

Moriarty - The Invisible Man

by
Howard Ostrom

"If there is no Moriarty then I am not Holmes!"... Justin Playfair, They Might be Giants

With the vast number of Moriarty performers I've come across in my years of collecting Holmes in the various medias, I'll admit I get a bit stunned when I'm asked questions like, "Who is your favorite Moriarty actor?" or "Which actor most resembles Moriarty?" Yet, I'm never as stunned as the person who asked it is, when my response is Claude Rains. A sharp questioner might shoot back at me with, "Claude Rains never played Moriarty, did he?" Or, the more common follow up might simply be "Okay", followed a blank stare. Still others will try to impress me by saying, "I thought for sure you'd answer, Eric Porter, or Jared Harris, or Andrew Scott, or Lawrence Olivier, or Henry Daniell, or Lionel Atwill, or George Zucco, or Lyn Harding, etc.?", totally unaware Claude Rains never played the Professor. I'm not attempting to deceive or show up these questioners with my response, and I will explain why my answer is Claude Rains, and not the other Moriarty media performers I might strew out, in the following paragraphs.

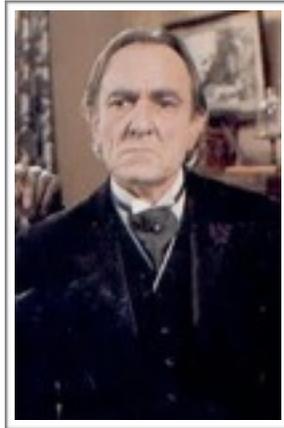
In his 1893 short story *The Final Problem*, Arthur Conan Doyle introduces Holmes's greatest opponent, the criminal mastermind, Professor James Moriarty. The physical description of Professor James Moriarty comes directly from Holmes. "He is extremely tall and thin, his forehead domes out in a white curve, and his two eyes are deeply sunken in this head. He is clean-shaven, pale, and ascetic-looking, retaining something of the professor in his features. His shoulders are rounded from much study, and his face protrudes forward, and is forever slowly oscillating from side to side in a curiously reptilian fashion. He peered at me with great curiosity in his puckered eyes."



Paget's Moriarty

Watson, as a medical man, may have described Moriarty perhaps as having osteitis deformans, the aptly called Paget's disease, named for the English surgeon Sir James Paget, whom Doyle was surely aware of. Paget's disease is a chronic bone disorder that typically results in enlarged, deformed bones due to excessive breakdown and formation of bone tissue that can cause bones to weaken and may result in bone pain, and bone deformities. I say aptly named 'Paget's disease' since the illustration of Moriarty supplied in FINA comes from Sidney Paget. Is this the portrait of Moriarty I imagined from my readings, sorry Sidney but not quite how I would have portrayed Moriarty in the medias.

Given this description by Holmes, put to illustration by Sidney Paget, I would have probably replied to the question of the performer that looks like Moriarty the most with Eric Porter perhaps, since Granada succeeded in finding a Paget illustration lookalike. Igor Maslennikov's choice for Visilay Livanov's antagonist in the Russian series Viktor Yevgrafov is another dead ringer.



Eric Porter



Viktor Yevgrafov

But wait, Holmes has told us more than a description of Moriarty. He has detailed Moriarty's situation for us too. "He is the Napoleon of crime, Watson. He is the organizer of half that is evil and of nearly all that is undetected in this great city. He is a genius, a philosopher, an abstract thinker. He has a brain of the first order. He sits motionless, like a spider in the center of its web, but that web has a thousand radiations, and he knows well every quiver of each of them. He does little himself. He only plans. But his agents are numerous and splendidly organized. Is there a crime to be done, a paper to be abstracted, we will say, a house to be rifled, a man to be removed--the word is passed to the Professor, the matter is organized and carried out. The agent may be caught. In that case money is found for his bail or his defense. But the central power which uses the agent is never caught--never so much as suspected. This was the organization which I deduced, Watson, and which I devoted my whole energy to exposing and breaking up."

The innovator and most famous American stage actor William Gillette chose actor W. L. Abingdon to play Professor Moriarty in *Sherlock Holmes* at the Lyceum Theatre, London in 1901.



