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THE ARTY SEMITE

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Proliferating Jewish Fiction Online

By Lauren F. Friedman

[Jewish Fiction. net](#) is a new, online journal of Jewish fiction currently accepting submissions of original work and translation for its premiere issue. The Arty Semite contributor Lauren F. Friedman recently chatted with Nora Gold, the journal's Toronto-based founder and editor, about why we need a new Jewish literary journal, what Jewish Fiction. net hopes to achieve, and what Jewish fiction is, anyway.

Lauren F. Friedman: Why did you decide to start this journal?

Nora Gold: The changes occurring in the publishing industry — especially with the transition into the digital realm — make it harder for many really good writers to get published. I wanted to make people's work accessible to an interested audience while fostering new Jewish writing and writers.

Why is there a need for such a journal right now?

I looked at the situation and said, "There's a real lacuna here." There was nobody bringing together excellent Jewish writing and writers from around the world. I wanted to create a place where you could encounter familiar names of writers you know, but also new writers, familiar ideas and new ideas. We all have one common language as Jews, but there are different cultures.

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Which Jewish cultures are you aiming to bring together?

There needs to be more of a bridge between Diaspora Jewish writers and Israeli Jewish writers. I'm an ardent Zionist, but there's disagreement about whether the center of Jewish life is in Israel or America. There's a real tension there, but I see it as a creative tension. There are also many writers in Israel having difficulty getting their work published, and I really want to do something about that. There are writers in Israel really excited about the journal because lots of doors are closing on them.

What exactly is Jewish fiction? Can you define it?

There are as many answers as there are Jews. I think probably the easiest thing is to define what Jewish fiction is not. I don't mean to be flippant, but I don't adhere to culinary Judaism, where you throw in a blintz and it's a Jewish story. I keep coming back to what Ruth Wisse wrote about the Jewish canon: Jewish literature is when both the author and the main character know they're Jewish and let the reader know they're Jewish. It has to be reflective somehow of the Jewish experience, whether that's Jewish history or Jewish consciousness. The idea is that there would be nothing left if you took out all the Jewish content. The Jewishness has to be central — you can't take it out like a blintz and have the story still resonate.

How do you define "Jewishness" in this context?

I come at this with a broad, pluralistic definition of what Jewish is, not just religious or Zionist or Holocaust-related. I welcome the diversity — religious, political, gender, sexual orientation, age — and I'm so excited by the international part of the journal. It would be very exciting if we could help bring the Jewish people closer together through literature.