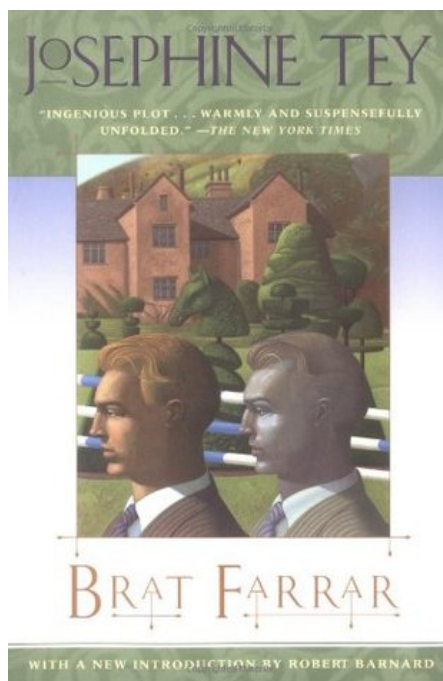




Brat Farrar

Josephine Tey , Robert Barnard (Introduction)

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What begins as a ploy to claim an inheritance ends with the impostor's life hanging in the balance. In this tale of mystery and suspense, a stranger enters the inner sanctum of the Ashby family posing as Patrick Ashby, the heir to the family's sizable fortune. The stranger, Brat Farrar, has been carefully coached on Patrick's mannerisms, appearance, and every significant detail of Patrick's early life, up to his thirteenth year when he disappeared and was thought to have drowned himself. It seems as if Brat is going to pull off this most incredible deception until old secrets emerge that jeopardize the impostor's plan and his life. Culminating in a final terrible moment when all is revealed, Brat Farrar is a precarious adventure that grips the reader early and firmly and then holds on until the explosive conclusion.

Brat Farrar Details

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ISBN : 9780684803852

Author : Josephine Tey , Robert Barnard (Introduction)

Format : Paperback 288 pages

Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Crime, Thriller, Mystery Thriller, European Literature, British Literature, Classics

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From Reader Review Brat Farrar for online ebook

Abigail Bok says

This is one of my all-time favorite mysteries. Published in 1950, *Brat Farrar* is about a young man, Bartholomew Farrell (he comes to be known as Brat Farrar over the course of extensive teenage wanderings), who is left as a foundling at a high-class orphanage. He leaves that life in his early teens and knocks about Europe and the Americas, eventually feeling the call of his homeland and returning about age twenty. In London he crosses paths with a ne'er-do-well, Alex Loding, who is startled to see Brat's close resemblance to the members of a family who lived near his childhood home: the Ashbys. Loding hatches a scheme to pass off Brat as Patrick Ashby, a boy who disappeared at age thirteen and was presumed a suicide. Patrick and his twin, Simon, would be about to come of age; and because Patrick was the elder of the two, he stood to inherit Latchetts, a small estate and stud farm, upon reaching his majority. So if the impostor can pull it off, he will be a well-off man and can afford to pay Loding an allowance for life.

We see the Ashbys—the remaining four children having been brought up by their aunt on the estate after their parents' death—preparing to celebrate Simon's coming-of-age, when word leaks out of "Patrick's" return from the dead. The pseudo-Patrick is accepted by the family with various degrees of willingness, and he settles into a life he might have been born to lead. But all is not happy under the surface, as you might imagine: Simon in particular is not pleased with the return of his twin.

The story is told from within Brat's mind, so we know from the start that he is not Patrick Ashby and is committing an imposture. Even so, it's very hard not to *like* Brat and wish him success. The foundling boy has finally found a place where he fits, and he loves his new family, feeling a deep need to belong to them, even though those feelings are crossed with his sense of guilt. The pressure builds on various fronts until a dramatic climax is reached—about which I propose to tell you nothing. But it is a satisfyingly tidy yarn, full of characters to savor and plenty of suspense.

