

Agatha Christie's Murder on the Orient Express

Audition Packet — Theater Tallahassee

Produced by Theater Tallahassee

Note to Auditioners:

This audition packet contains scenes ("Sides") from the theatrical production of Agatha Christie's Murder on the Orient Express

. Each Side lists the characters involved, their nationalities and suggested accents, and where applicable, a Pronunciation Guide for non-English words and names.

Stage directions appear in

[brackets and italics]

and are labeled clearly throughout. Please read all stage directions silently; they are included to provide context and are not meant to be spoken aloud.

Side 1

Character: POIROT (Belgian accent)

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Word / Name	Pronunciation
Tokatlian	to-ka-ti-ahn
Hercule	her-kuel (rhymes with "fuel")
Poirot	Pwa-roh

Good evening. The story you are about to witness is one of romance and tragedy, primal murder and the urge for revenge. What better way to spend a pleasant evening together?

From the beginning it was an Odyssey of deception and trickery. One minute I could see the light, like the beam of a train engine hurtling past. The next minute, all was darkness and the thread that I pulled came away in my fingers and led to nothing.

I believe it was the greatest case of my career, but who am I to say? Modesty forbids it. It was certainly the most difficult I have ever encountered, and it made me question the very deepest values that I have held since I was a young man.

It began in the exotic city of Istanbul. I planned to vacation there for several days following a trying case that was on my nerves, but things began changing the moment I stepped into the dining room of the world-famous Tokatlian Hotel, where the enormity of the prices was matched only by the self-esteem of the waiters.

My name, incidentally, is Hercule Poirot and I am a detective.

Side 2

Characters: MARY (English accent), ARBUTHNOT (Scottish accent)

MARY: James! At last! Where have you been?!

ARBUTHNOT: Oh I'm not that late, am I?

MARY: Of course you are. You're always late. And I was terrified we'd miss the train. It would ruin everything!

ARBUTHNOT: I was just exploring a bit. I've never been to Istanbul before and I quite adore all this Eastern nonsense.

MARY: Well I don't. I just want to leave right now and get it over with.

[Stage Direction: He puts his hand on her cheek.]

ARBUTHNOT: I wish to hell you were out of all this. You deserve better, you know.

MARY: Shh! Not now! No one should see us like this. Not till it's all behind us. Besides, I think we're being observed by that funny little man over there.

[Stage Direction: She nods towards Poirot, who is hidden behind his newspaper.]

ARBUTHNOT: What, him? He's just some damned foreigner who probably doesn't even speak English.

MARY: Shall we order? I'm starving.

ARBUTHNOT: Not here. I found a cute little place around the corner where I'm sure the food will be ten times better.

MARY: But we can't be late for the train! We can't miss it!

ARBUTHNOT: We won't be late, I promise, now stop fussing and come on, let's hurry.

Side 3

Characters: RATCHETT (American accent), POIROT (Belgian accent)

RATCHETT: Mr. Poirot, slow up! Now I'd like to discuss that proposition I mentioned.

POIROT: Non non, I'm afraid it is not a good time.

RATCHETT: Oh sure it is. Sit down. I'll be quick, I promise.

POIROT: I am afraid—

RATCHETT: Sit down.

POIROT: ...Eh bien. Proceed.

RATCHETT: Now I want you to take on a job for me.

POIROT: I take on few new cases.

RATCHETT: You'll take this one on, I guarantee it.

POIROT: And why is that?

RATCHETT: Because I'm talkin' big money here. Mr. Poirot, I have an enemy.

POIROT: I would guess that you have several enemies.

RATCHETT: Now what is that supposed to mean?

POIROT: You are successful, n'est-ce pas? Successful people have many enemies.

RATCHETT: Right. That's it exactly! You see I've been getting some threatening letters lately and I want an extra pair of eyes to do some snoopin' around. And that's what you do, am I right? Snoopin'? Of course I can take care of myself [*Stage Direction: he flashes the gun under his coat*] but I'll pay you five thousand dollars. How does that sound?

POIROT: Non.

RATCHETT: All right, ten. For a few days' work.

