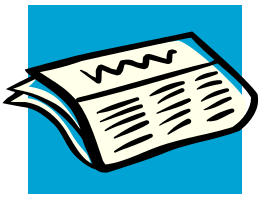
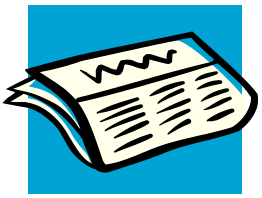


S4 National 5
Homework
Newspaper Analysis



Task
Complete the analysis by reading the article and writing **detailed** information under the following headings:

1. Name of newspaper and date.

2. Headline

3. What the article is about

4. Audience and purpose of the article

5. (a) Two language techniques, including examples, used by the writer, eg, simile, metaphor, word choice, sentence structure, tone, link.

   (b) State why each technique is effective.

6. The meanings of **five** new words

7. Summarise, **in your own words,** five key ideas.

Barrhead High September H/W

Why do we worry that few girls take physics, but not that boys make up just 29% of English A-level students?

There is concern over female participation rates in science, but gender disparities need to be addressed in many subjects

Laura McInerney, The Guardian, Tuesday 18 March 2014

A few years ago, I walked into a university to find several posters of my face. That was disconcerting enough. But it was advertising a graduate scheme for a science teacher – and I am a citizenship teacher. I made inquiries, and was told a focus group had suggested a female teacher was needed for the campaign to "break stereotypes" about scientists. The organiser quipped: "I think your being blonde was a bonus."

This event came to mind last week when reading yet another story about girls' collective failure to study physics at the same rate as boys. The schools minister, Liz Truss, has lamented this fact in many of her recent speeches. Her facts are stark: only a quarter of A-level physics students are female. And while half of all boys who receive an A* in GCSE physics continue to study the subject to 18, for girls that figure is less than one in five.

Like the university tutors who thought sticking a blonde woman on a science poster would somehow resolve gender disparities, Truss's main solution to the science gap appears to be gutsy role-modelling. In a recent speech to Google, Truss said: "It's up to all of us to encourage girls and say, you are just as good as the boys, you can do it."

But why are girls the ones constantly pathologised? This narrative makes out that girls are afraid to study the big scary sciences: but another way of thinking about it is that boys are the odd ones – crowding as they do into just a few subjects. They take up 60% or more of places in just five subjects, and two of these – maths and physics – are particularly dominated by boys, with the subjects accounting for one in five of all A-level examinations taken by boys.

Look across the full suite of A-level subjects, though, and girls dominate in more than 10 subjects, including English, psychology, and modern foreign languages: in some cases, by a lot. Girls make up more than 90% of performing arts students – yet when was the last time you heard a politician imploring teachers to tell boys they can dance "just as well as the girls"?

Looked at in this way, the question we need to answer is less "Why do so few girls

choose physics?" and more "Why do so many boys *only* choose physics and maths-related subjects?" After all, if they spread themselves out across all other subjects, girls would no longer be regularly outnumbered in physics.

Sadly, few politicians question gender disparities in other subjects. The schools minister has referred on several occasions to the fact that 40% of students who take maths A-level are female. She is at pains to point out how disastrous this is. Yet male participation rates in psychology, sociology, and religious studies are regularly well below 40% and no one bats an eyelid. One might argue that these are not "core" subjects. But boys only make up 29% of English A-level students – why isn't that deemed a "problem"? Apparently only girls deserve that label.

Vocational education presents an even greater problem. Few things are more perplexing on sixth-form enrolment days than sitting opposite a male student desperately wanting to study childcare and having his eyes plead with you to lie as his father leans in and abruptly asks: "Tell me, how many boys normally take this subject?" In truth, just 2.5% of childcare BTec students are male. Construction, hairdressing and motor vehicle engineering have similarly large imbalances.

On the upside, some subjects' enrolments are surprisingly even. History, chemistry, business studies and politics are all fairly balanced between the sexes. Commentators point to the parity in these fields as a consequence of path-breaking women. But recent research warns against such simplistic notions.

US researchers found that girls who played with Barbie dolls for just a few minutes, even Barbies dressed as a medical doctor, were less likely to feel capable of doing male-dominated jobs. In contrast, children who played with a more androgynous "Mrs Potato Head" figure showed greater faith in their abilities to take on male-dominated roles. This suggests that while glitzy female role models sound like a good idea, they can actually be less effective for improving women's confidence than a simple "any person can do this" approach.

