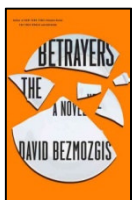


SISTERHOOD TORAH FUND BOOK CLUB

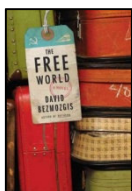
January 9, 2016



***The Betrayers* by David Bezmozgis (2014)**

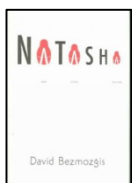
Escaping his political opponents in a Crimean resort town, disgraced Israeli politician Baruch Kotler runs into a former friend who had him sent to the gulag forty years prior and must reconcile with his betrayer and his own poor choices.

MORE BY DAVID BEZMOZGIS:



***The Free World* (2011)**

Refusing the Kremlin's order to relocate to Israel, the Jewish Krasnansky family of 1978 Russia makes their way across Italy at the sides of thousands of other immigrants over the course of a culturally rich six months.



***Natasha and Other Stories* (2004)**

A collection of short stories follows a Russian Jewish family living in Toronto, covering twenty-three years in the life of Mark, from arguments with neighbors to his first sexual encounter with a cousin and the death of his grandfather.

FURTHER READING:

***From Exodus to Freedom: A History of the Soviet Jewry Movement* by Stuart Altshuler (2005)**

Between 1967 and 1991, almost half of the entire Jewish population of the Soviet Union left for freedom to Israel, the United States, and other western countries. Rabbi Altshuler, an activist/participant in the Soviet Jewry movement as Chairman of the Rabbinic Action Committee for Soviet Jewry, tells the story of the American Jewish community's involvement in this exodus.

***When They Come For Us We'll Be Gone: The Epic Struggle to Save Soviet Jewry* by Gal Beckerman (2010)**

Draws on newly released government documents and hundreds of interviews to trace the three-decade effort to protect Jewish Soviet Union citizens after World War II, providing coverage of the movement's impact on Judaism, the Cold War and immigration. ("Jewish Book of the Year," 2010 National Jewish Book Awards)

***Unfinished Journey: From Tyranny to Freedom* by Nancy Rosenfeld (1993)**

Tells the story of how Rosenfeld, an upper-middle-class, suburban Chicago housewife turned fervent activist, spearheaded a five-year, grassroots campaign (from 1982-1986) to gain freedom for the Ukrainian-Jewish scientist and poet Yuri Tarnopolsky. See also: *Memoirs of 1984* by Yuri Tarnopolsky.

MEMOIR & BIOGRAPHY:

***From Leningrad to Jerusalem: The Gulag Way* by Hillel Butman (1988)**

In 1966 Butman, who was expelled from the Leningrad police force for associating with pro-Israeli Jews, joined in the formation of an underground Zionist organization aimed at "awakening the consciousness of Soviet Jews." He was arrested by the KGB, charged with treason and sentenced to 10 years in the Gulag. After serving nine years, he was deported to Israel, where he now lives.

***Shush! Growing Up Jewish Under Stalin: A Memoir* by Emil Draitser (2008)**

Many years after making his way to America from Odessa, Emil Draitser made a startling discovery: every time he uttered the word "Jewish"—even in casual conversation he lowered his voice. This behavior was a natural by-product, he realized, of growing up in the anti-Semitic, post-Holocaust Soviet Union, when "Shush!" was the most frequent word he heard. This compelling memoir takes the reader back to Draitser's childhood and provides a unique account of mid-twentieth-century life in Russia.

***A Backpack, a Bear, and Eight Crates of Vodka* by Lev Golinkin (2014)**

A former Jewish refugee recounts his family's desperate flight from the Soviet Union in the late 1980's and his personal quest to retrace their journey years later to thank the strangers who helped them.

***Out of Line: Growing Up Soviet* by Tina Grimberg (2007)**

The author (now a Rabbi in Toronto) was born in Kiev and recounts her colorful, bright, and funny childhood in a grand city that is by turn hilarious and heartbreaking, and shares how she never lost her affection for her homeland even after moving to America in 1979.

