



A Traitor to Memory

Elizabeth George

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From Reader Review *A Traitor to Memory* for online ebook

Alicia says

This one was harder for me to read of her books. There was no resolution in the end, not that there really could be, but it was emotionally draining. I also found the format - switching between the narrative and the diary distracting.

Karo says

I've read all of Elizabeth George's Thomas Lynley/Barbara Havers series, and I must say that this is the weakest of the bunch. One of the aspects that I've always enjoyed in this mystery series is the attention that the author paid to the lives of the two main characters. In *A Traitor to Memory*, that seems to have flown by the wayside, and Havers and Lynley are given rather slipshod treatment. The small sections devoted to their private lives seem perfunctory and forced.

In addition, I felt that the mystery itself wasn't as strong in this novel. The timeline for one character's novel is not in sync with the other chapters, which I found to be quite confusing when I realized what was going on. The ending comes out of nowhere and leaves many questions unanswered, which, in itself isn't a crime, but these questions needed to be answered in order for the book to make sense.

Overall though, *A Traitor to Memory* kept me glued to its pages. Regardless of the book's weaknesses, Ms. George is a fantastic British mystery writer. I look forward to her next book, hoping that she'll take time and care with it, and especially to the BBC adaptation of the first book in her series, to appear on PBS some time in early 2002.

Skip Maloney says

This, as noted in another entry here, was a discovery. Found at daughter-in-law's house and taken up without much faith in the fact that I'd actually finish the 719-page hardcover. But I did and it's led me back to the first of the Inspector Lynley mysteries, with a lot of catching up to do.

Ms. George is a very lush writer. Her details are very . . . well, detailed and she has a way of making you see, hear, feel and sometimes even taste what her character's are seeing, hearing, feeling. There's a depth, too, that extends beyond the circumstances of a given moment that provides the reader with a panoramic look at a character's life. In "Traitor to Memory," she employs a journal technique that takes you outside of the central mystery, while that central mystery unfolds with the character who's writing the journal right in the thick of things.

Thoroughly enjoyed this and as my search and current reading of the first book in this series attests, I'm hungry and deliciously anticipating more.

Probably not for everyone though. Things develop slow and sometimes in unexpected directions. Definitely not a slam-bang type of page-turning mystery or thriller story, but more of a carefully considered and ingeniously crafted piece of serious writing which just happens to center of a titled Scotland Yard detective and the mysteries that come his way.

Carol says

‘A Traitor to Memory,’ by Elizabeth George is a compelling, fascinating book. It’s a long book – over 1000 pages long – but the writing is strong, the plot well-conceived, and the characters well developed. Holding ‘A Traitor to Memory’ together is the story of Gideon, a violin virtuoso, and originally a child prodigy. We read his journal entries, written to his psychiatrist, and learn with Gideon about the tragedy in his family’s past.

One way to describe Elizabeth George’s writing is research, research, research. If you look at her acknowledgments, you can see that she’d researched just about every aspect of her book. She’s spent time with policemen, learning police procedures, methods, hierarchies etc. Since there’s a nanny in her tale, she watched nanny training courses. To give a realistic account of Gideon’s life and career, she’s learned all about the violin and violin training. Etc. Etc. Not a stone left untouched.

Research alone doesn’t make ‘A Traitor to Memory’ a great book, however. Elizabeth George is an experienced novelist who knows how to spin a tale, blending together her main plot with subplots, and pacing her book extremely well. We see a return of Lynley and Barbara Havers, with a new domestic issue for Lynley to deal with. But George’s detectives in ‘A Traitor to Memory’ don’t take center stage, as some detectives do in classic detective novels. ‘A Traitor to Memory’ is about Gideon and his family, the family lodgers, the nanny, the tutor, the violin trainer, and a whole host of other characters. Many of these we have more than a glimpse of because George takes the time to develop these characters and make them memorable. I especially like Libby, Gideon’s American lodger, whose speech is such a marked contrast to the British spoken by Gideon’s family and by Lynley and co. I also enjoyed George’s handling of the cybersex material, which was simultaneously funny and rather sad.

