

A Q&A with Hercule Poirot

*Shortly before she wrote **Evil Under the Sun**, Agatha Christie responded to questions from her American publisher with this imaginary letter from Hercule Poirot himself...*

So you think the Americans will be interested in reading about Hercule Poirot? I, who undoubtedly have the finest brain in Europe – do you not know that above all things I have a horror of publicity? But it is well that you sent me in your letter a list of questions and these I am answering in the same order.

What was your first case?

I began work as a member of the detective force in Brussels on the Abercrombie Forgery Case in 1904, and for many years was proud to be a member of the detective service in my native Belgium.

Where do you live?

Since the closing year of the war, I have been in London, having rooms for some time with *mon vieux ami* Hastings, at 14 Faraway Street, under the motherly supervision of Mrs Pearson. I limped badly in those days and lived a short while in the country where for months I cultivate the marrows. I didn't like the country particularly, however. The English people have a mania for the fresh air. The big air, it's all very well outside where it belongs – why admit it to the house? In 1923, I set up as a private detective in London, sharing joint rooms with *mon ami* Hastings. In June of 1935 I installed

myself in one of the newest type of service flats in London, called Whitehaven Mansions, which particular building I chose entirely on account of its strictly geometric appearance and proportion.

Is it true that you have your little prejudices?

Anything in the least crooked or disorderly is a torment to me. In my bookcase, I arrange the tallest book at the end; then the next tallest, and so on. My medicine bottles are placed in a neatly graduated row. If your necktie were not correct, I should find it irresistible not to make it straight for you. Should there be a morsel of omelette on your coat, a speck of dust on your collar, I must correct these.

Order and method are my gods. For my breakfast, I have only toast which is cut into neat little squares. The eggs – there must be two – they must be identical in size. I confess to you that I will stoop to pick up a burnt match from a flower bed and bury it neatly. I cannot help but straighten up the ornaments on a mantelpiece, and to me the game of golf for which you Americans have a furious energy is shapeless and haphazard. Its only redeeming feature is the square tee-boxes.

How would you be recognized in a crowd?

I am five feet four inches high. My head, it is egg-shaped and I carry it a little to one side, the left. My eyes, I am told, shine green when I am excited. My boots are neat patent leather, smart and shiny. My stick is embossed with a gold band. My watch is large and keeps the time exactly. My moustache is the finest in all London.

What do you read – Sherlock Holmes, perhaps?

I read almost nothing. True, I delight in Dickens and Shakespeare. Also, I am *bon catholique* and read my Bible. As to the Sherlock Holmes stories about which you enquire, to many they are admirable but to me greatly over-rated. The fallacies – the really amazing fallacies – that there are in those stories! I also read the little papers with the pictures, but for me I like a game of cards at which I admit I have considerable skill.

What is your technique in solving a crime?

As to the method, the technique, of Hercule Poirot, my force is in my brain – not my feet. In my early days I carried a little case, small forceps and test tubes; things which I found I put into tiny envelopes. Everything I wrote in a little note-book. In the police force in Belgium I learned it was very useful to read handwriting upside down. *Eh bien*, that was when Papa Poirot was young. Today I am a consulting detective, as much a specialist as a Harley Street physician. I own I have a certain disdain for tangible evidence. I prefer just to sit here and think – what *mon ami* Hastings has called ‘employing the little grey cells’. I arrange the facts neatly, each in its proper place. These I examine – and reject. Those of importance I will put on one side; those of no importance, pouf! I blow them away! One fact leads to another – so we continue. Does the next fit in with that? *Voyons!* Good, we can proceed. This next little fact – no! Ah, that is curious! There is something missing – a link in the chain that is not here. Peril to the detective who says, ‘It is so small – it will not matter. I will forget it.’ That way lies confusion. Everything matters. With method and logic one can accomplish anything.

Excerpted from ‘A Letter To My Publisher’ ©Agatha Christie Ltd.