POIROT: I am not for sale, monsieur. I have been very fortunate in my profession and I now take only such cases as interest me—and frankly, you do not interest me.

RATCHETT: You want me to grovel, is that it?

POIROT: I want nothing, monsieur, except to leave.

[Stage Direction: Poirot exits. Ratchett is darkly unhappy.]

Side 4

Characters: MRS. HUBBARD (American accent), MACQUEEN (American accent)

[Stage Direction: Mrs. Hubbard calls to the Head Waiter as she rummages through her handbag for her money.]

MRS. HUBBARD: Yoo hoo! Excuse me, waiter. You did a very nice job and I'm leaving you something extra because of it.

[Stage Direction: Noticing MacQueen.]

Excuse me, young man. Are you American?

MACQUEEN: Y-yes I am.

MRS. HUBBARD: I thought so. I can see from your passport. Us Americans have to stick together, you know. Especially in a place like this. I can't even pronounce half the things on the menu. Can you believe it? And what's a falafafafafafel? I keep seeing them on the street and they look like you could play hockey with 'em.

MACQUEEN: I believe they're made of fried chick peas.

MRS. HUBBARD: Well there ya go. Who knew. Some people will fry anything. By the way, I don't mean to snoop but I see your train ticket sitting there on the table and I wonder - do you know if they're providing a bus to the station?

MACQUEEN: I don't think so. I-I believe the hotel has a private car.

MRS. HUBBARD: Well don't you worry, I'll ask and find out. As the Bible says, "if Moses doesn't know the answer, ask the Concierge." Now I better go. I think I'm annoying that odd little man with the silly moustache. *[Stage Direction: sotto voce]* And I don't think it's real.

Side 5

Characters: POIROT (Belgian accent), BOUC (Belgian accent), HEAD WAITER (Turkish or French accent)

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Word / Name	Pronunciation
Poirot	Pwa-roh
Bouc	Book
Wagon-Lit	Vagon-lee
Lausanne	laws-ann

BOUC: I hope that the food at this humble establishment is up to your usual standards.

POIROT: What? What's this? ...Ah, mon Dieu, it is Monsieur Bouc!

BOUC: My friend! Ha haaa!

POIROT: Mon ami! But what are you doing here?

BOUC: What am I doing here? This is my city! I live here!

POIROT: Of course, I'm a fool!

BOUC: I run Wagon-Lit, the greatest train company in the entire world, and the central office is in this hotel. Garçon! This meal is on me, please charge my office.

POIROT: Ah non.

BOUC: Ah oui. It will give me pleasure, you are my guest here. So tell me, what are you doing here? You are solving a crime, eh?

POIROT: No no, I did that last week in Syria. It was a bad affair. An army officer, a missing check, a beautiful woman, puh. It did not end well. The man was guilty, that was certain. But perhaps, because I pressed the man too hard to admit his guilt ... It was unfortunate in the extreme. And yet I believe I did nothing wrong.

BOUC: Of course you did nothing wrong. If you break the law you must pay the price. That is what you have told me.

POIROT: It is what I live by.

BOUC: Now tell me, you are staying here at the hotel?

POIROT: I was hoping, eh? I was going to play the tourist, but at the desk there was a telegram from Scotland Yard, begging me to return at once, so I have asked the Concierge to get me a ticket for tonight on your famous Orient Express.

BOUC: There will be no problem, and the best news is, I will be joining you, for I go to Lausanne tonight on business.

POIROT: Ha, ha! C'est magnifique.

[Stage Direction: The Head Waiter approaches Poirot.]

HEAD WAITER: Pardon, monsieur. The Concierge said to tell you there are no more first class tickets for the Express tonight. It is sold out.

POIROT: Ah non!

BOUC: Attends. It is my train and it is never sold out at this time of year. That is ridiculous.

HEAD WAITER: It must be a party, or a convention, perhaps.

BOUC: Well you tell the Concierge to find a berth for Monsieur Poirot. He is my personal friend.

HEAD WAITER: But monsieur—

BOUC: The Number 7 is always available. It is held in reserve. Now go tell him!

HEAD WAITER: Right away, monsieur.

