

Women Rabbis (and Rebbitzins) in Contemporary Fiction

An Analysis

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Women's ordination as rabbis for nearly four decades has provided a bountiful harvest. Women serve as spiritual leaders of congregations, as educators, chaplains, counselors, and administrators. Worldwide, there are now close to one thousand rabbis who are women.¹ Undoubtedly, these women rabbis influence and affect the way rabbis and congregants alike—whether women or men—view the rabbinate. “Women rabbis have changed the face of Judaism,” explains Rabbi Laura Geller. People “experience women rabbis differently from the way they experience male rabbis. And that difference changes everything: the way they experience prayer, their connection to the tradition, and even their image of divinity.

“When women function as clergy, the traditional American division between clergy and lay person begins to break down.”² More directly, the presence of women rabbis has changed the rabbinate itself.³

How does one measure the impact of rabbis upon the world in which they function? One way is through personal testimony combined with a sociological analysis. Another way is through the lens of fiction. This article begins with a description of women in the factual rabbinate and then describes women in the fictional rabbinate. I also comment about the extent to which fictional women rabbis reflect the “reality” of their real-life counterparts. To frame the description of the transformation that women have brought to the rabbinate, I use criteria suggested by the prominent American rabbi, Janet Marder, in her persuasive article, “How Women Are Changing the Rabbinate.”⁴ Marder highlights three categories: balance, intimacy, and empowerment.

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Finally, as a male rabbi I bring to this article the reflections of many women rabbis with whom I have conversed for more than three decades. I also bring my own knowledge as a rabbi who has congregational, academic, literary and chaplaincy experience.

In a novel or short story, the writer has complete control over the actions of the characters. Through their plots, writers set the stage and express their understanding of the rabbi and the rabbinic role. As in Jeremiah's image of the potter (Jer 18:4), authors shape their characters and can rework them at will. At the author's discretion the rabbi can be committed and compassionate, self-centered or officious. The credibility of the rabbi as a person and as a rabbi depends largely upon the writer's craft; yet, words alone do not make a fictional rabbi believable, any more than words alone make a real rabbi believable. The reading public accepts or rejects a character as credible, to a large measure, based upon their own experience. Is this fictional rabbi like a real rabbi I have known or, at least, are the rabbi's actions believable given the situation in which that rabbi is placed? Accepting the rabbi's credibility does not mean approving the action. Rabbis can be believable and not praiseworthy in what they do. Conversely, a fictional rabbi may act virtuously or kindly, but not be convincing as a character to the reader.

Fiction, being fiction, has its own built-in biases. A novel does not pretend to be a scientific-sociological-statistically accurate presentation. Further, fiction usually presents a snapshot, a brief description of a particular event. It is virtually impossible to present the full context, and writers often choose to set characters in dramatic (dare I say melodramatic) situations. Not infrequently, women rabbis are positioned within situations of maximum pressure, which bring out traits that some segments of society still regard as negative for women. To that end, women rabbis often appear to fulfill anti-feminist stereotypes rather than break out of them, as actual women rabbis have done to a significant extent.

The ordination of women as rabbis developed out of the feminist revolution. Neither the rabbinate nor Judaism would ever be the same. That revolution had its impact also upon the world of rabbi's wives—*rebbitzins*.

In the last three decades, the role of the *rebbitzin* also changed. The latter part of this article notes transformations in that position, presents material about how authors portray fictional *rebbitzins*, and comments upon how these portrayals reflect the "reality" of real-life *rebbitzins*. Similar to portrayals of fictional women rabbis, descrip-

tions of fictional *rebbitzins* also often cast these women in an unflattering light.

Women in the Rabbinate: The Factual World

Women have been ordained as rabbis in the United States since 1972, when Sally Priesand was “the first woman to be ordained by any theological seminary into the rites and privileges of the rabbinate.”⁵ Within a couple of decades of their ordination, it was patently clear that women approached the rabbinate in a different way than did their male colleagues. Francine Klagsburn highlighted some of the significant contributions of these women.

Women *qua* women have brought a great deal to the rabbinate...Women rabbis have opened the eyes of the community—all of us, men and women—to new ways of understanding and thinking...They have added new meaning to old prayers and created new prayers that have meaning to both women and men. They have focused interest on...vital community matters—child care, abortion, sexual harassment. They have sought to enrich the spiritual life of women, so long neglected in our tradition, and to correct the wrongs of sexism.⁶

What is particularly striking among women rabbis is that they have different goals than do their male colleagues. As noted above, primary among the goals of women who are rabbis is realizing “balance,” “intimacy,” and “empowerment” in their lives.

Balance

Women rabbis seek a satisfying “balance” between the demands of their professional and their personal lives. In contrast to the previous all-male rabbinate, women see career and family in terms of both/and, and they do not unquestioningly delegate their family’s care to another person. While noting that generalizations are always risky, Marder writes that “male rabbis in general tend to take pride in how many hours they devote to their work. Being overworked appears to be a point of honor with most. Women rabbis, on the other hand, emphasize the ways in which they’ve managed to use their worktime efficiently so as to make room in their lives for other priorities.”⁷ This introduction and valuing of a more balanced perspective caused a ripple effect upon the rabbinate as a whole. Ellen M. Umansky notes that while not all the women ordained as

rabbis would characterize themselves as feminists, nonetheless “the feminist emphasis on balance has proved to be appealing not just to the vast majority of women rabbis but to a small, but growing number of male rabbis as well.”⁸ The past thirty-plus years have allowed for the visible presence of women rabbis who are also mothers rearing children. This is seen as a major factor in “raising congregations’ consciousness that all rabbis need to set limits on the time they give their synagogues,” explains Ellen Jaffe-Gill, “though that may contain a generational element as well, as younger men assert a need to spend time with their spouses and children.”⁹

Intimacy

Marder’s second point, “intimacy,” reflects the willingness of these women to place closer relationships with congregants as an objective. Many women rabbis are relegated to smaller congregations, but many choose smaller pulpits where it is easier to form a sense of community. This is reflected in the fact that less than a dozen women occupy the position of senior rabbi at large American pulpits (defined as 1000 member families and larger), and that women comprise the bulk of rabbis holding down part-time positions in Reform congregations and affiliated organizations.¹⁰ In a 2004 study of Conservative rabbis, it was reported that “men lead larger congregations and women lead the smallest congregations,” and that no women serve as lead rabbis in Conservative congregations of 500 families and above; in fact, most women rabbis serving in pulpits do so in congregations of 250 families or fewer.¹¹

At the same time, however, women rabbis have argued that they do not necessarily believe that “intimacy” is exclusively an issue for women. In the words of Rabbi Amy Eilberg, the first woman to be ordained by the Conservative movement, there is no reason to suggest that “nurturing, sensitivity, passion for connection and mutuality and intimacy are the exclusive domain of women. Yet...men still sometimes need to be led by women on issues of interdependency, the primacy of relationship in the spiritual life, and sensitivity to those on the fringe.”¹²

Anecdotal material suggests that men are learning/have learned that they can be more nurturing and sensitive and that this enhances their relationship with their congregants, and with others with whom they come into contact.

