

Evil



Evil

This section deals with the concept of evil and the way it comes to expression in both fiction and non-fiction. How can we define evil? Do we need evil to understand what is good? Is man fundamentally evil or good – or do we all possess both elements? What triggers evil and what prevents it from surfacing? Why are we so fascinated by evil?

The material is adapted from the book “Wider Contexts”, Gyldendal 2012.



The Citizen, by Richard Hamilton.

RICHARD HAMILTON (1922-2011)

1. An English painter and collage artist. His 1955 exhibition *Man, Machine and Motion* (Hatton Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne) and his 1956 collage, *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?*, produced for the *This Is Tomorrow* exhibition of the Independent Group in London, are considered by critics and historians to be among the earliest works of pop art.
2. A major retrospective of his work was at Tate Modern until May 2014.

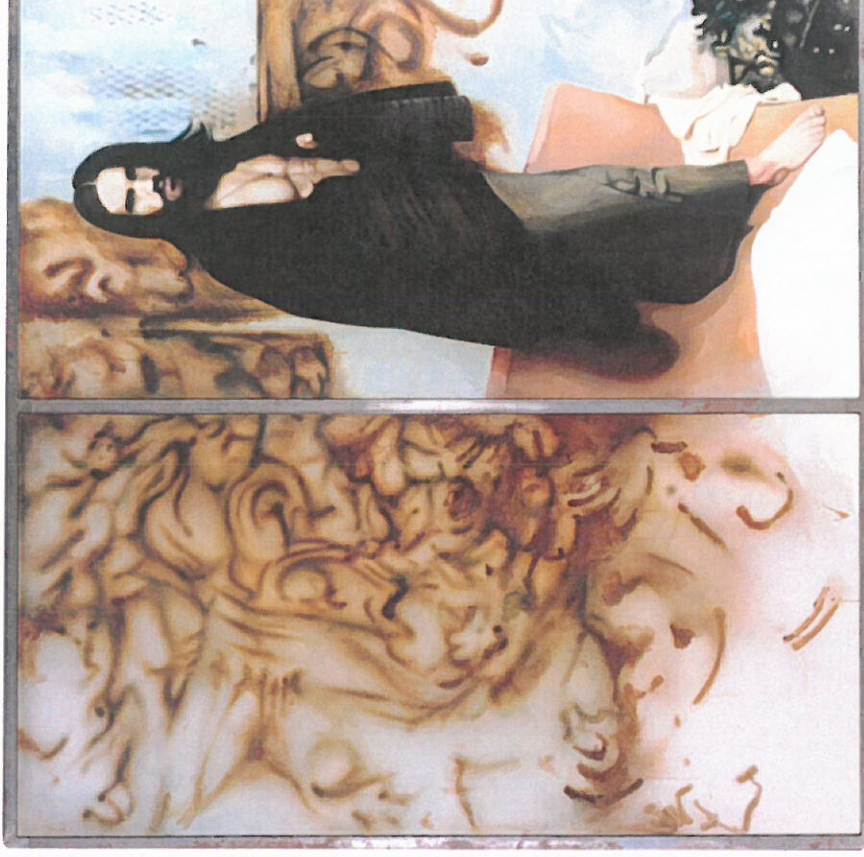
Source:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Hamilton_\(artist\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Hamilton_(artist))

RICHARD HAMILTON: THE CITIZEN

1 Describe the painting.

GALLERY 1.1 The Citizen



To be found at the Tate Museum:

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hamilton-the-citizen-t03980>

a Focus on the man. What does he look like? Where is he? What do you think he has done? Does he look evil? If yes – what gives you that impression?

b The title of the painting is The Citizen, and it was painted in 1981-3 by Richard Hamilton. Does this information add anything to your interpretation?

c The painting is part of the Tate Collection. Check the internet for further information about the inspiration for the painting.

General questions

1 Which of the following definitions of evil come closest to your idea of evil? Is it

a that which causes harm, destruction or misfortune

b something morally bad or wrong

c having the nature of vice

d morally objectionable behaviour

e the quality of being morally wrong in principle or practice

f earthquakes and other natural disasters

g other ...?

Explain the following quotations:

1 "The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones."

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (1564-1616, POET, PLAYWRIGHT)

2 "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."

ATTRIBUTED TO EDMUND BURKE (1729-1797, STATESMAN, POLITICAL THEORIST AND PHILOSOPHER)

3 "Life often presents us with a choice of evils rather than of good."

CHARLES CALEB COLTON (1780-1832, CLERIC AND WRITER)

4 "No man is justified in doing evil on the ground of expediency."

THEODORE ROOSEVELT (1858-1919, 26TH PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA (1901-1909))

5 "The evil best known is the most tolerable."

LIVY (59 BC-AD 17, ROMAN HISTORIAN)

6 "Don't let us make imaginary evils when you know we have so many real ones to encounter."

OLIVER GOLDSMITH (1730-1774, WRITER AND POET)

7 "I, and the public know

What all schoolchildren learn, Those to whom evil is done

Do evil in return."

W.H. AUDEN (1907-1973, POET)

2 Choose your favourite quotation from the above, learn it by heart and walk round your classroom quoting it to the others.

Further assignments:

3 In pairs: have you read a text or watched a film whose main theme is evil? If yes, what was the attitude to evil expressed in it? Underline why you consider it evil.

4 Can you think of acts which some people may regard as evil and others as heroic?

Bad or Mad, by Sean Spence

SEAN SPENCE (1962-2010)

1. Sean Spence was a reader in psychiatry at the University of Sheffield and honorary consultant psychiatrist to Sheffield Care Trust. He convened the Sheffield Psychopathology Symposia, the last of which was devoted to "Psychiatry and the Problem of Evil".