W L Abingdon

The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News, Oct. 19, 1901



W L Abingdon as Moriarty

Black and White Budget, Jan. 11, 1902

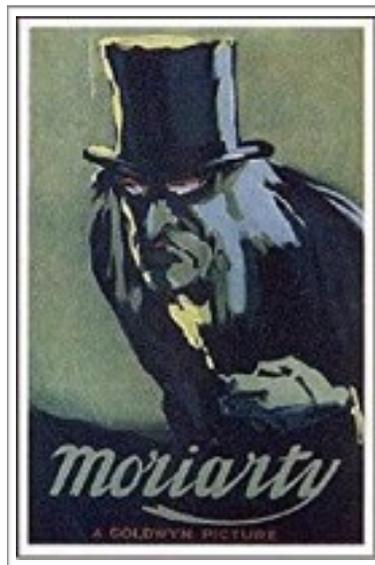


W L Abingdon as Moriarty

Many Sherlockians have described Moriarty and Holmes based on these words as the light and dark sides of the same coin, or the yin and yang. To a questioner who views Moriarty through those glasses, I would respond the performer who best mirrored Holmes was Gustav von Seyffertitz in *Sherlock Holmes* (1922). Many viewers were convinced John Barrymore actually played the dual role of Holmes and Moriarty which is high praise of Gustav von Seyffertitz's Moriarty abilities.



John Barrymore & Gustav von Seyffertitz



Poster of Gustav Von Seyferrtitz as Professor Moriarty.

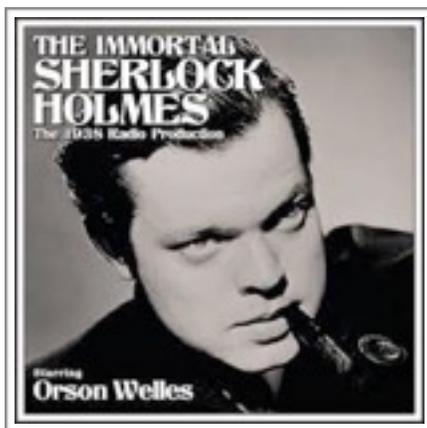
Based on the character from the 1922 silent film *Sherlock Holmes* Artist: Will Dyson.

Talk about a Moriarty actor mirroring a Holmes actor, I'll bet the theater goers for the stage play *Sherlock Holmes*, in Reykjavik, Iceland in 1912, thought they were seeing double. Bjarni Björnsson played Sherlock Holmes and Andrjes Björnsson, his twin brother, and the other actor on the postcard below, was Professor Moriarty. Fans of the BBC show *Sherlock* know that a running joke over it's seasons has been the oft-repeated phrase "it's never twins." Well this time it *is* twins.



Andrjes Björnsson and Bjarni Björnsson

Other actors have actually performed as both as Sherlock Holmes and Professor Moriarty on different occasions which lends support to a yin and yang theory, at least by numerous casting directors. The legendary Orson Welles, who played Sherlock Holmes on radio in *The Immortal Sherlock Holmes* (1938) for the *Mercury Theater on Air*, would return to Moriarty on radio in 1954, with John Gielgud as Sherlock Holmes and Ralph Richardson as Dr. Watson.



Orson Welles



Gielgud, Welles, & Richardson

Anthony Higgins, who played Sherlock Holmes, with Debrah Farentino in the Watson (Amy Winslow) role, in the 1993 TV movie *1994 Baker Street; Sherlock Holmes Returns*, also appeared in in the 1995 movie *Young Sherlock Holmes* as Professor Rathe, the younger version of Professor Moriarty, with Nicolas Rowe as Sherlock Holmes and Alan Cox as Dr. Watson.



Anthony Higgins - Sherlock Holmes



Anthony Higgins - Professor Rathe

Richard Roxburgh would appear as Sherlock Holmes, with Ian Hart as Dr. Watson in the 2002 TV movie *Hound of The Baskervilles*, and then just a year later show up as Moriarty in the film *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*.

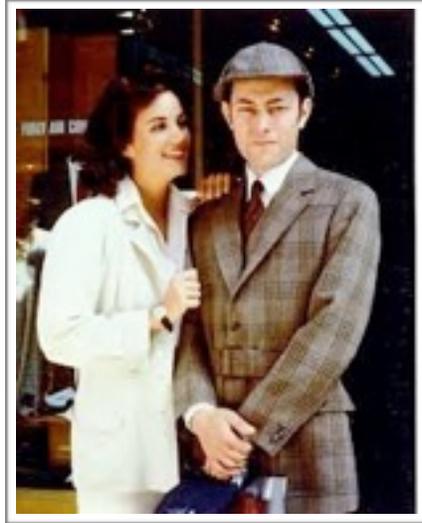


Ian Hart & Richard Roxburgh - Watson & Holmes



Richard Roxburgh - Moriarty

Actor Michael Pennington shows up as Sherlock Holmes in the 1987 TV movie *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*, with lovely Margaret Colin as Jane Watson and returned to BBC radio as Moriarty in a 1991 version of *The Final Problem* and a 1993 version of *The Empty House*.