What is unclear is the relationship between women’s being more nurturing, sensitive, and passionate about connection and statistics

that suggest that women rabbis are less likely to marry than are their male colleagues. In Sylvia Barack Fishman's study published in the mid-1990s, "Expectations, Education and Experience of Jewish Professional Leaders," Jewish professionals were surveyed some four to ten years after graduation. In terms of rabbis, "only 2 percent of male rabbis had never married, in contrast with 33 percent of female rabbis who had not yet married...[further, while] only 8 percent of the male rabbis were childless; 46 percent of the female rabbis had no children."¹³ It should be noted that an undefined number of heterosexual and homosexual rabbis may have been counted as single when, in fact, they are in committed relationships. Whether congregations, or other rabbinic professions, take up the energy that a woman rabbi might devote to dating and mating is an important question that requires an analysis in its own right. This is not within the purview of the present study.

Empowerment

Finally, there is "empowerment," defined by most women rabbis as a conscious desire to replace the more traditional hierarchical structures with one's having much greater emphasis on "shared responsibilities, privileges and power."¹⁴ Julie Goss, writing on the subject of "Reworking the Rabbi's Role," explains that women rabbis are intentionally reinterpreting the relationship between rabbi and congregant. No longer is it "omnipotent patriarchal leader and humble follower." Goss quotes Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin, "It's no longer the distant holy man, but rather that of a hand-holder, an educator to inspire and teach...The idea is to empower the congregant to be a more active member of the Jewish community."¹⁵

Women rabbis have explained that they have a different relationship with congregants than do their male colleagues. In part, this is because oftentimes people experience women differently from the way they experience men. Then too, "people don't attribute to women the power and prestige often attributed to men...there is less social distance between the congregant and the clergy...[which] leads to the breakdown of hierarchy within a religious institution."¹⁶ Women rabbis are perceived also as being more accessible than are their male counterparts.

Rabbi Elizabeth Weiss Stern explains that although women have yet to "come up with a convincing alternative model for success," they can refer to many examples in their rabbinates in which they "have transformed the Rabbinic model. Many of us can point to

successes for which we can take credit: gender sensitive worship experiences [where God is addressed as neither “he” nor “she”]; women in positions of leadership...empowerment of lay people; a growing appreciation among Jews—Rabbis and congregants alike—of the benefits of smaller, more intimate congregations and of the Rabbi’s need for a personal life.”¹⁷

Rita J. Simon and Pamela S. Nadell report that women rabbis understand their roles differently than do their male counterparts. When asked, “As a rabbi who is also a woman, do you think you carry out your rabbinical role differently than a male rabbi who is the same age as you are and who was ordained from the [same] seminary,” the women overwhelmingly answered “Yes.” These women described themselves as “less formal, more approachable, more egalitarian, more likely to reach out to touch and hug, less likely to intrude their egos, and less likely to seek center stage. They asserted that they perform rites of passage ceremonies differently.”¹⁸

Today, rabbis—both men and women—agree that the rabbinate is not the exclusive purview of men. Yet the Simon-Nadell study showed also that male rabbis often do not appreciate the values that women bring to the rabbinate. Some women rabbis were experienced as “‘warmer,’ ‘more nurturant,’ and ‘less hierarchical’ in their interactions with the members of their congregations, but these comments were made almost in passing and were not emphasized.” Even when male rabbis acknowledged differences, they devalued them almost into non-existence. Consequently, “Even the men who worked with women rabbis in the same congregation and even male rabbis whose wives were also rabbis...did not perceive any difference in the way the women rabbis performed their roles.”¹⁹

Whether or not male rabbis are able to articulate differences in their rabbinical style and approach to congregational life from those of their female colleagues, the fact is that women are making their mark upon the rabbinate. By the 1990s, a growing acceptance of women rabbis was evident. Reporting on “Lay Leaders’ Views about Female Rabbis and Ministers,” Simon and Nadell explained that the “reactions of the Congregation (men and women) and Sisterhood Presidents to their rabbis ranged from satisfied to ecstatic...The lay leaders described with approval the ritual innovations that their rabbis introduced.”²⁰

The impact of women rabbis went further than liturgical innovations. The visible presence of women-as-religious leaders—as

officiants at formal prayer services—helped people to broaden their thinking about God, including expanding the definitions of God’s roles and relationships with humans. The presence of women on the pulpit has been a factor in the conscious shift in theological language. Undoubtedly, explains Lenore Bohm,

...the impact on the theological enterprise of the addition of female perspective and women’s experience has been significant and profound. It is not that God has been changed by the addition of women’s theological musings, but that our sense of *what God means* has evolved dramatically. The images and language that feminist theologians have introduced have transformed conventional God-talk and have impacted the social/political maps we rely on for finding our way in religion, culture, and society.²¹

Women congregants often suggest that it is easier for them to study with a woman rabbi when they are searching for a sense of their own spirituality.

Women in the Rabbinate: The Fictional World

Beginning in the early 1980s, books began to feature women rabbis as central or important fictional characters. Novels in this first wave (1983–1991) were, in chronological order: Rhonda Shapiro-Rieser’s *A Place of Light* (1983) featuring Rabbi Lynda Klein; Alex Goldman’s *The Rabbi Is a Lady* (1987) with Rabbi Sara Weintraub in the central role; Joseph Telushkin’s *The Murder of Rabbi Wahl* (1987) with Rabbi Myra Wahl; and Erich Segal’s *Acts of Faith* (1991), which introduces Rabbi Deborah Luria.²²

Although by the mid-1990s all the liberal seminaries were ordaining women, all the fictional women rabbis with but one exception were Reform rabbis. That one exception was Conservative Rabbi Sara Weintraub, who serves a Conservative congregation in the 1980s. Many of the arguments raised by that novel reflect the very issues debated at that time concerning the ordination of women, a fact that was realized in 1985.