Pre-reading

1 What do you consider evil? Use General Questions task 1, p. 3 for inspiration.

2 In pairs: tell each other about an evil act that you have witnessed or heard about. Underline why you consider it evil.

Could there be mitigating circumstances?

3. Use the words below to fill in the gaps:

mitigating punished offenders compassion
inexplicable secular abduction mental commit

Whatever your views on God, the distinction is appealing. In our _____ world,

where crimes are _____, we need to believe that someone who commits an

_____ act of violence or physical cruelty, such as torture, child

do you think will be characteristic of the style as regards sentence structure and vocabulary?

Bad or Mad

New Scientist 20-26 March, 2004

If Child Killers And Serial Killers Know They Are Doing Wrong, Does That Make Them Culpable?

It's Not Nearly As Simple As That, Says Psychiatrist.

WHAT is evil? In today's largely **secular** western society we may find it hard to define. But, historically, the question of evil has been a theological one. Generations of **apologists** have searched for ways to justify God in an imperfect world. In the Christian tradition, **Saint Augustine** distinguished between two forms of evil: "moral evil" the evil humans do, by choice, knowing that they are doing wrong; and "natural evil", the bad things that just happen – the storm, the flood, volcanic **eruptions**, **fatal** disease.

Whatever your views on God, the distinction is appealing. In our **secular** world, where crimes are punished, we need to believe that someone who commits an **inexplicable** act of violence or physical

_____ or murder, has freely chosen to do so. We accept that there may be

_____ circumstances, including diminished responsibility or

_____ illness. What we find most chilling are crimes that are planned,

where _____ have a goal in mind and demonstrate control. Like Uma

Thurman's character in Quentin Tarantino's film Kill Bill, people who _____ such

crimes are seen as unambiguously morally evil. "It's mercy, _____ and forgiveness I lack," she says, "not rationality."

4 Find out what kind of magazine New Scientist is and what ideas it was founded on. Based on this information, what modes of appeal would you expect to find in the article? What

cruelty, such as torture, child **abduction** or murder, has freely chosen to do so. We accept that there may be **mitigating** circumstances, including **diminished** responsibility or mental illness. What we find most **chilling** are crimes that are planned, where **offenders** have a goal in mind and demonstrate control. Like Uma Thurman's character in Quentin Tarantino's film Kill Bill, people who commit such crimes are seen as **unambiguously** morally evil. "It's mercy, compassion and forgiveness I lack," she says, "not **rationality**."

Thurman's character "The Bride" can be seen as possessing what is now recognised by psychiatrists as a **severe** antisocial personality. Such people are not clinically mentally ill, and

they usually know when they are doing wrong. But are they really evil? **Neuroscience** is beginning to tell us that while the **cognitive**, planning part of the brains of **severely**

antisocial people works normally, other **neural** centres do not. The findings raise a series of **thorny** questions. Should courts view evidence of antisocial personality **traits** as **mitigating** a violent crime?

Should medical treatment

supplant punishment? Should psychiatrists be compelled to

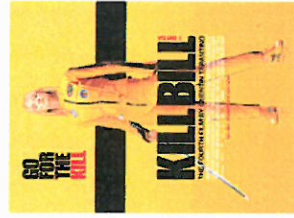
identify people with these mental abnormalities and **incarcerate** them for their own good and that of society? And, even, does moral evil exist, or is all evil "natural" according to **Saint Augustine's** definition? [...]

Undoubtedly, we have much more to learn about the neuroscience of violent and antisocial behaviour, but what we know already must surely influence our views on evil. As our scientific knowledge **expands**, it seems that the space for moral evil **contracts**. If we can find explanations for the evil people do, then are we not replacing moral evil, which is freely undertaken, with natural evil, which is beyond our control? [...]

It is difficult not to conclude that although neuroscience gives us a greater insight into the minds of killers, it only complicates the decisions we must make when dealing with the evil that humans do. Faced with questions of **culpability**, violence and victimhood, our moral sense works rather like our visual system observing the illusion of the **Necker cube**. When first we look we see one form, but as we stare for longer it **reverses**: the corner that was towards us now **recedes** into the plane. Similarly, when we see the **perpetrator** of a violent act we see a villain – until we know their story. Then a victim may emerge, and it becomes easier to minimise their crime.

Yet we must not lose sight of the evil act itself. Our responsibility as moral agents is not to look away. It is to look

INTERAKTIV 1.1 Kill Bill



<http://la-screenwriter.com/2012/03/12/script-kill-bill-volumes-i-ii/>

clearly and to hold two thoughts in mind: what this man did was wrong, but he is still a man.

(2004)

While-reading

COMPREHENSION AND ANALYSIS

- 1 Why is it more difficult to define evil today than it was previously?
- 2 Explain "Generations of apologists ... imperfect world." (p. 6)
- 3 What is the difference between moral evil and natural evil?
- 4 Mention examples of "mitigating circumstances".
- 5 Why do we consider planned crimes "most chilling"?
- 6 How do psychiatrists explain the behaviour of characters like Thurman's "The Bride"? Why do you think the writer has included a reference to a film?
- 7 How does science explain antisocial personalities?
- 8 According to the writer, what effect should our knowledge of neuroscience have on the way we treat offenders with antisocial personalities? Do you agree?
- 9 What is the conclusion of the article?

10 Reread the text and fill in the corners of the rhetorical pentagon by answering the "useful questions" (See Toolbox p. 329).