Margaret Colin & Michael Pennington

Canadian Actor John Colicos who appeared on stage in 1975 as Sherlock Holmes, with Donald Symington as Dr. Watson, took on a dual role as both Inspector Lestrade and Professor Moriarty in an 1989 episode of *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, titled *My Dear Watson*, which had Brian Bedford as Sherlock Holmes.



John Colicos

Geoffrey Whitehead played Holmes in the TV series *Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson* (1980), with Donald Pickering as Dr. Watson, and later Moriarty on radio in the BBC's *The Newly Discovered Casebook of Sherlock Holmes* (1999), with Roy Hudd as Sherlock Holmes and Chris Emmett as Dr. Watson.



Geoffrey Whitehead- Sherlock Holmes



Geoffrey Whitehead - Moriarty

Luis Hector, the first actor to play Sherlock Holmes on TV in NBC's *The Three Garridebs* with William Podmore as Dr. Watson, also played Holmes in the 1936 *Sherlock Holmes* radio series, with Harry West as Dr. Watson, and Moriarty in the (1939 -1947) *The New Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* radio series with Basil Rathbone (& Tom Conway) as Sherlock Holmes and Nigel Bruce as Dr. Watson.



Luis Hector

New York Times, Jan.13, 1935



Luis Hector

Juris Strenga (Juris Strang) (1937 -), is a famous Latvian actor who played Sherlock Holmes in *Here Is My Village* (1972) a Latvian TV movie, which also had the future Dr. Watson, Vitaly Solomin in it. Juris Strang, would then play Moriarty, in the 1982 *Sherlock Holmes* a Latvian musical based on the Gillette play.



Juris Strenga - Holmes



Juris Strenga - Moriarty

Curiously enough, even Dr. Watson actors have become Moriarty actors. For example the aforementioned Alan Cox, Watson in *Young Sherlock Holmes* in 1995, showed up as Moriarty in Big Finishes' *Empty House/Final Problem* in 2011 with Nicholas Briggs as Sherlock Holmes and Richard Earl as Dr. Watson. Actor Daniel Davis actually appeared on stage in 1980 as Dr. Watson in the play *Crucifer of Blood*, with Peter Donat as Holmes, but is better remembered for his sterling holodeck performances as Moriarty in *Star Trek the Next Generation*, with Brent Spiner (Data) as Sherlock Holmes and Levar Burton (Geordi) as Dr. Watson, episodes *Elementary*, *My Dear Data* (1988) *Ship in a Bottle* (1993). Even the Granada Sherlock Holmes series Inspector Lestrade, Colin Jeavons got into the act, appearing as Moriarty in 1983's *The Baker Street Boys*, with Roger Ostime as Sherlock Holmes and Hubert Rees as Dr. Watson, episode *The Adventure of the Winged Scarab*.



Daniel Davis



Alan Cox



Colin Jeavons

Putting aside Holmes description of Moriarty, and the yin and yang theory of Holmes and Moriarty, what else do we really know of Moriarty. A blog of friend and fellow Sherlockian Ray Wilcockson came to the conclusion that it was the *invisiblity* of Moriarty that secured his legendary status. He noted that this T.S. Eliot poem said it better than he could. Eliot, as you know, was a great Holmes reader - Macavity's inspired I believe by Moriarty.

MACAVITY: THE MYSTERY CAT

Macavity's a Mystery Cat: he's called the Hidden Paw -
For he's the master criminal who can defy the Law.
He's the bafflement of Scotland Yard, the Flying Squad's despair:
For when they reach the scene of crime - Macavity's not there!

Macavity, Macavity, there's no one like Macavity,
He's broken every human law, he breaks the law of gravity.
His powers of levitation would make a fakir stare,
And when you reach the scene of crime - Macavity's not there!
You may seek him in the basement, you may look up in the air -
But I tell you once and once again, Macavity's not there!

Macavity's a ginger cat, he's very tall and thin;
You would know him if you saw him, for his eyes are sunken in.
His brow is deeply lined with thought, his head is highly domed;
His coat is dusty from neglect, his whiskers are uncombed.
He sways his head from side to side, with movements like a snake;
And when you think he's half asleep, he's always wide awake.

