

# The Film/TV faces of Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot

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First introduced by author Agatha Christie in 1920, Belgian sleuth Hercule Poirot has appeared in 33 novels and more than 50 short stories, before publication of his final tale in 1975.

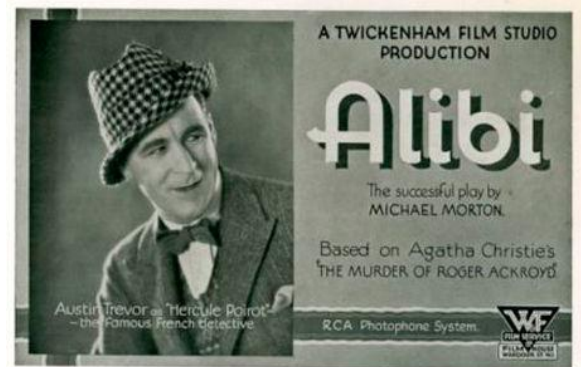
With such a wide range of material to draw from, it was inevitable that Poirot would go on to be so widely portrayed on screen. Starting with Austin Trevor in 1931, many actors have stepped into the detective's shoes over the years, with the latest incarnation being portrayed by *Dunkirk*'s Kenneth Branagh in 2017's Branagh-directed adaptation of [Murder on the Orient Express](#).

An all-new TV-mini-series version of The ABC Murders will feature John Malkovich as Poirot in 2019.

## Austin Trevor (1931)

The first actor to play the detective on the big screen, Trevor first appeared as Poirot in the 1931 film *Alibi*. He went on to reprise the role in *Black Coffee* (1931) and *Lord Edgware Dies* (1934), and famously believed that the main reason he gained the role was down to his ability to speak with a French accent.

Trevor also appeared in a later Poirot film, *The Alphabet Murders* (1965), albeit in a smaller character role with Tony Randall stepping in as the detective.



## Martin Gabel (1962)

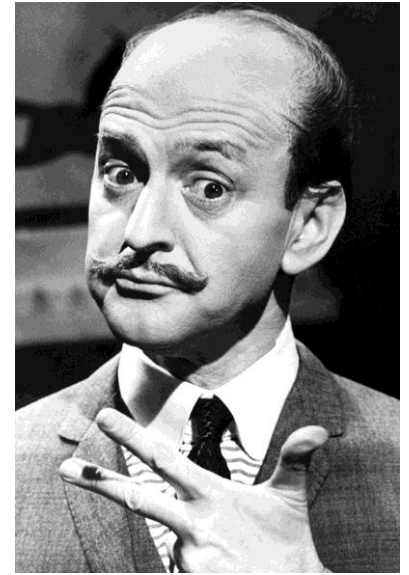
Gabel appeared as Poirot only once – in a 1962 pilot episode for a proposed series, *The Adventures of Hercule Poirot*. The plot adapted the short story, “The Disappearance of Mr. Davenheim”, in a half-hour presentation. Though this pilot episode did air on British television, the series was not picked up. Perhaps for the best, as the production notes available seem to indicate the producers planned to take several liberties with Poirot and the Christie source material.

## Tony Randall (1965)

Best known as a romantic comedy star, Randall's sole appearance as the Belgian detective occurred in the 1965 made-for-TV adaptation of *The Alphabet Murders*.

Despite being based on a genuine Agatha Christie tale, the film was significantly altered from the original source in terms of both character and plot, and was viewed as more of a satire than a faithful adaptation. Poirot is seen as something of a "joke" character.

[Note: Margaret Rutherford also made an uncredited cameo appearance in the Tony Randall film. She passes Poirot on a stairway, and both characters turn to stare at each other. This is literally the only time Poirot and Marple have both appeared in the same filmed production!]



## Albert Finney (1974)

The first to portray Poirot in a film adaptation of *Murder on the Orient Express*, Finney was highly praised for his performance in this 1974 release.

With an all-star cast including Vanessa Redgrave, Sean Connery and Anthony Perkins, the release went on to gain six nominations at the 47th Academy Awards, securing Finney's status as the only actor to date who has been Oscar nominated for his performance in the role.

## Peter Ustinov (1978-86)

With Finney declining to reprise the role of Poirot, Ustinov became the next embodiment in the 1978 adaptation of *Death on the Nile*. During a rehearsal for the film, Christie's daughter reportedly shared her concerns over the lack of physical resemblance to the popular detective.

However Ustinov, alongside a cast including Maggie Smith, Angela Lansbury and Bette Davis, proved to be massive success, and went on to continue the role for a further five films, ending with *Murder in Three Acts* in 1986.



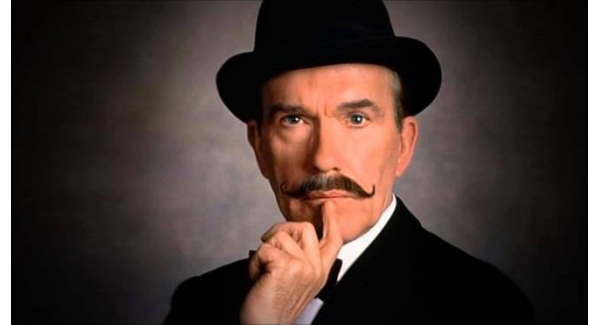


## Ian Holm (1986)

The *Alien* and *Lord of the Rings* actor made for an effective Poirot in this speculative made-for-TV movie, in which Christie (played by Peggy Ashcroft) looks to kill off the character who brought her fame. There's a factual basis to this – Christie did in fact grow to resent the popularity of the Belgian detective – and the script is written by *Horse Whisperer* author Nicholas Evans.