OVERALL QUESTIONS

- 1 Did the article live up to what you expected when you answered pre-reading question 4?
- 2 When you read texts, you will find that most good writers organise their writing with cohesion markers. These are words that connect different parts of the writing and give structure to writers' thoughts and help readers understand them.
Some important cohesion markers are:
also – therefore – except – unless – however – instead – though – furthermore – moreover – nevertheless – on the other hand – as a result – despite – in conclusion
a Find the few cohesion markers there are in the first three paragraphs of the article
b Give each of the paragraphs a title and check how they are linked. Try to improve the coherence by adding cohesion markers also where the article has been abridged.

3 Find a summary or a trailer of Tarantino's film Kill Bill 1 and Kill Bill 2 on the internet. Do you think the writer's choice of film reference is illustrative? Why/why not?

Post-reading

TEXT-RELATED ASSIGNMENT

1 Written assignment: blog; discussion of the definition of evil.

“Write an entry for a blog where you discuss whether there can be a universal definition of evil or whether your concept of evil is determined by your social or cultural background. Which acts would for instance be universally considered evil? Could there be situations where evil acts could be justified? (Use about 150-200 words.) You may find it useful to discuss your attitudes in groups first for inspiration.”

2 Written assignment: Lone Frank's article "Ondskabens problem".

“Read Lone Frank, “Ondskabens problem” (Weekendavisen, July 29th, 2011) and give a summary of the article in English (use about 200 words).”

3 Historical, sociological and cultural context: Hannah Arendt's concept of evil.

“Compare the attitude to evil expressed in the article “Bad or Mad?” and Hannah Arendt's concept of evil which she

encapsulated in the phrase “the banality of evil”. By this she meant that the great evils of history in general, and the Holocaust in particular, were not carried out by psychopaths or sociopaths, but rather by completely ordinary people who accepted the ideology of their state and therefore believed that their actions were normal.

You may want to look for further information about Hannah Arendt and her book from 1963, “Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil” on the internet.”

4 Historical, sociological and cultural context: statement by Edmund Burke.

“The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing”

Attributed to Edmund Burke

Relate this quotation to the article you have just read.

a) Would the writer agree? Why/why not?

b) Do you agree?”

5 Sociological and cultural context: British newspapers and text message assignment.

“Matrix groups:

a) In groups of four:

1. find an article which deals with evil in one of the British online newspapers mentioned below.

The Guardian – The Independent – The Daily Mail – The Daily Telegraph – The Sun

2. In pairs: write a text message about it to the other pair in your group. Compare your messages and account for differences.

3. Find out what is characteristic of the article as regards lay-out, the use of photos, choice of vocabulary and sentence structure.

b) Form new groups where the various newspapers are represented:

1. In your new groups present your results and discuss differences in the ways the various newspapers deal with evil.”

6 Sociological and cultural context: find information about Anders Behring Breivik.

“Find information on the internet about Anders Behring Breivik and discuss if you can place him as ‘bad or mad’.”

Warning to Parents, by Elizabeth Jennings

ELIZABETH JENNINGS (1926-2001)

1. Lived most of her life in Oxford. She studied there and later worked as a librarian before becoming a full-time writer. She became famous for her poetry, and her style is characterized by a certain simplicity of metre and rhyme. Many of her poems deal with themes of family, friendship, loneliness and religious experience. She was awarded several prizes.
2. The poem "Warning to Parents" was first published in her collection of poems called "Recoveries" (1964).

Pre-reading

- 1 List five issues that parents need to be warned about concerning the upbringing of their children. Use the imperative form of the relevant verbs and write a warning to the parents.
- 2 Children are often portrayed as innocent, angelic human beings. Can you think of a film or a story in which a child has been portrayed as being capable of evil?
- 3 What were you afraid of as a small child? Talk about your fears with your partner. Take turns.

Warning to parents

- Save them from terror; do not let them see
The ghost behind the stairs, the hidden crime.
They will, no doubt, grow out of this in time
And be **impervious** as you and me.
- 5 Be sure there is a night-light close at hand;
The plot of that old film may well come back,
The ceiling, with its long, uneven crack,
May hint at things no child can understand.

You do all this and are surprised one day

10 When you discover how the child can **gloat**

On **Belsen** and on tortures – things **remote**

To him. You find it hard to watch him play

With thoughts like these, and find it harder still

To think back to the time when you also

15 Caught from the cruel past a childish glow

And felt along your **veins** the wish to kill.

Fears are more personal than we had guessed –

We only need ourselves; time does the rest.

(1964)

While-reading

COMPREHENSION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

1 In groups or pairs: read the poem aloud. Take turns to experiment with different ways of reading: cheerfully, ominously, furiously, philosophically or in a style of your own choice.

Which style produced the best effect? Why?

2 Find the personal pronouns and explain who they refer to.

3 Where does the poet use the imperative form of the verbs? What is the effect?

4 What are "the ghost behind the stairs" and "the hidden crime" in stanza 1?

5 What do parents do to protect their children from fear?

6 What is implicated in the word "gloat" in stanza 3? Why is it difficult for the parents to watch this?

7 Why is it "harder still to think back ..." in stanza 4? What do the parents think back to?

8 What is the function of the last two lines?

9 Divide the poem into three sections and give each a title. Where is evil to be found in each of the three parts?

10 Put the examples of evil in the poem into two categories: external and internal. What is the effect of this division?

- 11 Characterize the tone. Is there a change in the tone?
- 12 What is the real warning in the poem?
- 13 What is the theme?
- 14 Does the information about the author and what is characteristic of her poetry match your analysis?
- 15 Do you like the poem? Why/why not?

Post-reading

1 Critical context: reception: excerpt from blog.

Explain the following excerpt from a blog from 2007 commenting on Elizabeth Jennings' poem "Warning to Parents". Do you agree?

