

weighty gust of arctic wind combined with Mrs Fulck's moo of love, caused him to lurch backwards, then forwards, then backwards, then forwards. One forward lurch too many saw gravity nudge Mr Fulck in the rear to send him flapping wildly like a lead peppered grouse to the unyielding earth below. An airtight saturninity was draped over the universe as a shudder rippled upwards from ground to rooftop.

The "Three", who had remained reverentially silent throughout Mr Fulck's life affirming adventure, looked at each other blankly before heaving themselves up onto the wall to witness the spectacle of Mr Fulck lying like a human swastika on a bed of cranberry sauce on the cracked paving below.

The "Three" remained speechless till Goryy uttered in a low croak; "Yes, Fujiwawa, it is time for peanut butter".

"It's dying," I said and Natalie fixed me with her good eye; I knew what she was thinking. I went over and opened the car boot. I pulled out a shovel and brought it back."

Nat and Charlie

Alan McCormick

As I drove she fell asleep again, lying along the back seat with a white hospital blanket dragged over her. The cold night wind off the Mojave Desert swam in through the crack at the top of the window and flicked through her hair.

It was four a.m. when, later, I parked our car by the roadside. I left her asleep and walked out into the violet black, into the sounds of crickets and the closing wing beat of a predatory bird. Walking on the gravel – being careful of rattlesnakes (they're drawn to the tarmac, becoming sleepy and dangerous in the lonely car beams) – I took one long, satisfying leak, then trod some more to iron out the muscle creases in my legs. I felt the shingle's crunch underfoot and looked up for the hint of yellow light about to creep into the dark; the morning sun that would soon cook the car's insides and send sweat running down my back. Hard to imagine, it was so cold right now, the night flooded with frosted stars and lone, scooting satellites. I tried to shake out the chill that ran in my bladder and into my blood by walking quickly back towards our car.

When I got there, Natalie had gone. A pulse of panic crept into my heart. I breathed in deep and walked some more, and there she was, sitting at the top of a bank that ran down from the roadside and into a dried out stream-gully below. She flicked a pebble into the sandy bottom and spoke slowly into the night, not looking up.

"Right now I'd do anything for a coffee, Charlie, just anything."

"Anything?" I knelt behind her and she leant against me. I stroked her hair, careful to avoid the scar. She purred, our joke, and I looked out at a streak of blue filtering into the big dark sky, the desert falling momentarily quiet.

"When do you think we should go back?" she said.

"Nat, we're not going back anymore."

"You've changed your mind?"

"No, we did, last night. Don't you remember?"

"Yea, yea, I do, but it was nice to dream."

"Still is," and my fingertips brushed against her eyelids.

"Charlie, you won't ever go off me, will you?"

I squeezed her tight around her waist. "You'll have to prize me off first."

She laughed and I helped her up, and we

walked arm in arm towards the car. This time she got into the passenger seat.

"Shall we?" I said.

"Let's," she replied, looking forward through the windscreen to the grey twilight of road that ran ahead. In the driver's mirror, as we set off, I saw her adjust her eye patch back onto her left eye; her free eye blinking, straining to react to the subtle new changes in the desert light.

The car slid off the gravel and picked up speed as we hit the road. Almost immediately, I felt a solid bump as the bonnet stirred and fell; the car skidding to a halt as I hit the brakes. Natalie gasped for breath and we stared at each other, not saying anything. I turned my head to look back. A misty plume of displaced dust floated past the back window, then cleared away. I could just make out a small brown shape, back maybe a hundred yards or so, lying in the middle of the road. I set the car in reverse and we drew up beside. I could see the long angle of its jaw, the tongue lolling out, the stuttering choke-breathing of its body: a small desert fox. We got out of the car and went and stood over it.

"For Christ's sake, Charlie, it's still alive."

"It's dying," I said and Natalie fixed me with her good eye; I knew what she was thinking. I went over and opened the car boot. I pulled out a shovel and brought it back, holding the handle really tight.

"You will say something first?" Natalie said.

"Say something?"

"Yes, you're good with words."

"I'm sorry, Mister Fox."

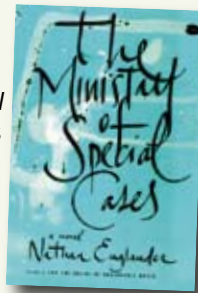
"No, Charlie, I'm serious."

I felt foolish, self-conscious somehow: on

New Releases

The Ministry of Special Cases

Nathan Englander
Faber & Faber



The *Ministry of Special Cases* combines the horrors and absurdities of Argentina's "Dirty War", the military coup and the resultant totalitarian regime.

Nathan Englander marvellously crafts the Poznan family; Kaddish who spends his days chipping away the names of disreputable ancestors from gravestones, Lillian his wife who sells insurance to desperate citizens afraid of death and Pato, their son, a student at university.

Englander's thrilling pace and attention to detail encapsulates the Poznan's experiences of a nation riddled with corruption and torture where money is the only valid currency for liberty as the governments bureaucratic agencies strive to extinguish the future and past of Argentina's inhabitants. In the Poznan family, Englander captures their struggle to survive under the oppressive cloud of the Argentinean military dictatorship. The urgency of Englander's prose resurrects the dictatorship of the past and the missing souls who perished at the hands of the regime. Their plight resonates as a profound message to us all to oppose these regimes.

Shona Fairweather

Foreigners: Three English Lives

Caryl Phillips
Harvill Secker



Foreigners combines historical fact with reportage. Throughout three engaging chapters, we discover the stories of three black men who struggled to find a place in English society.

Francis Barber is "given" to the renowned writer Samuel Johnson in the eighteenth century. Treated well by his master and eventually inheriting his fortune, his life rapidly deteriorates with the money he squanders. We also learn the fates of Randolph Turpin, Britain's first world champion boxer, and David Oluwale, a Nigerian stowaway who arrives in Leeds in 1949 to face a series of challenges in the form of the racist police.

Phillips varies the voices with which the stories are told, using both first and third person narratives. Phillips' inimitable style and unusual approach to storytelling combine to create an affecting portrait of three very different lives bound together by oppression and the need to belong.

Alexis Somerville