Though I have read this mystery several times, it never ceases to enthrall me.

karen says

so this isnt a mystery novel in the traditional sense, but its got a very compelling pacing to it that makes the suspense parts both immediate and british-leisurely. like a brisk stroll on the grounds where we mustnt go too quickly or geoffrey will tire. my love of law and order (the one on television) has ruined me for mystery novels. or maybe just mystery novels written before 1950. because i always know my whodunits too soon. i have this affliction where i can retain very little of what i hear, but if i see it written, i can remember it quite well (for a time - dont ask me about books i read 10 years ago). it is why i always took really extensive notes in lecture classes, and why i forget things people tell me allll the time. why is this important? i dont know, except that i remember little facts that stick out in my mind - inconsistencies and whatnot because i am a pretty good close reader. but even the most obvious and bad movie with a central mystery, i generally dont figure it out until the reveal. and thats me. oh right, the book? the family is pretty interesting, its got horses for dana, its full of british charm and restraint, and i should get back to my paper. damn.

Carol ?? says

[Brat has a conversation with his drunk supposed twin Simon (hide spoiler)]

Barb in Maryland says

Oh, this book! I felt compelled to up my rating to 5 stars after this re-read.

The basic plot is one of my favorites--the return of the heir, long presumed dead. We the readers know fairly early on that Brat is not the missing Patrick. The tension is generated by the many hurdles Brat has to clear to maintain his impersonation of Patrick. At every point along the way there's the chance that the whole house of cards will come tumbling down.

Tey has such a smooth and warm style. All the characters are so real; I felt I knew them. And while I liked most of them, I absolutely loved Aunt Bee. She's so warm, loving and accepting, without being perfect. Brat just about broke my heart, in a good way. He is so basically decent, yet he has, of his own free will, set out on this con. His inner conflict, as he begins to live as Patrick, contributes to the ever rising tension levels. The story is not all nail-biting suspense. There are bits of gentle humor scattered throughout--breathing spaces, as it were, before the next turn of the screw.

The climax is a doozy; the story ends on a firm note of hope that had me in tears. Happy book sighs...

Marwan says

I was confused whether I should read this one or the Daughter of Time, but I chose the former since it's different from what I've read before. And wow, This probably one of the best book I've read.

It's not a typical classical mystery where a murder is committed in countryside and a detective is summoned to solve it. Instead, it revolves around Brat Farrar, an orphan who spent few years in America and returned to England. Few days after his return he's approached by Alec Loading, an actor who mistakes him for Simon Ashby (the next heir to the Ashby's fortune). After realizing his mistake, Alec invites Brat to lunch and offers to him a deal (which occurred to him at the moment) ; to disguise as Patrick Ashby, the twin of Simon Ashby who was originally the heir and who has disappeared at the age of 14 and was assumed to have committed a suicide. Alec in return wants a small allowance to be sent to him every week. Brat at beginning refuses the offer but later accepts when he learned that the Ashbys own a horses stud farm (and Brat is a fan of horses).

So Alec spends two weeks coaching Brat about the family members, memories, Patrick personality and hobbies. Brat succeeded in infiltrating and convincing the Ashbys that he's Patrick and life seems to go well with him until some secrets starts to emerge and jeopardize his life.

Kim says

A mystery involving an imposter and a possible crime set in and around a horse stud in the south of England, sometime after World War II, this is a novel which kept my interest from beginning to end. It's an intriguing work. On the one hand, the way in which the narrative develops and the resolution of the mystery are extremely predictable. I'm not particularly skilled at solving literary crime before the protagonist charged with that task, but here I worked out what had happened and what was going to happen reasonably early in the piece. On the other hand, even though the novel contained no surprises, I still found it very suspenseful.

Tey's prose is elegant, her characters are well-developed and she evokes a great sense of place and time. In addition, while I know nothing about the world of horses in which the novel is set, the way in which Tey writes about that world is entirely convincing.

The major weakness of this work is that the ending feels rushed. Even though I knew what was going to happen, I would have liked somewhat more exposition. It felt a bit like Tey, having written a particular number of words, was keen to wrap up the novel as soon as she could. It didn't ruin the reading experience for me, though. I thoroughly enjoyed reading the novel and although I didn't do so, I could easily have read it in one or two sittings.

I'm not sure why I read and enjoyed two novels by Josephine Tey when I was in my teens - *The Franchise Affair* and *The Daughter of Time* - and then didn't read another of her novels until last year, when I read two of the novels in her Alan Grant series. Neglecting Tey's novels for such a long time means that I missed out on a lot of reading enjoyment. On the other hand, not having read them before means that I still have that pleasure ahead of me.

Another enjoyable buddy read with my friend Jemidar.

Hirondelle says

You know those reviews where somebody is reviewing a deeply loved old book, and criticizing everything on it, accusing it of all types of political incorrectness? Either skip this or hold on, because this is going to be one of those reviews. (and that is surprising *me*. I did not know I had it in me).