[Stage Direction: He exits.]

POIROT: Merci.

BOUC: It is nothing. A gesture. Now you see this menu? Throw it away. Tonight we shall sit on the train together, just like old times, and we will dine like kings.

POIROT: The food on the train, it is edible?

BOUC: Monsieur Poirot! You stab me in the heart! I am writhing on the ground at your feet! It is not a mere train that will carry you tonight, it is a legend. It runs like no other vehicle on the earth. The fittings are from Paris, the paneling, Venice, the plates are from Rome and the taps from New York. The best food, the best beds, the best pillows, the best feathers inside the pillows. It is poetry on wheels, and Lord Byron himself could not write it better. Monsieur, prepare yourself. In one hour, I will meet you on the platform of the Orient Express.

Side 6

Characters: **POIROT (Belgian accent), BOUC (Belgian accent), MACQUEEN (American accent)**

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Word / Name	Pronunciation
Arbuthnot	Ar-booth-not

POIROT: Monsieur MacQueen, please sit down.

MACQUEEN: Of-of-of course. Are they all right?

POIROT: They will be fine, I assure you. Now tell me, please, what exactly were your duties as Secretary to your employer?

MACQUEEN: Well I-I wrote his letters and did his errands and things.

POIROT: And you knew him only as Samuel Ratchett.

MACQUEEN: How else would I know him?

POIROT: His real name was Bruno Cassetti.

MACQUEEN: Holy God. Are you sure of that?

BOUC: Then you know about the Armstrong case?

MACQUEEN: You bet I do. My father was the District Attorney for the state of New York and he brought the case against that ... son of a bitch. I'm sorry, but you have no idea what he did to that family. And they were so kind to me!

POIROT: Can you tell us who was in the Armstrong household?

MACQUEEN: Mrs. Armstrong had a sister. She went to graduate school, but after the tragedy she moved to Europe and I think she got married. Her name was Helena. And also Mrs. Armstrong's mother would come to visit. She was an actress.

POIROT: Anyone else?

MACQUEEN: There was a governess and a baby nurse, and then poor Suzanne. She was a French housemaid—she came from Paris—and my father's office thought she might be implicated, and ... and she was so distraught from the accusations that she—

BOUC: Killed herself.

MACQUEEN: *[Stage Direction: nods]* Only it turned out that she was innocent. My father was shattered. He never recovered.

POIROT: And where were you last night between midnight and two o'clock?

MACQUEEN: Twelve to two? I-I was with Colonel Arbuthnot on the Observation Deck.

POIROT: And did you see anyone last night you did not recognize?

MACQUEEN: No. I saw Michel the conductor, and the other conductor, and Colonel Arbuthnot, and Miss Debenham—

BOUC: The "other conductor?"

POIROT: There is a second conductor?

MACQUEEN: I guess so. I saw him.

BOUC: He was in uniform?

MACQUEEN: Yeah. The same one that Michel wears.

BOUC: And what did he look like?

MACQUEEN: I don't know. He had his hat pulled down. He was small-boned, you know what I mean? Sort of feminine.

POIROT: Did you speak with him?

MACQUEEN: I said hello and he just kept going.

POIROT: You are very helpful, thank you. You may go. And please ask Michel to come see me.

MACQUEEN: Sure thing. I'll see you later.

Side 7

Characters: POIROT (Belgian accent), MICHEL (French accent)

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Word / Name	Pronunciation
Poirot	Pwa-roh
Michel	Mee-shel

POIROT: I see that none of your buttons are missing, and moreover, the thread for each button is old, so nothing was sewn on recently.

MICHEL: That is correct, but may I ask—?

POIROT: Mrs. Hubbard found this button in her room this morning.

MICHEL: [*Stage Direction: examining it*] It is not mine, Monsieur.

POIROT: So I see. But it matches yours exactly.

MICHEL: It does.

POIROT: Michel, are there other attendants on this train at the moment?

MICHEL: There is one in second class. A ticket-taker I have known for years.

POIROT: Is he large or small?

MICHEL: Quite large, I'm afraid. Shall I ask him to see you?

