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Christina R. Martin

Josephine Tey: Scottish Detective Novelist

The Scottish writer best known as Josephine Tey had a successful and influential career as a playwright and novelist over more than twenty years. Her reputation at her death, in 1952, was high.

Film versions of her novels were made, adaptations have appeared on television, and her eight detective novels have been re-issued. The American critic, Sandra Roy, has recently studied her work, and claims that *Kif*¹ “as a psychological novel fits neatly into the mainstream of literature between Joseph Conrad and Somerset Maugham.”² Tey is one of the group of writers featured in *Ten Women of Mystery*.³ Her position is thus clearly established.

Despite this substantial contribution to literature her writing seems virtually unknown to the generation which has grown up in Scotland in the forty years since her death. Her name does not appear in recent reviews of Scottish literature by Alan Bold⁴ and Trevor Royle.⁵ She is ignored in the respected

¹Josephine Tey, *Kif, An Unvarnished History* (London, 1929). Tey's other novels include *The Man in the Queue* (London, 1929), first published under the pseudonym of Gordon Daviot; *A Shilling for Candles* (London, 1936); *Miss Pym Disposes* (London, 1946); *The Franchise Affair* (London, 1948); *Brat Farrar* (London, 1949); *To Love and Be Wise* (London, 1950); *The Daughter of Time* (London, 1951); and *The Singing Sands* (London, 1952).

²Sandra Roy, *Josephine Tey* (Boston, 1980), p. 37.

³Nancy E. Talburt, “Josephine Tey,” in *Ten Women of Mystery*, ed. F. Bargainnier (Bowling Green, OH, 1981).

⁴Alan Bold, *Modern Scottish Literature* (London, 1983).

History of Scottish Literature,⁶ despite the fact that she qualifies for inclusion under several headings in the volume devoted to the twentieth century; the most surprising omission is from the chapter by Joy Hendry specifically devoted to women writers, which offers no fewer than fifty names as worthy of interest. Hendry makes it clear, however, that Scottish women writers suffer from a double disadvantage by being women as well as Scottish, and it is typical that major talents have been ignored. I hope to show that Tey is fully entitled to a recognized place as a writer in the Scottish tradition.

Born in Inverness in 1896 with the name of Elizabeth Mackintosh, she attended the Royal Academy there, followed by Anstey Physical Training College at Birmingham. After teaching near Liverpool and in Tunbridge Wells, she returned home in 1926 to act as housekeeper for her widowed father, as would be expected of a daughter of that time. She then commenced writing for publication, and continued until her father's death in 1950 was followed by her own illness and subsequent demise in 1952.

She herself valued most the plays she wrote under the name of Gordon Daviot.⁷ *Richard of Bordeaux* was produced in 1933 at the New Theatre, London, directed by and starring the young John Gielgud, who felt that in this very successful production he "won his spurs."⁸ It was followed in 1934 by *The Laughing Woman* and *Queen of Scots* at the same theater. These were less successful than the first play, partly, Gielgud suggests, because she resisted changes to her text in production. At this point she was sued for plagiarism by a biographer of Richard II, who felt that his ideas about the character had been copied, and her publishers settled out of court. Her fourth major play, *The Stars Bow Down*, about Joseph of the Old Testament, unfortunately opened in 1935 shortly before another play on a biblical theme, *The Boy David*, by J. M. Barrie. The coincidence provoked criticism and she decided to confine her play-writing for a time to short pieces for performance outside London.

As well as *Kif*, 1929 saw a mystery novel, *The Man in the Queue*, which introduced her favorite detective, Alan Grant. It was followed by *A Shilling for Candles*, which formed the basis of the 1937 film *Young and Innocent*, directed innovatively by Alfred Hitchcock. Also in 1937 her one historical biography,

⁵Trevor Royle, *Macmillan Companion to Scottish Literature* (London, 1984).

⁶C. Cairns, ed., *History of Scottish Literature* (Aberdeen, 1987), Vol. 4.