This was my second read. I read it maybe 10 years ago, and I recalled it as being charming and with an interesting plot which included a favorite trope - impersonation. I picked up and read the first pages a while ago and was hooked into a full reread, how can anybody resist a book which opens like this:

"Aunt Bee," said Jane, breathing heavily into her soup, "was Noah a cleverer back-room boy than Ulysses, or was Ulysses a cleverer back-room boy than Noah?"

"Don't eat out of the point of your spoon, Jane."

"I can't mobilise the strings out of the side."

"Ruth does."

Jane looked across at her twin, negotiating the vermicelli with smug neatness.

"She has a stronger suck than I have."

"Aunt Bee has a face like a very expensive cat," Ruth said, eyeing her aunt sideways.

Bee privately thought that this was a very good description, but wished that Ruth would not be quaint.

"No, but which was the cleverest?" said Jane, who never departed from a path once her feet were on it.

And that is precisely a perfect example of the things I loved: the eccentric family britishness of this setting, the oh so clever allusions, the wit, and the writing. But on reread, I found problems I did not remember, either because I am older (presumably wiser and definitely pickier) or because it was a reread, and since I remembered something of the plot I was at liberty to think more on circumstances. It seemed as cozy a read as I remembered, but poking under the surface of this book disturbed me.

This is a profoundly reactionary book. That is an adjective I do not often use, but it seems the most appropriate to the tone of this. A british upper class countryside murder mystery reactionary novel. This is a nostalgic ode to traditional conservative british country values, a book published in 1949, likely set at that same time but which can fit no period in history - it glides over the history, it uses WWII as details for some things in plot ((view spoiler)) but then totally avoids the occurrence of world war II as having changed society or having influenced the lives of the main characters. For example there seems to be no rationing in this 1949 Britain (nor seemed to exist in recent past, apart from a small mention of *"Ireland in the days before it was more advisable to bring home the bacon."* If that is what is meant by bringing home the bacon) and the past history of Brat Farrar is simply impossible to insert into history at any time pre 1949 (view spoiler). Nope, this book fits no period in history.

I am mentioning the lack of historical coherence, not as a fault on its own but more as one example of the fact that this book is all about mood with little concern for details. More seriously than historical background for a mystery novel, is the fact that the mechanics of the mystery are never explained! Our main character mulls the logistics of an event, how it could have possibly have been done, till he has an eureka moment. While the reader understands the revelation of what that eureka moment is about, it still does not explain the hows and whens of the sequence of events((view spoiler)). It fails at making clear the puzzle. And this appalls me: (view spoiler)).

The characters quite often baffled me. Maybe it is an irreconcilable social-cultural gap between me and that particular class of people living at that moment in time, but oh they do seem so shallow to me. They are emotionally restrained (the horrors of providing entertainment to strangers by reuniting in public with a long lost brother) to the point of seeming emotionally stunted - the motives for a 13 year old child (nephew, brother) running away and not sending any news for 8 years are not at all questioned (bullying? Abuse? Secrets? apart from obliquely question ONCE days after his "return"), they are not the sort of people who pry or emote, you know: *There was no backslapping, congratulatory insistence on the situation as there would be in a transatlantic household.* What his family wants to know of yet unmet returned "Patrick" is not his explanations of why he run away, if he is happy or not, they want to know *"Is he nice to look at? And does he talk nicely or has he a frightful accent?"*. And there you have their priorities.

There is an inherent classism and snobbery, sometimes combined with misogyny in this book which drives me crazy. It's unspeakably important that the lovely old houses remain with their old families. Upper class things are "lovely". Social climbing is a horrible thing, particularly in women. "Progressive" schools are for dodgers"anyone who loathes hard work ". The casual misogyny, oh either women are horsey, upper class (preferably. And no matter what the Ashbys think of themselves they are not, with their horror of gentility, middle class by any definition of it) and totally unconcerned with their looks, or are vulgar or worse "nymphomaniac moron", "slatternly girl". Brat thinks horsey 11 year old Jane is a proper young girl, the sort of sister he would pick; but her girlier twin Ruth does not quite deserve the same love, being interested in clothes and attention from adults. I do not like nor respect the set of values of these characters. (I kept thinking of what either Jane Austen or Terry Pratchett would have made of these people or Miss Tey herself.)