POIROT: Non non, that is quite all right. And what other passengers, besides the ones in this coach, are on the train?

MICHEL: There is hardly anyone at the moment. It is the off-season. There is a mother and child on the Belgrade carriage and that is all.

POIROT: And could there be a second conductor on this train wearing a uniform like yours?

MICHEL: Oh no, monsieur, there is no such thing. I had to earn this uniform with many years of service. However

POIROT: Oui?

MICHEL: Well, frankly, I am not sure I trust her word, but Miss Ohlsson says that last night she saw what she calls a second conductor on the train.

POIROT: [*Stage Direction: suddenly alert*] Miss Ohlsson?

MICHEL: Oui, she told me this morning. She said he was wearing a uniform like mine and when she spoke to him he did not respond. In fact ...

POIROT: What? Tell me quickly!

MICHEL: The Princess tells me that she also saw this man last night.

POIROT: Oh la la, oh la la, oh la la.

MICHEL: What is it?

POIROT: It is just the kind of clue that I have been waiting for.

Side 8

Characters: POIROT (Belgian accent), BOUC (Belgian accent), COUNTESS (Hungarian accent)

COUNTESS: Excuse me, but you have asked to see me - Oh dear God.

POIROT: Forgive me, Countess, but I understand you were trained as a physician, so I thought perhaps you could help me with the body.

COUNTESS: I am happy to help.

[Stage Direction: Without hesitation, she strips off her jacket and rolls up her sleeves.]

POIROT: I'm afraid it is not a very pleasant sight.

COUNTESS: I have seen worse, believe me. I volunteered in the war.

[Stage Direction: The Countess begins examining the body.]

POIROT: Regardes. The left side of his face is slightly red, do you see?

COUNTESS: I do. It has been slapped.

BOUC: How do you know?

COUNTESS: Because I slapped it. *[Stage Direction: beat, as she examines the body]* I count eight separate wounds.

POIROT: That was my count also. Can you estimate the time of death?

COUNTESS: I would say it is between eight and ten hours ago, which puts the time between midnight and two o'clock.

POIROT: I am in accord.

COUNTESS: It appears that the killer was wild - in a frenzy of some sort.

POIROT: Regardes. See this. Of the eight stab wounds, five appear strong and three are mere scratches. And wait, do you see, the wounds are from different directions. Do you see it? I need a pencil.

BOUC: Here.

POIROT: Bon. Now watch. We place the pencil inside each wound and push it gently.

BOUC: Ugh! Is this necessary?

COUNTESS: Perhaps the man changed hands during the stabbing.

BOUC: Or there were two assailants. One right-handed and one left-handed.

COUNTESS: One strong, one weak.

POIROT: It is not impossible. But now another question presents itself: why did Mr. Ratchett not fight back when all the while he had this gun under his pillow?

[Stage Direction: He pulls the revolver out from under the pillow.]

COUNTESS: Oh la la.

BOUC: Alors. May I see it? *[Stage Direction: He takes the gun.]*

COUNTESS: How did you find it?

POIROT: He showed it to me yesterday so I knew it was here somewhere.

BOUC: It is an automatic and I believe it is loaded. *[Stage Direction: He waves it around.]*

POIROT: Attention!

COUNTESS: Ah!

BOUC: Wait! There is a safety switch, it is not on.

POIROT: S'il vous plait, mon ami! Have you not heard of the fatal accident?!
[Stage Direction: He takes the gun from Bouc, but stops suddenly and sniffs the air.] Un moment. *[Stage Direction: He sniffs again and puts his finger up.]* I have a very good nose. *[Stage Direction: He picks up Ratchett's empty wine glass and sniffs.]* Aha. Smell the glass of wine.

COUNTESS: It smells of almonds. *[Stage Direction: She pulls Ratchett's eyelids up and examines his eyes.]* He was clearly drugged, which is why ...

POIROT AND COUNTESS: *[Stage Direction: together]* ...he did not fight back.

Side 9

**Characters: BOUC (Belgian accent), MRS. HUBBARD
(American accent)**

MRS. HUBBARD: Help! Someone come quickly! Help!

BOUC: [*Stage Direction: running in*] What? What is it?!

