
Ezra Gliner, editor. *Have I Got a Story for You: More Than a Century of Fiction from the Forward*. New York: Norton, 2016. 464p.

JOSHUA LEAVITT
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

The New York–based, Yiddish–Socialist *Forverts* printed its first issue 120 years ago. In the generations since that day in April 1897, what later became the *Forward* has evolved from a daily newspaper into, currently, monthly magazines and continually-updated websites in English and Yiddish. In Judaism, 120 years carries special significance. It was the length of time Noah’s generation was given to repent and reform before the Flood; it was Moses’s lifespan; and, traditionally speaking, it is the oldest age one should ever hope to reach. In other words, the 120-year mark is the ideal moment for an enduring Jewish institution to reflect on its history and trajectory.

Enter *Have I Got a Story for You: More Than a Century of Fiction from the Forward*, a wonder-of-wonders anthology from *Forward* critic-at-large Ezra Gliner. No doubt the *Forward* has remained the farthest-reaching Jewish publication by dint of its independent journalism and cultural commentary. But the *Forward* has long included writing in other genres. (See Isaac Metzker’s anthology *A Bintel Brief* for samples from the paper’s advice column.) Fiction has formed another key genre cultivated in the *Forward*. From its origins to the present, the *Forward* has functioned as a venue for major and minor works of Jewish literature from both emergent and established authors throughout most of the diaspora. Even in its fledgling years, the paper ran serialized novels as well as short stories. A sweeping collection of its short-form fiction from the late nineteenth century through the early twenty-first, this anthology presents the *Forward* as a literary periodical. Gliner recovers stories never before published in English, written by famous and obscure Yiddishists alike, and encompassing such diverse kinds of stories as humor sketches, military fiction, and erotic literature. With crisp translations by Yiddish scholars, and accessible editorial glosses, this anthology fosters new appreciation for an under-acknowledged dimension of the *Forward*.

What does it mean for Gliner to have recovered these works? The front matter plumbs the significance of this anthology itself and offers framing insights for readers. In tune with the *Forward*’s historical dedication to labor issues, the preface begins with Abraham Cahan accepting the position of chief editor at the *Forverts*, implicitly drawing an analogy between Cahan’s editorial work and his own. Gliner paints a vivid portrait of the physical and intellectual labor he performed. Almost evoking New York shirtwaist factory workers at their sewing machines, he describes “the many hours I spent

hunched over the microfilm reader” observing how the pieces in a given issue were stitched together. Perusing bibliographies for story titles likewise “turned out to be a laborious process.” And while compiling the book was a labor of love, it also prompted somber reflection. Reviving obscure authors meant others would essentially remain dead. Exhuming these stories from the archive called to mind those that would remain buried. Gliner had to exclude work in other literary genres besides short stories, and, obviously, literature from other Yiddish periodicals, noting “One of the great joys of putting together this collection was the opportunity to unearth writing that may never have been read by anyone ever again, and to give it new life in a new language.” On the other hand, he expresses some sorrow over the fact that “the writers in these pages turned out to be winners of a kind of post-humous lottery.” Maybe this project is something of a literary *techiyat hametim* (resurrection of the dead).

Novelist and Jewish literature professor Dara Horn reframes Gliner’s preface in a sage introduction. (What? I appreciate good front matter.) For Horn, this collection is fundamentally about how we define and what we learn from Jewish literary history. If the *Forward* had been the Ashkenazi “paper of record,” she contends, then its fiction constituted a “record of private emotional experiences that would never make headlines” and “a psychological record of the invention of American Jews.” Noticing how the *Forward*’s fiction has not been future-oriented, paradoxically, but more interested in the present and the past, Horn suggests that these stories illustrate the very functions of literature and history in U.S. culture. Horn’s contribution is more instruction than mere introduction, where perhaps the main takeaway pertains to the larger historical contingencies of the literature produced by and for an immigrant group—and how they come to bear on American national narratives. “America’s founding legend insists that it doesn’t matter who our parents or great-great-grandparents are, that what matters is what we do with the opportunities this country gives us, that we are meant to be self-made men or women without a past. This is what we call the American dream, and its promise is precisely brought so many of our ancestors to this country,” Horn explains. “But Judaism has a very different founding legend . . . It insists that it indeed matters who one’s great-great-grandparents were, and that one is entirely defined by the past. The central challenge of American Jewish life, one now shared by many other groups in this marvelously complicated country, is to thrive within this tension, to live one’s life in a place where only the future matters in a community suffused by the shadow of eternity.” Written in various narrative styles and born out of different epochs and authors’ biographies, these stories all engage with those legends and the challenges of (in every sense) how to live.

