

## Nonfiction Chronicle

By MARC TRACY  
Published: December 10, 2009

### EMANCIPATION

#### How Liberating Europe's Jews From the Ghetto Led to Revolution and Renaissance.

By Michael Goldfarb.  
Simon & Schuster, \$30.



WINTER STORIES  
By Paolo Ventura

119 pp. Aperture. \$85.

In this collection of staged photographs, Ventura imagines that "an old circus performer looks back on his life"; his images evoke the Italy of the 1930s. Above, "The Painted Forest."

"Is not Germany the ghetto of Europe?" asked the 19th-century German nationalist Ludwig Börne, bemoaning his people's lack of a state. Though the irony stings today, Börne was not being sarcastic: he genuinely believed that the emancipation of all peoples was somehow pegged to the emancipation of the Chosen People. Goldfarb, a former NPR journalist, says that history vindicated Börne — freeing the Jews proved indispensable to Europe's general progress. Goldfarb's story, told in part through the lives of Moses Mendelssohn, Heinrich Heine, Alfred Dreyfus and Gustav Mahler, goes like this: As the 19th century dawned, the Ashkenazim, who stretched from Alsace to Russia — disenfranchised, impoverished and confined to the infamous ghettos — were the most obviously unfree people in Europe. Yet it was through their rather stark example that other more subtly oppressed groups — France's Third Estate, the stateless nations of Germany and Italy — realized their own needs for their own forms of freedom. Additionally, once emancipation arrived for the Jews, some pretty brilliant people no longer had to study Talmud their whole lives, thus freeing up their schedules so that they could come up with ideas like Marxian socialism and psychoanalysis. (Freud considered the Jews' outrageously outsize contributions to these intellectual movements to be, like every thing else, no accident.) Goldfarb takes welcome delight in his subject, though he could have built more scaffolding to hold his disparate stories together. Ultimately, his book is a celebration of that strain of thought that speaks to the universal desire for emancipation, material and spiritual — an invaluable intellectual tradition that, apparently, is one more thing anti-Semites can blame the Jews for.