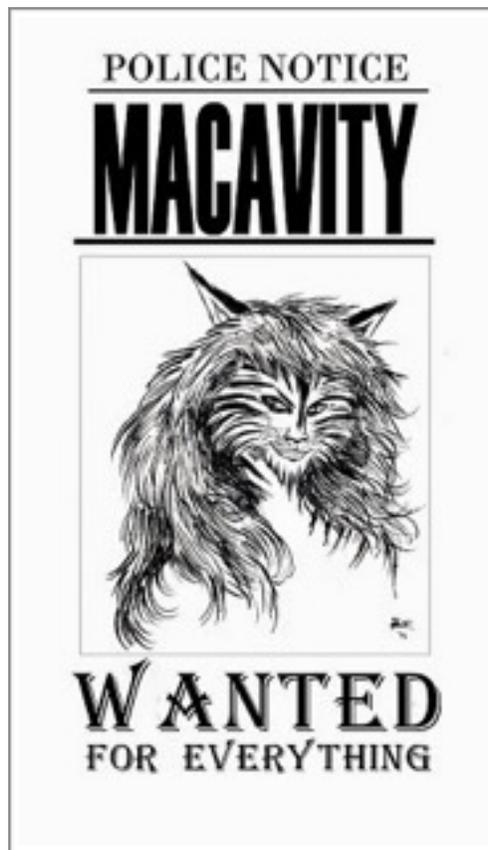
Macavity, Macavity, there's no one like Macavity,
For he's a fiend in feline shape, a monster of depravity.
You may meet him in a by-street, you may see him in the square -
But when a crime's discovered, then Macavity's not there!

He's outwardly respectable. (They say he cheats at cards.)
And his footprints are not found in any file of Scotland Yard's.
And when the larder's looted, or the jewel-case is rifled,
Or when the milk is missing, or another Peke's been stifled,
Or the greenhouse glass is broken, and the trellis past repair -
Ay, there's the wonder of the thing! Macavity's not there!

And when the Foreign Office find a Treaty's gone astray,
Or the Admiralty lose some plans and drawings by the way,

There may be a scrap of paper in the hall or on the stair -
But it's useless to investigate - Mcavity's not there!
And when the loss has been disclosed, the Secret Service say:
`It must have been Macavity!' - but he's a mile away.
You'll be sure to find him resting, or a-licking of his thumbs,
Or engaged in doing complicated long-division sums.

Macavity, Macavity, there's no one like Macavity,
There never was a Cat of such deceitfulness and suavity.
He always has an alibi, and one or two to spare:
At whatever time the deed took place - **MACAVITY WASN'T THERE!**
And they say that all the Cats whose wicked deeds are widely known
[I might mention Mungojerrie, I might mention Griddlebone]
Are nothing more than agents for the Cat who all the time
Just controls their operations: the Napoleon of Crime!



Macavity = Moriarty

Yes, Macavity, Moriarty was invisible to everyone except Sherlock Holmes! Moriarty is invisible to me. Claude Rains played the Invisible Man in the 1933 movie of the same name. An *Invisible Man* quote from that movie is, “Power, I said! Power to walk into the gold vaults of the nations, into the secrets of kings, into the Holy of Holies; power to make multitudes run squealing in terror at the touch of my little invisible finger. Even the moon's frightened of me, frightened to death! The whole world's frightened to death!” That quote could just as easily be from the mouth of Moriarty.



Claude Rains or Moriarty?

So now you know why I selected Claude Rains as the actor who best resembles Professor Moriarty. Which leaves me with the question of who is my favorite Moriarty performer. Since this is only an opinion question, and you made it this far in the article :-), I will give you my opinion. A few years back my answer might have been Lyn Harding of the Wontner 1930's Holmes films, or perhaps Daniel Davis from “Star Trek the Next Generation” as they would have been the most memorable two that first came to mind.



Lyn Harding

The Author's Favorite Moriarty

However, since the BBC *Sherlock* series debuted in 2010 my absolute favorite Moriarty, without peer, goes to Andrew Scott. He is the most exciting and haunting Holmes in my mind palace of Moriarty performers.



Andrew Scott - They even have the same hat!



Andrew Scott - This author's King of Moriartys

I have to give an honorable mention to a current internet Moriarty, who I also find extremely entertaining. Adrian Charlton, in the ongoing *Mary Morston Mysteries*, found on Ross K. Foad's *No Place Like Holmes* website. The *Mary Morston Mysteries* also may be viewed on Youtube. Charlton plays the classic style melodramatic villain to the tee! Moriarty fans, I recommend you out his fine performance.



Adrian Charlton

The Author's Least Favorite Moriarty

In finale, Natalie Dormer, Jamie Moriarty (or is she Irene Adler?) in CBS TV's *Elementary* is my least favorite Moriarty. Dormer, normally an excellent actress, is ruined by a terrible storyline, which has her as both Jamie Moriarty and Irene Adler.



Lucy Liu, Jonny Lee Miller, & Natalie Dormer

Holmes, Who is the card from?
Watson,



Merry Christmas Sherlock and A Happy New Year to all Sherlockians

The End