But in characterizing the anthology, Gliner and Horn both latch onto Abraham Cahan's description of the *Forward* as a "living novel"—when this collection exclusively features the *Forward's* short fiction. *Have I Got a Story for You* is a cross section of the short story. That aspect of the collection should be valued; it shows the evolution of the short story, as well as the ways in which the short story form dovetails with this anthology's content. The short story, as we know it, is a modern invention that also descends from the oldest literary narratives: folklore, fables, episodes in religious texts, jokes, etc. As they emerged in the nineteenth century and have developed into the present, short stories frequently sketch life in a given milieu, consider a scenario, elicit a particular readerly response, and/or study a character or narrator. Skilled authors craft them with special concision. We could accordingly consider this book in terms of short-story aesthetics as well as Judaic and/or other traditions. A number of selections struck me as *aggadot* or *maschalim*, that is, folktales or allegories, with modern approaches and topics. Abraham Cahan's "Shneur Zadobnik and Motke the Hatter" (1900-1901), a sketch excerpted from his novella *An Additional Soul*, presents a narrator recalling two men from the Old Country with very different circumstances and personalities who both experience contrary, ironic destinies in New York and rural Pennsylvania. The sketch reads like a folktale, and yet the narrative also questions the new mythmaking processes engendered by settling in the United States. Rokhl Brokhe's "Golde's Lament" (1907), Morris Rosenfeld's "Collecting Rent" (1911), and B. Kovner's Brownsville, Brooklyn humor sketches (1913-1914) avail themselves of third- and first-person narrators capturing the difficult or funny aspects of Jewish emigration and immigrant life. Sholem Asch's poignant long-short story "The Jewish Soldier" (1914) portrays the dangers and quandaries facing Jewish soldiers in the Imperial Russian Army during World War I, with conflicting aspects of the protagonist's psyche arguably represented in his fellow Jewish platoonmates. In some respects, this story exemplifies the modernist "*moi profond*" concept of the self; then again, we could say it explores the *pintele Yid*, or, inner/essential Jew. Later selections from Roshelle Weprinsky as well as Isaac Bashevis Singer explore region and religious practices with specific allusions to traditional narratives such as *A Thousand and One Nights*. We could similarly analyze the other texts through multiple frames of reference and specifically the short story form.

Have I Got a Story for You thus lends itself not only to literary criticism, but also teaching and, of course, reading. This anthology could also fit into many specialties. Eileen Pollack's review essay in the Yiddish studies journal *In Geveb* reveals, for example, the feminist dimensions of this anthology. In addition to emphasizing the high representation of women authors in this anthology, Pollack suggests we could examine the *Forward's* fiction

through the lenses of gender, sexuality, and love studies. These stories can also provide a valuable reading experience. For me, reading from *Have I Got a Story for You* was something of a *mechayeb*—it gave me new life—not only when the stories brought me laughter or tears, but also when they put me in the mind of my family’s and people’s history. I visualized my great- and great-great-grandparents on both branches of my family tree uprooting themselves from Austria-Hungary, Prussia, and the Pale of Settlement and making new roots in Brooklyn and Manhattan. They may have browsed the *Forverts* while discovering for themselves what Gliner calls “immigration and its discontents.” They were able to find relative success in America, and ultimately, that’s how I’m here. More broadly speaking, though, *Have I Got a Story for You* represents archival research and editorial work producing something wonderful for readers and scholars.

Alan H. Goldman, editor. *Mark Twain and Philosophy*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017. 235p.

B. W. JORGENSEN
BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

Mark Twain and Philosophy is the third volume in Rowman & Littlefield’s Great Authors and Philosophy series, preceded by volumes on Stephen King and Jane Austen (both 2016). The series resembles the earlier Open Court Popular Culture and Philosophy series, which numbered 109 volumes as of *The X-Files and Philosophy: The Truth is In Here* in May 2017. Wiley/Blackwell got into the game with a Philosophy and Pop Culture series with 51 volumes with *Alien and Philosophy: I Infest, Therefore I Am*, also May 2017; and the University Press of Kentucky rolled out a Philosophy of Popular Culture series, recently listing 32 volumes on its website, e.g. *The Philosophy of TV Noir* and *Tennis and Philosophy: What the Racket is All About*. Is this a Trend, or what?

The UP of Kentucky’s goal is “to demonstrate how philosophical inquiry has been reinvigorated by the increased scholarly interest in the intersection of popular culture and philosophy, as well as to explore through philosophical analysis beloved pop culture phenomena,” thus making “traditional philosophical ideas. . . accessible to the general public through examples of popular culture.” The series “seeks to publish both established and emerging scholars” while “eschewing ephemeral trends of philosophical and cultural theory.” This whole popcult and philosophy thing looks like a small but burgeoning economy of competing cottage industries that, one may hope, promotes the careers of “emerging” academics and perhaps enlivens the latter years of the “established” (read: long-tenured). Contributors to one series