If we really want more girls to do science, then, we need to be concerned about gender disparities in all subjects, not just physics. And pretending that some blonde woman in a photograph is a scientist is probably not the place to begin.

Barrhead High October H/W

The poor pay a high price when rich people avoid tax

Colette Douglas Home, The Herald, Tuesday 13 May 2014

WHAT does Gary Barlow think tax is for? The pop star appears to understand the idea of public duty. He is known as a dedicated fundraiser for charity. For years he has organised events that raised multi-millions for the benefit of others. But when it comes to dipping into his own pocket to make a fair contribution to society, it's been another matter.

Doesn't he realise tax is the bedrock of our society? It is how we pay for our welfare state, the NHS, our children's education, the police, our roads and pretty much all the infrastructure we rely on. It is a more dignified and effective way to look after everyone's needs than charity can ever be.

Certainly we all find it painful to part with a chunk of what we have earned - to send it south to the Treasury. But that distress is offset by the knowledge we contribute on a sliding scale. We give as a proportion of what we earn. Those at the bottom of the economic heap are excused while those at the top bear a heavier burden.

Or do they? In Barlow's case it seems not. The man lauded by fans and honoured by Buckingham Palace for generating money for the disadvantaged was, at the same time, "aggressively" avoiding what he owed in tax.

With two other members of Take That and the group's manager, he had a £66million investment in a convoluted tax-planning scheme called Icebreakers. None of 51 Icebreakers partnerships made a profit. Instead the losses they accrued could be set against tax. At the tribunal which ruled they must repay the Treasury, the judge said: "The predominant purpose of entering the scheme was to achieve a tax saving."

When the news broke there were calls for Barlow to return the OBE he received in 2012 for his charitable work and his contribution to entertainment. Some said he should be stripped of it. Margaret Hodge MP, chairwoman of the public accounts committee at Westminster, suggested Barlow might want to show contrition by giving it back.

The Prime Minister was asked for his view yesterday morning on live television. It was a golden opportunity to ram home the message he delivered when comedian Jimmy Carr was caught in a similar exposure. Then Mr Cameron called Carr's actions "morally wrong".

Instead of repeating that message, Mr Cameron cavilled. He said he opposed the tax avoidance but felt Barlow should retain his OBE because of his charity work and the huge amount he had done for the country.

The moment was lost as viewers registered with a certain world-weariness that Barlow is

a Conservative Party supporter. And so we sink another notch. It makes me livid.

We've seen Starbucks, Amazon and other big companies shamed. Now we are seeing celebrities in a harsher light.

Bear in mind that right here in Scotland, the Trussell Trust reports a five-fold rise in demand for emergency food parcels. They handed out 14,318 parcels in 2012/13. That rose to 71,428 in 2013/14. Just a couple of days ago a friend involved in children's charities told me she sees mothers visibly losing weight because they are going hungry to feed their children.

Families whose benefit payments have been cut can manage until someone needs a pair of shoes or there's a bigger than average bill to pay. Then they are sinking into debt.

In my lifetime I've never seen a time of greater need for state support. The economy may be on the up but it's not lifting everyone. To our shame, we live in an increasingly unequal society. If ever there was a moment to establish a zero tolerance policy for aggressive tax avoidance it is now.

I know some people don't see hiding their hard-earned cash from George Osborne's clutches as a serious offence. But failure to pay your fair and proper share puts an extra burden on decent people who pay up - those hard-working families again? - and damages our quality of life. Tax translates into public services.

It is wrong, a scandal. Mr Cameron should have said so.

I'd ask a further question and wonder why Gary Barlow received the honour in the first place. Do those who are already rich and famous need public recognition of this sort?

There are armies of unsung heroes and heroines dedicating themselves to charitable work in this country. They do it with no thought of personal gain or public glory which is just as well since most of them receive neither.

If a rich and influential man like Barlow uses his position to do as much that is, of course, admirable. But he will receive his reward in the increased admiration of his fan base. He will be feted by the great and the good. A trip to the palace and the recognition that brings is of course a filip. But think how much more it means to those for whom it is possibly their only glimpse of splendour; their only reward.

I hope Barlow returns his OBE with an abject apology. I also hope that he regularises his tax affairs and continues his charitable work.