Since 1991, several new novels and short stories appeared that feature women rabbis as central or important figures. Rabbi Marion Bloomgarten is featured in the short story collection by Eileen Pollack, *The Rabbi in the Attic and Other Stories* (1991); Rabbi Sarah Pollack is a primary character in Glenn and Jeanne Gillette and David J. Zucker’s short story, “Here and Now” (1996); Rabbi Gabri-

elle Lewyn is the central character of Roger E. Herst's novel *Woman of the Cloth* (1998); Rabbi Michelle Hertz appears in Anita Diamant's novel, *Good Harbor* (2001); Rabbi Ruth Gold is a central character in Athol Dickson's *They Shall See God* (2002); Rabbi Deborah Green is the protagonist in Jonathan Rosen's *Joy Comes in the Morning* (2004), and Rabbi Rebecca Nachman is the lead character in Julius Lester's novel *The Autobiography of God* (2004). To the best of my knowledge,²³ these are the only examples of American fiction that feature women rabbis as central characters.²⁴

Authors want to tell a story. They do not necessarily focus upon the specific issues of balance, intimacy, and empowerment. Some of these issues are inferred from the plots of the books. Nonetheless, using Marder's criteria, what do we learn from the way that these authors portray women rabbis in novels and short stories?

Balance

Marder suggests that women rabbis "emphasize the ways in which they've managed...to make room in their lives for other priorities"; however, this is rarely evident in the world of fiction.

Fictional Rabbi Klein feels overwhelmed by the incessant demands of her rabbinate. Whatever her earlier dreams, the reality of her workload is different. The novel speaks of the restrictive "walls of the rabbinate." In the early days, she had found time to pray, even if it was late at night in the synagogue. Yet, the real demands of the rabbinate have interfered with her plans. As the novel relates, "there was no time. The congregation waited, a jealous lover. Hundreds of people wanted her to inspire them, to lead them to God, or prayer, or to their own souls."²⁵

Congregational demands can seem endless for all rabbis; it is difficult to say "no" to what sounds like a reasonable request. Many a rabbi and rabbinic spouse (historically a woman), rabbinic partner, or significant other feels that she or he has to fight for personal time. One rabbinic spouse offered an example that *virtually every rabbinic family can affirm as true*. "How can you have a personal life when your evenings are spent teaching or attending meetings, and weekends are your busiest times? You plan on taking off a day every week, but inevitably something comes up. A doctor's answering service tells patients that the doctor is not on call today, but I cannot tell a troubled congregant that their rabbi is not 'on call.'"²⁶

Rabbi Weintraub attends committee meetings, counsels congregants, teaches, makes pastoral visits, and leads religious

services. Technically, the novel spans only a year, but in that time she confronts a list of major issues facing Jewish life in North America. These include: abortion, AIDS, Black-Jewish relations, cults, homosexuality, Jews-for-Jesus, nursing home abuses, women's liberation, women's ordination, and Zionism. Without question, this is an impressive list. Rabbi Weintraub also is troubled by the serious lack of balance in her life. "Sara's mind was...tumultuous...Woman or career?"²⁷ Her teenage daughter says to her, "You're never home anymore. You go from one meeting to another. You're not like a mother anymore... You've cared more about everybody and everything else." Rabbi Weintraub openly admits to her children, "I've let things run away with me."²⁸

Synagogue life is demanding in terms of time commitment. For example, Rabbi Luria works long hours and feels overwhelmed. "Almost by definition, a rabbi's duties are performed at abnormal hours. This was doubly difficult for a young single mother like herself...Deborah was conscientious and compassionate. She was dedicated. And while these qualities were also necessary for the exercise of motherhood, she seemed invariably to fulfill the rabbi's duties, not the parent's."²⁹

Rabbi Lewyn is the associate rabbi at a large, prominent Reform congregation in Washington, D.C. Seven years out of rabbinical school, she moves to the forefront of congregational leadership. "Demands upon her time and energy are ceaseless. The pace is exhausting. Every moment of privacy is invaded by a petitioner who wants her to write a letter, make a phone call, pay a visit, or promote a cause. Each petition is not without reason, but they accumulate faster than they can be dispatched. She feels herself drowning in work and occasionally thinks about giving up...Impulse is overruled by counter-impulse. She gasps for air, and life."³⁰

On the other hand, Rabbi Green is in the midst of a budding romance with science writer Lev Friedman. Although there are many demands upon her life professionally, she chooses to make time for herself and her relationship.

Rabbi Nachman is a mental health therapist at a small, private college in rural Vermont, having left the congregational rabbinate. She is unique among her fictional colleagues, in that she appears to have found a reasonable balance between professional demands and her personal life.

Intimacy

As noted earlier, Marder's second point, "intimacy," reflects the fact that women rabbis find themselves in smaller pulpits. Even as late as 2007, senior positions are usually not open to women rabbis. Rabbi Bloomgarten and Rabbi Hertz serve smaller congregations.

Toward the end of the short story, Rabbi Bloomgarten has developed a workable relationship with her male predecessor, the forcibly retired, irascible Rabbi Heckler, and she establishes a good connection with her congregation. As the narrator describes, "All of us feared death—our own, our religion's—and we felt safer in the presence of this rabbi whose very sex and youth seemed an indication that our hopes were fertile and might yet give birth to a new generation." Further, we learn that the rabbi did "enjoy several triumphs" with her congregation.³¹

Rabbi Hertz is in her twenties. She is dynamic, friendly, and thoughtful. She is knowledgeable about her congregation and she seems to have their support in her endeavors. Inasmuch as she is a minor character, her success is inferred rather than specifically demonstrated.

In terms of intimacy, serving very large congregations means that rabbis are in pulpits where it is harder to form a sense of community. Despite this, some rabbis are able to develop intimacy in these settings. Rabbi Pollack serves as an assistant rabbi, so this is not a small congregation. Nonetheless, it is clear that she has considerable pastoral care skills in working with some of her congregants. She easily establishes rapport when she makes a pastoral call. In similar fashion, Rabbi Green acts empathetically with congregants who come to see her in her office or with people she visits in the hospital.