There is a disturbing element to the plot((view spoiler)

)

This was a hard book to reduce to a rating. It's cozy, eccentric and interesting. It's often witty. I can see why so many people love it, even while I loathed many aspects of it, and think it is at core shallow and snobby. So let's throw it a three as a compromise.

John says

A novel that's (very) loosely based on the case of the Tichborne Claimant. Back in 2009 I read another novel based on the same case, Robin Maugham's *The Link* (1969). It's not really worth comparing the two because they offer completely different treatments of a similar tantalizing subject: How do you *know* someone whom you haven't seen in many years is actually the person they claim to be rather than a well trained impostor, even if that person is purportedly a family member?

(There's a more direct treatment of the case in the movie *The Tichborne Claimant* [1998], which I haven't seen but oughter. The theme is also tackled in two non-Tichborne movies, *Le retour de Martin Guerre* [1982] and *Summersby* [1993]. I'm sure there are others.)

Eight years ago, following the death in an air crash of his parents, 13-year-old Patrick Ashby, heir-presumptive by a matter of minutes to the Latchetts estate, left a suicide note on a cliff-edge and vanished. Now someone claiming to be him approaches the family solicitor; he has a strong resemblance to his just-younger twin Simon, and successfully answers all sorts of questions put to him by first the lawyer, then by Aunt Bee, who raised the kids after their parents' death: Simon, the somewhat younger Eleanor and the two much younger twins Jane and Ruth. By this time we know that Patrick is in fact an impostor, Brat Farrar, left on an orphanage doorstep as a baby and since then a wanderer in Europe and the Americas; he has been superbly schooled by a close acquaintance of the family, who wants to split with Brat the income from the estate that he'll very shortly inherit.

The trouble is that Brat is far too honorable a person to keep up such a pretense for long; besides, he soon falls in love with -- Simon excepted -- his new family. Just to complicate matters, in a different sense of the term he and Eleanor almost immediately start falling in love.

Soon he's taking a full role in the family business of rearing, training and displaying horses -- while in the US he spent much of his time working with the animals, albeit in rather less chichi environs than Latchetts. I'm not a fan of equestrian sports, nor even of horses in general (they want me to like them, they should stop pooping on my foot or trying to bite my head off), so it's something of a tribute to Tey's skills as a writer that, during a longish section of the book set at a horse show, I was, at least metaphorically, on the edge of my seat. But then that was the case throughout this novel.

Which is all the more remarkable when you consider that I've read it before (admittedly a long while ago) and so knew what was going to happen.

The text is full of wry observations, some quite poignant, some very funny. Here, from the very first page,

we have a bit of dialogue as the two little Ashby girls are coping with a dish of vermicelli:

“Don’t eat out of the point of your spoon, Jane.”

“I can’t mobilise the strings out of the side.”

“Ruth does.”

Jane looked across at her twin, negotiating the vermicelli with smug neatness.

“She has a stronger suck than I have.”

While I was reading this novel it struck me for the millionth time that, although Tey is generally talked of as a writer of detective novels, the four books for which she's most renowned are the ones that really don't properly fall into the category of detective fiction at all:

[] *Miss Pym Disposes*, about a know-it-all receiving the just deserts for her vanity (my account of this novel seems to have vanished from Goodreads);

[] *The Franchise Affair*, a study in mob rule and bigotry, often daftly listed as part of Tey's "Allan Grant" series, even though he makes barely an appearance and plays no real part in the plot (hm: coulda sworn I wrote about this one here, too);

[] *The Daughter of Time*, in which, although he's assuredly the central character, Grant is investigating not a new case but the historical mystery of the Princes in the Tower; and

[] *Brat Farrar*.

Of these four, I'd be hard-pressed to decide which I like the best. They're all really quite exceptional.

Returning to *Brat Farrar*, while I can imagine some people might find it irksome in that it's set in a sort of golden England that never was, and is quite smugly content to be set there, I found it to be -- again -- marvelous entertainment. The glorious conceit that it should be the Claimant who's trying to set things aright carries the novel a long way, but in the end it was the portrayals of the various characters, and their interactions, that made the pages go by in a blur: I really *cared* about what happened to these people.