And I hope he does so without the prospect of another honour. That would be another way of paying back.

Barrhead High November H/W
Stop sham indignation over armed police

by HUGH REILLY Scotsman 19 May 2014

A minority of Scottish officers bear firearms while on routine business, but this is hardly the scare story some are making it out to be, writes Hugh Reilly

I SNUGLY placed the butt of the rifle into the recess of my left shoulder. Breathing slowly and smoothly to minimise unwanted movement of the firearm, my left eye stared down the barrel of the gun and focused on the target. Denied the advantage of telescopic sights, I was forced to take aim using the kind of sighting arrangement that had made matchlock muskets cutting-edge military technology at the Battle of Sedgemoor. Beads of sweat began to trickle down my face as I imperceptibly squeezed on the trigger. Steeling myself for the inevitable recoil, I fired the weapon and watched in horror as the ball-bearing failed to hit the inner bull and instead struck an unwitting gonk on the third shelf straight between the eyes. "You did that on purpose, ya little runt!" screamed the fairground stallholder. Believe me, if Lee Harvey Oswald had sourced his armament from this stallholder, JFK would have been just another second-term, lame-duck president.

When I joined Strathclyde Police in 1975, I dreamed of becoming a firearms officer. I was, after all, eminently qualified for the post, having watched Dirty Harry three times. I pictured myself standing over Glasgow punks and menacingly asking them if they felt lucky. Instead, the only Magnum I handled was a chocolate and almond ice cream. Standard police issue of the time was a subtle variation of a kitchen rolling pin that, probably due to potential patent problems, had been given the rather poncy name "baton". It would be fair to say that Easterhouse gang members tooled up with bike chains, chibs and bespoke hatchets were somewhat less than intimidated when confronted by these baton-wielding boys in blue.

Thankfully, police officers nowadays have access to sprays and Tasers to protect themselves and the public. At the weekend, however, there was an outbreak of much faux outrage when it was revealed a tiny minority of police personnel are carrying guns while on patrol. The fact that 440 firearms specialists are covering the entire country – and not just urban areas – pleases me but upsets some politicians and human rights agitators. For example, Highland MP Danny Alexander says: "We are lucky to live in one of the safest parts of the UK. There is simply no need for officers to carry firearms in the Highlands."

Until 2 June, 2010, rural Cumbria was also thought to be a safe part of Britain. Derrick Bird's shooting spree that slew 12 and wounded 11 others put paid to that naïve notion. A subsequent investigation partly blamed a delay in deploying firearms officers for the high death total.

Scotland is still scarred by the memory of Dunblane. In my view, it would be a

dereliction of duty for Police Scotland not to offer the same protection to those in the sticks as it affords to city-dwellers.

To be fair, Alexander's absurd comments appear reserved when compared to the utterings of John Scott, QC, chairman of the human rights group Justice Scotland. "I am concerned there could be an increase of illicit firearms on the street in response," he warned. This learned man seriously believes that violent criminals will consider entering a de facto arms race with the forces of law and order – how bizarre! Here's some killer facts for the QC on the QT – gangsters are already plugging bullets into those seeking to undermine their business model.

On 13 January, 2010, my mother and I watched curiously from her window in north Glasgow as a police helicopter hovered over the Asda store's car park. Mr Kevin "The Gerbil" Carroll, lay dead in the back seat of his car, shot several times at close range by masked men in broad daylight. In 2006, two men calmly walked into a Glasgow MOT garage and shot dead a 21-year-old and wounded two others.

Taking Mr Scott's argument to its logical conclusion, any move by Police Scotland to disarm every officer would indubitably lead to all fair-minded mobsters reciprocating by throwing away their Glocks and nostalgically returning to the use of old-fashioned coshes to settle internecine disputes.

Not to be outdone in the inauthentic indignation stakes, Graeme Pearson, Labour's shadow justice minister, went ballistic, saying: "The public needs to be asked if it is something that they want. What happens if a gun goes off when the officer is routinely armed?" Instead of sniping, politicians and others should put things into perspective. There are more than 17,000 police officers, of whom less than 3 per cent are armed, hardly the stuff of a "police state".

I've had the good fortune to have spent time living in other countries where armed police routinely patrol the streets. When I taught in Greece, gun-toting cops would arrive, like other parents, to pick up their kids, and no-one blinked an eyelid. In Torrevieja, Spain, where I currently reside, police officers and the Guardia Civil stroll the prom, chatting and observing, just like their fellow officers in Scotland.