*"When all the philosophical and moral theologians have had their say about original sin, whether children are born with a **propensity** to sin, or are environmentally, genetically, behaviourally determined, or are free until their responsible conscious choices can be given moral significance; when the theologians think they have it **sussed**, Jennings' poem 'Warning to Parents' upsets the tidy theological game being played with the surprise finality of a cat jumping on a chess board."*

2 Psychological context: comparison with the article "Why not everyone is a torturer".

Compare the ideas about evil expressed in the poem with those expressed in the article "Why not everyone is a torturer".

THE TELL-TALE HEART

BY EDGAR ALLAN POE



Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) was an American author, editor and literary critic who is considered the originator of the short story as a specific genre with specific rules, one of these being that the story should be limited to "a certain unique or single effect". Poe's stories were a mixture of mystery, horror and realism, many of them examples of the Gothic (see Toolbox [www](#)). He is also known for having created the modern detective story and he was a master of the psychological thriller where the focus is on the psychology of the killer. Some of his important works are "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841) and the poem "The Raven" (1844). Poe and his works have been a great inspiration to many authors.

Pre-reading

- 1 Judging from the title, what do you think the story will be about?
- 2 A definition of the word 'horror' could be a feeling of intense fear, shock and disgust. Sit in groups or walk around the room and tell at least three of the others about the most scary horror character you have seen in a film or read about. Also explain why that particular character was so scary.
- 3 Vocabulary. Word classes and translation. [www](#)

The Tell-Tale Heart

True! – nervous – very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why *will* you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses – not destroyed – not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad? Hearken! and observe how healthily – how calmly I can tell you the whole story.

It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain; but once conceived, it haunted me day and night. Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire. I think it was his eye! yes, it was this! He had the eye of a vulture – a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by

tell-tale afslorende, sladrrende

dull sløve

acute skarp

hearken (ha:kn) lytte

conceive undfang

haunt forfølge, plage

object forml, grund

passion (her) vrede,

forbitrelse

give insult fornærm

vulture grib

film hinde

degrees – very-gradually – I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever.

Now this is the point. You fancy me mad. Madmen know nothing. But you should have seen me. You should have seen how wisely I proceeded – with what caution – with what foresight – with what dissimulation I went to work! I was never kinder to the old man than during the whole week before I killed him. And every night, about midnight, I turned the latch of his door and opened it – oh so gently! And then, when I had made an opening sufficient for my head, I put in a dark lantern, all closed, closed, so that no light shone out, and then I thrust in my head. Oh, you would have laughed to see how cunningly I thrust it in! I moved it slowly – very, very slowly, so that I might not disturb the old man's sleep. It took me an hour to place my whole head within the opening so far that I could see him as he lay upon his bed. Ha! would a madman have been so wise as this? And then, when my head was well in the room, I undid the lantern cautiously – oh, so cautiously – cautiously (for the hinges creaked) – I undid it just so much that a single thin ray fell upon the vulture eye. And this I did for seven long nights – every night just at midnight – but I found the eye always closed; and so it was impossible to do the work; for it was not the old man who vexed me, but his Evil Eye. And every morning, when the day broke, I went boldly into the chamber, and spoke courageously to him, calling him by name in a hearty tone, and inquiring how he has passed the night. So you see he would have been a very profound old man, indeed, to suspect that every night, just at twelve, I looked in upon him while he slept.

Upon the eighth night I was more than usually cautious in opening the door. A watch's minute hand moves more quickly than did mine. Never before that night had I felt the extent of my own powers – of my sagacity. I could scarcely contain my feelings of triumph. To think that there I was, opening the door, little by little, and he not even to dream of my secret deeds or thoughts. I fairly chuckled at the idea; and perhaps he heard me; for he moved on the bed suddenly, as if startled. Now you may think that I drew back – but no. His room was as black as pitch with the thick darkness, (for the shutters were close fastened, through fear of robbers,) and so I knew that he could not see the opening of the door; and I kept pushing it on steadily, steadily. I had my head in, and was about to open the lantern, when my thumb slipped upon the tin fastening, and the old man sprang up in bed, crying out – "Who's there?" I kept quite still and said nothing. For a whole hour I did not move a muscle, and in the meantime I did not hear him lie down. He was still sitting up in the bed listening; – just as I have done, night after night, hearkening to the death watches in the wall.

Presently I heard a slight groan, and I knew it was the groan of mortal terror. It was not a groan of pain or of grief – oh, no! – it was the low

fancy anse for

proceed gå til værks,

bære sig ad

caution forsigtighed

foresight forud-

seenhed

dissimulation

hykleri

latch klink, lukke-

mekanisme på dør

sufficient tilstræk-

kelig

lantern lygte

thrust stikke

cunningly snedigt

undo åbne for

hinge hængsel

creak knirke

ray stråle

vex forurolige

boldly dristigt

inquire forhøre sig

profound dybsindig

minute hand minut-

viseren

sagacity skarpsin-

dighed

contain (her)

beherske

chuckle kluble

startled opskremt,

forskrækket

pitch beg

shutter skodde

through på grund af

steadily vedhol-

dende, stille og roligt

fastening lukkeme-

kanisme

death watch en art

borebille der kaldes

dødnagur

groan stønnen

mortal døds-

stille (staf) under-
trykke
overcharge over-
mande
awe særtrygt
well up strømme op
bosom (buzzen)
bryst
distract forurolige

merely blot
cricket farekilling
chirp pippen
supposition formod-
ning
stalk liste sig
envelop indhylde
mournful sørgmodig
unperceived
ubemærket

