



# The Foreigners

*Maxine Swann*

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## The Foreigners Maxine Swann

**A glittering, energetic novel about three women-each experiencing an awakening in the gloriously conflicted and sexy city of Buenos Aires.** Buenos Aires is a city of Parisian affections and national anxiety, of amorous young lovers, seedy ports, flooded slums, and a dazzling social elite. Into this heady maze of contradiction and possibility enter two women: Daisy, an American divorcée; and Isolde, a beautiful, lonely Austrian. In Buenos Aires, Isolde finds that her blond European looks afford her entrée to the kind of elite, alluring social world she never would have had access to in her home country, but her ascension also sets her up for a long, surprising fall. Meanwhile, Daisy joins forces with Leonarda, a chameleonic Argentine with radical dreams of rebellion, who transfixes Daisy with her wild effervescence. Soon, Daisy is throwing off her American earnestness and engaging in a degree of passion, manipulation, and risk-taking in a way she never has before. Buenos Aires has allowed her to become someone else.

Against the throbbing backdrop of this shimmering and decadent city- almost a character in itself-Maxine Swann has created a stunning narrative of reawakened sensuality and compulsive desire that simultaneously explores with remarkable acuity themes of foreignness, displacement, and the trembling metamorphoses that arise from such states. From the award-winning, critically celebrated author of *Flower Children*, *The Foreigners* is a startlingly bold and original, unforgettable next novel.

## The Foreigners Details

Date : Published August 18th 2011 by Riverhead Books (first published July 28th 2011)

ISBN : 9781594488306

Author : Maxine Swann

Format : Hardcover 272 pages

Genre : Fiction, Contemporary

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# From Reader Review The Foreigners for online ebook

## OLT says

I chose this book from those offered in the Vine program because it was described as the story of 3 women in Buenos Aires, 2 foreigners (1 American and 1 Austrian) and 1 Argentine. Since I lived for many years of my adult life as an ex-pat in two large South American cities, I thought the book might appeal to me. And it started off well enough, with pretty decent writing and an interesting premise. Unfortunately, perhaps halfway in things started turning sour for me.

I am perhaps too unsophisticated in my reading tastes to appreciate this novel. Most of the characters are unappealing and unrelatable to me, and I include all 3 main characters in this group. According to the book blurb, they each "[experience] an awakening in the gloriously conflicted and sexy city" with "reawakened sensuality and compulsive desire that explores themes of foreignness, displacement..." Whatever. All I say is don't blame the city of Buenos Aires for these self-absorbed, selfish and strangely-behaved people. They could be found anywhere. I was lucky enough not to move in the same circles as people like this in my years in South America.

I will say that the city itself is very well drawn from the perspective of an outsider. It is also drawn from the perspective mainly of those in the middle-upper or educated classes, which is to be expected, considering the choice of main characters. The story is a character-driven drama, with characters sadly lacking in much character. The Argentine is manipulative, deceptive and, IMO, strange; the American is a bit malleable and passive; and the Austrian social climbing and somewhat vapid. There are secondary characters, such as the American's neighbor Gabriel, a bike messenger and prostitute on the side (or is it vice versa?), an older intellectual and relatively famous gentleman who has a puzzling relationship with the Argentine, a hairdresser, members of a social activist group called Mercury, a guy named Diego who is an ex-boyfriend of the Argentine and whom the Austrian is somewhat obsessed with, etc.

There is eventually some personal growth for the American and the Austrian. At least I like to think there was. I have given this 2 stars not for the writing, which is quite competent, but for the subject matter. These people's lives and problems did not resonate with me, did not interest me, and, ultimately, annoyed me.

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## Madison says

"'To choose is to age.' Who said that? Who cares? I pictured myself taking a right, then a left, then a right again."

The last lines of this book resonated with me more than ... whatever the rest of it was. There were some good passages about the loneliness of being an immigrant, even a temporary one. But the story was overshadowed by the odd plot. I think it's supposed to be about the places people will get to when they lose the boundaries and taboos of their own culture/family/history. Maybe it's just weird. idk, I'm pretty ill.