⁷Gordon Daviot, *Richard of Bordeaux* (London, 1933). Her other plays include *The Laughing Woman* (London, 1934); *Queen of Scots* (London, 1934); *The Stars Bow Down* (London, 1939); and *Leith Sands and Other Short Plays* (London, 1946).

⁸John Gielgud, in foreword to *Plays by Gordon Daviot* (London, 1953), p. xi.

Claverhouse,⁹ appeared, received respectful scholarly attention, and was widely read. After several years of silence, during which, according to Gielgud, she seemed “depressed and unhappy,”¹⁰ she returned to the detective-story form with the unusual and successful *Miss Pym Disposes*. *The Franchise Affair*, published in 1948, was made into a popular film of the same name in 1953. *Brat Farrar* (1949) was well received, as was *To Love And Be Wise* in the following year. In 1951 *The Daughter of Time*, now regarded as a classic of the detective-fiction genre, was published. It used the form inventively and controversially to launch a serious attack on contemporary research methods in history. Her final works were published shortly after her death. They included a collection of the one-act plays she had been continuing to write, a fictionalized biography of the real-life pirate Henry Morgan, called *The Privateer*,¹¹ and her final detective novel, *The Singing Sands*.

Throughout her varied work, Tey returned frequently to subjects and ideas that she found of enduring interest. They include history and our attitude to it, often involving the influence of the church. Striking, too, is her creation of independent women characters, through whom she expressed ideas much in advance of the time in which she was writing. Here I will consider these in turn.

Tey’s interest in historical themes is marked and not in itself surprising in a writer who admitted having difficulty inventing original plots. She did not, however, merely search out useful pegs on which to hang dramatic action. Her fascination is with individual characters rather than events, and her inclination to attempt the rehabilitation of accepted villains. Her most admired play, with which she first established a claim to be a major talent, was her account of the life of the unfortunate Richard II, entitled *Richard of Bordeaux*. To a London audience which had recently seen the leading actor, John Gielgud, successfully starring in the Shakespearean role of that name, her interpretation was relevant and interesting, with the eponymous hero blessed with a sense of humor and appealing gallantry in adversity. In *Queen of Scots*, another significant historical figure is examined, but in this case one who has usually been viewed sympathetically, and Tey’s favorite technique of revaluation of the villainous is inappropriate. Gielgud suggests she lacked understanding of Mary’s character, either as intriguer or seductress.¹² Many of her one-act plays are based on historical events. For example *Leith Sands* deals with public unrest, emanating from Scottish ill-feeling against the English shortly before the Union of 1707.

⁹Gordon Daviot, *Claverhouse* (London, 1937).

¹⁰Gielgud, p. x.

¹¹Gordon Daviot, *The Privateer* (London, 1952)

¹²Gielgud, p. xi.

Once more her aim is to suggest that the accepted villain of the piece, the condemned sea-captain, is innocent. *The Franchise Affair* is a reworking in a modern setting of an eighteenth-century trial in which an eccentric pair of women find the onus on themselves to prove their innocence of a crime the press and public assume they have committed. Again, truth is not what the public consciousness presumes it to be.

More unusual than her interest in historical themes and vilified characters is innovative interest in, and skepticism about, the very nature of our perception of the past. She wrote two other significant historical works, different from each other but both demonstrating that she considered our perception of well-known figures and events of the past to be important and yet often seriously flawed.

In *The Daughter of Time* she gives the detective-story form an unusual and revealing twist. Alan Grant is lying immobile on his back in hospital and in need of mental occupation. His attention is drawn to the character of Richard III, popularly supposed to have murdered his nephews, usually known as “the princes in the Tower.” Using his normal approach to investigating crime, Grant rewrites the evidence against Richard and finds most of it to be hearsay, and inadmissible in court. We are told that “Grant had dealt too long with the human intelligence to accept as truth someone’s report of what that someone remembered. . . . He was disgusted” (p. 72). What evidence is allowable produces a strong case for regarding Richard as a good man incapable of murder.