resolve beslutte
cervice sprække
stealthy forsigtig
dim svag

veil slør
chill få til at gysse
marrow marv

over-acuteness
hypersensivitet,
responsive to slight
impressions or
stimuli

refrain holde igen

tattoo hamren,
musik til
militærøveling

amid midt i

stifled sound that arises from the bottom of the soul when overcharged with awe. I knew the sound well. Many a night, just at midnight, when all the world slept, it has welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me. I say I knew it well. I knew what the old man felt, and pitied him, although I chuckled at heart. I knew that he had been lying awake ever since the first slight noise, when he had turned in the bed. His fears had been ever since growing upon him. He had been trying to fancy them causeless, but could not. He had been saying to himself – "It is nothing but the wind in the chimney – it is only a mouse crossing the floor," or "It is merely a cricket which has made a single chirp." Yes, he had been trying to comfort himself with these suppositions: but he had found *all in vain*. All in vain; because Death, in approaching him, had stalked with his black shadow before him, and enveloped the victim. And it was the mournful influence of the unperceived shadow that caused him to feel – although he neither saw nor heard – to feel the presence of my head within the room.

When I had waited a long time, very patiently, without hearing him lie down, I resolved to open a little – a very, very little crevice in the lantern. So I opened it – you cannot imagine how stealthily, stealthily – until, at length a simple dim ray, like the thread of the spider, shot from out the crevice and fell full upon the vulture eye. It was open – wide, wide open – and I grew furious as I gazed upon it. I saw it with perfect distinctness – all a dull blue, with a hideous veil over it that chilled the very marrow in my bones; but I could see nothing else of the old man's face or person: for I had directed the ray as if by instinct, precisely upon the damned spot.

And have I not told you that what you mistake for madness is but over-acuteness of the senses? – now, I say, there came to my ears a low, dull, quick sound, such as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. I knew that sound well, too. It was the beating of the old man's heart. It increased my fury, as the beating of a drum stimulates the soldier into courage.

But even yet I refrained and kept still. I scarcely breathed. I held the lantern motionless. I tried how steadily I could maintain the ray upon the eye. Meantime the hellish tattoo of the heart increased. It grew quicker and quicker, and louder and louder every instant. The old man's terror must have been extreme! It grew louder, I say, louder every moment! – do you mark me well? I have told you that I am nervous: so I am. And now at the dead hour of the night, amid the dreadful silence of that old house, so strange a noise as this excited me to uncontrollable terror. Yet, for some minutes longer I refrained and stood still. But the beating grew louder, louder! I thought the heart must burst. And now a new anxiety seized me – the sound would be heard by a neighbor! The old man's hour had come! With a loud yell, I threw open the lantern and leaped into the

room. He shrieked once – once only. In an instant I dragged him to the floor, and pulled the heavy bed over him. I then smiled gaily, to find the deed so far done. But, for many minutes, the heart beat on with a muffled sound. This, however, did not vex me; it would not be heard through the wall. At length it ceased. The old man was dead. I removed the bed and examined the corpse. Yes, he was stone, stone dead. I placed my hand upon the heart and held it there many minutes. There was no pulsation. He was stone dead. His eye would trouble me no more.

If still you think me mad, you will think so no longer when I describe the wise precautions I took for the concealment of the body. The night waned, and I worked hastily, but in silence. First of all I dismembered the corpse. I cut off the head and the arms and the legs. I then took up three planks from the flooring of the chamber, and deposited all between the scantlings. I then replaced the boards so cleverly, so cunningly, that no human eye – not even *his* – could have detected any thing wrong. There was nothing to wash out – no stain of any kind – no blood-spot whatever. I had been too wary for that. A tub had caught all – ha! ha!

When I had made an end of these labors, it was four o'clock – still dark as midnight. As the bell sounded the hour, there came a knocking at the street door. I went down to open it with a light heart, – for what had I now to fear? There entered three men, who introduced themselves, with perfect suavity, as officers of the police. A shriek had been heard by a neighbor during the night; suspicion of foul play had been aroused; information had been lodged at the police office, and they (the officers) had been deputed to search the premises.

I smiled, – for *what* had I to fear? I bade the gentlemen welcome. The shriek, I said, was my own in a dream. The old man, I mentioned, was absent in the country. I took my visitors all over the house. I bade them search – search *well*. I led them, at length, to *his* chamber. I showed them his treasures, secure, undisturbed. In the enthusiasm of my confidence, I brought chairs into the room, and desired them *here* to rest from their fatigues, while I myself, in the wild audacity of my perfect triumph, placed my own seat upon the very spot beneath which reposed the corpse of the victim.

The officers were satisfied. My *manner* had convinced them. I was singularly at ease. They sat, and while I answered cheerily, they chatted of familiar things. But, ere long, I felt myself getting pale and wished them gone. My head ached, and I fancied a ringing in my ears: but still they sat and still chatted. The ringing became more distinct. – it continued and became more distinct: I talked more freely to get rid of the feeling; but it continued and gained definiteness – until, at length, I found that the noise was *not* within my ears.

