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Believing the Lie, by Elizabeth George, Dutton, 2012

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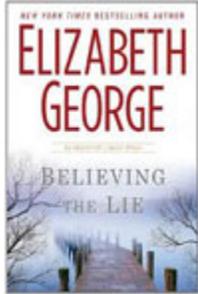
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Believing the Lie

by Elizabeth George, Dutton, 2012

Reviewed by Larry W. Riggs

Elizabeth George has always been an ambitious writer. Her mysteries are long, complex, and informed by knowledge of psychology, society, and literary traditions. In her most recent book, an addition to the long Thomas Lynley series the series that inspired a set of television dramas-- George sets herself a narrative problem that she must have relished: the mystery here is whether a crime has actually been committed. As George explores a wide range of characters and motives, including Lynley's own quasi-masochistic relationship with his alcoholic boss, Isabelle Ardery, the reader feels alternately certain and doubtful about whether a murder has occurred. Lynley is sent, undercover, to the country estate of Bernard Fairclough, a man who has used his wife's money to become a "self-made" success, and whose nephew, Ian, has drowned-or been drowned?-in the lake adjacent to the property. It gradually becomes clear that the Faircloughs rival families in Greek tragedy in internecine hatreds and individual problems. Ian had left his wife and family for a male lover. Nicholas, Bernard's son, is recovering from a drug habit of epic proportions. One of Bernard's daughters has spent her life faking semi-invalidism, the better to spy on and exploit her family. Each time Lynley, and the reader, become convinced that the drowning was accidental, George introduces a new and powerful motive that might well have brought someone to murder Ian. In my view, this story is well worth its length.

- Larry W. Riggs is Professor of French at Butler University.