Joshua Aaron Cohen was born on September 6, 1980 in New Jersey shore, on the shore of the Atlantic Ocean. Moses Mendelssohn, Cohen points out, was born on September 6, 1729 in Dessau, Germany on the junction of the rivers Mulde and Elbe. Coincidence? Perhaps, but just the sort of internet-factoid to prick the limitless and undefinable imagination of this year's winner-from-abroad of the Matanel Prize for Jewish Writers.

As part of its deliberations, the Matanel Prize committee solicited the opinions of a distinguished panel of novelists, editors, and scholars from North American and the United Kingdom. This is some of what they had to say about Joshua Cohen:

"Joshua Cohen is a phenomenon. Rips unabridged dictionaries in half just for fun." Here's another: "I admire Cohen’s freedom and his willingness to challenge himself in the most serious ways." And another: "Joshua Cohen is … doing the most technically and conceptually challenging work [among young Jewish American writers today], and doing it very well, and not getting nearly as much attention from readers as he deserves.” And another: "Joshua Cohen is *exactly* the kind of person that you want to win the prize - one of the most brilliant readers and thinkers, about Jewish and other literatures, that I know, and cares about Jewishness and its culture like almost no one else I can think of."

James Wood, writing in the prestigious New Yorker and naming Cohen's latest book, Four New Messages, a Best Book of 2012, had this to say: "Cohen, who can apparently write about anything, isn’t waiting to be read. He exists to write. … And he certainly can write! … His best prose does everything at once. He can move from a very clever, David Foster Wallacian phrase … to [a] perfect piece of realism, a lyrical and plangent evocation of Berlin, a kind of up-to-date Joseph Roth: “The leafy lindens and sluggish Spree, the breakfasts of sausages and cheeses and breads that stretch like communist boulevards in late afternoon, the stretch denim legs of the artist girls pedaling home from their studios on paint-splattered single speeds, the syrupy strong coffees the Kurdish diaspora made by midnight at my corner café and its resident narcoleptic who’d roll tomorrow’s cigarettes for me, ten smokes for two euros.” I was excited to read this young writer, and uncalmly await more."

And this from Dwight Garner in The New York Times:

"[Cohen's] work … is full of pauses, quick cuts and full stops. [His] stories here are anarchic; they tend to read as if he had stuffed three narratives into one, like squirming bats into a duffel bag. … [H]e’ll make you want to be an angel investor in his stuff. What’s a book but a public offering? You’ll want to be in on the ground floor."

And this from Stephen Burn, also from The New York Times, on Cohen's magnum opus, the 800 page novel Witz:
"[Cohen's] anarchic energy recalls Thomas Pynchon and David Foster Wallace, but what really distinguishes “Witz” is its language and Cohen’s vigorous assault on the sentence as a unit of simple communication. … While the scale of the sentences comfortably exceeds the lung capacity of most readers (Cohen isn’t afraid to unfurl a five-page sentence), the prose constantly highlights language’s sonar qualities: “At lot’s edge, last scattered lungs of leaves still hang from the boughs, breathe uneasy.” Cohen’s sentences are fluid, living things: “This lulling, ship’s loll, . . . a remnant, a reminder of the darkness, . . . and, flying across that sky a fish lands on the deck, at the forecastle, the fallen castle.” The way words evolve across the sentence — “lull” becoming “loll,” “remnant” mutating into “reminder” — is appropriate because this book is so preoccupied with inheritance and change. In a key late passage, Cohen explicitly identifies the burden of Jewish history, especially the Holocaust, as the novel’s inheritance, which helps to explain why “Witz” relies so consistently on negation…. Reversing and resisting what Cohen sees as the contemporary Jewish novel’s tendency to market the past as a “fashion,” with “minorities overcoming obstacles,” this novel is a linguistic extravaganza that negates reader expectations. Some will be exhausted by the tentacular punning paragraphs, but “Witz” is a brave and artful attempt to explore and explode the limits of the sentence."

And this is what Joshua Cohen has to say about himself:

"My being Jewish has always seemed a fact, whereas Jewry itself has always seemed a fiction, a collective dream constantly adapting, revising, translating itself, so as to assimilate even its direst transgressors—Spinoza, Marx, Freud, Philip Roth—into heroes. The Torah, which turned Israelites into Jews, followed the Jews into exile, where it provided the language of their bind, begetting commentary, which, in turn, begat secular letters. Communal ritual became individual practice: one Jew reads, another Jew writes—for holidays, they switch. This is the history I inherited."

Joshua Cohen is the author of the novels *Witz*, *A Heaven of Others*, and *Cadenza for the Schneiderman Violin Concerto*, and a number of collections of shorter fiction, including, most recently, *Four New Messages*. His (mostly) nonfiction book, *ATTENTION! A (Short) History* will be published this Spring. His prose is as promiscuous and he is prolific. Exhilarating and confounding, playful and profound, deeply-rooted and avant-garde, he is clearly one on the most exciting young writers on the American scene today, and a worthy recipient of the Matanel Prize for Young and Promising Jewish Writers.