

# The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept **THE** definitive answer. This week it's the actor Christopher Eccleston's turn

**The prized possession you value above all others...** My father Ronnie's old brown sheepskin coat, which he gave to me in the 1980s. He died in 2012 aged 84 from pneumonia following a hip replacement. We loved each other deeply and I still think about him every day, especially when I wear that coat.

**The biggest regret you wish you could amend...** Failing to make it as a professional footballer. I was captain of my school team in Salford and very committed, but I had a terrible first touch on the ball. Knowing I'd never play for Manchester United was the first great disappointment in my life.

**The temptation you wish you could resist...** I find cigarettes particularly hard to resist when I'm out drinking, but I'm getting better.

**The book that holds an everlasting resonance...** If This Is A Man, Primo Levi's memoir about surviving Auschwitz. He writes of starving prisoners sharing their daily bread with each other in order to retain their humanity, which the Nazis sought to destroy. It's a masterpiece.

Right: David Bradley as Billy with his kestrel in the film Kes. Above right: croissants. Far right: a beach by the ocean in Sri Lanka

**The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day...** I'd become a fourth member of the Ikettes – Ike and Tina Turner's beautiful backing singers in the 1960s. I could listen to their troubles with men and offer them a solution... me!

**The pet hate that makes your hackles rise...** Bad manners. Manners are an admission that others have feelings.

**The person who has influenced you most...** My mum Elsie for her hard work and curiosity. She's 84 and the most loving person I've ever met. Without her and my dad, I'd be nothing.

**The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint...** William Shakespeare. I'd ask if his plays were really written by the Earl of Oxford and/or Francis Bacon, as some people believe.

**The film you can watch time and time again...** Kes, directed by Ken Loach. The protagonist, Billy, was the first character I saw who I could identify with. The kestrel was his dream and my dreams were football, acting and self-expression.



'The 12 years my father lost to dementia were so heartbreaking I even wish he'd died before it began'



**The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity...** I

love the moon in all its phases. When it's full, I howl and drink and engage in pagan shenanigans.

**The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child...** Think of other people.

**The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again...** The 12 years my father lost to dementia. It was heartbreaking to see his suffering and I even wish he'd died before it began. I'm a lot like him. He was fiery and always confronted injustice.

**The unending quest that drives you on...** To be a great dad to my children, Albert, five, and Esme, three.

**The poem that touches your soul...** The Song Of Wandering Aengus by WB Yeats – it expresses the quest for identity and self-realisation.

**The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase...** That I have no sense of humour.

**The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it...** I'd help Donald Trump 'disappear'.

**The event that altered the course of your life and character...** On a personal level, it's the births of my children. Professionally, it was getting a place at the Central School Of Speech And Drama in London in 1983. It meant I could leave Salford and fulfil my dream.

**The song that means most to you...** We Got To Have Peace by Curtis Mayfield from 1971. The title says it all. What else should we aspire to? It's politics that you can dance to.

**The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions...** I'd wake up with Albert and Esme sleeping beside me, then I'd read Spike Milligan's Badjelly The Witch to them.

We'd go to Dunn's Bakery in north London for fresh croissants before flying to my mum's house in Salford for her spectacular chicken and leek pie. We'd be joined there by my twin brothers Alan and Keith – I'm 53 and they're eight years older than me – and their children. The kids would play football on the field where I played as a boy. Next Albert, Esme

and I would go to Sri Lanka to visit their maternal grandfather and great-grandmother. We'd run on the beach, swim in the ocean and eat a cashew nut curry. Later we'd go to New York in the 1960s and 70s to see Aretha Franklin, Marvin Gaye and James Brown. Soul music is my religion and I want to give it to my children.

**The happiest moment you will cherish forever...** Apart from the births of my children, it was stepping out for the first performance to play Hamlet at the West Yorkshire Playhouse in Leeds in 2002. It's the greatest role ever written and I'd worked 20 years to get it.

**The saddest time that shook your world...** When Britain voted for Brexit.

**The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you...** That I've not become a great stage actor, playing all the big Shakespearean roles. I'd give so much to have another crack at Hamlet.

**The philosophy that underpins your life...** Come together. Love, peace and the destruction of all weaponry.

**The order of service at your funeral...** Everyone will dance to soul and funk, drink to the point of transcendence, and hear stories about my life so they can laugh at my clumsiness.

**The way you want to be remembered...** I want my children to believe in their hearts that I was a good father.

**The Plug...** Christopher Eccleston stars in Anthony Burgess's Oedipus The King tomorrow at 9pm on Radio 3. ■  
As told to Rob McGibbon



## PS...

Gillian Anderson and Hugh Bonneville star in *Viceroy's House*, in cinemas Friday. Daniel Radcliffe returns to the stage in *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* at London's Old Vic today. And Ed Sheeran's new album ÷ is out on Friday



## NEXT WEEK

- Lady Carnarvon's secrets from historic house parties at Highclere – the real Downton Abbey – plus her favourite recipes
- Monty Don's tips for top sweet peas
- Britain's best TV listings