It is in this book that Tey spells out her proposition that what we regard as historical “truth” is often based on romantic images, as in the case of the martyred Covenanters, or flawed evidence, as in the case of Richard III. She calls such misconceptions “Tonypandy” in remembrance of Welsh “victims” who were no such thing (p. 129), and points out that words are chosen carefully to create the desired images, “dragoons,” for example, being an emotive word to describe a legitimate peace-keeping force (p. 132).

The title of the book comes from an old proverb “Truth is the daughter of time” and illustrates her conviction that truth is both important and attainable and that, as Grant says “The truth of anything at all doesn’t lie in someone’s account of it. It lies in all the small facts of the time” (p. 95). She contends that those who examine these small facts are “research workers” (p. 161), and are like detectives, while historians are involved in perpetuating myths in order to preserve the status quo and thus existing power systems. His colleague’s reaction to hearing that Grant has proved the history books wrong is to point out “I expect there’s a law against that. M.I.5 won’t like it. Treason or lèse-majesté or something like that it might turn out to be” (p. 177). Individuals, too, are resistant to having their received ideas overthrown: “. . . there was some vague inward opposition to, and resentment of, a revisal of accepted fact” (p. 159). Grant’s immobility is itself a symbol of the paralysis of the mind of the public. He remarks when he is at last able to sit up, “How small and queer

the world looks right way up" (p. 151). Like the world, neither people nor events are what they are assumed to be. This study of Richard III is an essay in deconstruction, a textbook study of how misrepresentation occurs and is perpetuated.

The other serious historical work which demands attention is the biography *Claverhouse*, which also attempts to vindicate an unpopular leader. A clearer understanding of the facts will illuminate the situation. John Graham of Claverhouse, Viscount Dundee, known as Bonnie Dundee, was a Royalist who supported James II against the heroes of the Scottish reformed church, the Covenanters. The book was agreed to be scholarly and readable, despite clashing with received opinion; moreover it *was* read, and widely. Roy, the only critic to discuss her work in full, finds the choice of central character completely mystifying. She claims he is so "obscure, even to professional historians,"¹³ that the book simply cannot be of interest or significance. Certainly the twists of church history in the seventeenth century are such that even well-informed Scottish readers have to think themselves back into the period. Roy, interested primarily in the detective fiction, and not a Scot, finds the subject impenetrable as well as uninteresting and unappealing.

Looking at her work from the perspective of its place in the Scottish literary tradition, however, we can see that Tey's themes and ideas are ones which have haunted its writers for centuries, and in dealing with Claverhouse she is acknowledging his centrality to Scottish history and consciousness. G. Gregory Smith claimed that "in no other country does the past grip the present as it does in Scotland," and continues that for the Scottish writer "it is a matter of instinct. . . to explain himself historically."¹⁴ Many modern Scottish novelists have dived, seemingly unexpectedly, into serious historical writing—John Buchan in his *Montrose*,¹⁵ is one example—quite apart from the very large number, such as Nigel Tranter and Dorothy Dunnett, who have made it their métier in the present day. Most striking is one who can be seen as Tey's direct predecessor in the twentieth century, Catherine Carswell. After a career as an influential novelist, journalist and critic, she published a biography of Robert Burns,¹⁶ which caused a storm of controversy by overturning the accepted sentimental view of his character. Similarly, Tey turned aside from a career in a popular form to examine a character seminal and vital to Scottish consciousness.

¹³Roy, p. 39.

¹⁴G. Gregory Smith, *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence* (London, 1919), p. 56.

¹⁵John Buchan, *Montrose* (London, 1928).

¹⁶Catherine Carswell, *The Life of Robert Burns* (London, 1930).