The ending of ‘A Traitor to Memory’ was completely a surprise. I had guessed a few things right (George gives us enough clues to be do some plausible guessing), but I was completely taken aback by the surprise ending. That’s good! I like to be surprised.

I’ll definitely be picking up another Elizabeth George in the future, and hope to read most of them. I think I’m a fan!

Kathy Davie says

Eleventh in the Inspector Lynley mystery series based in London at Scotland Yard and revolving around policemen.

My Take

This is a gawd awful depressing story but an essential read *if* you prefer to follow your characters chronologically. There is so much in here that you need to know. I think.

I had a hard time reading this story. It was well-written [I do have a few quibbles about the timeline George followed, see below]; but, its topic was so incredibly tragic. Such a waste. Such an argument for having issues out in the open. We think the story is about Gideon Davies, a brilliant violinist who suddenly freaks

out. In truth, the underlying story is about Richard Davies, his father. The desperate need that Gideon's father has to prove his worth to *his* father, the man who adopted him. So many lives destroyed because of one man's expectations of another.

Although the initial impetus is Gideon's inability to play, George uses the topical conflict between Gideon and his father to fuel Gideon's hunt to restore his memories of the crucial night when everything changed for all who lived or worked in the house of Gideon's childhood as well as to demonstrate the "stage mother" that Richard is. Flashbacks are the memories reawakening and providing us with the backstory; it also provides the clues that tell us which character was the initial murderer while the foreshadowing George includes very subtly prepares us for the end. In some ways, Gideon's journey back in time provides him with a realization as to his self-absorption even though he is incapable of relating it to Libby's observations.

George splits the story in both perspective and how she presents the flashbacks. I don't object to flashbacks, but it is frustrating when the past itself is broken up into so many different times; it's like she cut the chapters up, threw 'em in the air, and then reassembled the manuscript according to how it ended up on the floor. We read the events of November 20th in a number of different places and then all of a sudden the next chapter is on November 16.

So many questions, so much unhappiness. The majority of the story is Gideon's current-day struggle. In between, we get bits and pieces of the regular cast of characters until we get a third of the way through the story when they begin to come into their own again. The only positive in the entire story is Lady Helen. I feel rather desperate to move on to *A Place of Hiding* to discover what has happened to Webberly.

The Story

The *Archduke* is Gideon Davies' Achilles heel, and he freaks out at a concert at which he is to play it. In his struggles to find out why he froze and can no longer play his violin, he unearths a 20-year-old family history of repression surrounding the murder of a two-year-old sister he didn't remember. A mother he forgot. An entire family and staff blanked out.

Today, we find DCI Eric Leach in charge of the brutal hit-and-run of a middle-aged woman. When he learns the identity of the victim, he quickly alerts his old partner, Webberly. Leach has remembered a past indiscretion of Webberly's, and luckily for most of the people involved, Webberly assigns Detective Inspector Lynley and Detective Constables Barbara Havers and Winston Nkata to help DCI Leach with this hit-and-run which quickly appears to have a connection to more hit-and-runs, which are all tying back to that 20-year-old murder. It seems obvious that the nanny convicted of the murder must be behind their deaths as she was recently released from prison.

The Characters

Detective Inspector Thomas Lynley and **Detective Constables Havers and Nkata** are working as a team here. **Lady Helen** is Tommy's wife with an interesting condition, and we get a bit of **Deborah and Simon St. James**.

DCI Eric Leach is in charge of the initial hit-and-run. When he learns the identity of the victim, he quickly alerts his old partner, Webberly. Leach has his own home drama with his about-to-be ex-wife, **Bridget**, and his daughter, **Esmé**. **Detective Superintendent Malcolm Webberly** and his wife, **Frances**, are celebrating their 25th anniversary. Probably the high point of the story as it goes decidedly downhill from here. Just ask their daughter, **Miranda**. **Assistant Commissioner David Hillier and Lady Hillier** are related through the sisters; Hillier is an ass but he seems to appreciate Webberly.

