have met God, not a new God but God anew, God set free, God within, God among, God beyond women.

Women know now that if God is only male, if God is hierarchical, manipulative, domineering, racist, coercive and bellicose, then he is not god. The God who has burst upon women
is the God who can be called "she", who transcends maleness and femaleness. This God is free and sets free; she seeks friends not slaves. She is the Creator God who enfolds in herself all of creation: the trees, the stars, the ostriches and the peoples. Now we have seen you with our own eyes and you exceed everything they ever told us about you.

What has transpired for women is the "shattering of images", those learned by the hearing of the ear. In the ensuing chaos women have opened themselves to the "dark mystery of God", and the stammerings, the efforts to find new language has ultimately to the place beyond language, to the place where Johannah found herself. "Now I have see you with my own eyes".

Women's new relationship to God has changed women's relationship to authority. No longer is authority external, to be found exclusively outside women's experience. Of that view women repent. Instead, women find authority in and among themselves and this changes their ideas, their behavior and their politics in relations to themselves, to their families and friends, to their institutions, to the earth itself.

There is, therefore, an epilogue for women. Women know Johannah's joy of resurrection in new personal awareness, self-discovery and affirmations, in the sisterhood of women's friendship and traditions, and in the rediscovery of religion and culture from new perspectives, in the love of men who are free enough to call women equals. Yet Johannah's story is unfinished among us. The new heaven and the new earth remain but a promise.
HERMENEUTICAL PROCESSES

Two hermeneutical decisions undergird this revision of the Book of Job. The first is the decision to claim the story for women by changing the characters to females. The second is to assert that the fundamental elements of the original story illuminate the lives of women today and that, in turn, women’s lives illuminate the book of Job. The final part of this essay reflects upon the validity and significance of these interpretive tactics and places this discussion within the larger frame of feminist hermeneutics.

My deliberate misreading of the Job story as the story of Johannah creates a new story that appears to violate the historical nature of the original. Writing in the fifth or fourth century B. C. E., the author of the Book of Job wrote the story of a man. However, my revision falls within the general scope of the biblical original because the story of Job is not the story of a man but of a people.

To limit Job’s significance to the prototype of the faithful male is to read western individualism into the Book. Job’s story is the story of the whole suffering people of Israel, a connection little noted in interpretations of the Book. The pattern of Job’s suffering and the questions which the Book raises are remarkably similar to those of Israel during and after the Exile. The Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem in the sixth century B. C. E., caused enormous suffering for the community. Not only did many die in the sieges and their aftermaths, but
large numbers of the population were deported to Babylon where they became prisoners of war. They lost their land, their temple, their community life, and many thought they also lost their God. Everything around them returned to chaos and their suffering called out for interpretation.

Many of their religious thinkers taught that God rewards the good and punishes the wicked. These included not only wisdom writers such as the authors of Proverbs, but also the Pre-Exilic prophets and deuteronomic writers. Toward the end of the Exile and after, however, the belief that they suffered because they had sinned grew less reasonable. For example, the prophet of the Exile, Second Isaiah proclaimed that their suffering far outdistanced their sins (Isa 40:2). Later the prophet Zechariah observed that God was only a little angry but the nations went out of control in applying Israel's punishment (Zech 1:15). Like Job, Israel began to see itself in the role of innocent victim, abandoned by God. Hopeless and without out a future, the people were physically and spiritually destitute.

The author of the Book of Job attempted to make sense of this reality for the community. In its original context the book proclaimed that God never abandoned them in their suffering, that in their affliction they met God anew, and this transformed them in all their relationships. The restored Job is the restored Israel, the tormented and demeaned community reestablished in its homeland, a people of dignity, transformed and vindicated. Job, therefore, symbolizes not only suffering individuals but
primarily the suffering victims of the nations. In these respects, the Book of Job is implicitly the story of women.

But if that is true, why is it necessary to rewrite the story explicitly for women? The answer lies in the nature and function of stories. Stories tell women and men who we are. With regard to gender stories are not neutral. They grant us possibilities; they create our roles; they constrain or release us. Indeed, feminist theology has based its agenda upon this truth. Stories, symbols and images, language itself, have inestimable power to make us visible or invisible to ourselves. Tillie Olsen describes the impact of the absence of women and women's lives from literary educational curricula this way:

In its concern for male identity (literature) leaves female identity aside...so that women are estranged from their own experience and unable to perceive its shape and authenticity in part because they do not see it mirrored or given shape in literature. They are expected to identify with male experience which is presented as the human one.

In the case of the Bible the effects are the same. Women of faith are largely denied stories of women of faith. Identification with the figures in the stories is second hand, filtered through necessary translations of gender, and women's most personal, immediate, and daily concerns are never engaged at all. Because historically women's experience is different from men's, women's faith struggles are not automatically subsumed under the category of male experience. Women are thereby estranged from their own faith lives.

Along these lines, Carolyn Heilbrun argues that women need women's stories more than they need exemplary women.
"Lives do not serve as models, only stories do and it is a hard thing to make up stories to live by. We live our lives through texts... Whatever their form or medium, these stories have formed us all; they are what we must use to make new fictions, new narratives." 