Single women who are rabbis often report that it is difficult to date, much less to mate—no matter the size of the congregation. In small congregations, there are limited numbers of eligible Jews, unless this smaller congregation is in proximity to other synagogues. In terms of professional interaction, if one is serving as the sole congregational rabbi in a rural area, easy contact with other rabbis is often precluded. In larger congregations, for example in the case of Rabbi Gabrielle Lewyn, "People immediately jump to the conclusion she has a million dates when the reality is just the opposite. Single men don't know what to do with a female rabbi, so they take the course of least resistance and avoid asking her out. She

wonders if God ever intended for his clergy to suffer such an injustice."³² At age 33, she would like to get married. It is not that she is celibate; she just makes choices that would, in all likelihood, not lead to marriage. These may be factors why women rabbis are less likely to marry or have children than are their male colleagues.³³

Rabbi Rebecca Nachman is divorced, and childless. Living in Vermont, she is somewhat isolated from mainstream Jewish life, and this limits her ability to date. Although she has gone out a few times, at this point she seems content to remain a single woman.

Empowerment

Most women rabbis define "empowerment" as a purposeful desire to emphasize "shared responsibilities, privileges and power." This model seeks to replace the more traditional hierarchical structures of the past with the rabbi as omnipotent patriarchal leader and the congregant as humble follower. Not every work of fiction addresses this issue. In three of the works, there are references to rabbis (Gold, Hertz, Bloomgarten) organizing popular adult study groups, which favor an environment of open discussion. At one point Rabbi Gold absents herself and encourages a layperson to take over an adult study group. Rabbi Hertz connects with a congregant who is a librarian to see if she will help set up the synagogue library. Rabbi Bloomgarten successfully invites one of her congregants to teach the children to bake fresh *challah* in after-school classes. In addition, we learn that among her community service activities, Rabbi Lewyn "promotes feminine self respect among high school girls in the besieged public schools" of Washington, D.C.

Likewise, in several poignant passages Rabbi Green empowers an elderly congregant in the hospital to speak the truths of her heart, including her hopes and her fears. Rabbi Green displays fine chaplaincy skills, particularly in hospital settings. As the novel relates, "Rabbi [Elliott] Zwieback, the senior rabbi, was only too happy to give her hospital detail," and indeed half of Rabbi Green's salary is paid by a "grant that supported ministering to the sick."³⁴

Though years earlier, when she served as a pulpit rabbi, fictional Rebecca Nachman attempted to increase her congregants' involvement in Jewish life, she did not succeed, as they were largely indifferent to her efforts. In her role as a college-based counselor, however, she is successful in empowering both students and faculty.

God-talk and Belief Systems

Beyond Marder's three criteria, there are theological aspects resulting from the feminization of the rabbinate, including a change and an expansion of how we think about God's roles and relationships with humans. Said simply, God-talk has changed because of the presence of women on the pulpit.

The best example in a work of fiction is found in Rabbi Hertz' synagogue, where the prayer book is gender neutral. "The old *Union Prayer Book*...[is] gone, replaced by a softcover book in which God had changed from *He* to *You*." At one point Rabbi Hertz reflects the feminist influence on God-talk when she offers a free-flowing translation of the *Shehecheyanu* prayer, which "praises God for the gifts of the moment...[as she continues] '*Baruch Ata Adonai, eloheynu melech ha-olam: Holy One of Blessing, Your presence fills creation.*'"³⁵ "Holy One of Blessing" is quite a change from the more traditional "Praised are you, Lord, King of the universe" or even the more gender neutral "Praised are you, Eternal, Ruler of the universe."

This reference, however, is exceptional. Most books that feature women rabbis as characters do not reflect the changes in God-talk that address one feminist critique of theology. Indeed, Rabbi Green "had never cared about making prayers gender neutral. The soul knew no gender." On the other hand, when she leads people in what has been termed "custom-made" or spontaneous prayers that invite God's intervention, her language usually is gender neutral, referring to the deity as God, and not Lord.³⁶

Some of these women rabbis have rejected other traditional approaches to theology, such as belief in a personal God who might intervene in human affairs.

There is a chasm between what [Rabbi Lewyn] does and what she believes. The liturgical prayers she faithfully recites from the pulpit refer to an omniscient god who watches over the affairs of individual worshippers. To her mind this type of divine providence is a wish rather than a reality...people seem to share earthly rewards or punishments quite randomly. No fairness. No equity. No underlying rhyme or reason. The best she can commend to her inquiring congregants is a deity who somehow watches over the human species and...somehow permits humanity to flourish...But as far as individuals are concerned, hey, they're on their own.³⁷

In another instance, a rabbi seriously questions the traditional view that there is an afterlife. Rabbi Gold does “not believe in resurrection” and she has doubts about the Jewish position on the afterlife. During her seminary days “she had taken the position that this life was all we could expect...[though several] times since her ordination congregants and fellow rabbis had challenged her on that.” Still, there seem to be some inner questions that periodically bubble up within her soul, for she continues “to defend her position,” even though periodically, “her heart filled with an undeniable longing.”³⁸ One might speculate upon what this “undeniable longing” is for, but the novel does not offer any further clues.

Rabbi Green actively struggles with her understanding of God’s presence. Sometimes, she feels it very strongly, and at other times, she feels she is a fraud, merely mouthing words. Despite the fact that at one point her faith is challenged, she understands that this is part of the growing process of being a rabbi, and that she will need to learn to deal with her periods of doubt. By the novel’s end, she is described as more substantial, though not as self-confident; chastened, and less assured, but more mature. Rabbi Green understands that her own relationship to faith and Judaism is often lived at a wordless level of simple doing.

Of all the novels and stories, the work that most overtly addresses theological issues centers on the career of Rabbi Rebecca Nachman. Rabbi Nachman also struggles with her understanding of God’s presence, but she does so from a different perspective: she is the child of Holocaust survivors, and grew up in a community of survivors in New York City. A subplot deals directly with the issue of theodicy. One of the figures in the book is the deceased spirit of someone who died during the Holocaust. Another character is God. Without exposing the plot of the novel, I say only that Rabbi Nachman connects with and empowers this deceased spirit, and likewise she does so with God, who is a speaking—and visible—character in this provocative work.