To Roy, Tey's turning to the examination of the character of Claverhouse is an inexplicable aberration which can only be dismissed as of no interest and relevance to her other work. Not only, however, is it natural—almost compulsory—for Scottish writers to examine their country's history, but the conflict selected by Tey for attention is the clash between Royalists and Covenanters which was pivotal in the development of the nation. It is symbolic, too, of the traditions and attractions of romantic adventure and ancient loyalties in competition with those of caution, pragmatism and sober calculation. The outcome of the final battle, at Killiecrankie in 1689, was the doubtful one that victory went to the Royalists who were, however, unable to capitalize on it because of the death of their leader Claverhouse. The clash of ideologies represented by this battle has never been satisfactorily resolved in the national consciousness and the resulting pressures make their presence felt, if often unacknowledged, under the surface of twentieth-century literature, even when it appears superficially confident and unruffled. This conflict is memorably and succinctly described by James Kennaway when one of his characters declares that "Under the cake lies Bonny Dundee."¹⁷

Not only in her choice of historical themes and central character is Tey firmly in the Scottish tradition, but also in her attitude to and treatment of them. Kenneth Simpson, discussing Tobias Smollett, tells us that "habitually Smollett's rationalist sense manifests itself in the investigation of the reality beneath appearances" and points to his "skepticism regarding human nature and achievement."¹⁸ This sounds very close to the sharp, factual approach Tey brings to her historical characters. The same conviction comes into play in her detective fiction, where such a commodity as truth is understood to exist, especially regarding the psychological nature of individual human beings. Careful examining of facts in an unbiased manner will reveal this truth.

Closely linked with Tey's interest in history is her knowledge and foregrounding of the institutional church and its influence on people's lives. She grasps the opportunity in her first detective novel to make her position clear. In *The Man in the Queue*, a detective is required in the course of duty to attend a church social evening. It is an excruciating experience among unpleasant people in a hideous environment. In the same book Grant attends church, endures "mournful Highland 'praise,'" (p. 167), and sits through "a sermon in which Mr. Logan proved to his own and his congregation's satisfaction that the King of kings had no use for the foxtrot." As we have already seen, her historical work goes further to condemn the Covenanters, representatives of the reformed church, as intolerant and in fact vicious. In *The Franchise Affair*, her detective Robert Blair's casual list of unsavory

¹⁷James Kennaway, *Household Ghosts* (Harlow, 1961), p. 174.

¹⁸Kenneth Simpson, *The Protean Scot* (Aberdeen, 1988), p. 28.

characters—"Calvin or Caliban, he did not care" (p. 12)—makes even clearer Tey's response to the Scottish church. In *Brat Farrar* the Church of England appears in the form of a more sympathetically treated vicar and his wife who escape such bitter condemnation, but when appealed to for help, they are ineffectual. The church and its representatives are at the very best irrelevant.

This interest in, and violent condemnation of, the church is almost universal in serious Scottish writers, to the extent that David Craig calls it "almost a test of sanity."¹⁹ Calvinism is clearly something to be escaped from. This condemnation is a common factor in the four authors (Kennaway, Alan Sharp, George Friel and Robin Jenkins) picked out as significant by Glenda Norquay in her essay on them.²⁰ To them, religious influences have been important in shaping the Scottish psyche in ways that characterize it and it is an understatement to say the result is not advantageous. Here, too, Tey fits strongly into the Scottish tradition in general and into the thinking of her contemporary compatriots.

Turning now to Tey's depiction of women, it is evident from reading her work in the order in which it was published that she was developing striking female characters and radical ideas about their possible roles. References to the texts will demonstrate this. In *The Man in the Queue*, Miss Dinmont is the most clear-thinking character, "with her logic and her self-containedness" (p. 217), and her conversation surprises Grant, who notices in particular one "unfeminine pronouncement" (p. 191). This is "I'd rather be a brute than a fool." Erica in *A Shilling for Candles* is similarly admired for her lack of conventional femininity, and it is effectively she who solves the mystery. In *Miss Pym Disposes* we find a setting where not only are women positive and independent, they are happily occupying their own world in which men hardly impinge. Attachments between them are strong and form the impetus of the action, in interesting counterpoint to the exclusively male worlds of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*²¹ and *The Thirty-Nine Steps*.²² That fact is emphasized throughout. When a minor male character does appear he is purely an appendage to his much more memorable wife, and Miss Pym is "relieved to see that the man was the mate she would have chosen for such a woman" (p. 68). A famous actor is treated with indifference by the college as a whole and with contempt by the significantly named Miss Lux, whom he courts. In the "demonstration" of work at the graduation ceremony the highlight is a

¹⁹David Craig, *Scottish Literature and the Scottish People* (London, 1961), p. 63.