MRS. HUBBARD: There was a man in my room! He ran off! I'm sure of it!

BOUC: Which way did he go?!

MRS. HUBBARD: That way! Just this second!

BOUC: But madam, that is where I am coming from and I saw no one.

MRS. HUBBARD: Well ... well maybe he ducked into one of the compartments or something! I don't know. I tell you I was lying there in my bed, dead to the world, and I open my eyes and I see this man going out the door. And he's wearing a uniform.

BOUC: But where would he come from?

MRS. HUBBARD: I don't know. He just suddenly appeared.

BOUC: And he looked like ... ?

MRS. HUBBARD: I don't know! I could barely see him! One second he was there and then he was gone. He was like a phantom!

BOUC: But how is this possible?

MRS. HUBBARD: HOW SHOULD I KNOW!

BOUC: Perhaps you were dreaming.

MRS. HUBBARD: I wasn't dreaming. I know when I'm dreaming. My mouth gets dry. Does my mouth look dry to you?

BOUC: And your door was locked - ?

MRS. HUBBARD: Of course it was locked, but people have keys, don't they? I'll bet you have keys. Don't you own the company?

BOUC: No, madame, I run the company. And I will look into it.

MRS. HUBBARD: Well all right then. But hurry up about it. I don't feel safe!

Side 10

Characters: POIROT (Belgian accent), PRINCESS DRAGOMIROFF (Russian accent), GRETA (Swedish or other accent)

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Word / Name	Pronunciation
Poirot	Pwa-roh
Dragomiroff	Drag-o-mirr-off
Bolshevik	Bol-shiv-ik
Andrenyi	An-dren-yi
Debenham	Deb-en-ham

PRINCESS: Monsieur Poirot, we are here out of a sense of duty, that is all. I do not like having my day disturbed.

POIROT: Then let us begin immediately. Now it says in your passport that you are Russian.

PRINCESS: That is correct. I have been in exile since the Bolshevik dogs took over.

POIROT: And I see that your first name is—

PRINCESS: Natalya.

POIROT: And is this your handkerchief, madam?

PRINCESS: Of course not. It has the letter H on it. My initials are N.D. Natalya Dragomiroff.

POIROT: Is it yours, mademoiselle?

GRETA: No, no, I could not afford such a beautiful thing as this. It would be a sin.

PRINCESS: Oh!

POIROT: And may I ask each of you where you were last night between midnight and two o'clock?

PRINCESS: I could not sleep, so at midnight the Countess Andrenyi and I read a book together in my room. Out loud. It is the very best way to get to sleep when you are anxious.

POIROT: And what were you anxious about?

PRINCESS: The Bolsheviks.

POIROT: And what book did you read?

PRINCESS: The Tale of Two Cities, it is very comforting.

POIROT: And you, Miss Ohlsson? Where were you?

GRETA: I was in my room with Miss Debenham, who is also nice. We talked from twelve o'clock until two o'clock and then we slept. You can ask her!

POIROT: And have either of you ever been to America?

PRINCESS: Yes, many times.

GRETA: I have not been to America but I must go some day to raise money for my babies in Africa.

POIROT: You are very religious.

GRETA: Ja, since I was a little girl and Jaysus came to visit me in my garden. He spoke with me, and told me I must work hard to help little babies in Africa.

POIROT: And I'm sure you have done it beautifully, mademoiselle. Just one more question for both of you ladies. Are you aware of the identity of the man who was killed last night?

GRETA: His name was Ratchett [*Stage Direction: sob*] and I pray for his soul.

PRINCESS: No, my dear, his name was Bruno Casseti, the Countess told me, and what I pray is that his soul is damned and that he burns in hell for all eternity.

GRETA: Princess!

PRINCESS: He murdered a girl named Daisy Armstrong and her grandmother is my dearest friend. You would know her as the actress Linda Arden.

BOUC: She was very great.

PRINCESS: Not was, monsieur. She is very great. She is very much alive and remains the greatest actress of the American stage. And when her five-year-old granddaughter was murdered by this monster Casseti, it took her years to recover, indeed she has not yet recovered!