This claim arises from an underlying assumption, first expressed by Aristotle, that empathy is aroused by a character who is "one like ourselves". I am convinced that a character who is "one like ourselves" is, above all, of the same sex. Gender identification is central to empathic involvement in texts. My own experience and feminist literary criticism support this view.

When I read or view stories in which women are victims, stalked by murderers, rapists, or monsters, I am terrified and I take that terror within where it festers to create in me a vulnerable, frightened victim. When the victim is a man, the terror is less immediate, less personal. Or when the hero is a heroine, I rewrite my life; I consider new possibilities of courage or love toward which to reach.

Feminist literary critic, Annette Kolodny observes:

Nonfeminist critics, after all, tend to ignore the fact (and significance) of women as readers as much as they tend to ignore symbolic significance of gender within as text. Kolodny goes on to say that women, too, require "imaginative constructs through which to accommodate themselves to the often harsh realities of their lives".

To change Job to Johannah makes the story women's story. It enables women to enter it with immediacy, directness, and empathy. It grasps our imaginations, unfiltered by the otherwise necessary translation of gender. It elevates women's pain, gives
dignity to women's struggle, as if women's pain and struggle matters. In the retold story, a woman becomes the "representative of searching humanity", "a woman questions the absolutes of received wisdom", and a woman is "emblematic of the human condition". The story invites women, in the particularity of female experience, to appropriate their lives in new ways by identifying with the character or by separating from her.

If women recognize in the story of Johannah their own stories, with all their contextual differences, then they are no longer "monsters in their isolation". They are able to see themselves as part of a collective, "not caught in some individual erotic and familial plot, and inevitably, found wanting", but connected to other women and to other sufferers. In such a story they may find there a mirror of their lives and the possibility of a different future.

If this revision of the story of Job is at all effective, it is only because the Book of Job contains a deeply human story. Job's movement from silence to "envoicement", from despair to joy, from impasse to new relationships, is truly reflective of a pattern of existence known in the spiritual traditions of Judaism and Christianity. It has a metaphorical or iconic quality that can evoke the genuine struggles of any peoples. Feminists have sought to describe women's spirituality in similar terms (fn.) When they do so they are not uncovering some utterly new human phenomenon, but claiming in women's specific experiences a
portion of the ancient tradition. Women and men are, after all, members of the same species.

I am fully aware that this approach might appear to be a blanket reaffirmation of the tradition. No such affirmation is intended. With a chorus of others, I propose, instead, that buried in the patriarchal, misogynist literature of the Bible, lies liberative tradition that must be brought to light by daring strokes to create of an enlarged and corrected canon and interpretation that includes and affirms women.

There is another aspect to this feminist revision of the Book of Job. While I have argued that the story of Jehovah illuminates women’s lives, women’s lives illuminate the book in new ways. In this interpretation I have paid particular attention to the characterizations of divine human relationship found in the major literary units of the text. My attentiveness to relationship arises from the feminist assertion that relationality is at the heart of women’s modes of being. This lens has uncovered divine human relationship to be the central concern of the Book, not the ascent of the hero, not innocent suffering, not the power of God, not God alone, not even the justice of God. Though these themes are present, they are not hold pride of place. Hence, a feminist reading of the book enlarges its possible meanings. In doing so, it finds in the text an affirmation of a major theological breakthrough among women—that God affiliates with humans in free, reciprocal, mutual relations.
Katharine Doob Sakenfeld has identified three methods currently employed by feminist biblical scholars in this recovery process: a formal literary analysis in which the text is treated as it is found; "culturally cued literary reading" in which the text is interpreted according to allowable meanings in its original setting; and historical reconstruction in which the text serves as the door to the events and cultural realities that produced it. This article suggests a fourth method, a retelling of the original story as if the characters were women, a revision as "an act of survival".

In this revision it is not only God that women see with their own eyes; it is the text itself. Before it women stand as if before an equal, ready to interrogate it and to be interrogated by it. Denying its absolute, iron-fisted control over our lives, wrenching it away from overly narrow interpretations of the centuries, women are able to revise it, to claim it as their story, and in it to find life.


3. For instance, David Robertson [The Old Testament and the Literary Critic (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977) 48-50], sees in God's reply to Job the imposition of control over humans by a powerful, patriarchal deity.

5. Job's wife colludes with the satan; Wisdom Woman's appearance is both fleeting and problematic; Job's daughters, named among his inheritors, may signal the liberated social relations of Job, but probably indicate that his wealth was so great that it even included his daughters. See Elizabeth Cady Stanton's treatment of Job, The Original Feminist Attack on the Bible (The Woman's Bible) (New York: Arno, 1974), 93-95; and Marvin Pope [Job, Anchor Bible 15 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965) XVIII] for a view of the extraneous character of the poem.

6. The Woman's Bible, 93-95.


17. These two sentences use phrases of Constance Fitzgerald, "Impasse", 285 and 297.


23. De Poetica, 13:6. Aristotle, however, with the this conclusion. Characters, therefore must be good. "Such goodness is possible in every type of personage, even in a woman or a slave, though the one is inferior, and the other a wholly worthless being" (15:19-21).