Gideon Davies is a world-renowned violinist. A child prodigy. **Richard Davies** is Gideon's father and the adopted son of Jack Davies. Eager for his father's approval, Richard sacrifices everything and everyone to Gideon's future. All for the sake of his whacked-out dad. **Eugenie Davies** ran out on her husband and son shortly after the death of their daughter **Sonia** and has been paying penance ever since. **Sister Cecelia** is a Catholic nun to whom Eugenie turned for comfort. **J. W. Pitchley**, a.k.a., James Pitchford, a.k.a., James the Lodger, a.k.a., Jimmy Pytches, the poor sod. His only crime? Reinvention. **Jill Foster** is the very pregnant, current fiancée of Richard Davies. **Raphael Robson** is Gideon's musical instructor and paid companion; a part of Gideon's life since childhood and with his own secrets to hide. **Sarah-Jane Beckett** was Gideon's teacher with her own bone to grind. **Liberty "Libby" Neale** is an American struggling to escape her marriage to a drug-dealing jerk while trying to help Gideon through his frustrations.

Yasmin Edwards and her son, **Daniel**, are currently living with **Katja Wolff**, the nanny who spent 20 years behind bars for Sonia's murder. Yasmin and Katja met in prison where both learned not to trust the law.

Dr. Rose is the psychiatrist whom Gideon sees as a last resort and whom Richard insists is a waste of time. *Yeah, and we find out the real reason he hates her!* I feel so sorry for **Major Ted Wiley**; I do hope that Havers or Lynley clue him in at the end.

Hadiyyah and her father, **Azhar**, don't appear at all.

The Cover and Title

The cover is as dark as the story with its wide paving-stoned walkway with a dark figure hiding behind a huge, black umbrella as he trundles down the hill, the only light coming from the flight of stairs behind him.

The title is too, too accurate, as the truth is indeed *A Traitor to Memory*.

aPriL does feral sometimes says

I think 'A Traitor to Memory' was an interesting book to read. It dissects a dysfunctional family which rotates around two human suns made important by family dynamics, a son and an obsessive father.

First is the musical prodigy, Gideon Davies, who is a minor sensation in classical music circles, a favored child and now adult whose career everyone in the Davies' world must support.

The father, Richard Davies, forces the entire family into a supplementary role behind Gideon's talent in every way. Every capable adult in the house lives there only to support Gideon financially and emotionally in his (actually, mostly his father's) quest for Gideon to be a violin virtuoso. Raphael Robson, a music instructor, is made to give up his apartment and he moves into the family house in order to instruct the tot when he shows (according to family legend) musical interest. Eugenie Davies must work at two jobs despite being the mother of two children, one being the 'prodigy', but the other being a handicapped girl, Sonia, with tremendous medical issues and fragility. An unqualified nanny, eastern Germany refugee Katja Wolff, is given an upstairs room to be available for Sonia's care. A teacher, Sarah-Jane Beckett, is hired as an in-house governess to tutor Gideon when it becomes apparent going to a school is taking away too much of Gideon's time from practice. Various lodgers are installed at different times in another available bedroom for their rent money. The crowded house also includes Jack Davies and his wife, grandparents to the prodigy and Richard's parents. Jack is a damaged war hero, suffering from PTSD. He cannot tolerate anyone with disabilities, particularly Sonia, and he constantly berates Richard for her existence while she lived.

Early in the book, Gideon, now a young adult, is suffering from an emotional crisis. During a concert, he has forgotten how to play music. He walks off the stage after three minutes of humiliation. The family sends him to a psychiatrist, who urges him to begin a journal. As he writes down his thoughts, it becomes clear to him he has trouble remembering parts of his childhood. He realizes that somehow he has completely forgotten he had a sister. He vaguely remembers, eventually, Sonia drowned, and that is why his mother Eugenia left Richard to begin another life without ever contacting him again. Also, inexplicably to himself, he asks an uneducated delivery girl, Libby Neale, who has expressed dissatisfaction with her estranged husband and her living arrangements, to move into a downstairs flat in his house. They have almost nothing in common, but soon Libby is imagining she is needed by Gideon to fulfill him. Gideon is struggling with his career and his family and his memory, so he has reached out to Libby for companionship, but he is in no shape for a girlfriend.

Then, Eugenia is murdered. Constable Barbara Havers and his lordship, Thomas Lynley, are on it, and gentle reader, so are we.