When Scottish decision-makers whine that having armed police more readily available is somehow a threat to the safety of society, they are shooting themselves in the foot.

Barrhead High December H/W

Disappearing act: how easy is it to clean up after yourself on Google?

It's not simple to get an embarrassing photo wiped, writes Chloe Hamilton

The Independent, Tuesday 13 May 2014

Every user has googled themselves at least once – if you say you haven't, you're lying. And typing your own name into the search engine generates conflicting emotions: anxiety and excruciating excitement. What will I find? Will I be first on the list of results? Will that photo of me with two cigarettes stuffed up my nose still be the top image?
But what happens if we stumble across something we consider to be irrelevant or outdated, or even something that might infringe on our privacy?

Keen to find out just how easy it would be to be "forgotten" by a global search engine, following the court ruling that Google must amend some search results at the request of ordinary people, I decided to try to get a photo of myself (a terrible one from last summer in which I'm trying desperately to hide my newly-fitted braces) permanently erased from all Google searches.

My first point of call is, of course, the search engine itself. Typing "how to get Google to remove something" into Google throws up a number of results, the first of which is the company's support page. I trawl my through various Contact Us options, but struggle to find a number for a helpline. Are theirs the only contact details not available via their all-seeing online powers?

Clicking my way through incomprehensible questions, however, I discover that if I want a webpage removed I should go directly to the site's webmaster. For those not in the know, Google helpfully explains that a webmaster is someone who controls the content on websites – not, as I'd suspected, a megalomaniac who runs the internet.

Disappointed with this response, I tick a box telling Google that the overlord has been unresponsive to my request. Google then asks me what I want removed and provides a list of options: a picture, contact details, a government-issued ID number, bank details, a photograph of my signature, inaccurate information about myself, and so on.

I choose "picture" and come up against another brick wall. The reply tells me there's very little that Google remove from search results "on a discretionary basis". Requests to remove contact details and inaccurate information yield the same response. Apparently, the search engine won't remove webpages on the whims of silly girls who want to bury bad photos of themselves.

Requests to delete ID numbers, bank details, and signatures are treated with a little more consideration. Again, I'm told to contact the webmaster, but this time Google asks me to provide more information and I send a form off into the ether.

I try a different approach next, calling the Google press office to see if they can help. I'm directed back to the support page and again told to contact the webmaster of the page I want removed. However, they explain that as the search engine is an index of all of the webpages on the internet, they can in theory remove pages from their results, but it's better to approach a webmaster who can get the content removed altogether. After all, a page removed from Google's results can still be found through another engine, such as Bing or Yahoo.

"People make the mistake of thinking that Google is the internet, which is flattering but inaccurate," says a Google spokesperson. "Even if Google was to take down content, if you went to another search engine you would find it there."

The issues of censorship and privacy remain, but according to Google it is not they but the webmasters who hold the real power.

Barrhead High January H/W

Oscar Pistorius and the blame game

The psychiatric tests Pistorius is undergoing raise the question of how far our state of mind can absolve us of responsibility for our actions

David Shariatmadari, The Guardian, Monday 19 May 2014

Most of us have woken at night to an unfamiliar sound. Those who have will know that the grogginess of sleep does little to dampen the surge in adrenaline. The blood turns sour, and in a moment the heart is pounding at a rate that is frightening in itself. This is the "fight or flight" response, the raw material of anxiety. There is a threat abroad: we enter a state of hypervigilance.

The ability to experience this condition is the result of millions of years of evolution. The better our fight or flight system, the more likely we are to escape from or overcome an adversary. As with every aspect of our physiology, there is a natural variation in the threshold at which we begin to experience that sense of threat, and certain life events can also make us more sensitive to it.

Last week Oscar Pistorius was sent out of a court in Pretoria to undergo psychiatric tests. These will determine whether any anxiety he experienced on the night he killed his girlfriend, Reeva Steenkamp, was related to an existing problem. If it was, then it is possible he could be absolved of any criminal responsibility for her death.

For most of human history differences in the way we think, feel and behave were thought of as personality traits. When these differences were extreme, the person was labelled mad (or, sometimes, a prophet). But the fearful person – just like the shy person, the disobedient person or the easily distracted person – would not have been considered ill, just one of a range of constitutional types. (There is a parlour game to be played in handing out contemporary diagnoses to characters from literature. Did Heathcliff suffer from oppositional-defiant disorder? Was Raskolnikov schizoid?)