²⁰Glenda Norquay, "Four Novelists of the 1950's and 1960's," in *History of Scottish Literature*, Vol. 4, (Aberdeen, 1987), p. 261.

²¹Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (London, 1886).

²²John Buchan, *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (London, 1915).

dance in which a woman asserts her authority over an imaginary humble suitor. Miss Pym herself is determined to maintain her independent life, despite being conscious of loneliness. In *Brat Farrar*, the main female character, Aunt Bee, has taken on a more conventional female role in looking after the orphaned family. As a “good” substitute mother, she is however a highly unusual figure which works against the traditional “wicked” stereotype. She, too, finally departs for a satisfactory career abroad. In *The Franchise Affair* the same message is stated more clearly and developed further. (“Franchise” of course means freedom and is especially associated with women’s freedom to vote.) That this book is particularly concerned with exploring the role of women is shown not only by the title, but by the attention drawn to minor female characters, like the first woman clerk in the office: “A whole revolution Miss Tuff was in her single, gawky, thin, earnest person” (p. 6). A more traditional woman is also shown: “Linda Bennett led a life of recipes, film stars, godchildren, and church bazaars and found it perfect” (p. 38). The key characters are Marion Sharpe and her mother who are at first depicted as eccentric with the suggestion that they might even be witches. They emerge, however, as independent and attractive characters, happy to contravene received ideas of suitable attitudes and behavior. Marion declares, “I loathe domesticity” (p. 35), and like Lucy Pym is determined to stay single. In the final pages of the book she turns down the solicitor Robert Blair’s proposal of marriage in a clear statement, “I am not a marrying woman” (p. 250). Grant’s actress friend Marta Hallard expresses an independent philosophy, as indeed does Grant himself who finds that his work absorbs his entire emotional energy. It is difficult not to conclude that through these sympathetic characters Tey is setting out her own consistent views and position.

Once again, we can see that Tey is developing the ideas of her predecessors, such as Catherine Carswell, who stressed the need for women to develop roles for themselves and break away from their traditional interests, in *Open the Door*²³ and *The Camomile*.²⁴ She has affinities, too, with Naomi Mitchison who used similar themes in *The Bull Calves*.²⁵ Her unusual setting of a novel in the female world of a girls’ college was used again to great effect by Muriel Spark in the much-acclaimed *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*.²⁶

Not only, however, does Tey’s work foreground unusual and independent female characters, but her very use of the genre of detective novel itself can be seen as working strongly against its own entrenched values and assumptions.

²³Catherine Carswell, *Open The Door* (London, 1920).

²⁴Catherine Carswell, *The Camomile* (London, 1930).

²⁵Naomi Mitchison, *The Bull Calves* (London, 1947).

²⁶Muriel Spark, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (London, 1961).

The genre is perceived as supportive of authority in all its forms and as creating in its detectives deities of awesome perspicacity who clearly distinguish between good and evil and infallibly restore order in the final pages.

Tey's novels are very different. *Miss Pym Disposes* occupies a pivotal position in her career, appearing ten years after its predecessor *A Shilling for Candles*, and, of course, after the social upheaval of the Second World War. It marks the beginning of her second phase of literary activity and her first use of a detective other than Grant. Lucy Pym is far from a god-like figure who "disposes," but is vacillating, quite unable to identify the murderer and cannot even accuse her when she finally accidentally reveals herself. Authority, too, in the figure of the head-teacher, Henrietta, is criticized, seen to be unreasonable, selfish and vulnerable, and bears a load of guilt for the crime. The atonement for the crime voluntarily suggested for herself by a guiltless, but innocently implicated, character is that of being banished to work for her father in a market town in a Celtic country, which sentence is equated with that of death. (This sentence is of course the one that was imposed on Tey herself in her own life.) Order is not restored. The real criminal does not suffer. Seen in this way, the whole book emerges as a grim ironization of the form and a savage attack on the nature of patriarchal society itself.