***Hope Against Hope : A Memoir* by Nadezhda Mandelstam (1970)**

Nadezhda Mandelstam's memoir of her life with Osip, who was first arrested in 1934 and died in Stalin's Great Purge of 1937-1938. A vital eyewitness account of Stalin's Soviet Union as well as a love story that relates the daily struggle to keep both love and art alive in the most desperate circumstances.

***Unbroken Spirit: A Heroic Story of Faith, Courage, and Survival* by Yosef Mendeleovich (2012)**

In the Latvian capital Riga after World War II, a Jewish boy grew up in an atmosphere pervaded by anti-Semitism. Powerfully drawn into Jewish life, at age 19 he founded an underground organization that struggled for Jewish rights. This struggle opened the first cracks in the Iron Curtain and eventually brought about the mass exodus of Soviet Jewry and its dramatic *aliyah* to Israel.

***A Hand in the Darkness: The Autobiography of a Refusenik* by Ida Nudel (1990)**

A Soviet Jew describes her sixteen-year battle to leave the USSR and emigrate to Israel, detailing the frustration, imprisonment, exile, and hardships that she experienced during that struggle.

***Fear No Evil* by Natan Sharansky (1988)**

The classic, inspiring memoir of a political dissident--a man whose fierce spirit and drive for freedom triumphed over imprisonment, solitary confinement, the Soviet Union, and Communism itself. See also: *Shcharansky, Hero of Our Time* by Martin Gilbert.

***Leaving Russia: A Jewish Story* by Maxim D. Shrayer (2013)**

A memoir of coming of age and struggling to leave the USSR, Shrayer chronicles the triumphs and humiliations of a Soviet childhood and expresses the dreams and fears of a Jewish family that never gave up its hopes for a better life. See also: *Yom Kippur in Amsterdam: Stories*.

***Little Failure: A Memoir* by Gary Shteyngart (2014)**

Traces the award-winning author's uproarious experiences as a young bullied Jewish-Russian immigrant in Queens, his haphazard college pursuits and his initial forays into a literary career. See also: *The Russian Debutante's Handbook*, *Absurdistan*, and *Super Sad True Love Story*.

***Mastering the Art of Soviet Cooking: A Memoir of Love and Longing* by Anya von Bremzen (2013)**

Evokes a mid-twentieth-century Soviet experience, as the author traces her upbringing by an anti-Soviet mother, her witness to the political events surrounding the empire's collapse, and her parallel food universes that included both simple and sumptuous fare.

"RUSSIAN JEWISH" FICTION:

***Panic in a Suitcase* by Yelena Akhtiorskaya (2014)**

In this account of two decades in the life of an immigrant household, the fall of communism and the rise of globalization are reflected in the experience of a single family. The Nasmertovs left Odessa for Brighton Beach, Brooklyn, with a huge sense of finality, only to find that the divide between the old world and the new is not nearly as clear-cut as they thought. (A 2015 Sami Rohr Prize Finalist)

***Hotel Moscow* by Talia Carner (2015)**

With her job in jeopardy, American businesswoman Brooke accepts an offer to travel to Russia, a nation just recently emerging from communism, but she soon runs into trouble when she helps with the investigation of a crime.

***A Replacement Life* by Boris Fishman (2014)**

A failed journalist is asked to do the unthinkable - forge Holocaust-restitution claims for old Russian Jews in Brooklyn - in this humorous and heart-wrenching story of an aspiring twenty-something Russian-Jewish writer who struggles to reconcile his immigrant roots with his fragile new American identity. (The 2015 Sohie Brody Winner, a National Jewish Book Award Fiction Finalist, and a Sami Rohr Prize Finalist)

***Inconvenient* by Margie Gelbwasser (2010)**

While fifteen-year-old Russian-Jewish immigrant Alyssa tries desperately to cope with her mother's increasingly out-of-control alcoholism by covering for her and pretending things are normal, her best friend Lana attempts to fit in with the popular crowd at their high school. (Young Adult/Teen novel)

***All Russians Love Birch Trees* by Olga Grjasnowa (2014)**

Fluent in five languages and able to get by in several others, Masha lives with her boyfriend, Elias. Her best friends are Muslims struggling to obtain residence permits, and her parents rarely leave the house except to compare gas prices. Masha has nearly completed her studies to become an interpreter, when suddenly Elias is hospitalized after a serious soccer injury and dies, forcing her to question a past that has haunted her for years.