Today, many of these types have been redefined as medical conditions. This tendency is controversial, but can be the means by which those whose thoughts or feelings make them distressed, or a danger to themselves or others, get help. What is increasingly clear is that it has seismic implications for the law.

The principle that an altered state of mind can excuse a crime is built into many legal systems. The cause could be drink, a brain tumour that distorts judgment, or an episode of mental illness. But as the empire of psychiatric diagnoses expands, taking in ever finer variations in personality, this will become much more difficult to navigate.

The argument isn't new: lawyers have long argued over what constitutes an impairment of reason. What is changing is the ability of scientists to identify tiny differences in the brains and bodies of subjects, and link those to behaviour. A cultural bias to "hard" data means that the biological carries more weight than the biographical with jurors and judges (although the two are inextricably linked). If a brain tumour can be used as a defence, then why not poor functioning in the pre-frontal cortex, or reduced blood flow in the angular gyrus?

Judgment is certainly altered by anxiety. The levels of important neurotransmitters may change and, over time, the mass of certain structures in the brain too. We cannot know what an unanxious version of Pistorius would have done that night. The question is absurd, though, as the Pistorius we are dealing with *is* anxious. Should that person not be held to account for any crime he may have committed?

With our ability to scrutinise the brain improving all the time, it will become more and more difficult to maintain the fiction that the mind and body operate separately. But as the line between disease and personality blurs, traditional ideas of blame and responsibility could start to fall apart. Should we then abandon blame?

Gwen Adshead, a consultant at Broadmoor hospital, has written that "as clinicians we know mental illness does not necessarily abolish the capacity to form meaningful and competent intentions". For her part Farahany believes that moral accountability is essential, even if we get to a point where we can closely map behaviour to biology. "We have some self-direction," she says. "While it may be limited, we are still clearly capable of making some decisions. And without blame, society can't stigmatise the decisions and actions it wants to prevent."

New scientific techniques make the correlations between biology and behaviour much clearer. But until we are ready to give up the idea of a mind that can choose, even in its darkest moments, blame will have to be part of the story.

• This article was amended on 19 May. Cape Town was changed to Pretoria in the third paragraph.

Barrhead High February H/W
Childcare provides boost to education and economy

by DAVE WATSON **Scotsman 20 May 2014**

Good quality childcare has the power to change lives. The Scottish Government's pledge to transform it is an exciting opportunity. We should not let it pass by, by getting bogged down in arguments about the underlying political motivations.

Research shows low-cost quality childcare benefits women, children, family budgets, in-work rates and economic growth. It's one of the few policies that contributes to both growing the economy and redistributing that growth more fairly. It is undeniably a good thing.

We even have authoritative research showing the positive contribution it makes to improved educational outcomes, higher in-work levels for women, improved health and wellbeing, stronger skills, higher confidence in later life and even lower crime. It genuinely transforms lives.

Early-years education was an achievement of early-years devolution. The then-Labour Liberal coalition introduced it universally for three and four-year-olds, from which nine in ten children benefited. We saw large-scale expansion of wrap-around care, breakfast clubs, after-school clubs and community schools. This was, at the time, big first steps. The problem is, apart from a small expansion in hours and some effort to align private and public sector hours and attempts to make it more flexible for families, there have only been a few baby steps since.

What we now offer complicates as much as it supports family life. There are the free 15 hours of early-years education for three and four-year-olds per week; the childcare elements of Working Tax Credit; employer voucher schemes and various small schemes through Job Centre Plus and anti-poverty initiatives which fund nurseries, crèches and breakfast clubs. Local authorities also subsidise childcare social enterprises and a range of sports and social clubs in schools. It's a maze for parents to navigate.

And childcare in Scotland is not cheap, with fees rising 4.8 per cent last year. The fees for part-time care for two children are now 22 per cent higher than the average mortgage bill. Charges vary considerably across Scotland: in some areas the difference is as much as £3,000.

Twenty-five hours in a nursery in Scotland now costs on average of more than £100 a week and an after-school club almost £50 a week. You only need a couple of children to

ensure there is little financial advantage to working. If you ever wondered where those high childcare fees go, they do not end up in the pockets of those who do the frontline caring of our children.