Rebbitzins: The Factual World

The ordination of women brought about positive changes for many women and negative changes for some. Shuly Rubin Schwartz observes that in

the wake of the women's movement, and as part of the general anti-establishment sentiment of the age, the term *rebbetzin* lost its distinguished status. The demythologizing of leaders characteristic of the era affected rabbis and *rebbetzins* as well. The term *rebbetzin* began to be replaced first with the more neutral "rabbi's wife," a term that carried less baggage but also less honor, and then, soon after, with the politically correct and more accurate "rabbi's spouse" (though one male rabbinic spouse suggested the term "rebbitz").³⁹

With this cultural upheaval, women, and in this context, *rebbitzins*, were increasingly reevaluating their role in society. Some were pleased to remain within the context of their historical roles as help-mates to their husbands; however, many were opting to set their own course, independent of their spouses. In the mid-1980s, Hadassah Ribalow Nadich suggested that many "young Jewish women are no longer satisfied to play the role of the traditional rabbi's wife whose function they interpret as 'making the rabbi look good.'" Nadich noted that women today "are entering all professions and a young woman who marries a rabbi will perhaps not be satisfied to be part of a team... Thus, the congregation no longer can look to the rabbi's wife for involvement in synagogue life." These spouses, partners, or significant others are rabbis, accountants, lawyers, educators in religious and secular schools, administrators, scientists, artists, and other professionals. These women, she suggests further, do not expect to be involved in their husbands' professional lives any more than they expect their husbands to be involved in their professional lives. "Each one has spent years of study and they expect to find fulfillment in their own respective fields."⁴⁰

Nadich went on to write that in her experience, congregations recognized this major change in American life, and "many have accepted the fact that when they engage a rabbi, they are not taking on his wife as well."⁴¹ Nadich's experience notwithstanding, many congregations continue to hold these expectations (the smaller the congregation, the larger the expectations). In the 1980s, the 1990s, and to some extent still today, many synagogues continue to consider the rabbi's wife to be an extension of her husband. A few years ago at a convocation on the "Changing Role of Clergy Spouses"—a program which was part of the wider series, "The Feminization of the Rabbinate and the Cantorate"—a *rebbitzin*

explained that congregations often assume that when they hire the rabbi, they have, in fact, hired two religious leaders at one salary.⁴² Not surprisingly, at least anecdotally, there are no or minimal expectations of the male spouse of a woman rabbi. The thought that congregations should get two for the price of one, and that the congregation somehow expects that it can make “reasonable demands” on the *rebbitzin* also is found in a fictional setting.⁴³

Rebbitzins: The Fictional World

The *rebbitzin*'s independence and the congregation's acceptance of this fact has a fictional analog. Rabbi David Small's successor in the final novel of Harry Kemelman's *Weekday Rabbi* mystery series⁴⁴ explains to the pulpit search committee that “his wife was no part of the deal; that [they]...were not to expect her to play the part of the traditional rebbetzin because she had her own interests.”⁴⁵ The new rabbi's wife is a practicing lawyer. The committee takes the news with a poise rarely displayed in that community. In terms of expectations of male partners of women rabbis, Dr. Elliot Klein, the husband of Rabbi Lynda Klein, is not demonstrably involved in synagogue life. His appearance is restricted to only a few lines in the book.

There are limited examples of fictional women rabbis as central or even important characters, and there are even fewer examples of *rebbitzins* who are central or important characters in contemporary fiction. Until recently, the most prominent *rebbitzin*-as-central fictional character was Rachel Sonnenshein, in Sylvia Tennenbaum's novel *Rachel, the Rabbi's Wife* (1978).⁴⁶ By contrast, *rebbitzin* Miriam Small of Kemelman's *Weekday Rabbi* mysteries remained a minor but significant character. These books reflect an earlier era when the *rebbitzin*'s role basically was “making the rabbi look good.”

To the best of my knowledge, only one fictional *rebbitzin* emerged as a major figure in the past several decades, *Rebbitzin* Ruby Rothman in a book by Sharon Kahn. She made her debut in Kahn's first novel of what would become a mystery series. Technically, Ruby is a former active *rebbitzin*, for she is now a widow. Her late husband, Rabbi Stuart Rothman, was killed in a hit-and-run accident about eighteen months before the beginning of the first novel. As the titles of Kahn's books indicate, this sequence of works takes a light tone. *Fax Me a Bagel* (1998) was followed by *Never Nosh A Matzo Ball* (2000),

Don't Cry for Me Hot Pastrami (2001), *Hold the Cream Cheese, Kill the Lox* (2002), *Which Big Giver Stole the Chopped Liver?* (2004), *Out of the Frying Pan, into the Choir* (2006).⁴⁷ This forum allows the author, through the marketing tag line, "A Ruby, the Rabbi's Wife Mystery," to offer caustic observations about synagogue life. Though she now is the former *rebbitzin*, Ruby Rothman maintains a certain social standing within the community. She would like to be "just a person," but she also understands that her position affords her a certain status, which she finds is a mixed blessing. She is elected to the Board of Trustees of the synagogue,⁴⁸ which is meant as an honor, yet the chief *baaleh boosteh* (mover and shaker) of the congregation thinks she still is entitled to make demands on *rebbitzin* Ruby's time.⁴⁹ *Rebbitzin* Ruby also suggests that this contemporary congregation in Eternal, Texas is resistant to gender changes in its rabbinic leadership. For example, when it came to choose a successor for her late husband's position, despite the fact that there were women applicants, not one woman is among the finalists. *Rebbitzin* Ruby comments: "Surprise, surprise."⁵⁰

Rebbitzins and Social Isolation

Another issue that appears in the "Ruby, the Rabbi's Wife" novels, is the reality of social isolation, the distance between the rabbinic family and their congregants. This social distance was one of the subjects addressed in the classic study of the Reform rabbinate, published in the 1970s, by Theodore Lenn, *Rabbi and Synagogue in Reform Judaism*. Lenn quotes three "overview comments" from *rebbitzins*. "A Rabbi and his wife cannot have friends inside the congregation — it must be friendly, but impersonal." "My experience has taught me to be nice to everyone, but not too close to anyone." "No confidants—never!"⁵¹ In a fictional analog, a *rebbitzin* explains to her by then retired husband, "As the *rebbitzin*, I had to be careful and circumspect...never had any real friends; friendships that you cultivate on the basis of the importance of their husbands to the congregation don't mean much."⁵² This means that the rabbinate is, for rabbi and spouse, significant other, or partner, a very lonely existence. Kahn's novels reflect these facts.

Rebbitzin Ruby comments upon this distance that is endemic among clergy families. She notes that in her experience, "Most people don't want God at their New Year's Eve party." She also notes that "Life is difficult enough without having friends who feel they must be on their best behavior whenever in your company."

She explains that she got very tired of being viewed as “a parental stand-in.”⁵³

Concluding Observations

Rebbitzins

In the real world there are thousands of *rebbitzins* in contrast to hundreds of women rabbis. Yet, fictional portrayals of *rebbitzins* as central figures are significantly more limited than are those of women rabbis. Many real-life *rebbitzins* continue to be proud to be regarded as extensions of their husbands, while others have professional careers apart from their husband’s positions.