Meanwhile, Detective Superintendent Malcolm Webberly, Havers and Lynley's boss, and his wife Francis and their daughter Miranda, are having some major issues of their own. Francis has severe agoraphobia. Webberly has moved on with his job and his life, but he loyally comes home to Francis despite her inability to leave the house, which has crippled their marriage as well as her life. Lynley and Havers wonder at Webberly's intense interest in Eugenia's murder - until Lynley discovers love letters from Webberly in Eugenia's dresser.

This is a MASSIVE murder mystery, heavy with character analysis as much as with red herrings. However, I floundered about, a bit disconcerted, when the book's construction was revealed to be on two timelines which did not coincide. The timeline difference was not made conceptionally clear that that is what is happening until very late in the book when one of the timelines was discussing identifiable events which had occurred a LOT earlier. It seemed like a very rough welding of story progression. I also found the essential plot events too disparate and separated without linkage for too long. If you put this story off too long between readings, it would have been hard to keep up. All in all, I was unhappy with the book's architecture.

I read other reviews, and as usual, some were discomfited by the changing points of view. Usually, I have no sympathy or understanding with this complaint, and it isn't the first time I have seen people upset with this, to me, normal process available to an author in writing a book. However, in this particular story, since the soldering of scenes was poor, IMHO, the changing viewpoints added to my confusion occasionally.

The development of motivation and the impact of childhood, education, and family on character viewpoint was of the usual high-quality perspicacity I expect from this author. George explored each character from behind their eyes, and I loved it. This has always been my favorite aspect of George's books, so while I'm a bit unhappy about how the book was put together, the tone-perfect explorations of character keep me a fan.

Kellie says

(#11 of the Havers-Lynley series) Wow...This was another masterpiece by George. I have never read another book like the ones George puts out. Amazon's rating does not do it justice. This author, in my humble opinion, is ingenious. The book is about many things. The main plot is about a family. A family torn apart by lies and murder. Although, George always starts the book out in a very mysterious way. Not with the Havers-Lynley character or any regular in the series. It usually is something to grab you and take hold so

you are cast under her spell. This was about Gideon, the violin player who suddenly has lost the ability to play. He enters psychotherapy with Dr. Rose so he can peel back the layers of emotional damage he has repressed for all of these years about the sister who disappeared from his life when he was young and the tragedy behind her death and of the life of a protegee and all the pressure that goes along with it. Webberly, Lynley and Havers boss, was involved with Gideon's mother. An affair secretly kept from his wife. He is hit by a car soon after Eugenie's murder. All of the people involved in this tangled web are developed in the most intimate way. The story within the story. The story of the regulars. Helen is pregnant and no one knows. They are afraid to tell Deborah because of her history of miscarriages. Webberly's wife who has been home bound for so long and can't leave the house even after he is struck down. Nkata who is investigating the woman convicted of the murder of Gideon's sister Sonia. Validating her alibi but also finding an emotional attraction to her roommate and son. There was so much to this book. Yes, I was a bit intimidated by the 1,000 page paperback. But, it was worth the read. Definitely worth the read and I am looking forward to the next one.

Bob says

This was my second Elizabeth George and like the first one it was a multi-threaded mystery with probable culprits changing places through out. The shape of the book has a main character; a violin prodigy who has suddenly "lost" is ability to play, writing a journal at his psychiatrist's suggestion. He is trying to remember his "history" from the time of the murder of his younger sister, when he was 8, in the hopes of uncovering the cause of his block. Is narrative is interspersed with current events surrounding his life and the people in it and flashbacks to events that took place at the time of his sisters murder and during the time up to the present. DI Lynley, Barbara Havers and Winton Nkata are busy chasing leads as various principal players spend time at the top of the suspect list. At 708 pages it is not a book to just "dash off" but is worth the time to read.

Leslie Jem says

this book was so bad that our book group brought it up at every single meeting thereafter...

Ray says

I want to fall in love with Elizabeth George. With dozens of books under her belt, she'd be the perfect author to go back to time and again for a good read. But I am losing faith. This is the 3rd book of hers I have read and and it was the worst so far. I like a long book. But length should either result in deep character development or ridiculous/funny/detailed description. Unfortunately George uses length just to repeat the same few ideas/plot points over and over. So it gets really boring.