Madeline says

Did anybody else ever see that movie *Candleshoe*? It's one of the lesser-known films from Disney's live-action canon; the cool part is that it stars Jessica Tandy and a pre-*Taxi Driver* Jody Foster. Anyway, Jody Foster plays this orphan who gets chosen by a con man to impersonate this rich British woman's long-lost granddaughter. The con man wants to plant Jody Foster at the lady's house because the guy who built the place was a pirate, and he hid his gold somewhere on the grounds. Jody Foster's job is to find the clues in the house that lead to the treasure, and naturally she ends up getting really attached to her adopted family and the creepy con man loses in the end.

The plot of *Brat Farrar* is a lot like that movie, is what I'm saying. I liked it a lot, and you should probably read it. And track down a copy of *Candleshoe*, while you're at it.

Read for: Social Forces in the Detective Novel

Ivonne Rovira says

Josephine Tey's best known for her mysteries featuring the suave Scotland Yard Inspector Alan Grant, particularly *The Daughter of Time*; however, *Brat Farrar* has to be her best book. The novel, which deals with mistaken identity and how appearances can be deceiving — on many levels — builds such suspense that you can't put the book down. That's such a cliché, I know, but, in the case of *Brat Farrar*, it's actually true.

By chance, British-born orphan Brat Farrar gets the chance to pose as the long-lost heir to a horse stable in the English countryside. Brat has spent the last years as a cowboy in France, other parts of Europe and America. On Brat's return to England, in a move reminiscent of *The Prince and the Pauper*, a distant relative of the heir, Alex Loding, realizes that Brat's the spitting image of the missing heir, Patrick Ashby. Alex drills Brat on the Ashby family and directs the imposture where Brat would reclaim Patrick's legacy.

Thirteen-year-old Patrick disappeared eight years and was presumed a suicide. Since then the estate, The Latchetts, was to go to Patrick's fraternal and slightly younger twin, the mercurial Simon. Needless to say, Simon's none too happy to see his long-lost brother, but Aunt Beatrice — along with a team of lawyers — happily accept Brat as Patrick. Despite the initial subterfuge, the reader comes to sympathize with Brat. Will Brat be able to keep up the deception? And what really happened to Patrick those many years ago?

Despite having been published more than 60 years ago, *Brat Farrar* holds up magnificently: Tey does an amazing job keeping readers on the edge of their seats. Don't miss out on this classic suspense story!

Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says

This 1949 suspense novel is a gripping story of deception and hidden identity, set in post-WWII England among the upper classes. Simon Ashby is about to turn 21 and finally inherit his dead parents' estate, easing the financial stresses on his family and younger sisters. But suddenly another young man appears, claiming to be Simon's older twin brother Patrick, who is thought to have committed suicide at age 14.

In fact, "Patrick" is Brat Farrar, an orphan who's been coached by an unscrupulous neighbor to claim Patrick's place and inheritance. But all isn't as it seems, and the plot thickens from there...

The mystery is more or less disclosed fairly early on, but the suspense builds until the end. Even when the Ashby family is engaged in horse shows or other apparently innocuous pursuits, there's an ominous atmosphere, a feeling that disaster could strike at any time. It was a highly entertaining old-fashioned mystery/suspense novel, one of the inspirations for Mary Stewart's *The Ivy Tree*.

There's some unexamined classism in the story, but it's pretty minor and typical of the time this was written. The mystery itself isn't up to, say, Agatha Christie levels, but Josephine Tey was a fine author who spins a good tale. This and several other Tey novels are available online at Project Gutenberg Australia, if you're interested in checking her out.

Sept. 2017 buddy read with the Retro Reads group.

Laura says

Free download at Project Gutenberg Australia

Chapter 1:

"At this same table had eaten Ashbys who had died of fever in India, of wounds in the Crimea, of starvation in Queensland, of typhoid at the Cape, and of cirrhosis of the liver in the Straits Settlements. But always there had been an Ashby at Latchetts; and they had done well by the land."

"No queens had come to Latchetts to dine; no cavaliers to hide. For three hundred years it had stood in its meadows very much as it stood now; a yeoman's dwelling. And for nearly two of those three hundred years Ashbys had lived in it."

"But the Ashbys stayed at Latchetts."

Chapter 18:

"Antipathy or no antipathy, common sense or no common sense, he wanted to know where Simon Ashby was when his twin went over the Westover cliffs."

Page 176:

"Some day, Brat Farrar, he thought as he walked down the path to the Rectory, you are going to be faced with something that you couldn't possibly have forgotten."

Page 219:

"I suppose because you are the only one who doesn't believe that I am Patrick."