It is hoped that there will be new novels or short stories in the coming years that feature *rebbitzins* and male partners of women rabbis as central characters. It is a niche that could be developed creatively and be interesting to read.

Women Rabbis

Women rabbis are part of mainstream Judaism. Women who are rabbis *are* different. They bring their inherently feminine views of the world to the rabbinate, and Judaism is healthier for their perspectives. With, however, the exception of one novel’s single reference to Aviva Zornberg’s commentary on Genesis,⁵⁴ there is no indication that these fictional women rabbis are familiar with interpretations of Torah and Jewish history that have been written by women. Where in these novels or short stories do women rabbis quote or refer to such titles as: *The Women’s Bible Commentary*, much less works like *Standing Again at Sinai*, *Four Centuries of Jewish Women’s Spirituality*, *Daughters of the King*, *On Being a Jewish Feminist*, *The Book of Blessings*, or *Reading Ruth*? These latter books are texts, explains Rabbi Sue Levi Elwell, “written by women...[that] widen our understanding of Jewish text, they increase our understanding of Torah...they open minds and hearts to a Judaism transformed by women’s wisdom.”⁵⁵ Perhaps our fictional women rabbis do not enlighten us with this enrichment, because, with few exceptions, their creators are unenlightened men.

“Women who are rabbis also face different problems than male rabbis,” affirms real-life Rabbi Bonita E Taylor. “What we wear—or do not wear—is always open to comments: how high or low our hem- or neck-lines, our hair, open or closed shoes, and how, where, and with whom we appear at non-rabbinic functions—everything

is scrutinized by congregants." Fictional Rabbi Green "was wearing a long pale silk dress with large green and auburn roses. It was important to look good but not too good." She is also criticized for wearing skirts that are on the edge of being too short for a "rabbinic role model." In Rabbi Green's mind, she "did not wish to be one of those desexed rabbis who hung around the synagogue like neutered house cats."⁵⁶ Rabbi Taylor observes, "Male authors also perpetuate the age-old practice of encouraging women to compete with each other, like Leah and Rachel." Finally, Rabbi Taylor explains, "Women who are also rabbis always have to be prepared for things that male rabbis are never distracted by, for example, the possibility that an event when we are planning to wear a dress or a white robe with insubstantial pockets coincides with an event when we might need tampons."⁵⁷ As a male rabbi, I can attest that these, and other reported problems, such as specifically hurtful remarks about age or gender-related issues heard over the years from women colleagues, just are unknown to me or to my male colleagues.⁵⁸

Another area that needs exploration is increased representation of denominational diversity in the rabbinic sisterhood. The vast preponderance of fictional women rabbis are ordained by the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, the seminary of the Reform movement. Women ordainees of the Jewish Theological Seminary, and the University of Judaism (Conservative), the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, as well as The Academy for Jewish Religion, and Great Britain's Leo Baeck College (both multi-denominational) also have made significant contributions to American Jewish life. As Jonathan Sarna notes, the

emergence of women rabbis in Conservative, Reconstructionist, and Reform Judaism both symbolized and advanced feminism's impact on...American Jewish life...stirring controversy but also bringing new excitement and involvement on the part of women to diverse aspects of Jewish religious life.⁵⁹

There are dozens and dozens of articles written by—and about—real-life women rabbis. Yet, in terms of fictional examples, the number of women rabbis remains small. It is hoped that in the coming years we will see increased fictional illustrations that depict women rabbis as major or central characters. With this material, we might be able to offer additional instances in which women are employed as senior, associate, or part-time rabbis, serve as chap-

lains and in other communally-based rabbinic work, introduce new rituals, and demonstrate further how they deal with issues of “balance,” “intimacy,” and “empowerment” in these various settings.

As women bring their unique gifts to the rabbinate and continue to change the face of Judaism and Jewish life, it is hoped that authors will find ways to reflect this. It is hoped also that more women will enrich the portrayal of women who are rabbis by becoming authors of this fiction. In time, also the world of fiction will reap a bountiful harvest.

**Women Rabbis
(as major figures) in Contemporary American Fiction**

- Diamant, Anita. *Good Harbor*. New York: Scribner/Simon and Schuster, 2001 — Rabbi Michelle Hertz.
- Dickson, Athol. *They Shall See God*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2002 — Rabbi Ruth Gold.
- Gillette, Glenn and Jeanne, and David J. Zucker. “Here and Now” *Jewish Spectator*, Fall 1996 — Rabbi Sarah Pollack.
- Goldman, Alex. *The Rabbi is a Lady*. New York: Hippocrene, 1987 — Rabbi Sara Weintraub.
- Herst, Roger E. *Woman of the Cloth*. New York: Schreiber, 1998 — Rabbi Gabrielle Lewyn.
- Lester, Julius. *The Autobiography of God*. New York: St. Martin’s, 2004 — Rabbi Rebecca Nachman.
- Pollack, Eileen. “The Rabbi in the Attic” in *The Rabbi in the Attic and Other Stories*. Harrison, N.Y. and Encino, Calif.: Delphinium Books, 1991 — Rabbi Marion Bloomgarten.
- Rosen, Jonathan. *Joy Comes in the Morning*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2004 — Rabbi Deborah Green.
- Segal, Erich. *Acts of Faith*. New York: Bantam, 1992 — Rabbi Deborah Luria.
- Shapiro-Rieser, Rhonda. *A Place of Light*. New York: Pocket, 1983 — Rabbi Lynda Klein.
- Telushkin, Joseph. *The Unorthodox Murder of Rabbi Wahl*. Toronto and New York: Bantam, 1987 — Rabbi Myra Wahl.

**Rebbitzins
(as major figures) in Contemporary American Fiction**

- Kahn, Sharon. *Fax Me A Bagel*. New York: Scribner, 1998; *Never Nosh A Matzo Ball*. New York: Scribner, 2000; *Don’t Cry for Me, Hot Pastrami*. New York, Scribner, 2001; *Hold the Cream Cheese, Kill the Lox*. New York:

Scribner, 2002, *Which Big Giver Stole the Chopped Liver?* (Scribner, 2004), *Out of the Frying Pan, into the Choir* (Waterville, Me.: Wheeler/Thorndike, 2006) — *Rebbitzin* Ruby Rothman.

Tennenbaum, Silvia. *Rachel, the Rabbi's Wife*. New York: Morrow, 1978 — *Rebbitzin* Rachel Sonnenshein.

