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Nora Gold on the launch of Jewish Fiction.net



Photo: Eli Talel

Nora Gold is an extraordinarily accomplished Jewish feminist. Currently living in Canada, she is a professor of Social Work, an award winning fiction writer, a researcher and a community activist with interests including Israel, anti-Semitism, sexism, Jewish identity, literature and social activism among others. She is among the founders of the Yedidya synagogue in Jerusalem, is a founder of the New Israel Fund Canada, sits on the academic board of the Hadassah Brandeis Institute, was a founder of Givat Haviva Canada, was the first woman chairperson of her synagogue, recently completed research on gender and Jewish identity among Canadian Jewish adolescent girls and is working on a novel.

This week, she is launching her latest project, an electronic journal called [Jewish Fiction.net](#), touted as “the first English-language journal devoted exclusively to the publishing of Jewish fiction” with the goal of “showcas[ing] the finest contemporary writing on Jewish themes... and provid[ing] an online community for writers and readers of Jewish fiction from around the world.”

Why did you decide to create Jewish Fiction.net?

I began to notice a few years ago that among Jewish fiction writers, it was getting harder and harder to publish. For my first book, I had three publishers fighting over it. That was ten years ago. There have been a lot of changes in the publishing industry; the industry is in a crisis. But the more specialized you are as a writer, the more difficult it is.

Recently, I have been hearing writers talk about how they cannot get published, how they get rejections over and over again. And it just sort of became obvious that Jewish fiction writers needed someplace to get published, and that digital is the way to go.

I have multiple goals for this. One is, I really want to create a first rate forum for Jewish fiction. I want it out there, and I want readers to be able to access it, immediately. I want anyone to be able to click on a button and read it right away and share it with others. I also want writers of fiction to meet each other and to be able to talk to each other.

Recently, someone told me that Israeli writers are struggling to survive. Unless you're David Grossman, it's a real struggle. Really fine writers, especially ones starting out, are not reaching their audiences. So part of what I hope to achieve with this journal is also to be a bridge between Israeli and Jewish writers.

Tell me about your work on Israel.

It's a difficult time to be pro-Israel in the world. It's politically incorrect in academia to love Israel. At the same time, in the Jewish world, 'left' has become a dirty word, almost synonymous with 'anti-Israel'. In Jewish circles if you say you're on the left, you're out. So it's complicated.

I see myself as a progressive pro-Israel. I'm starting a group to provide an alternative to the pro-Israel right and the anti-Israel left. It's a group for people who are progressive and pro-Israel. My view is that the only people who can influence the anti-Israel left are the pro-Israel left. You have to have something in common. And the mainstream Jewish community can't get in there. The pro-Israel left is a bridge between communities.

Who is funding this project?

At the moment, we're operating on zero budget. I wasn't exactly planning on starting a business, but it all costs money – setting up the website, graphics and of course spending time on editing and correspondence. But there is no money for this kind of project. I'm going to be reading 1000 manuscripts a year. It's an enormous undertaking. One of my biggest concerns is how time concerns is how time consuming this is. Since I started setting this up five months ago, I haven't been working on my novel. It would be a terrible irony if as a result of this journal I won't be able to work on my own fiction writing. I don't expect to make money, but we have to make this project self-sustaining. I believe in this journal, and the enthusiasm coming in from many people is very encouraging.

How do you manage all your different jobs and professional identities?

We live in a time of specialization. If you're a geologist and you're an expert in a particular kind of rock and know nothing about the rest of the world, you're respected for that, for not knowing anything. When I decided to leave university, I became aware that not all knowledge fits within those walls. At the same time, my son had a career event at school, they were asked to choose what they wanted to be, and he turned to me and said, can't somebody be really talented in both arts and sciences? Do I really have to choose? And then we were in Italy and we stopped at the Leonard da Vinci museum, and he said, "You see? You can be both." We have multiple connections. You're allowed to be who you are and not just define yourself by one thing. I think it's really damaging to tell people that your career is who you are for the rest of your life and the rest is just a hobby. For me, writing isn't a hobby, and research isn't a hobby. It's all part of who I am. It's about living in a world and trying to understand it.

There is a school of thought that social change should not enter literature. But that's not how I think. I'm a social worker, and an activist, as well as a researcher and a writer. What I write about is real. It's not in a little box. It is naïve to think that there aren't social implications to everything we do. I would love this journal to bring people together, to bring the Jewish people together, to help heal our divisions, across generations, across countries, across the religious-secular divide, and across the Ashkenazi-Sephardi divide. I would love for this journal to bring us all closer together.