

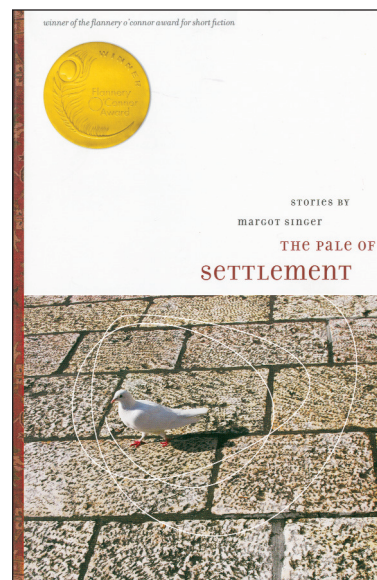
# JEWISHLIFEFICTION PRIZE

## THE WINNER IS INTRODUCING MARGOT SINGER

**M**argot Singer has been awarded the Reform Judaism Prize for Jewish Fiction for her short story collection, *The Pale of Settlement* (University of Georgia Press, 2007). The \$5,000 award, conceived by its principal benefactor, Dr. Alexander Mauskop, a New York neurologist and member of Larchmont Temple, assists promising Jewish fiction writers. Previous winners have been Scott Nadelson (2007), Tamar Yellin (2006), Jonathan Rosen (2005), David Bezmozgis (2004), and Dara Horn (2003). To learn more about the

prize visit <http://urj.org/rjprize>.

Singer's collection of interlinked stories takes its title from the name of the western border region of the Russian empire within which Jews were required to live in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Like Susan, the protagonist of the stories, who lives in the U.S. but whose family is rooted in pre-state Israel, the stories themselves shuttle back and forth between past and present, Israel and the U.S., revealing the emotionally complex relationship between contemporary American Jews and the Jewish state. □



## A SAMPLING THE PALE OF SETTLEMENT

### ISRAEL 1997—SUSAN

In my memory, my grandmother [Lila] is framed by flowers. Head-high stalks of gladioli, a backdrop of hibiscus, anemones at her feet. My grandmother is smiling, cheek to bloom. Here are the flowers still: tricolor lantana bordering the sidewalk, vermilion bougainvillea overhanging the second-story stairs. Here are photographs, a pile of black-and-white snapshots taken in the 1940s, not long after my grandparents arrived in Palestine. I flip through them like tarot cards, lay them face up on my hotel room bed. Here is my grandmother in a full skirt and blouse and walking shoes, kneeling in the Carmel woods called Little Switzerland. Here she is, arms linked with her two sons, posing on the beach. She is beautiful, or almost, cat-eyed and slim, with an aquiline nose and prematurely white hair. Here she is leaning against a railing by the sea. Her hair is blowing across her face and she is squinting just a bit. The sea behind her is

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flecked with white. The camera has caught that fleeting moment that precedes the self-consciousness of a smile, and that, with that slight squint and wind-blown hair, makes her look contemplative and a little reckless, both vulnerable and brave. I sweep the photographs back into a pile, leaving this one on the top.



IT IS JUST SO UNCIVILIZED, SHE WRITES TO HER SISTER IN A LETTER SHE WILL NEVER READ. EVERYONE WEARS KHAKI SHIRTS AND SHORTS—EVEN THE GIRLS! **YOU SEE WOMEN SQUATTING BY THE ROADSIDE, BREAKING PAVING STONES, WHILE HERR DOKTOR PROFESSOR DRIVES A BUS.**

### PALESTINE 1939

Here in Haifa, it is primitive, dusty, dirty, hot. It is the Orient, the Levant, the Near East but not nearly enough. The road they live on is unpaved. Only cold water from the tap. Lila boils the drinking water, scrubs the fruit and vegetables with soap, makes sure to toast the bread. She pores over the notebook her cook gave her when they

left, recipes handwritten in a slanting German scrawl. She cooks in the heat of the afternoon while Josef takes his nap—the kind of food they're used to, too heavy for this climate—Wiener schnitzel, potato salad, a chocolate roulade. It is just so *uncivilized*, she writes to her sister in a letter she will

never read. Everyone wears khaki shirts and shorts—even the girls! You see women squatting by the roadside, breaking paving stones, while Herr Doktor Professor drives a bus. Even Josef has had to take work selling curtains door to door. There are fedayeen and jackals in the hills. At night, the jackals come down into the wadi behind the house; you can hear them howling at the moon. □