Another of the most striking features of Tey's writing is the constant recurrence of the sense of her characters having two identities. She herself in fact adopted two distinct identities as an author, one Scottish and male, and the other English and female, with a perhaps characteristically ambiguous third (F. Craigie Howe) which she used briefly for the light comedy, *Cornelia*, produced in 1946 at the Citizens' Theatre, Glasgow. Interestingly, the Craigie Howe *Cornelia* was followed the next week by a production of *The Little Dry Thorn*, under the name Gordon Daviot. No attempt seems to have been made to inform the audience of the oneness of the two playwrights.²⁷ There are many cases in her books of mistaken or dual identities and characters painfully conscious that they suffer from a split personality which seems irreconcilable. In *Brat Farrar*, the hero impersonates one of a pair of twins for most of the duration of the novel, and this impersonation eventually seems morally correct when we discover that one twin has in fact murdered the other. In *To Love and Be Wise* the mystery is solved when it is discovered that the character who has disappeared finds it convenient to dress, for professional reasons, for six months of the year as a man and six months as a woman, and actually is a woman with the ambivalent name of Leslie Searle. Miss Pym is tortured by indecision and the sense of having two selves pulled in different directions. "She could never get away from that other half of herself . . . which stood watching her with critical eyes" (p. 191). Alan Grant is a Scot but has an English accent, and he,

²⁷This information was kindly given to me by the historian of the Citizens' Theatre, Dr. Anthony Paterson.

most of all, has an internal voice which argues with his outer, rational, professional self, creates problems and has to be controlled, but, disconcertingly, is always, in the end, proved correct.

This sense of having two identities is perhaps the feature most individual to, and deeply embedded in, Scottish writing. Simpson tells us that “from Scott to James Kennaway the way of Scottish literature is strewn with split and multiple personalities.”²⁸ The need to create two identities is often seen as having its origin in the need to escape from a rigid religious framework. James Hogg’s *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*,²⁹ and Stevenson’s *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, are thought of as seminal examples, used and built on by Scottish authors, including, in detective writing, Conan Doyle. Spark’s character, Jean Brodie, is quite explicitly a descendant of Deacon Brodie, on whom Stevenson based his portrait of Dr. Jekyll.

The phrase “The Caledonian antizysygy” was coined by Gregory Smith to define the problem of conflicting identities.³⁰ It was immediately adopted and used extensively by poets of the time, especially Hugh MacDiarmid. In a recent article W. N. Herbert admitted that the now well-worn concept could be seen as a “little learned joke” or “catchphrase.”³¹ Herbert goes on, however, to show that Smith was “in pursuit of more complex issues” and had perceived and identified “twin poles” of the native literary imagination. These are, on the one hand, a delight in fantasy and extravagance, and, on the other, an impulse to build a realistic picture from the accumulation of detail. His theory linked with this the struggle to find a coherent national voice which could take account of the traditions of the Gaelic and Scots languages as well as accommodating the powerful force of English language and culture. Smith’s book itself, like much Scottish literature, was, according to Herbert, “the Scottish antithesis to the English thesis” (p. 27).

This concept of division is discussed by Bold in his section “Stevenson and Schism.”³² He describes three “perennially relevant Scottish topics” all three of which are found in Tey’s work. The first topic, or opposition, is the divided personality. Tey constantly presents us with internal divisions, in major and minor characters. They are most notable in the key figure of Grant, whose own mental conflicts threaten his health, and lead eventually to a convincingly por-

²⁸Simpson, p. 250.

²⁹James Hogg, *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (London, 1824).

³⁰G. Gregory Smith, p. 4

³¹W. N. Herbert, “The Significance of Gregory Smith,” in *Gairfish: Discovery*, ed. W. N. Herbert and R. Price, (1991), p. 22.