No doubt I now grew very pale; – but I talked more fluently, and with a heightened voice. Yet the sound increased – and what could I do? It was

muffled dæmpet
cease ophøre

precaution forholds-
regel
concealment det at
skjule
wane aftage, gå på
hæld
dismember partere
flooring gulv-
belægning
deposit anbringe
scantling planker
wary forsigtig
tub kar
labor anstrengelse

suavity [sua-viti]
højfløjet
foul play forbrydelse
lodge indgive
be-deputed få til
opgive
premises stedet

fatigues udmattende
arbejde
audacity dristighed
repose hvile

singularly overor-
dentlig
ere = before

gain definiteness
blive mere og mere
tydelig

a low, dull, quick sound – much such a sound as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. I gasped for breath – and yet the officers heard it not. I talked more quickly – more vehemently; but the noise steadily increased. I arose and argued about trifles, in a high key and with violent gesticulations; but the noise steadily increased. Why would they not be gone? I paced the floor to and fro with heavy strides, as if excited to fury by the observations of the men – but the noise steadily increased. Oh God! what could I do? I foamed – I raved – I swore! I swung the chair upon which I had been sitting, and grated it upon the boards, but the noise arose over all and continually increased. It grew louder – louder – louder! And still the men chatted pleasantly, and smiled. Was it possible they heard not? Almighty God! – no, no! They heard! – they suspected! – they knew! – they were making a mockery of my horror! – this I thought, and this I think. But anything was better than this agony! Anything was more tolerable than this derision! I could bear those hypocritical smiles no longer! I felt that I must scream or die! and now – again! – hark! louder! louder! louder! louder!

“Villains!” I shrieked, “dissemble no more! I admit the deed! – tear up the planks! here, here! – It is the beating of his hideous heart!” (1843)

- vehemently liden- skabligt
- trifle småting
- key toneleje
- pace to and fro gå frem og tilbage
- stride skridt
- foam skumme
- rave rase
- grate skraabe

- make a mockery of håne
- agony pine
- derision forhånelse

- dissemble forstille sig

While-reading

COMPREHENSION AND ANALYSIS

- 1 How would you characterize the opening of the story?
 - 2 We seem to be overhearing a conversation. Who do you think the narrator is addressing? What is the effect of this technique on the reader?
 - 3 What are we told about the setting?
 - 4 What information do we get about the narrator? Age, looks, name etc.
 - 5 What is the narrator's state of mind? What can he hear that others can't hear?
 - 6 What are the narrator's arguments for asserting that he is not mad? Check the whole story. Refer to specific passages and find at least five key words.
 - 7 As you read the story, find as many arguments as you can in support of the view that he is mad.
- a Look at what he says and at his way of saying it.
 - b Look at the punctuation.
 - 8 Is the narrator's and the reader's (= your) concept of madness the same?
 - 9 Take turns to ask and answer the following questions (p. 154, l. 1 - p. 156, l. 16):
 - a What is his attitude to the old man?
 - b Why does he make up his mind to kill the old man?
 - c How does the narrator treat the old man in the daytime?
 - d What does the narrator do at night? Why is he unable to carry out his plan on the first seven nights?

- e How come the narrator knows the "groan of mortal terror"? (p. 155, ll. 43-44)
 - f Why does the narrator "chuckle at heart"? (p. 156, l. 5)
 - 10 Take turns to ask and answer the following questions (p. 156, l. 17 - p. 157, l. 17)
 - a Why does the old man feel the narrator's presence in the room? How does the old man feel?
 - b What is so troubling about the eye?
 - c What feelings does the eye evoke in the narrator?
 - d Why does he hear the sound of the old man's heart? How is the sound described?
 - e How does the sound of the old man's heart make him feel?
 - f What makes him decide to act?
 - g What does the narrator do with the body?
 - 11 Instead of simply stating that he had heard a groan, the narrator describes the sound in detail (p. 155, l. 43 - p. 156, l. 4). What effect does that have on the reader?
 - 12 From p. 155, l. 43 the narrator repeats "I knew" several times. Why does he do that? What does it tell us about the narrator?
 - 13 How does the narrator behave towards the police? Find key words.
 - 14 What sound does the narrator hear? In his opinion, why don't the police react to the sound?
 - 15 Account for the change in his language in the last two paragraphs. What does this change signify?
 - 16 Why does he confess?
 - 17 Characterize the narrator. Which of the following words would you use in your characterization? Add at least three other adjectives.
 calm – wise – insane – cunning – cautious – nervous – furious – sagacious – confident – sensitive – triumphant – psychopathic – cheerful – shrewd – patient – sly – audacious
- Use the examples you found when you answered questions 6 and 7 to substantiate your choices.
- 18 Account for the point of view. How reliable is the narrator? Is he convincing and does his behaviour support his comments? What does Poe achieve by using this point of view?

OVERALL QUESTIONS

- 1 Read out the passage on p. 156, ll. 17-26. Take turns to experiment with different ways of reading: slowly, hectically, ominously, furiously, cheerfully. You may add suggestions of your own. Which style produced the best effect? Which elements in Poe's style contributed to create this effect? Consider the use of punctuation, choice of vocabulary, imagery, repetition and other literary devices.
- 2 How does Poe use style to characterize the narrator?
- 3 How is the eye described? What effect is created by the fact that we only hear about the one eye?

- 4 Whose heart does the narrator hear? Find examples in the text to prove your point.
- 5 Describe the atmosphere. Find phrases and images which contribute to creating this atmosphere.
- 6 What role does sound play in this short story? Where is the noise? What literary techniques does Poe use to emphasize the importance of sound? You may look at sentence structure and rhythmic effects.
- 7 What is the significance of the title?
- 8 What are the themes? You may add suggestions of your own.
 - Guilt, repentance and self-betrayal
 - Sanity and insanity
 - Time
 - The evil sides of human nature
 - Rationality and instincts
 - Obsession
 - The psychology of a murderer

Post-reading www

LEARNING CHECK

- 1 Vocabulary.
- 2 Agree/disagree statements.
- 3 Written assignment: translation.