"You mean, don't you, that I'm the only one who knows you're not?"

Another splendid gothic mystery written by Josephine Tey which books are becoming available at public domain.

?Susan? says

Is it a scam, if not even the scammer is sure it is actually a scam? A good fast paced mystery with just enough deception to keep me guessing as to who was the victim and who was actually the villain.

Cphe says

A strongly delivered story of sibling rivalry. Patrick Ashby was considered a suicide when a young boy, years later he returns to the family seat of Latchetts as Brat Farrar.

Wonderful air of time and place and an engaging mystery. Had an inkling early on as to how the mystery surrounding Brat Farrar might unfold but it in no way detracted from the appeal of the story overall. An enduring mystery that manages to hold up over time, well worth a look at.

Roman Clodia says

There's an intriguing premise here as an orphan is brought to pose as the lost heir to a family fortune: we know this from the start so this is no spoiler - yet, there's still a question about who exactly *is* Brat Farrar?

I usually like the brisk conciseness of Golden Age mysteries but here it can feel too abbreviated in places, especially towards the end which wraps up with puzzling rapidity. This is also a very horsy book and while that certainly helps to characterise Brat well, it can also get a bit much for non-horsy readers.

Tey, as always, writes well and the characters are well defined - do note, though, some class-bound stereotypes of female 'nymphomaniacs'! There are interesting sub-texts, too, of homoeroticism and a slightly edgy 'romance' (view spoiler)

One kind of mystery shades into another and I have to say I found the later developments unconvincing. For all my niggles, though, Brat himself is a wonderful character and I would happily have read about him for far longer.

Mizuki says

After so many re-reads, *Brat Farrar* by Josephine Tey is still one of the best classical British mystery novels of all time.

I like the plots and how the characters were written, I like the strong sense of British-ness that seeps through the story, although the typical classism (everyone in the story tends to judge people by their family backgrounds, their breeds and their social statuses, etc) is pretty difficult to swallow, still the strong points of the story easily manage to overwhelm the weakness, so 5 satisfying full stars.

Bill says

I've read a few books by Josephine Tey. The others have been part of her Inspector Alan Grant Series. Brat Farrar is one of two standalone mysteries by Tey. It was also turned into a TV mini-series and a movie. I will readily admit that I had an inkling about part of the book when I was fairly shortly into it and this turned out to be correct. However, having said that, it didn't take away from my enjoyment of the book at all. Brat Farrar, an orphan, left England at a young age and traveled through France and the US until as he neared the age of 21, he returned to England. Alex Lodging sees him by chance in London and realizes that he looks remarkably like Patrick Ashby, who committed suicide as a young boy after a tragic accident which killed his parents. The Ashbys live in Westover County and run an estate that makes its money breeding horses. Simon Ashby, Patrick's younger twin stands to inherit the estate on achieving his 21st birthday. Alex Lodging's proposal is that Brat should turn up at the Ashby estate and claim the inheritance and for his efforts, Alex would receive a monthly allowance from Brat.

Brat allows himself to be persuaded and after training on Patrick's life and that of the family, he introduces himself to the family solicitors to be identified as the true heir.

I won't get into the story anymore except to say that all goes well, and Brat is welcomed into the family as the long lost prodigy. There are of course mixed feelings, especially those of Simon who now loses the inheritance.

The story is an evenly paced work of fiction as we follow Brat through his introductions and new life with

the Ashbys. They are wonderful characters, especially Aunt Bea, who has run the estate while Simon, now Brat, grew to the appropriate age to take over. And also, the lovely Eleanor, oldest of the sisters, who trains horses and welcomes Brat.

At times I wondered how this would work out, waiting patiently for some action. But, you know, it wasn't necessary. The story reminded me of watching one of those thoughtful, excellent movies on TCM, the classics, enjoying the characters and the story. Of course, Brat's taking over of the life of Patrick has consequences and it's a joy to see how everything is resolved.

An excellent novel and enjoyable mystery, one of those little surprising gems (5 stars)

Terri says

A friend recommended this mystery book to me when hearing of my interest in English authors. Josephine Tey is better known for her book "The Daughter of Time" which is next on my reading list. If "Bret Farrar" is any indication of this author's talent, then I am in for a treat. "Bret Farrar" is a intense look at the English upper classes and their love for well-bred horses. The wealthy family in the book has a history of traditions, class snobbery and tragic loss. It is a crime novel based on the Tichborne Claimant, which was a famous 19th-century legal case in Victorian England. Like the Tichborne Claimant case, the novel tells the story of a "missing heir" who returns home to his family. The family warmly accepts him (even though he is a imposter) with the exception of his twin brother and a family friend. They know he is a fraud and that he wants to claim the family manor and wealth as his own. Josephine Tey is a brilliant observer of human nature and she tells a very good story.

