



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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***“Poirot murmured:
‘An intelligent dog.
More intelligent per-
haps than the police
were.’”***

-Agatha Christie’s *Elephants Can Remember*

I don’t know when I became aware of all the books being made into movies – probably not until I had children. Before that, I guess you could say I had no opinion about this topic; I had certainly seen movies like that, for instance *Old Yeller* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* and I didn’t give much thought to their origins. Although I did give much thought to the premise of *Old Yeller* – a movie I have never really recovered from. There are childhood books or movies that leave lasting good impressions – and then there is *Old Yeller*, a movie that paralyzed, crushed and infuriated me all at once. Perhaps only that truly grim scene in Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* can rival these feelings. Or the entire *Of Human Bondage*.

But to stay with my original topic: I was reading the *New York Times* recently and I noticed there were two made-from-books movies reviewed on the same page. My first thought was that was two movies too many, because, to my

mind, books are books and movies are movies and they should stay that way. My rationale is that once a book is made into a movie and a character has been given a face and a voice, it robs us of the freedom to use the author’s voice and our imagination to create our own images.

This is especially true for children’s books. I know what my *Anne of Green Gables* looks and sounds like, and I resist the idea that, no matter how excellent the movies may be, an actress can be my Anne. Consequently, my children were encouraged to read the books before seeing the movie so that they would have the opportunity to use their imaginations first.

On the other hand, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which is to my mind one of the best books ever written, is also a wonderful movie and the world is better off for the existence of that film. Who could ever forget the door slowly opening, to reveal

...well, in case you have somehow missed this film, I'll stop there.

So, what am I trying to say? I guess you could call this an effort to accept or even embrace the existence of these films. The great thing about the imagination is that it is limitless. Perhaps seeing a movie will for a short time influence our ideas of the characters in a book, but repeated reading or various movie versions or even the passage of time may ameliorate the effects. There is also the fact that there are so many books made into movies that the Mid-Continent Public Library, based in Independence, Missouri, has a compilation of “over 1,150 books, novels, short stories, and plays that have been made into motion pictures [since 1980]” (MCPL.lib.mo.us). So, realistically, I am definitely fighting a losing battle.

In addition, I have been watching the BBC series based

on Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot books. These are wonderful, low-key, beautifully acted pieces, with David Souchet playing Poirot. To my mind, Souchet looks nothing like the real Poirot, and despite seeing many episodes, I still carry a clear vision of the real Hercule in my mind.

This has been comforting and revealing to me, and it has encouraged the small step I have made in the direction of accepting that no matter what I think, books will continue to be made into movies and children will continue to watch them. And, to be honest, those same children will come into the library and ask for the book. So, maybe it all works out in the end.