

(NONFICTION)

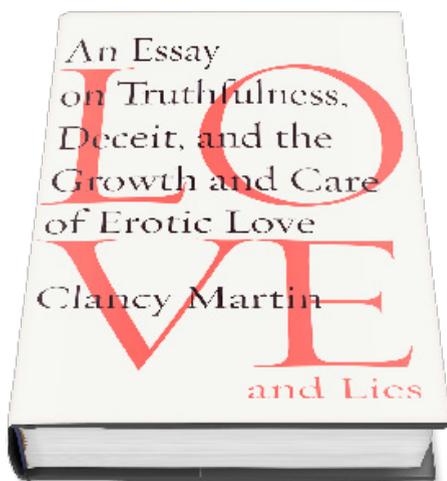
# BLURRED LINES

Reflections on honesty, restraint, and deceit in relationships

By Louisa Kamps

The provocative claim of Clancy Martin's *Love and Lies* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux) is that love is not only forged on whopping lies but requires truth-shading to thrive. We're taught to believe "love depends on absolute truthfulness"; yet Martin, a University of Missouri philosophy professor—while refreshingly clear-eyed about the harm he caused in his first two marriages by cheating amid "a flurry" of lies—encourages us to shake the oddly limiting, often destructive notion that intimacy requires complete transparency.

Drawing on psychology, biology, and his own life, Martin (now devoted to his third wife) illuminates common lovers' tricks: Fish and flowers falsify their body shapes to ensnare mates, and humans likewise BS shamelessly in the lead-up to sex. Martin, as a virgin wooing a beautiful teen named Lila, spun lies "of the most juvenile kind: I tried to seem smarter than I was...I wrote long erotic letters detailing imagined sexual scenarios." His one-sided, "narcissistic" deceptions worked. He landed Lila—but also uncynically bought into his own lie. Even better than the sex was how "the experience was fitting itself into a narrative of expectation and hopes: Lila would be



my girlfriend...we would be a couple: 'There they go, Clancy and Lila.'

A central pleasure of *Love and Lies*—an unsettling one at times—is realizing, I know that fantasy; I've been burned by that hoodwink; or, I told my man an equally selfish lie yesterday. To Martin, learning to lie in "benevolent" moderation is key to safeguarding intimacy. He trusts his wife, for example, in the quiet after sex, to spare him a daydream about the "astounding sex" she once had with another man, and that silence grants them new space to "create some truth together." "I think we try to tell each other the most important truths. We willingly take the risk of love," Martin writes. "And when I am with my wife, I do not feel alone." That vision of love is pleasing indeed. ●



Martin

(FICTION)

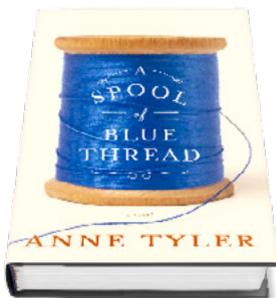
# HOUSE PROUD

Family turmoil as a generation drifts toward the end of the line

By Elyse Moody

John Updike wrote that in Anne Tyler's fiction, "heredity looms as a kind of destiny, and with the force of a miracle people persist in being themselves." That fascination with the flickery yet immutable dynamics of family abides in Tyler's twentieth novel, *A Spool of Blue Thread* (Knopf). Over the past half century, her fine-spun kitchen-table and road-trip dramas set in and around Baltimore have earned Tyler a Pulitzer Prize and comparisons to Southern greats such as Eudora Welty. Her indelible portrait of the Whitshank household deserves the same plaudits.

Retired social worker Abby Whitshank



considers hers "one of those enviable families that radiate clannishness and togetherness and just...specialness." Since the 1950s, she and her contractor husband, Red, have lived and raised their four children in the grand house Red's fortune-seeking father, Junior, custom-built—originally for the well-to-do Brills, before he fell in love with it—on stately Bouton Road. Given this upwardly mobile bunch's standard for "quality," Abby is constantly "falling all over herself to set her family to rights." (That often owes to their son Denny, who unfailingly courts trouble.) But a problem has sprung up that can't be glossed over: In part because of her worrisome "blank spells," Abby and Red can no longer keep up the house. This symbolizes the end of an era, for just as Red has painstakingly maintained its wide, varnished front steps, Abby has tended to the family's sundry dark secrets.

Exploring this dichotomy—the imperfections that reside within a polished exterior—is Tyler's specialty, and her latest generation-spanning work accomplishes just that, masterfully and monumentally. ●



Tyler

(NONFICTION)

# THE ELLE'S LETTRES 2015 READERS' PRIZE

15 ELLE readers choose their favorite among three promising new books—this month, globe-trotting, culture-crossing memoirs

1 **THE BIRD MARKET OF PARIS**  
NIKKI MOUSTAKI  
(HENRY HOLT)



Moustaki's Greek grandfather instilled in her a love of exotic birds: She collects them and (besides being a poet of note) has written extensively about their care and training. But in this emotionally resonant account, a series of lonely academic and urban sojourns alternates with bouts of alcoholism that are only gradually reined in—not least by way of a fantastically eventful visit to Paris to seek out the bird market her *Poppy* had magically described to her.

2 **LEAVING BEFORE THE RAINS COME**  
ALEXANDRA FULLER  
(PENGUIN PRESS)



Fuller (*Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight*) reminds us what a vivid, energetic writer she is with this installment of her life story. But the material she has to work with—middle age, deepening debt, a failing marriage—are depressingly familiar and familiarly depressing. Things pick up when she visits her aged parents in Zambia, and thereby hangs her tale, suspended between the cares and troubles of raising her children in Wyoming and the hallucinatory beauty of her beloved southern Africa.

3 **RUSSIAN TATTOO**  
ELENA GOROKHOVA  
(SIMON & SCHUSTER)



Another evocative memoirist building on a fine previous volume (*A Mountain of Crumbs*, about growing up in the Brezhnev-era ennui of Leningrad), Gorokhova too has to work a little harder in this outing to fascinate us with the altogether more familiar saga of becoming American. She navigates an emotionally blighted first marriage, finds her sea legs as a college language teacher and then writer, allows her redoubtable mother to come and move in—and imbues this narrative of the gathering momentum of her assimilation with admirable esprit.

Martin: © Greg Martin; Tyler: Michael Llonstar