But those last lines man. To choose is to age. I feel that. It is always, always easier to live in a state of suspended animation and foreign places are wonderful places to do that. They're almost sanctioned by the western cultural phenomenon of a gap year/year abroad. And then the narrator, saying that it's nonsense, that you make many choices, that the pleasure is in making choices, but also she hasn't really done anything in

the story? That could be the point. You'll have to decide for yourselves because I don't care enough to think about it. I need more ibuprofen.

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## Amy Meyer says

### The Foreigners by Maxine Swann

*Date Published:* August 2011

*ISBN:* 978-1594488306

*Publisher:* Riverhead Hardcover

*Pages:* 272

*Genre:* Contemporary Fiction

*Rating:* 3.0 out of 5

*Publisher's Book Summary:* A glittering, energetic novel about three women-each experiencing an awakening in the gloriously conflicted and sexy city of Buenos Aires.

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*My Thoughts:* I finished this book last week but I needed to think about it for several days. I'm still a little unsure what to say about *The Foreigners*. This is the first book I've read that is set in Buenos Aires. I was really looking forward to reading *The Foreigners* for the setting alone, especially since the book summary tells us the city is "almost a character in itself". Unfortunately, I didn't find this to be the case. We're told a little bit about Buenos Aires at various points throughout the book and even more about the tourists or foreigners who come to Buenos Aires. *The Foreigners*, primarily although, is a story about the course of the friendships between Daisy and the two women she meets in Buenos Aires, Leonarda and Isolde as well as the intriguing trajectory of Isolde's life.

Daisy, the protagonist of the novel, escapes to Buenos Aires after her 9-year marriage ends in divorce. She doesn't handle the stress and disappointment of divorce well physically or psychologically and is hospitalized after a frightening fainting spell. Daisy's friend suggests she get away. Through him, Daisy obtains a grant to study the water system in Buenos Aires.

Daisy visits the Silver river and some other bodies of water in Buenos Aires after sharing what she's read about them and the water situation in Buenos Aires. In addition, Daisy occasionally tells about an area of the city she read about or shares glimpses of the different neighborhoods she walks through or the places where she goes for drinks or dinner. Rather than focus on the city itself, it's the tourists, the foreigners who come to Buenos Aires and how they are received by the residents that Daisy learns more about when she temporarily moves to Buenos Aires. The foreigners "fall into categories" depending on where they come from and why they come. Europeans or Americans, as long as they are "basically decently physically assembled" are considered upper class unless proven otherwise. I found the passages about Buenos Aires, foreigners and Daisy's conversations with Argentines and other tourists about life in Buenos Aires one of the most interesting aspects of the book. These sections in the book were written in beautiful, compelling prose. I would have liked more of this writing and wish it had been weaved into the story rather than appear in the beginning or end of a chapter.

Maxine Swann is quite adept at creating eccentric, bizarre and fascinating characters. Daisy is the main character and also the first-person narrator. She is lost and at loose-ends after her divorce. She seems healthy, physically now but there's a disconnect between her and life which makes it difficult to relate to and connect with her. Unfortunately, I had similar difficulty with the two women Daisy befriends. Leonarda is an Argentine who is "interested in foreigners". She is moody, immature, has serious issues with control and enjoys shocking people. I'm not sure whether Leonarda is crazy or simply absurd. Maybe both. The first night Daisy meets her, Leonarda admits to staking Daisy, kisses Daisy in an erotic, sensual manner to shock some men in a bar and steals a policeman's hat right off his head and, laughing, runs away leaving Daisy standing with the policeman.

It becomes evident early in the book that Leonarda has a very loose relationship with telling the truth. I'm not sure if this is on purpose or if it's part of her 'eccentricities'. Nevertheless, Daisy becomes enchanted with her and wants to be with Leonarda constantly. When their relationship becomes physical, Daisy becomes obsessed almost unable to keep her hands off Leonarda when they're together. When Leonarda decides they are going to hunt human "prey" and picks a victim imagining hurting or killing him, I was shocked. Daisy was, too, sometimes!