POIROT: There were four who died?

PRINCESS: No, five, monsieur! Five people died! Little Daisy, and then her mother, who was pregnant, died in childbirth, and the baby died, too. And the little girl's father, Colonel Armstrong, who could not live with what happened and ended his life! And a housemaid as well! Five human souls were extinguished. So please forgive me, Greta, if I take the view that there is no forgiveness in a case such as this and that Mr. Casseti should have been flogged to death and his remains cut up and thrown onto a rubbish heap!!

GRETA: Ahhh!

[Stage Direction: Greta runs out.]

Characters: POIROT (Belgian accent), BOUC (Belgian accent), ARBUTHNOT (Scottish accent), MARY (English accent)

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Word / Name	Pronunciation
Poirot	Pwa-roh
Arbuthnot	Ar-booth-not
Colonel	ker-nal
Meerschaum	meeuh-shawn

ARBUTHNOT: Poirot! I have brought Miss Debenham as you requested, now what do you want with her?

POIROT: I merely wish to ask her some questions. Colonel, you may go.

ARBUTHNOT: I beg your pardon?

POIROT: You are not needed for this.

ARBUTHNOT: Well I'm sorry to hear it, because I'm staying.

POIROT: I am sorry also because you are not.

ARBUTHNOT: Now listen to me you little Frenchman—

BOUC: He is Belgian.

ARBUTHNOT: I don't care if he's the man in the moon, I'm not leaving her!

MARY: It's all right, James. Honestly. I'm sure it won't take long.

POIROT: She is correct. I need a mere ten minutes.

ARBUTHNOT: Well I don't like it! Do you understand? And you can put that in your meerschaum pipe and smoke it!

BOUC: That is Sherlock Holmes.

ARBUTHNOT: Oh go to hell!

[Stage Direction: Arbuthnot stalks out.]

POIROT: Bon. Please sit down, Miss Debenham. There is much pain?

MARY: Well, it's rather sore, that's all.

POIROT: You are very brave. Let us all be grateful that it is not worse.

BOUC: *[Stage Direction: crossing himself]* Thank the Lord.

POIROT: Now Miss Debenham. In the hotel yesterday I heard you speaking with the Colonel and you said you were terrified you would miss the train. Can you tell me why it was so important to you?

MARY: It wasn't that at all. I didn't want to be late.

POIROT: But you said you wanted to "get it over with." Get it "all behind you." Get what behind you? You seemed quite agitated.

MARY: I'm afraid you're reading into it. I'm tremendously punctual, that's all.

POIROT: Aha. Pardon. It is my profession. Sometimes I am too imaginatif. And you and the Colonel are very close, I take it?

MARY: We only met a few days ago, and I suppose we rather hit it off.

POIROT: And as for the murder, I assume you know that the dead man was Bruno Cassetti.

MARY: I heard.

POIROT: And what do you know of the kidnapping?

MARY: Not much, I'm afraid. I've never been to the States.

POIROT: Aha. I see. And what is it that brought you to Istanbul?

MARY: I lived with a family for about a year. I'm a governess.

POIROT: And can you tell me your whereabouts last night between midnight and two o'clock?

MARY: I was in my room with Miss Ohlsson. We chatted until quite late. You see she ... she talks quite a bit, especially when she's anxious, and I may have dozed off for a few minutes.

POIROT: I see.

MARY: May I go?

POIROT: You may. Oh wait. There is one last thing. Would you sign your name please.

MARY: All right. *[Stage Direction: She does.]* It's a good thing I'm left-handed. I'd have trouble signing with my right at the moment.

POIROT: Merci.

BOUC: Please get some rest. And on behalf of the company I will have some champagne sent straight to your room.

MARY: Thank you so much. *[Stage Direction: She exits.]*

BOUC: *[Stage Direction: calling to her]* And if there is anything else I can do to help, please let me know. *[Stage Direction: pleasantly]* Good bye! Good bye! *[Stage Direction: He closes the door.]* Oh my God, can you imagine if she had died? Thank goodness she is such a lovely young woman.

POIROT: She is more than lovely. She is a complete liar.

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