## John Moffat (1987-2007)

British actor John Moffat portrayed Poirot in a series of 26 radio adaptations of Christie's novels for BBC Radio, between 1987 and 2007, becoming indelibly connected to the role for radio listeners. Some of those radio versions – all full-cast productions – are available via CD.



## David Suchet (1989-2013)

Arguably the man most associated with the role, Suchet played Poirot for a grand total of 24 years. He was already a well-established actor when he first took on the role at the age of 42, in the ITV drama *Agatha Christie's Poirot*.

Suchet's reign lasted for a total of 13 series, securing his place as the longest-serving actor in the role, and covering almost the entire catalogue of Christie's work. This included *Murder on the Orient Express*, which screened on Christmas Day 2010.



Many of the actors who appeared in the series have gone on to much greater fame, including Emily Blunt (*Edge of Tomorrow*), Michael Fassbender (*Alien: Covenant*) and Jessica Chastain (*The Martian*).

The final episode of the series aired on November 13th 2013, and was an adaptation of Christie's novel *Curtain: Poirot's Last Case*.

## Alfred Molina (2001)

Molina portrayed the legendary detective in the second adaptation of *Murder on the Orient Express*, a made-for-TV adaptation that was released in 2001.

Set in the present day and with a cast of characters smaller than that of the novel, this movie adaptation served as a modern update of Christie's bestselling thriller.



## Kenneth Branagh (2017-)

Kenneth Branagh not only portrayed Hercule Poirot in 2017's *Murder on the Orient Express*, he also directed the film – another huge-cast production. It was successful enough that Branagh has been signed to star in and direct two additional Poirot films.

## John Malkovich (2019)

Emmy-winning and Oscar-nominated actor John Malkovich will take his turn as Poirot in a BBC 3-part adaptation of *The ABC Murders* for television in 2019. A promotional still has already been made available.

Some information from:

<https://agathachristieonscreen.com/2016/10/>



# The Film/TV faces of Agatha Christie's Miss Marple

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## Gracie Fields (1956)

Gracie Fields was the first actress to appear as Miss Jane Marple in any filmed project, an episode of the U.S. television series **The Goodyear Playhouse**, adapted from the novel [A Murder is Announced](#) in 1956. (Fields is to the left in the photo → with Jessica Tandy and Roger Moore, her co-stars in [A Murder is Announced](#).)



## Margaret Rutherford (1961-1964)

Margaret Rutherford was the first actress to appear in a feature film as Miss Jane Marple, but her four Marple films were extreme departures from the character as seen in Christie's novels and stories. Rutherford's Marple movies are entertaining, but far too comical to be taken seriously. Her fourth film, *Murder Ahoy*, isn't even based on a Christie story. Christie, herself, was very unhappy with Rutherford's portrayal of Marple. [Note: Rutherford also made an uncredited cameo appearance in the 1965 film *The Alphabet Murders*, starring Tony Randall as Hercule Poirot. She passes Poirot on a stairway, and both characters turn to stare at each other. This is literally the only time Poirot and Marple have both appeared in the same filmed production!]

## Angela Lansbury (1980)

Later **Murder She Wrote** (1984-1996) mystery-solver Angela Lansbury got a start on preparing for the long-running role of Jessica Fletcher by appearing as Jane Marple in a single, 1980 feature film adaptation of [The Mirror Crack'd](#) (original British title was [The Mirror Crack'd From Side to Side](#)). It was an all-star cast, including Elizabeth Taylor, Kim Novak, Rock Hudson, Tony Curtis and more. Lansbury was made-up to appear older as the spinster sleuth, when in fact the actress was born the same year as both Hudson and Curtis!





## Helen Hayes (1983-1985)

Film and Stage legend Helen Hayes, known as the First Lady of the American Theatre, took two turns as Miss Marple, both in made-for-TV movies – [A Caribbean Mystery](#) (1983) and [Murder With Mirrors](#) (1985) (which had a UK title [They Do It With Mirrors](#)).

## Joan Hickson (1984-1991)

Between 1984 and 1991, the actress Joan Hickson portrayed Miss Jane Marple in 12 different adaptations for television – TV mini-series for each of the 12 Marple novels (she did not appear in adaptations of any of the 24 Marple short stories. Hickson is judged by most Marple fans to be the most accurate portrayal of Marple on screen. She also comes with an impressive and rather unique connection to Christie – in 1946, Agatha Christie saw Hickson performing on stage as “Miss Pryce” in an adaptation of one of Christie’s stories, “*An Appointment With Death*”. Christie was so impressed by Hickson’s performance, that she sent the actress a note – “*I hope one day you will play my dear Miss Marple!*”. First, Hickson appeared in a Marple film, as Mrs. Kidder opposite Margaret Rutherford’s Marple in [Murder She Said](#) (1961). Then, 38 years after Christie sent her the note, Hickson appeared for the first time as Marple in “The Body in the Library”.



## Geraldine McEwan (2004-2007)

In 2003, noted stage and film actress Geraldine McEwan was chosen to portray Miss Marple in a new series of two-hour TV-movies for ITV in the UK and PBS in the US. McEwan filmed 12 of the TV-movies before tiring of the role and ending her portrayal. The series continued with Julia McKenzie as Marple for another 11 TV-movies.

## Julia McKenzie (2008-2013)

Following Geraldine McEwan’s retiring from the role of Miss Marple after 12 TV-movies, Julia McKenzie took it over for another 11 stories. . Reactions to these 23 films has been varied, with long-time Christie fans frustrated by the changes made to Christie’s stories in order to bring them to the screen, and others admiring the performances of both actresses in the role of Marple. Since the end of this series of TV-movies in 2013, Miss Marple has not been seen again on either TV or in feature films.