Isolde is the other woman Daisy befriends. She is Austrian, blonde and beautiful. She easily fits in with the elite class and loves moving in their circles. She struggles because, although she looks the part, she doesn't have the money she needs to comfortably fit in. Appearance is everything to Isolde. She's a vain, very superficial woman and extremely lonely. When not attending cocktail parties and sleeping with one of them men she's met, Isolde spends her time tending to her appearance and trying to come up with a respectable way to make money to afford the lifestyle she loves. Daisy and Isolde have little in common but Isolde treats Daisy as her confidant. Daisy introduced Isolde to Leonarda but then became jealous when they got along! Isolde's life takes a surprising and unexpected course towards the end of the book.

These characters are fascinating but I wasn't able to relate to them or identify with them. Ms. Swann doesn't fully develop the women, barely referencing their past lives. Leonarda, for instance, speaks of her mother as "the monster" but says nothing more about her until the day Daisy compliments her nails and Leonarda says her mother painted them. We're left to wonder if her mother is the reason for Leonarda's nutty behavior or is there something else going on. After a while, the behavior of all the women becomes tiresome. Daisy also becomes friendly with Gabriel. He's a secondary character who I really liked and hoped to see more. The biggest problem I had with *The Foreigners* is there's no plot to the story. I kept waiting for something big to happen, a climax of sorts, but the story just meandered along. Although *The Foreigners* didn't work for me, I'm not finished reading Ms. Swann's work and will be picking up her other books when I have the chance.

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## **Jennice Ong says**

Maybe just not my cup of tea.. didn't finish the book as I really lost interest halfway

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## **Joy says**

This book isn't good really. It has all the possibilities to be good, a beautiful city, conflicted characters, and lots of sex.

But the plot never really does anything. At first it seems to be an awakening novel of the "Eat, pray, Love" vein, where some unhappy woman goes and finds herself in a foreign city. Then it moves into an apparently Lesbian/Bi-Sexual awakening, but even that is written in an unconvincing, cool way. then it seems like it's going to be an exciting novel about sexual control, and power roles, but even that just peters away into a puff of unfulfilled promise.

None of the characters are written in a way that is particularly likeable or easy to relate to, and I truly don't care if they had a happy, sad, or indifferent ending.

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## **Maureen says**

I was really looking forward to reading this book as it had been highly recommended in one of the magazines I read that has book reviews (can't really remember which one). I had been to Buenos Aires a couple of years back and found it to be an incredible city, a little schizo, very European in many ways, but third world at the same time. Buenos Aires is like a beautiful woman who has aged - her bones are good, but she is shabby and worn.

In many ways that was one of the premises of the book, that Argentians had this strange reaction to foreigners, both pride in their city but this feeling of inferiority as well. Otherwise though I thought the characters were totally unbelievable and for the most part, unlikeable. I kept waiting for something interesting that would grab me to happen but it didn't. The storyline was thin. I probably would have not finished the book except it was a short and I kept thinking it would improve.

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## **Kimberly Richardson says**

A lovely story set in the Buenos Aires, the Paris of South America.

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## **Caroline says**

Contemporary Buenos Aires exudes a sultry welcome to all. Her exotic charms entice all who visit and destroys the souls of those who aren't careful.

Daisy, a divorced American, flees to Buenos Aires, grant in hand, ostensibly to research and write about their

waterworks, an area in which she is unqualified. Throwing off her conservative cloak, she is fascinated by Leonarda, a young Argentinian sprite with a yearning to tear the establishment. Isolde, a beautiful Austrian, leaps into the glittering Argentinian jet-set, seeking to belong.

As Daisy decides to embrace everything she would not have opened herself to in the past, Leonarda experiments with the emotional boundaries of others, and Isolde unwittingly breaks certain social taboos. Where one eventually finds understanding and contentment in herself, another finds herself spiraling out of control, while the other discovers a hidden depth of depravity within herself.

The writing was beautiful in certain passages, but I was left with a bad taste in my mouth at the humiliating cruelty inflicted on some of characters. Peeling back the surface layers of each character and exposing their rotting cores may actually be the strength of this novel. This is anything but a bland read. Be prepared to have some strong reactions when reading this novel.

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### **Heather says**

It was pretty good for a book with no plot.