³²Bold, p. 103.

trayed nervous breakdown. Secondly, Bold points to the tendency to look back to a happy, rural childhood. Again, Grant offers a prime example, wistfully recalling freedom on Speyside. The third opposition is conflict between father and son, or between authority and subversion. This is clearly seen in Grant's relationship with his superior, who, in *The Man in the Queue* finds his doubts and intuitions threatening. His instructions are, "You keep a rein on your imagination, Grant" (p. 205).

Also an indigenously Scottish characteristic, according to Bold, in the same passage, is the pretense that there is no moral middle ground, an idea linked with the Calvinist doctrine of the predestination of souls. Tey fits in there too. Her evil characters were born evil and have no chance of escaping their destiny. Betty Kane in *The Franchise Affair* and Simon Ashby in *Brat Farrar* are beyond redemption, their wickedness as inherent as the color of their eyes.

The need to escape from such contradictions often finds resolution in a journey to wild country. Examples are *Kidnapped*,³³ and John Buchan's *The Thirty-Nine Steps*. Tey uses similar journeys, notably in *The Man in the Queue*, where Grant chases the suspected criminal to the far north and rescues him from drowning in a loch.

The oppositions and contradictions Bold points to are apparent in all of Tey's books. The solving of a mystery is far from an intellectual quest based on the discovery of hard evidence by an unmoved detective, as the genre of the time demanded. Instead, an emotional struggle is set up within the detective, involving a reluctant clash with authority and necessitating painful discernment between good and evil, right and wrong, the true and the false. Roy draws attention to "Tey's development of unique detectives whose self-torturing consciences plague them into moral judgements."³⁴ In the first pages of *Miss Pym Disposes*, Lucy agonizes over the possible social consequences of minor details of her own behavior. It is pointed out that "Lucy's mind always worked like that. It wasn't sufficient for it to visualise one horror: it must visualise the opposite one too" (p. 12). Lucy feels incapable of acting as the narrative proceeds, tortured by the opposing horrors of revealing or failing to reveal the evidence she has discovered.

We have in this book an arresting physical symbol of the "divided self":

They overtook a small, scuttling figure clutching under one arm the head and thorax of a skeleton and the pelvis and legs under the other arm . . . 'I really don't know if I can remember how to hook up his middle' (p. 16).

In its humorous grotesqueness this image is distinctively Scottish, recalling the physicality of straggles of mind and body together of Burns's "Tam o'

³³ Robert Louis Stevenson, *Kidnapped* (London, 1886).

³⁴ Roy, p. 5.

Shanter.” In its division and the suggested impossibility of restoring it to wholeness, it is even more so. We are told that the “divided self” is “. . . characteristic of Scottish culture over the past two centuries to an extent that distinguishes the Scottish among the cultures of Europe; and they derive from, and express, the ongoing crisis of identity.”³⁵ Tey’s use of divided characters demonstrates how strongly her work fits into the Scottish tradition.

It seems undeniable that Tey’s well-established interests, including the interest in divided character, were brought to their sharpest focus in her final detective novel. She might well have developed them further in the theater and indeed she never abandoned hope of returning to her career as a dramatist. Her father’s death in 1950 might have been a suitable time for this. She was, however, mortally ill herself. It was in these circumstances that she wrote *The Singing Sands*, and in it her right to a place in Scottish literature is definitively established. Typically, details of the mystery and its solution are not important, but its effect on the life of the detective is. Suffering from a breakdown and feeling that his other self has finally taken control, Grant takes an agonizingly claustrophobic train journey to his cousin Laura’s home in the Highlands. He is involved in the discovery of a dead body on the train, and through his commitment to the case finds the solution to his problems and spiritual renewal. Familiar themes recur and are discussed with greater urgency. History, especially that of Scotland, is examined closely, and our perceptions questioned. The Church, both Roman Catholic and Reformed, is looked at too, with the same conclusions drawn. Grant is told firmly, “The Presbyterians are much nastier customers to be up against” (p. 78).