The childcare workforce, particularly in the private sector, is not well paid. One of the key reasons for UNISON's support for public sector childcare is to ensure that we can build on improvements we have made to pay in that sector. One thing is for sure; we will not transform Scotland by simply expanding the low-paid private sector.

Fees and pay are, of course, only part of the story. To really transform Scotland, we need to provide childcare of the highest quality. This will only be provided by qualified early-years staff. The skills required to deliver high quality childcare, as with much work traditionally done by women, are not rewarded in the market. They are not invested in like other industries.

But again, it is local authorities who employ the best-qualified and most experienced childcare workers and are best placed to expand their workforce while maintaining a high standard.

So let's take the First Minister at face value and get started. We need to engage with parents and staff and start national strategic planning. We need to understand the level of demand and how many parents would work if childcare was available and affordable, and the mix of formal and informal family care parents want, and we need to end the false divide between childcare and education.

Transforming childcare will cost money, we can't pretend otherwise, and without doing the preparatory work at this stage it is anyone's guess as to how much. But we do know it will generate more tax by creating jobs and by supporting women to return to work after maternity leave. And we know there will be a return on our investment. We will also make savings if we invest in getting it right in the first place, as opposed to the high costs we currently pay to overcome the effects of poverty and inequality.

So we need get on with it, so we can all reap the benefit. If the outcome of our divisive constitutional debate results in the transformation of childcare then it may just have been all worthwhile.

• Dave Watson is the Head of Bargaining and Campaigns at UNISON Scotland
www.unison-scotland.org.uk

Barrhead High March H/W

Caroline Aherne: reclusive comic superstar with a big heart

The Royle Family star quit TV at the height of her fame. But now she's back in the public eye, offering her support for a new cancer campaign and revealing her own illness

The Observer Sunday 18 May 2014

In 1999, Caroline Aherne, then at the peak of her powers, following a triumphant first run of *The Royle Family*, met a young comedian, David Walliams. They flirted at the Groucho Club, lying side by side on the snooker table, before going back to Aherne's house in Notting Hill for more drinks. There, as Elvis crooned in the background, she gave Walliams some advice: "Whatever you do, don't lose your anonymity. It's the most terrible thing to lose."

No one can doubt that Aherne meant it. In 2001, after three impeccable series of *The Royle Family*, she announced she was quitting television, aged 37. (She chose, in either a curious, or ingeniously meta, touch, to use *Hello!* as the organ to make this revelation.) She left for Australia, came back to the UK and, in 2006, sold up in London and moved to the south Manchester suburb of Timperley, where she lives round the corner from her mum, Maureen, and brother, Patrick.

Aherne's sardonic narration can be heard on Channel 4's *Gogglebox*, but, in contrast to Walliams, she has practically disappeared from view this past decade.

The 50-year-old Aherne's return to the headlines is not a cause for celebration. Sadly, it is not because of a new television show – though she is said to have been writing again with her regular collaborator, Craig Cash. Instead, it emerged that she is recovering from chemotherapy for lung cancer. The condition was diagnosed at the end of last year and is understood to be hereditary. This is the third time she has had to deal with cancer, having had retinoblastoma, a sight defect, as a baby and also bladder cancer.

With Aherne's aversion to publicity, her decision to speak at an event in Manchester on 26 June, organised by all the cancer-care providers in the city, is a significant one. Her reasons were both personal and philanthropic. "I've had cancer and my brother's had cancer and we know how it affects people," she said for the launch of the initiative. "It's truly shocking to learn that Manchester came bottom out of 150 areas in England for premature deaths from cancer. Our survival rates are 25% lower than the national average and the number of people getting lung cancer is a third higher."

There has been some discussion in recent times, notably around the deaths of American actors James Gandolfini and Philip Seymour Hoffman, of our tendency to grieve over the travails of celebrities – essentially strangers. Perhaps we are mourning the loss of an irreplaceable talent. Maybe, some speculate loftily, we are preparing for when we have to go through similar emotional upheavals ourselves.

News of Aherne's illness, however, has provoked a particularly heartfelt emotional outpouring – yes, on Twitter, but also in the real world. Again, part of this is down to the fondness that people feel towards her work, first as the faux-naive chatshow host Mrs Merton, and then in her portrayal of Denise, the self-absorbed but surprisingly likable daughter in *The Royle Family*.