***Mannequin Girl* by Ellen Litman (2014)**

A young girl in Soviet Russia, confined to a back brace in a school-sanatorium due to fast-progressing scoliosis, tries to prove that she can be a beautiful, free spirit and as exceptional as her intellectual parents despite her limitations. See also: *The Last Chicken in America*.

***The Mathematician's Shiva* by Stuart Rojstaczer (2014)**

Following the death of Rachela, a famous female math professor, mathematicians crash the shiva in order to discover the solution to the million-dollar Navier-Stokes Millennium Prize Problem, which she was rumored to have solved. (Winner of the 2014 National Jewish Book Award for Outstanding Debut Fiction)

***Dinner with Stalin and Other Stories* by David Shrayer-Petrov (2014)**

These fourteen stories are set in the former USSR, Western Europe, and America and feature Soviet Jews grappling with issues of identity, acculturation, and assimilation.

***The Russian Debutante's Handbook* by Gary Shteyngart (2002)**

In a novel about being an outsider in America and what it means to be an American, Vladimir, a young Russian-American immigrant, pursues his dreams of success, wealth, and a girlfriend, as his quest takes him deep into uncharted territory. See also: *Absurdistan*, *Super Sad True Love Story*, and *Little Failure*.

***Forgiving Maximo Rothman* by A. J. Sidransky (2013)**

On a chilly autumn night in New York, the lives of two men born decades and continents apart collide when Max Redmond is found bludgeoned in his Washington Heights apartment. Spanning 65 years and three continents - from Hitler's Europe to the decaying Soviet Empire of the 1970s, and revealing the little-known history of Sosua, a Jewish settlement in the jungles of the Dominican Republic - this debut novel leads us into worlds long gone, and the lives of people still touched by those memories.

***Petropolis* by Anya Ulinich (2007)**

Abandoned by her father and struggling through adolescence under the shadow of her overbearing mother, Jewish-Siberian teen Sasha has a baby with a nihilistic homeless alcoholic and becomes a mail-order bride as part of her quest to find her father in America. See also: *Lena Finkle's Magic Barrel: A Graphic Novel*.

***The Funeral Party* by Ludmila Ulitskaya (2001)**

As a group of Russian immigrants attends the deathbed of Alik, a charismatic artist, they reminisce about their individual relationships with him, argue about the past, and worry about their Russian homeland as the coup against Gorbachev unfolds, in an evocative story of Russian immigrant life in New York City. See also: *The Big Green Tent*.

***There are Jews in My House: Stories* by Lara Vapnyar (2003)**

Reflecting the perspective of a recent immigrant to the United States, this debut collection of short fiction explores the lives of Russians in Moscow and Russians in Brooklyn in such tales as "Love Lessons," "Mistress," and the title story, about a Russian mother who shelters a Jewish woman and her daughter during World War II. See also: *The Scent of Pine*.

READ-A-LIKES:

***The Secret Chord* by Geraldine Brooks (2015)**

A richly detailed fictionalized account of the life and times of King David.

***The Ghost Writer* by Philip Roth (1979)**

Introduces Nathan Zuckerman in the 1950s, a budding writer infatuated with the Great Books, discovering the contradictory claims of literature and experience while an overnight guest in the secluded New England farmhouse of his idol, E. I. Lonoff. Bezmozgis admitted that he used *The Ghost Writer* as a conceptual model for *The Betrayers*: four people in a house – two men, two women.

***Damascus Gate* by Robert Stone (1988)**

A violent confrontation in the Gaza Strip, a mind-altering pilgrimage, a race through riot-filled Jerusalem streets, a cat-and-mouse game in an underground maze, a desperate attempt to prevent a bomb from detonating beneath the Temple Mount - *Damascus Gate* is an exhilarating journey through the moral and religious ambiguities that haunt the holiest of cities and its seekers, cynics, hustlers, and madmen.