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.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... I'd become a fourth member of the Kiettes – 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 unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... I love the moon in all its phases. When it's full, I bowl and drink and engage in pagan shenanigans.

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

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

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, Louis and Liam.

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 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 chuminess.

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 5pm on Radio 5."

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

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