WIDER CONTEXTS

- 1 Human nature: perverseness in Poe.
- 2 Literary context: other media: YouTube versions.
- 3 Literary context: Todorov and the marvellous, the fantastic and the uncanny.
- 4 Psychological and literary context: our fascination with horror (quote by Stephen King).
- 5 Psychological and literary context: attitudes to evil and free will (quote by Stephen King).
- 6 Written assignment: comparison with Poe's "The Black Cat".
- 7 Literary context: other text by a different author: comparison with Robert Louis Stevenson, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (text, glossary and questions)

Killing Child at Zoo, by Bret Easton Ellis

BRET EASTON ELLIS (1964-)

1. Born in Los Angeles and now lives in New York. He published his first novel *Less Than Zero* when he was 21. It was well received and was made into a film two years later. American Psycho about the serial killer Patrick Bateman was published in 1991 and instantly caused an uproar because of its violent content. It depicts an amoral, materialistic and disoriented American society in which young people find it difficult to find a deeper meaning in life. His latest novel *Imperial Bedrooms* (2010) is a sequel to his debut novel.

Pre-reading:

- 1 What expectations do you usually have when you go to the zoo? Will it be educational – depressing – dangerous – inspiring – relaxing – amusing – entertaining – hilarious – recreational – frustrating – exciting?
- 2 The term 'Yuppie' is short for 'young urban professional' and was used to describe a specific culture and lifestyle in the 1980s. A typical Yuppie would be well-educated, career-driven, preoccupied with appearance and personal consumption.
Read the first paragraph of "Killing Child at Zoo" and find evidence to suggest that the main character is a Yuppie.

Killing Child at Zoo (1991)

A string of days pass. During the nights I've been sleeping in twenty-minute intervals. I feel aimless, things look cloudy, my homicidal compulsion, which surfaces, disappears, surfaces, leaves again, lies barely dormant during a quiet lunch at Alex Goes to Camp, where I have the lamb sausage salad with lobster and white beans sprayed with lime and foie gras vinegar. I'm wearing faded jeans, an Armani jacket, and a white, hundred-and-forty-dollar **Comme des Garçons** T-shirt. I make a phone call to check my messages. I return **10** some videotapes. I stop at an automated teller. Last night, Jeanette asked me, "Patrick, why do you keep razor blades in

your wallet?" The Patty Winters Show this morning was about a boy who fell in love with a box of soap.

Unable to maintain a credible public **persona**, I find myself roaming the zoo in Central Park, restlessly. Drug **15** dealers hang out along the perimeter by the gates and the smell of horse shit from passing carriages drifts over them into the zoo, and the tips of skyscrapers, apartment buildings on Fifth Avenue, the Trump Plaza, the **AT&T** building, surround the park which surrounds the zoo and heightens its **20** unnatural-ness. A black custodian mopping the floor in the men's room asks me to flush the urinal after I use it. "Do it yourself, nigger," I tell him and when he makes a move toward me, the flash of a knifeblade causes him to back off. All the information booths seem closed. A blind man chews, feeds, on **25** a pretzel. Two drunks, **faggots**, console each other on a bench. Nearby a mother breast-feeds her baby, which awakens something awful in me.

The zoo seems empty, devoid of life. The polar bears look stained and drugged. A crocodile floats morosely in an oily **30** makeshift pond. The puffins stare sadly from their glass cage. Toucans have beaks as sharp as knives. The seals stupidly dive off rocks into swirling black water, barking mindlessly. The zookeepers feed them dead fish. A crowd gathers around the tank, mostly adults, a few accompanied by **35** children. On the seals' tank a plaque warns: **COINS CAN KILL – IF SWALLOWED, COINS CAN LODGE IN AN ANIMAL'S STOMACH AND CAUSE ULCERS, INFECTIONS AND DEATH. DO NOT THROW COINS IN THE POOL.** So

what do I do? Toss a handful of change into the tank when **40** none of the zookeepers are watching. It's not the seals I hate – it's the audience's enjoyment of them that bothers me. The snowy owl has eyes that look just like mine, especially when it widens them. And while I stand there, staring at it, lowering my sunglasses, something unspoken passes between **45** me and the bird – there's this weird kind of tension, a bizarre pressure, that fuels the following, which starts, happens, ends, very quickly.

In the darkness of the penguin habitat – Edge of the Icepack is what the zoo pretentiously calls it – it's cool, in **50** sharp contrast to the humidity outside. The penguins in the tank glide lazily underwater past the glass walls where spectators crowd in to stare. The penguins on the rocks, not swimming, look dazed, stressed out, tired and bored; they mostly yawn, sometimes stretching. Fake penguin noises, **55** cassettes probably, play over a sound system and someone has turned up the volume because it's so crowded in the room. The penguins are cute, I guess. I spot one that looks like **Craig McDermott**.

A child, barely five, finishes eating a candy bar. His mother **60** tells him to throw the wrapper away, then resumes talking to another woman, who is with a child around the same age, the three of them staring into the dirty blueness of the penguin habitat. The first child moves toward the trash can, located in a dim corner to the back of the room, that I am now **65** crouching behind. He stands on tiptoes, carefully throwing the wrapper into the trash. I whisper something. The child

spots me and just stands there, away from the crowd, slightly scared but also dumbly fascinated. I stare back.

"Would you like – a cookie?" I ask, reaching into my pocket.

70 He nods his small head, up, then down, slowly, but before he can answer, my sudden lack of care crests in a massive wave of fury and I pull the knife out of my pocket and I stab him quickly, in the neck.

