

The Vancouver Sun (British Columbia)

June 14, 2008 Saturday
Final Edition

A flair for the best of British

BYLINE: Rebecca Wigod, Vancouver Sun

SECTION: WEEKEND REVIEW; Rebecca Wigod; Pg. C8

LENGTH: 579 words

Crime writer **Elizabeth George** may have spiky hair, but her conversational style is calm, collected and intelligent, and she describes herself as "a structured person" who "takes a structured approach."

So it caught her off guard when a woman in the audience at last weekend's Studio One Book Club in CBC's Vancouver Broadcast Centre asked why a character in her 20th book, **Careless in Red** (HarperCollins), tells Detective Superintendent Thomas Lynley how to play darts.

Pointing out that every man in Britain knows how to play the pub game, the woman wondered whether George -- who lives on Whidbey Island in Washington state -- simply wanted to make sure her American readers understood the rules.

After considering this for a moment, George said, "Good catch." Then, addressing an invisible security guard, she commanded: "Escort this woman from the room!"

This good-humoured admission of fallibility aside, the author was serious and focused in her conversation with North by Northwest host Sheryl MacKay (the early-morning weekend radio show will broadcast it, starting June 21) and Vancouver magazine's John Burns.

She spoke of trying to make each of her books more complex and better crafted than the last, as has been the case with John le Carré's oeuvre.

And at one point she explained that *What Came Before He Shot Her* (2006) seems so dissimilar to her other novels because she used an omniscient point of view, rather than the third-person shifting point of view that normally lets her observe the world from deep within the various characters.

Omniscient, she said, is the most difficult point of view to do. "It's the godly voice of a narrator who knows all and sees all."

Burns, who reads widely and deeply in preparation for these sessions, has a puckish manner when drawing authors out. "You have an American accent," he said to George, "and yet the book has an extremely strong Cornish accent."

This is the central mystery of the mystery writer's work. She's not British, but her books are.

She told the studio crowd that she was a high-school English teacher in California when she decided, in 1983, that it was "put-up-or-shut-up time." Having written since the age of seven and been an admirer of all things British since the 1960s, when pop culture from the Beatles to Jean Shrimpton and Mary Quant impressed her to the core, she was determined to write a British crime novel. Working only in the summers at first, she debuted with *A Great Deliverance* (1988), which won France's Grand Prix de Littérature Policière. Since then, the BBC has filmed nearly all of her novels for television and the adaptations have been shown on PBS's *Mystery!* in North America.

"I go on location to do the research. If there's a place that's in a book, I've been in that place, with the exception of the crack house in *With No One as Witness*," George said.

However, she takes pains to "bury" her research because she hates scenes in books that scream, "Author doing research."

- - -