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### **Tara Chevestt says**

First of all, where's the plot in this?? I didn't read much of a plot... To me, it was all a bunch of weird women living in Buenos Aires visiting their weird friends and banging their very weird lovers.

First of all, the narrator... She should have a stronger voice, but instead she just seemed to be following her friends around, letting them make her decisions for her.. Despite the fact she was narrating the story, her character was weak. She's also a moocher.. she's getting a free trip to Argentine and is supposed to be doing research. Instead she's just wandering around following Leonarda.

Leonarda... cannot decide if she is a man or a woman. She follows this man around.. becomes his lover and gets him to cook for her while leading around the American. She puts on mustaches and declares she is growing a dick.. "I always wanted to be a sailor. I have an ontological dick. But now it's really growing." Sometimes she has a dick. Sometimes she doesn't. What the heck?

Isolde... I liked her better than the other two, but not much. She is very focused on having an affair with a weird man named Diego who shoved his tongue down her throat upon first meeting her. Wow. Must be something in the air in Buenos Aires.

Something else I didn't like: mostly telling, little showing. First person POV didn't work here.

Two points in the book's favor: a. it can be read in a day if you have the day off. b. I learned a lot about Argentina.. Matter of fact, I no longer wish to visit the place.

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## Becky says

### It was ok

This book wasn't what I thought when I read the description. Really didn't have a story but only a few ladies and their sexual freedom with both sexes. Not a huge fan, I was looking for more of a story.

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## Dominique says

Meh. This is what I get from selecting a book based on its cover.

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## Antigone says

I have often thought banality to be the most dangerous affliction of all. Where else but in the midst of such dullness, cliché and overarching predictability is the imagination more prone to damaging pursuit? The trick, as Ms. Swann demonstrates so deftly, is to gear such damage toward evolution.

The setting is modern day Buenos Aires. Newly-divorced and fresh from the hospital (where no physical ailment could be found) comes Daisy on a grant to study the city's waterworks. Here she meets Isolde, an Austrian social climber, and the native Leonarda whose experiments with passion are performed using life itself as a canvas. Disjointedness prevails as compulsions are uncovered and the restrictions of existence begin to keen and quake.

A fascinating study of suffocation - and the risk of reaching toward another breath of air.

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## Tracy Towley says

I received *The Foreigners* through the Goodread First Reads program and after reading the first chapter, I really wasn't sure that I'd make it through to the end. The writing was extremely laconic, to the point of abruptness. Short sentences. Telling you a few things. Sort of strung together. Abrupt, like I said.

Surprisingly though, the writing style grew on me and I eventually found myself somewhat fond of it. I don't think this was a result of the writing changing at all, but rather me adjusting to the writing. I started to see that it was actually quite melodic and lyrical.

Once I got used to the writing style, I was able to focus more on the story line. The plot centers around Daisy, an American woman who's recently gone through a divorce, and who decides that a change of pace would do her some good. She scams some company into giving her a grant to study the water in Buenos Aires (despite not being any kind of water expert or caring at all about water systems) and heads on down. Before long she's befriended two very different women, both of them foreigners. The story is that of their intertwining lives and the story of each of their struggles to escape from something.



There were parts of the plot that I found interesting enough, but most of it was about Daisy's acceptance of some terrible behavior on the part of a woman she met named Leonarda, who was a completely mentally unstable person who lied, cheated and was just generally awful. For example, at one point she convinces Daisy that they killed a man, when in fact it was all some elaborate game Leonarda was playing. I found these antics to be both annoying and dull at the same time.

Overall, I think there is an audience for this book. It was interesting to learn some things about Buenos Aires and there was one minor character, Gabriel, who I found quite endearing. Overall though, it was an overly complicated story told with very simple language. It did not manage to engage me and in the end was quite forgettable.