I am also really tired of her police characters engaging in professionally unethical behavior. It just doesn't seem necessary for them to do their jobs and it raises too many questions about their deeper motivations that George never bothers to answer.

Last but not least, I now have enough perspective to know that shifting points of view are George's thing. And I've also read two in a row now where in addition to multi-person omniscient narration, George

intersperses a first-person account (in this case a journal) throughout.

This is really annoying.

All in all, a disappointment. But I will keep trying.

Rebecca Huston says

I did enjoy this one, albeit it's not my favourite Inspector Lynley novel. This time there are family secrets, murder, mental disabilities, and classical music.

For a more complete review, please go here:

http://www.epinions.com/review/A_Trai...

Mary says

Another brilliant British police procedural featuring Lynley and Havers. Gideon Davies' estranged mother is the victim of a vehicular homicide. She is a quiet woman beloved by everyone so the range of suspects is pretty sparse. But there's a daughter's death in her past so Lynley and Havers are soon tilling the earth around all her friends and relations. Gideon was a child prodigy with a brilliant career who at 28 just stopped playing and no one knows why. His diary, addressed to his therapist, is interspersed with the investigation. The story centers on all the complex relationships among all those related in any way to the victim and I found it fascinating.

Ruth says

Oh man. Sometimes I think I notice glitches in mystery novel plotting, but never ones this bad. It's such a long long book, with so many interwoven stories. But the central event, Eugenie's death, is revealed to her son on page 226--& then again, as if he hadn't known it at all, on page 676, as if it happened the night before instead of days or weeks earlier. Also Katie Waddington, whom he visits in his quest to understand his past, is just fine--but soon we are told that she had recently been victim of a hit-&-run & had suffered a broken hip & another serious injury.

I kept reading to see whether these bizarre anomalies were part of some clever intention. But no, they were huge, unremedied errors.

In the acknowledgments, George gives thanks to those who helped her crank this book out in just 10 months. She should have taken longer.

Jean Cole says

Why oh why did I mentally promise to read all the books in this series? The series has such potential. Sir Thomas Lynley, Eighth Earl of Asherton juxtaposed with blue collar Barbara Havers provides tension and opportunity for demonstrating how each one's background affects how they view and interact with homicide suspects. The back story of each of these main characters also lends depth to each of these murder mysteries. I lost patience with the pouty Lady Helen, Lynley's true love, early on, but as she is relegated for the most part to scenes that have nothing to do with the plot I decided to tolerate her.

As to this particular installment, where do I begin? The story of miserable people in a variety of miserable situations is dragged out for more than 1000 pages. The ending was unlikely at best and illogical at worst. I did not like it.

But will I continue to read this series? Probably. Hopefully the next one will be better.

Aleshanee says

Ich kann verstehen, dass manche es langatmig finden, aber der Aufbau und der Entwurf der Charaktere und wie das alles zusammenspielt ist einfach großartig! Ich war von der ersten bis zur letzten Seite gefesselt! :D

Amanda Patterson says

Elizabeth George is an American who writes British crime novels. And she does it well. Her fans will be delighted to re-enter the world of aristocratic detective, Thomas Lynley, and his sidekicks, Sergeant Barbara Havers and Constable Winston Nkata.

I read *A Traitor to Memory* when it was released in hardcover last year. I enjoyed it as much the second time around – an acid test for a novel. George's plotting is immaculate, her characterisation superb. I wanted to know what happened to everyone in this book.

Gideon Davies was a child prodigy violinist. At the age of 28 he loses the ability to play. At the same time, a woman named Eugenie travels to London and is killed. How do these 2 incidents connect? The story of Gideon and his complicated life unravels through his first person account of his therapy sessions. George tells us the story simultaneously in third person as events surrounding these 2 events unfold.

George allows the twisted story of deceit and mystery to unfold in the glimpses she affords us into their lives. We also revisit the lives of the detectives.

Lynley tries to come to terms with his wife's pregnancy. Havers is still struggling with her lonely life and her aging mother's Alzheimer's Disease.

We see Winston Nkata as a real character for the first time in this novel. Lynley also has to investigate a superior officer and that officer's wife's involvement in a crime.