The foregrounding of women and the roles available to them recurs. Laura is a contented wife and mother and there is a strong suggestion that traditional family life might offer comfort now for Grant in his extremity, and by association, for Tey herself. Grant views the happy family wistfully and suppresses his resentment at its exclusivity. The familiar self-sufficient woman makes a brief appearance, confident, forthright and capable, discussing airplanes on an equal basis with a surprised pilot. Grant contemplates the possibility of marriage but is diverted by his overwhelming interest in the identity and character of the man who has been murdered. With his returning health and the satisfaction of solving the mystery, his old commitment to independence reasserts itself. The last lines of the book are

What odd notions occurred to one on holiday. He was going to resign, and be a sheep farmer or something, and get married. What an extraordinary idea. What a most extraordinary idea. (p. 202)

The antizysygy reappears in its three classic forms. The inner voice asserts its predominance, adopting various tones but pushing Grant towards discovery

³⁵Simpson, p. 251.

of the truth and recognition of its unreasonable importance to him. In the final pages he himself has lost his head in his anger, while the voice inside is reminding him of police procedure and the need for proof of what, deep down, he knows to be true. "On what evidence?" said his inner voice, nasty-polite" (p. 109). We certainly have a nostalgic, and moving, looking back to childhood days on Speyside, with "hill mornings smelling of pine needles and endless twilights sweet with the scent of clover" (p. 19). Grant is acutely conscious of his superior's lack of understanding of his illness and clashes with his authority; Bryce is "antagonist rather than colleague" (p. 51). Finally, there is certainly no moral middle-ground. The murderer is vain and ruthless, with no redeeming features, and we are not allowed to sympathize with his motives or his fate. The victim is heroic and Grant feels not the professional satisfaction of having solved a crime, but the personal one of restoring reputation where it is deserved, recognizing that "He had paid back the debt he owed that dead boy" (p. 201).

The symbolic journey of escape to the Highlands assumes higher proportions and takes up almost the whole of the book. Merely journeying to Speyside is inadequate and it is not until Grant reaches the farthest shore of the most westerly part of the Hebrides and contemplates the Atlantic that he begins to feel he may recover. Roy points out the importance of the setting, saying that *The Singing Sands*, of all Tey's works, ". . . unquestionably has the most significant and colourful atmosphere,"³⁶ but she is clearly unaware that this is a classic journey typical of Scottish literature. Significantly the theme has recently been picked up in *Espedair Street*, where the central character longs to "be borne north, to where the white sands sing."³⁷

An interest in what in fact constitutes Scottishness runs almost casually through Josephine Tey's books. *The Singing Sands* attacks the question most forcefully, introducing a professional Scottish patriot who is not only unpleasant but fraudulent and finally criminal. She also discusses the issue of language, so important to the literary Scot, for the first time. Gaelic is spoken, with Grant remembering a few words from his childhood, but it is impractical for official or general use and not considered suitable for the hotel tannoy. Grant's nephew has picked up some Scots in the village but is to be sent to school in England where it will quickly disappear. Grant is half regretful, half relieved. We are told explicitly as well as implicitly that Scottishness must always be diluted: "As an ingredient it was admirable; neat it was as abominable as ammonia" (p. 186).

In returning to Scottish themes for her last work, Tey followed in the steps of other seemingly Anglicized twentieth-century writers. One is J. M. Barrie,

³⁶Roy, p. 161.

³⁷Ian Banks, *Espedair Street* (London, 1987), p. 1.

whose *Farewell, Miss Julie Logan* is imbued with a sense of devastating personal and national loss. Like Tey with *The Singing Sands*, John Buchan wrote his final book *Sick Heart River*, in the knowledge of approaching death. It too was published posthumously and involves an agonizing journey in search of lost Scottish roots, becoming a spiritual quest.

Josephine Tey's work fits into the mainstream of literature in English. Roy and Talburt, who have recently praised her work, naturally did not approach it as *Scottish* literature. In fact they perceived her true nationality only vaguely. As Tey wrote largely in the twentieth century genre of the detective novel in English supposedly purely for the purposes of entertaining a wide international audience, it is doubtful whether even she herself thought of her work as specifically Scottish. But in the light of the Scottish literary tradition she comes clearly into focus as a writer whose distinctive voice used its most basic elements to make a highly individual contribution to its development for a new era.

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