Notes

1. My deep appreciation to my friend and colleague, Rabbi Bonita E Taylor, for reading this in earlier drafts and offering invaluable editorial suggestions. Special thanks to the many staff members of the rabbinical seminaries and rabbinical organizations who provided statistical information for this article.

By mid-2007, there were 485 women rabbis ordained by the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. Most of these women are associated with the Reform movement's Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), which lists 453 women among its members. There are 230 women rabbis who are members of the Conservative movement's Rabbinical Assembly (RA); 139 women members of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Assembly (RRA)—and 137 women were ordained by the Reconstructionist movement's Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC); over 40 women ordained by the Leo Baeck College in London; and 37 women rabbis have been ordained by the Academy for Jewish Religion (AJR) in New York, and 18 women at the Academy for Jewish Religion in California. The latter three seminaries are multi-denominational.

Because of dual membership, some of these numbers may overlap.

In the CCAR, 277 (61%) of these women are in congregational life, full or part-time; about 128 (28%) are community-based, including chaplaincy, academic, or organizational, and about 22 (5%) are involved in education. In the RA, about 50% are involved in congregational work, and 50% in other areas of rabbinic work, mostly in Jewish education. In the RRA, 42 women serve full-time in congregations, 11 part-time. 76 are community-based including chaplaincy, organizational, and academia. In terms of women ordained by the AJR, about 60% are involved in congregational work, the balance are largely community-based.

2. Laura Geller, "From Equality to Transformation: The Challenge of Women's Rabbinic Leadership," *Gender and Judaism: The Transformation of Tradition*, ed. T. M. Rudavsky (New York and London: New York University Press, 1995), pp. 244–45.
3. "Women rabbis are creating the rabbinate anew..." Nina Beth Cardin, "The First Generation of the Women's Rabbinat," *Conservative Judaism* 48:1 (Fall 1995), p. 19. See the chapter "Women Rabbis" in David J. Zucker, *American Rabbis: Facts and Fiction* (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson / Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998).

4. Janet Marder, "How Women Are Changing the Rabbinate," *Reform Judaism* 19:4 (Summer 1991). In 2003, Rabbi Marder was elected the first woman to serve as President of the Reform rabbis' professional organization, the Central Conference of American Rabbis.
5. Bess Myerson in Sally Priesand, *Judaism and the New Woman* (New York: Behrman, 1975), p. ix.
6. Francine Klagsburn, "How Different Are Women —and How Different Should They Be?" *Conservative Judaism* 48:1 (Fall 1995), p. 57.
7. Marder, p. 5.
8. Ellen M. Umansky, "Feminism and American Reform Judaism," *The Americanization of the Jews*, eds. Robert M. Seltzer and Norman J. Cohen (New York and London: New York University Press, 1995), p. 272. This point is brought out also by Peter J. Rubinstein, who states that some "recent graduates have sought part-time positions, or positions that will allow more private time, affording them the opportunity to stay home with children." Peter J. Rubinstein, "The Next Century," *Tanu Rabbanan: Our Rabbis Taught CCAR Yearbook 1989*, vol. 2, ed. Joseph B. Glaser (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1990), p. 150.
9. Ellen Jaffe-Gill, "Bias Hits Rabbis on Mommy Track," *Jewish Journal of Greater Los Angeles*, September 26, 2003.
10. Umansky, p. 273. See also Geller, pp. 247ff. In 2004 the Conservative movement's Rabbinical Assembly published a major study, "Gender Variation in the Careers of Conservative Rabbis" (conducted by Steven M. Cohen and Judith Schor). The study suggested that "women themselves are uninterested in pursuing senior positions, due to quality-of-life considerations, social norms, family, and finances. The survey reported that [the vast number...] of the women surveyed said they did not want to be a senior rabbi at a large congregation." Joe Berkofsky, "Women's Work," *Atlanta Jewish Times* (December 10, 2004), pp. 10, 12. The director of placement for the Central Conference of American Rabbis estimates that ten women currently lead congregations of 1000 families or more. Jaffe-Gill, op. cit.
11. "Gender Variation in the Careers of Conservative Rabbis," pp. 8, 32. This changed in late 2005, when Francine Rosten became rabbi of Congregation Beth El in South Orange, N.J., which has 550 families.
12. Amy Eilberg, "Ministry for the Next Generation," *Conservative Judaism* 48:1 (Fall 1995), p. 37.
13. Emily H. Feigenson, "Female Rabbis and Delayed Childbearing" *CCAR Journal* (Spring 1997), pp. 74–75. She refers to a section by Sylvia Barack Fishman, in *Expectations, Education and Experience of Jewish Professional Leaders: Training for Jewish Leadership and Service* produced by the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University, 1995.
14. Umansky, p. 274.
15. Julie Goss, "Women in the Pulpit: Reworking the Rabbi's Role," *Lilith*

- 15:4 (Fall 1990), pp. 16–17. See also Christine Stutz, “Natural Wonder: Gila Ruskin redefines the role of the rabbi,” *Baltimore Jewish Times* 227:8 (Feb. 23, 1996), pp. 52–56.
16. Geller, p. 245.
 17. Elizabeth Weiss Stern, “Practical Realities of the Rabbinate,” *Papers of the Women’s Rabbinic Network Conference*, March 21–24, 1993, Oakland, Calif., p. 26.
 18. Rita J. Simon and Pamela S. Nadell, “In the Same Voice or Is It Different?: Gender and the Clergy,” *Sociology of Religion* (1995, 56:1), p. 63.
 19. *Ibid.*, pp. 68–69.
 20. Rita J. Simon and Pamela S. Nadell. “Lay Leaders’ Views about Female Rabbis and Ministers,” *Shofar* (Summer 1995), p. 56.
 21. Lenore Bohm, “The Feminist Theological Enterprise,” *CCAR Journal* (Summer 1997), p. 72.
 22. These four novels are discussed at some length in David J. Zucker, “Rebbetzins and Women Rabbis: Portrayals in Contemporary American Fiction,” *CCAR Journal* (Winter/Spring 1995), pp. 1–12.
 23. If readers are aware of other examples, I would be delighted to learn of them. Please contact me at djzucker@juno.com.
 24. A number of authors have an “insider’s” perspective. Rhonda Shapiro-Rieser was a rabbi’s wife, and Jonathan Rosen is married to a rabbi. Alex Goldman, Roger E. Herst, Joseph Telushkin, and David J. Zucker are ordained rabbis.
 25. Rhonda Shapiro-Rieser, *A Place of Light* (New York: Pocket, 1983), pp. 242, 243.
 26. Adrienne Sundheim, Symposium on “Today’s Rabbinate: The Personal Equation,” *Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook: 90* (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1981), p. 154.
 27. Alex Goldman, *The Rabbi is a Lady* (New York: Hippocrene, 1987), p. 267.
 28. Goldman, p. 272.
 29. Erich Segal, *Acts of Faith* (New York: Bantam, 1992), pp. 385–86. Another example of a fictional rabbi who struggles with the issues of motherhood and her professional career is found in a British setting. In 1992–1993, a marvelous series appeared on British television titled “Love Hurts.” Rabbi Diane Warburg serves, by British standards, a moderately-sized congregation. She struggles with the issue of “balance” in her life, finding time for a reasonable blend between the demands of her professional life and her personal life. At one point, she concludes that she works unsociable hours, for her workweek often includes evenings and weekends. It is quite clear that she is struggling with her role as rabbi, wife, and mother. This is exacerbated after she and her husband separate and she has to function as a single mother. Recognizing the lack of balance in her life, she quips, “I’m only on a twenty four hour day.” At the conclusion of the series, Rabbi Warburg