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## **Heather says**

In this tense and erotically charged new novel from Maxine Swann, three very different women experience life in Buenos Aires, Argentina amid a backdrop of tropical torpor and haute society. When Daisy, an American divorcee, escapes to Argentina after a medical scare, she's at first withdrawn and alienated from her new surroundings and their inhabitants. When one day she's discovered by Leonarda, a young Argentine woman with a strange sprightly outlook that hides a deep streak of masochism, Daisy is thrown headlong into a very confusing world of desire, repulsion and jealousy. Meanwhile, Isolde, a beautiful Austrian, is trying to use her looks and connections to climb into the upper echelons of Argentine society, but is finding that her brash neediness is undoing all of her careful work of ingratiating herself with the upper-class locals. As Isolde and Daisy experience a new world with very different rules than they're used to, they'll come face to face with their insecurities and strengths in a place where appearances and motives may be deceiving, and where their passions and fears are juxtaposed with the lives they left behind.

I have to say I wasn't sure what to expect of *The Foreigners*. I had thought it would be a quiet story of a few women's adventures abroad, with an emphasis on character development and a look into the exotic locale of Argentina. What I got was a dizzying ride into the heart of two very different women on the edge of a society that's sometimes cruel and that prided itself on appearances and facades that were designed to make foreigners feel superior while being silently sneered at in private.

When Daisy arrives in Argentina, ostensibly to work on a grant project, she's more aimless than involved, but that all changes when young Leonarda chooses her as a target for her whirlwind courtship and strange power plays. As the two get caught up in increasingly bizarre and dangerous forays, Daisy is held emotionally captive by a woman who seems to like to have people in her thrall and who executes malevolent games of desire and violence. As Daisy and Leonarda wind their way through the city, I was on the edge of my seat, wondering what was behind Leonarda's manipulations and disturbing trysts with a man that she goaded Daisy into agreeing to humiliate. It was a volatile situation that grabbed me by the throat, and though I got the impression that Daisy felt the danger too, it didn't stop her from being fully inveigled by the games Leonarda was playing. Working on Daisy's visceral side, Leonarda began to warp her slowly, baiting her with passion, attention and complicity. It was a heady mix for Daisy, and for myself, and I began to see that although Daisy thought she had things under control, Leonarda was like a wild animal who would not be contained. The end result was a mix of obsession and jealousy that pricked Daisy violently and caused her to behave in some very uncharacteristic ways.

The situation with Isolde was also uncomfortable. Coming to Argentina seemed to be Isolde's way of escaping the conundrum of settling down like the other women from her hometown. Isolde was an

emotionally needy woman who tried to insinuate herself into the quasi-aristocracy of Argentina but who somehow kept getting it wrong. She was constantly humiliating and debasing herself in her desire to be at the center of the action, and her unfortunate relationships with all the wrong men kept her from being taken seriously in the right circles. Isolde was a beautiful woman, but along with her penchant for being pushy and overbearing, she was also running out of money and had no way of obtaining what she needed other than by promoting herself as an international art procurer. This was fraught with problems because Isolde had greatly embellished her credentials and experience, and often she would negate her chances by becoming romantically involved with her prospective employers. In Isolde there was a constant flux of self-sabotaging behavior that for some reason she refused to acknowledge or rectify. Isolde was constantly at war with herself and often her fear of being alone and unwanted made her do some very unwise things.

As things speed towards a conclusion, the situation between Leonarda and Daisy begins to turn very strange, with the prey becoming the predator. But is this merely what Daisy wants to believe, and will she ever really be able to turn the tables on a woman who refuses to be subdued and marginalized? Isolde, too, finds herself in very foreign straights and must come to accept a life that at times horrifies and embarrasses her. It's at this point that the story begins to creep into the edges of the readers psyche and crouches there, waiting to spring into its final haunting conclusion. Obsession and mayhem turn to debasement and cruelty for one, and expectations come crashing down for the other, into a reality that is unpleasant and tinged with regret. Both women, seeing the futility of the lives they've led, begin to come to terms with what they've become and realize that there is indeed a way out.

I was greatly impressed with Maxine Swann's narrative, and it was thrilling to be brought to the brink of suspense and discomfort by her elegant and spare prose. This was an emotionally charged book that kept me constantly reevaluating and that felt dire albeit in a very quiet way. It was also erotic at points without being vulgar, its strangeness tempered with a curious feeling of intimacy. I would certainly recommend this book to people who are looking for something different that will penetrate their sensibilities in a slightly untoward way. A fantastic read, and one that I would highly recommend.

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