Lisa (Harmonybites) says

Josephine Tey, along with Agatha Christie and Dorothy Sayers, is my favorite mystery author. Sadly, she wasn't at all prolific. She only wrote eight mystery novels before her death in 1952. What I find remarkable about them is that each really is so memorable and so different, yet each offers more than just some intricate puzzle piece, and producing some jaw-dropping twist is usually beyond the point.

Tey's probably best known for *The Daughter of Time*, and I'd probably name that one as my favorite Tey--that one is rather unique in mystery novels, with its fictional contemporary detective solving a centuries old real mystery about the Two Princes in the Tower and the true character of Richard III. But if you wish for a more traditional mystery, well, *Brat Farrar* for all it's very singular touches might be more your cup of tea and this is a close second favorite among the Tey mysteries.

The title character is an orphan who finds out he bears an uncanny resemblance to a missing English heir and so decides to impersonate the long lost Patrick Ashby. We meet the Ashby family in the first pages, so naturally you'd expect your sympathies would be with them, not the interloper. But Tey develops Brat in such a way you can't help but care about him. Because it's not the fortune that really attracts him--it's the chance to *Belong*. Before the book ends you feel tremendous sympathy for Brat, and the Ashbys, especially Aunt Bee who welcomes him into the fold.

There were so many small things that made this a pleasure to read. I loved the focus on horses, the breeding, riding, showing and life in a working stable. Also, Brat has an American background, having spent years there. So many times reading British authors tackling American characters or settings, they just don't ring true, or have this condescension about them--especially a book, like this one, written before 1950. Yet Tey writes of Americans and America with obvious insight and affection. And yet writes about England with

such evident love you wish you lived there.

Purely as a mystery this more than passes muster. Rich characterizations, suspenseful, even moving, this is one of my favorite mysteries, one where its details stayed vividly in my mind decades after first reading it.

Tracey says

Somehow, I never read this before. Somehow I never had a copy until not too long ago, and somehow when I reread all my Tey's at the beginning of the year I couldn't put my hands on my copy. (It's a trade paperback, which lives in a different place from the ordinary paperbacks. Stupid segregation.) Also, there is the sort of vague feeling that I was saving this: with *Brat Farrar* still unread, there was still a Tey novel out there that would be new to me. But then last week my Goodreads friend Jemidar pointed out that Josephine Tey was available free online, and that was all I needed to hear. I didn't plan on reading it online in two big gulps, but that's what happened, and the less said about what computer was used for those gulps the better, mmkay?

The synopsis: A young man called Brat Farrar, orphan and traveler and something of a chameleon, is approached by a less than scrupulous actor because he is the spitting image of another young man called Simon Ashby, the heir to Latchetts, something of an equestrian empire. The actor – Loding, an old friend of the family, if by friend you mean opportunistic crook – propositions Brat almost immediately; I enjoyed the fact that he had to be very specific that what he had in mind was a business arrangement, and a different sort of illegal-and-immoral than Brat initially assumes. Simon, he informs this striking young man, is a twin – or, rather, was, because the twin, named Patrick, killed himself shortly after their parents died in an accident when the boys were thirteen; he walked into the sea and drowned. But the note he left behind was somewhat open to interpretation: it is an apology, not specifically for suicide but for leaving, and Loding's brainstorm upon seeing this young stranger who looks so very like Simon is to send Brat to the Ashbys as Patrick returned from not death but prodigality. And of course out of the money that that would bring, a monthly stipend would be forwarded to himself. Brat refuses; he's disgusted by the idea. But then Loding mentions the horses. And Brat starts to wonder what, really, would be the harm in taking up his dream life.