- chooses to take an extended leave of absence from the rabbinate. She speaks of going into social work or perhaps turning to the academic world. Laurence Marks and Maurice Gran, "Love Hurts," Series 2, Episode 1 "Strictly Business"; Episode 10, "Love For Sale."
30. Roger Herst, *Woman of the Cloth* (Rockville, Md.: Schreiber, 1998), p. 11.
 31. Eileen Pollack, "The Rabbi in the Attic," *The Rabbi in the Attic and Other Stories* (New York and Encino, Calif.: Delphinium Books, 1991), p. 119.
 32. Herst, p. 31.
 33. Serving a small congregation where there are limited possibilities to meet possible mates may be one dynamic, but in terms of the fictional examples, several rabbis serving large congregations (Gabrielle Lewyn and Ruth Gold) also are unmarried. Ruth Gold had been on the verge of an engagement, but her fiancé is murdered, one of many such killings in this murder mystery.
 34. Jonathan Rosen, *Joy Comes in the Morning* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2004), pp. 137ff., 203ff., 7.
 35. Anita Diamant, *Good Harbor* (Scribner/Simon and Schuster, 2001), pp. 61, 250.
 36. Rosen, pp. 10, 131, 210–11. "Spontaneous" or "Custom-made" prayer is discussed by Bonita E. Taylor, "The Power of Custom-Made Prayers," ed. Dayle A. Friedman, *Jewish Pastoral Care*, 2nd ed. (Woodstock, Vt.: Jewish Lights, 2006), pp. 150–160.
 37. Herst, pp. 33–34.
 38. Athol Dickson, *They Shall See God* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2002), pp. 256, 244.
 39. Shuly Rubin Schwartz, "'We Married What We Wanted to Be': The Rebbetzin in Twentieth-Century America," *American Jewish History*: 83 (June 1995), pp. 224f. See also Shuly Rubin Schwartz, *The Rabbi's Wife: The Rebbetzin in American Jewish Life* (New York: New York University Press, 2006). Grammatically the Yiddish/English word "rebbitzin" is a feminization of the word "rabbi," and historically refers to the rabbi's wife; it has been suggested that *rebbitz* might be the male version of *rebbitzin*.
 40. Hadassah Ribalow Nadich, "The Rabbi's Spouse," *The Jewish Spectator* 50:2 (Summer 1985), p. 18. Twenty years later this would be applicable to the rabbi's spouse/partner/significant other, male or female.
 41. Nadich, *ibid*.
 42. "The Feminization of the Rabbinate and the Cantorate," sponsored by the Denver Institute of Jewish Studies, 1996. For a longer discussion of the roles and perceptions of the rabbi's family, see Zucker, *American Rabbis: Facts and Fiction* (op. cit.).
 43. Sharon Kahn, *Fax Me A Bagel* (New York: Scribner, 1998), pp. 50, 13.
 44. Beginning with *Friday the Rabbi Slept Late* (1964) and continuing for over three decades, Harry Kemelman authored a total of a dozen mystery novels featuring David Small as his rabbi-sleuth.

45. Harry Kemelman, *That Day the Rabbi Left Town* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1996), p. 33.
46. *Rachel, the Rabbi's Wife* is discussed in Zucker, "Rebbetzins and Women Rabbis: Portrayals in Contemporary American Fiction," op. cit.
47. Sharon Kahn, *Fax Me a Bagel* (New York: Scribner, 1998); *Never Nosh a Matzo Ball* (New York: Scribner, 2000); *Don't Cry for Me, Hot Pastrami* (New York, Scribner, 2001); *Hold the Cream Cheese, Kill the Lox* (New York: Scribner, 2002); *Which Big Giver Stole the Chopped Liver?* (Scribner, 2004); *Out of the Frying Pan, into the Choir* (Waterville, Me.: Wheeler/Thorndike, 2006). As with a number of the authors of women rabbi-centered stories, Tennenbaum and Kahn have an "insider's" perspective; both are *rebbitzins* in real life.
48. Serving on the Board of Trustees of the synagogue of your spouse's successor may sound like a fictional stretch. It is not. At one point in my congregational career, two former *rebbitzins* of that congregation concurrently sat on the synagogue Board.
49. This woman, Essie Sue Margolis, who appears to be a permanent board member, is a caricature and serves as a foil for Ruby's often acidic comments about congregational life. Essie Sue Margolis, however, also represents a familiar congregational figure: someone who through her/his financial contributions commands attention.
50. Kahn, *Bagel*, p. 26.
51. Theodore Lenn, *Rabbi and Synagogue in Reform Judaism* (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1972), p. 374.
52. Harry Kemelman, *Monday the Rabbi Took Off* (New York: Putnam, 1972), p. 234. Note: the speaker is Betty Deutch, not Miriam Small. See Kahn, *Hold the Cream Cheese*, p. 4.
53. Kahn, *Bagel*, p. 33.
54. Dickson, p. 385.
55. Sue Levi Elwell, "Transitions and Transformations: Creating Judaism for the Twenty-first Century," *CCAR Journal* (Summer 1997), pp. 42–43.
56. Rosen, pp. 57, 39.
57. Rabbi Bonita E. Taylor, personal communication, February 2005.
58. "Gender Variation in the Careers of Conservative Rabbis," p. 15.
59. Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 343.