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The Daughter of Time

Josephine Tey, adapted by M Kilburg Reedy

Steven M Levy for Charing Cross Theatre Productions Ltd

Charing Cross Theatre

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Josephine Tey was the pseudonym under which Elizabeth MacKintosh wrote detective stories, many featuring Scotland Yard's Inspector Alan Grant. In *The Daughter of Time*, which was the last of them, it is 1950, and Grant is in hospital with a broken leg. He is bored, and to ease the tedium, his glamorous stage star friend Marta Hallard brings him a selection of portraits to exercise the skill he professes at judging people from their faces. One of them is of Richard III.

Most people see Richard as a monster: the malevolent, misshapen monarch depicted by Shakespeare, but not Grant. For him, this isn't the face of a man who would order the death of his young nephews or commit the other crimes laid on his deformed shoulders, if indeed he had a deformity. What is the truth about the princes in the Tower? Was Richard really a villain?

Grant takes this on as a centuries-old cold case and turns his private ward into an incident room. With the help of his Scotland Yard assistant, Sergeant Williams, and Brent Carradine, a young American researcher recruited by Marta (and even input from his nurses), he assembles evidence from the past.

In a parallel story strand, Marta seeks to awaken Grant to the feelings she is sure he has for her by making him jealous. She and fellow actor Nigel Templeton pretend to be lovers and getting married.

The Daughter of Time is a play in which little happens, though it is busy contriving ways to feed in information found in books and archives to support both prosecution and defence; Templeton's playing Richard at the Old Vic gives us Shakespeare's villain version.

In unearthing the detail of medieval history, finding truth, discarding lies and propaganda, investigation starts with a blank canvas, and that is a problem for how much will the audience know already, especially one of London's theatregoers who may know their history and their Shakespeare and seen television news and documentaries prompted by the discovery of Richard's alleged remains in Leicester? Reminders of the facts and exposing fiction are fine, and it is right not to assume pre-knowledge, but it is almost the interval before unfamiliar material turns up. The action, meanwhile, lies in the constant coming and going of visitors and nurses, with a swish of red curtain bringing Old Vic Richard and eavesdropping on the thespians plotting over lunch at the Ivy.

Set in spring 1950, Jenny Eastop's production sometimes feels like a play from the same date. Rachel Pickup's Marta is a stereotype gushing star before we see the real person underneath. Janna Fox's Nurse Darroll, fixated on Richard I not Richard III, is comic working class, Hafsa Abbasi's Nurse Ingham a funny foreigner. When one exits, another always enters, though it dawns this is to mark a time lapse and a new scene rather than being deliberately funny. Sanya Adegbola's police sergeant is a good solid copper and Noah Huntley puts a discreet straight face

on Nigel's sexuality and gives Richard's opening soliloquy an echo of Olivier. Harrison Sharpe has fun as enthusiastic, excitable Brent, even breaking into a funny walk; he brings an energy too lacking elsewhere.

Stuck in bed and far upstage, Rob Pomfret as Grant isn't best placed to connect with the audience. Indeed, it is only when watching the Old Vic Richard that the action really comes downstage. With his feet on the floor, things get better for Pomfret to give him more humanity, but we learn very little about the detective, and that is the problem with this drawn-out play: it is full of facts but doesn't make us care about people.

When it comes to the questions it poses, it has its faults too. It offers nothing to support Grant's belief that facial appearance really reveals character, and though, quite rightly, being suspicious of what seems Tudor propaganda, it hardly considers who painted the portrait that sets things off and what might be the reasons for it.

In 1990, the British Crime Writers' Association chose Josephine Tey's book as the best crime novel of all time, but this play would be an unlikely award winner.

Reviewer: [Howard Loxton](#)