The understanding of horses – the plain common sense of it – is a joy. (“It’s the sound of the crowd that worries her,” Gregg said. “Something she hears and can’t understand. If I were you, Mr. Patrick, sir, I’d take her out and walk her. Take her out and show her the crowds and she’ll be so interested she’ll forget her nerves.”) They're not overly romanticized, seen through a soft-focus lens; horses can be a right pain in the rump just like any other creatures (and more often a literal pain there, if you see what I mean, than most), and are a chancy entity to pin your living onto; they can sicken and die or fail to live up to expectations – or kill. But for all of that they have a fascination which I thoroughly enjoyed seeing explored here.

"You haven't got my favourite in your collection," she said, having examined his choice, and brought another tome from the shelves. And then, finding that he was totally ignorant, she took him back to the beginning and showed him the foundations — Arab, Barb, and Turk — of the finished product. By midnight there were more books on the floor than there were on the shelves but they had both had a marvellous time.

(At which I must interrupt for a brief word toward whatever Recording Angel or Celestial Agent or whatnot who has the placing of infants: Dear Sir/Madame/Otherwise: This is the life I should have had. Horses, sir/madame/other – horses. That's all I ever wanted. England would have been nice too. My own family is mostly lovely, so thank you – but this is where I belonged. There's probably some Englishwoman out there

exactly my age who loathes horses and wishes she had been born in Connecticut and would have been perfectly happy working in offices. Ill done, sir/madame/other.)

A brief – but intense – period of preparation using photos and maps and blueprints later, Brat slowly works himself into the Ashbys' bosom at Latchetts, and something funny happens. The book is largely told from Brat's point of view, so that the reader is given the privilege of knowing his reasoning and reaction. And even though his history (as, once upon a time, Bart Farrell, then Brat Farrar, and now Patrick Ashby) is thoroughly documented and I was given no reason to see him as an unreliable narrator, lying about the early years, Brat is ... nice enough, and so well suited for the place, that I half believed that somehow he really was Patrick. And Simon is just enough short of nice (not vile, but, among other things, not loving the horses as he should, as Brat does) that the half-belief is bolstered by a wish.

There is also the anxiety about when these lovely folk will learn the truth. Because they will. And all of them (except for Simon) are characters I don't like to think of being hurt. (Ruth is a flighty and self-centered little creature, but still to be protected.) Therein lies the suspense: with judicious foreshadowing and excellent character building, Tey creates a situation in which a wrong word could bring everything crashing down about their ears.

"Some day, Brat Farrar, he thought as he walked down the path to the Rectory, you are going to be faced with something that you *couldn't possibly* have forgotten.

- He should thank God Patrick was only thirteen years old when he vanished; even a couple more years and there would have been a great many more associations, not to mention girls.

Before long, a new question begins to rise, as to whether part of Brat and Loding's ploy might not have a little truth to it: perhaps Patrick did not kill himself.

The exposition in this book is masterful, and makes me sigh when I think of trying it myself. The history of the family is introduced in a completely painless manner – Josephine Tey never heard of the concept of "infodump". Characters are presented, fully formed human beings with flaws and virtues and "hair ... of what color it please God": their characteristics come out in their actions and conversation, and it's a lovely thing to watch.

Conversation between the younger set of twins:

"If I ran away for years and years, would you believe I was me, Jane?" Ruth asked.

"You wouldn't stay away for years and years, anyhow," Jane said.

"What makes you think I wouldn't?"

"You'd come home in no time at all."

"Why would I come home?"

"To see how everyone was taking your running away."

Here's where the doubts about Simon come in – first, the question of whether Brat, false as he is, might not after all be a better heir to the estate than his purported twin. "No one, *no one*, was going to come between Simon Ashby and the sun and get away with it."

This possibly doesn't really rate five stars. Even as I read the ending I recognized a problem: the solution to the mystery of eight years before is glossed over. Brat ponders the data he's collected, and the apparent impossibility of what he's thinking – and after a bit of time he has an epiphany in which all is revealed to him. The epiphany, however, is never shared with the reader: the details are never revealed. Also, I have no idea what the laws were in the forties and fifties in England, but I hardly think that fraud to usurp a fair-sized inheritance was looked at any more lightly than it would be now; they still hanged criminals in the 40's and 50's. I think whatever the personal feelings of those involved Brat should have faced a good deal more trouble than, in the end, he does... He took on the plot as something of a lark, and his only hesitations were

purely moral: it was the wrong thing to do, and sordid. But he never really considers what will happen, on legal or personal levels, if he gets caught. Finally, Loding (view spoiler)

Still and all, there it is: the last new-to-me Tey. It was a wonderful read. (Thanks, Jemidar!)