More than that, though, was the spirit of those programmes, both of which she wrote with Cash and Henry Normal. Although clearly tack-sharp – she has an IQ of 176 – the comedy of *The Royle Family*, in particular, is tender and often very moving. "She loved the daftness of people," noted Walliams, who had a turbulent, year-long relationship with Aherne, in the book *Inside Little Britain*. "So she would watch *Trisha* and point out the silly things people said but her observations were affectionate. Full of warmth. There was no intellectual snobbery about her. Or superior class judgment. She is from that world and loves it."

Much of the material for *The Royle Family* came from Aherne's own nearest and dearest. Her father, Bert, was an alcoholic and sometimes violent with it. He worked on the railways, died in 1995, and he bequeathed some of his comic grouchiness to Ricky Tomlinson's Jim Royle. Maureen was an Irish immigrant, too, and the family lived first in London before moving to a council house in Wythenshawe, Manchester, when Aherne was two.

When Aherne announced her "retirement" in 2001, she said: "Celebrity is just a game… I can't be [bothered] playing it any more because I've decided I'm no good at it." She was not wrong. In 1994, Aherne married New Order's bassist Peter Hook in a wedding chapel in Las Vegas; two years later they split.

Aherne's drinking was a recurring problem: a bottle of asti spumante was her rider for *The Mrs Merton Show*. More seriously, in July 1998, she mixed three bottles of champagne with antidepressants; a suicide attempt that ended in a month's rehab at the Priory. "I actually have no recollection of it," she said later. "Finding out what I'd done was like finding out I'd stabbed 15 people. I would never knowingly hurt people in that way."

The details we have of Aherne's life now are scarce and random. She doesn't go out much except to a local Italian restaurant. In 2012, she went on holiday to Benidorm with her mother on a Monarch flight. She's given up smoking. Anonymity obviously suited her and we can only be saddened about her reasons for having to give it up.

Barrhead High April H/W

So you regret your tattoo. Should you have it removed?

It may be the one thing Beyoncé, Chris Martin and Jill Abramson have in common. But ultimately you can't eradicate the past

John Crace, The Guardian, Friday 16 May 2014

If you have enough tattoos, it's a fair bet you will come to regret one or two of them several years later. I write from experience. The trick is damage limitation: to ensure you don't end up with something you hate so much you feel obliged to have it removed.

There have been three people in the news this week whose tattoos have become a matter of public interest. After Beyoncé's sister Solange had a pop at Jay-Z in a New York lift, Beyoncé-ologists have been studying close-ups of the singer's fingers and concluded she might have had a tattoo removed. The tattoo in question was reportedly the letters IV, the semiotics of which have been interpreted as either the Roman numerals for 4 – Beyoncé and Jay-Z's birthdays are both on the fourth of the month: wow, written in the stars! – or an abbreviation of their daughter Ivy. Or, possibly, that the tattooist couldn't fit a D in front of the IV.

Coldplay's Chris Martin is also reportedly in long-term therapy over the future of the letter G, for Gwynnie, he had tattooed in happier days. And the issue most bugging Jill Abramson after her sacking from the New York Times is that she recently had the newspaper's logo tattooed on her arm. The cost of laser removal is proving to be the biggest obstacle to agreeing a severance package.

It's also possible that all this is just speculation. But even if it is, Beyoncé, Chris Martin and Jill Abramson have all committed the cardinal error of having a tattoo that is hostage to fortune. Every tattoo should have a meaning for the person who is having the artwork done – even if its only meaning is decorative – but it is possible for it to be just too personal.

If your tattoo is going to be personal it's important to choose subjects that you know you can live with in perpetuity. I have two such tattoos. One is my dog, the estimable Herbert Hound, whom I know is incapable of letting me down. The other is Tottenham Hotspur Football Club, which I know is incapable of not letting me down. Neither can surprise me.

But even the mistakes tell their own story. It sounds as if it's too late for Beyoncé, but

Chris Martin should definitely keep the G. Perhaps his next partner will be a Grace or Gloria. In which case, he's ahead of the game. If she's not, then he can always have ONE added after the G. Same goes for Abramson. She's rightly proud of having edited the New York Times, so why not remember it? And if she's still mad at them in six months she can have "SHAFTED BY" added to the tat.

In any case, trying to forget or eradicate the past doesn't make it go away. Let the mistakes stay.