Elizabeth George weaves a wonderful tale; as carefully crafted as an elaborate quilt. She deserves the

accolades she's received, including the Anthony & Agatha Best First Novel in the USA for 'A Great Deliverance'.

Lisa says

Elizabeth George has written some terrific books in the Inspector Lynley series, but this isn't one of them. The book alternates between long, first-person passages by a protagonist named Gideon Davies, who is writing his thoughts and memories to his therapist, and third-person passages telling of the efforts of others, including Thomas Lynley, Barbara Havers, and Winston Nkata, to solve the murders of people related in some way to Gideon, as well telling of other events and people in Gideon's life. I appreciate the novelist's attempt to try a new format, but this one doesn't work. Good therapy is a boon to humankind, but no one should have to read the hour-by-hour account of someone else's therapy. The blow-by-blow, sometimes redundant accounts of Gideon's struggle to remember and analyze his life are much too long. He and most of the people related to his life are not worth spending so much time with. And by now, the reader of the series is more interested in the continuing characters than in the others around whom the mystery revolves, especially when (a) the non-continuing characters are not well-drawn--what we know about them revolves around the same shallow redundancies, (b) the telling of the mystery is chronologically mixed up without enough signposts to readers to help us orient ourselves--the date in a chapter heading isn't enough, and (c) the transitions where events are occurring more-or-less chronologically, but to different people, are difficult to follow. (Whatever happened to three centered asterisks to mark a minor, not-new-chapter-worthy transition?) To make things more difficult, my Nook edition would change font sizes between the first-person and third-person passages, distracting from the story. I kept waiting (for 700+ pages) for George to pull it all together and explain why the reader had to slog through this painful tale to reap the few gems in the muck, but she never did. The resolution of a 20-year-old murder that relates to the current investigations was one that I saw coming the moment it was described early in the book, but I thought surely the author would come up with something else less obvious than my glib foreshadowing--she didn't. The identity of the present-day murderer--which I didn't quite trust as truth after every red herring had been squeezed desert-dry--happened too fast after all the intricacies of the long tale of Gideon's life and the present-day investigation. The ending--in which two characters suddenly begin behaving in rather uncharacteristic fashion--is most unsatisfactory. I hope George returns to form in the next book in the series.

Lobstergirl says

An inexplicable book, filled with inexplicable characters, unforgivably long. I still don't know what happened on the last page, yet I'm grateful George didn't expend any more pages yapping on in explanation. 1,009 was quite enough. I think I know who the killer was, but I don't understand why a character who is not actually psychotic would destroy the Guarneri violin of the man she's trying to repair a relationship with and think this is acceptable. I don't get why everyone in a book published in 2001 seems to accept without question that Down's syndrome children are ghastly freaks, and that the proper response to them is shame and despair. (People: learn from George F. Will and Sarah Palin. Yes, we can learn even from Sarah Palin.) So many things about this book I don't understand, as well as why does this woman teach writing classes?

Tom says

This is a huge book at over 1000 pages. In small script, no less. I love Elizabeth George. I love her prose and her literacy. She respects her characters and the page, and it shows. But if you're going to go for a 1000 page book, it better be dang good. And it's a good, not great, chapter in her Lynley series. It could've been edited down by 250 pages and it would have been great. While I love anything she writes, the first half just didn't go anywhere for me. Or went there very slowly. Still, there's definite foreshadowing (intentional or unintentional by George) about the tragedy that's looming ahead in book #13. The second half of the book is definitely 4.5 stars. It's just unfortunate her editor didn't size down the first half.

Jamie Collins says

The writing is really good, as I've come to expect from George, but this is not one of my favorites in this series. The characterizations were as well done as usual, although I was a little disappointed that the lady in the opening chapter, a morbidly obese anorgasmic sex therapist, was not a main character. I didn't care much about the characters that *were* the focus of the mystery (I got thoroughly sick of Gideon's diary) and the denouement was less satisfying than usual. The author continues to "cheat" by letting you inside the mind of the killer without revealing his or her guilt.

We spend relatively little time with the personal lives of Lynley and Havers, but there's some nice stuff with Nkata. The author continues with her terribly cynical view of marriage, profiling more miserable couples.