Bewildered, he backs into the trash can, gurgling like an infant, unable to scream or cry out because of the blood that starts spurting out of the wound in his throat. Though I'd like to watch this child die, I push him down behind the garbage can, then casually mingle in with the rest of the crowd and touch the shoulder of a pretty girl, and smiling I point to a

80 penguin preparing to make a dive. Behind me, if one were to look closely, one could see the child's feet kicking in back of the trash can. I keep an eye on the child's mother, who after a while notices her son's absence and starts scanning the crowd. I touch the girl's shoulder again, and she smiles at me and

85 shrugs apologetically, but I can't figure out why. When the mother finally notices him she doesn't scream because she can see only his feet and assumes that he's playfully hiding from her. At first she seems relieved that she's spotted him, and moving toward the trash can she coos, "Are you playing

90 hide-and-seek, honey?" But from where I stand, behind the pretty girl, who I've already found out is foreign, a tourist, I can see the exact moment when the expression on the mother's face changes into fear, and slinging her purse over her shoulder she pulls the trash can away, revealing a face

95 completely covered in red blood and the child's having trouble blinking its eyes because of this, grabbing at his throat, now kicking weakly. The mother makes a sound that I cannot describe – something high-pitched that turns into screaming.

100 After she falls to the floor beside the body, a few people turning around, I find myself shouting out, my voice heavy with emotion, "I'm a doctor, move back, I'm a doctor," and I kneel beside the mother before an interested crowd gathers around us and I pry her arms off the child, who is now on his

105 back struggling vainly for breath, the blood coming evenly but in dying arcs out of his neck and onto his Polo shirt, which is drenched with it. And I have a vague awareness during the minutes I hold the child's head, reverently, careful not to bloody myself, that if someone makes a phone call or if

110 a real doctor is at hand, there's a good chance the child can be saved. But this doesn't happen. Instead I hold it, mindlessly, while the mother – homely, Jewish-looking, overweight, pitifully trying to appear stylish in designer jeans and an unsightly leaf patterned black wool sweater – shrieks

115 do something, do something, do something, the two of us ignoring the chaos, the people who start screaming around us, concentrating only on the dying child.

Though I am satisfied at first by my actions, I'm suddenly jolted with a mournful despair at how useless, how

120 extraordinarily painless, it is to take a child's life. This thing before me, small and twisted and bloody, has no real history, no worthwhile past; nothing is really lost. It's so much

worse (and more pleasureable) taking the life of someone who has hit his or her prime, who has the beginnings of a full **125** history, a spouse, a network of friends, a career, whose death will upset far more people whose capacity for grief is limitless than a child's would, perhaps ruin many more lives than just the meaningless, puny death of this boy. I'm automatically seized with an almost overwhelming desire to

130 knife the boy's mother too, who is in hysterics, but all I can do is slap her face harshly and shout for her to calm down. For this I'm given no disapproving looks. I'm dimly aware of light coming into the room, of a door 10 being opened somewhere, of the presence of zoo officials, a security guard, **135** someone – one of the tourists – taking flash pictures, the penguins freaking out in the tank behind us, slamming themselves against the glass in a panic. A cop pushes me away, even though I tell him I'm a physician. Someone drags the boy outside, lays him on the ground and removes his shirt.

140 The boy gasps, dies. The mother has to be restrained.

I feel empty, hardly here at all, but even the arrival of the police seems an insufficient reason to move and I stand with the crowd outside the penguin habitat, with dozens of others, taking a long time to slowly blend in and then back away, until **145** finally I'm walking down Fifth Avenue, surprised by how little blood has stained my jacket, and I stop in a bookstore and buy a book and then at a **Dove Bar** stand on the corner of Fifty-sixth Street, where I buy a Dove Bar – a coconut one – and I imagine a hole, widening in the sun, and for some **150** reason this breaks the tension I started feeling when I

first noticed the snowy owl's eyes and then when it recurred after the boy was dragged out of the penguin habitat and I walked away, my hands soaked with blood, uncaught.

While-reading

COMPREHENSION, ANALYSIS AND OVERALL QUESTIONS

- 1 Describe the point of view used in the text.
- 2 What hints are given in the first paragraph that this is not just going to be an ordinary day at the zoo?
- 3 Find negative details in the description of the setting ll. 13-35. Also notice the adverbs ll. 29-34. Change the description so that it becomes positive.
- 4 Describe Patrick's mood: at the beginning, when he throws the coins; when he watches the snowy owl; when he stabs the boy; and afterwards. Use the words below and add words of your own (paper hand-out).
aimless – excited – tenses – imperturbable – gloomy – relieved – calculating – restless – firm – jumpy – determined – sullen – indifferent – focused – nonchalant – uneasy – absorbed – empty
- 5 Why does Patrick pretend to be a doctor?
- 6 Comment on the use of the word "reverently" (l. 108).

7 How does Patrick describe the mother? What is his attitude to her?

8 What is Patrick's attitude to having killed a child? How does he explain this attitude?

9 What do you find particularly cruel in this text?

10 Characterize Patrick Bateman. Is he "Bad or Mad"? (See pp. 6-8.)

11 What is your impression of the tone of the title? Why has the author chosen this tone?

Post-reading:

1 Point of view.

Describe what happens from the child's point of view.

2 Written assignment: interview and article.

Work in groups of four. A is a journalist, B is the mother, C is the young boy, D is the woman the mother was speaking to.

a) A interviews the three women to get information for an article for a tabloid paper.

b) Help each other to write the article.

Agree on a catchy headline, an introductory paragraph and make sure that the body text is short and simple, including answers to what, who, where, when, why. Remember to include the personal angle. (Use about 400 words.)

WIDER CONTEXTS

1 Psychological and literary context: the concept of evil. Comparison with other texts.

Compare evil as it is described in "Killing Child at Zoo" with evil as it is described in some of the other texts you have read.

2 Literary context: other media: the first English edition cover.

Describe and comment on the first English edition cover of American Psycho.

Does it capture the atmosphere of the excerpt and does it represent what seems to be characteristic of Patrick Bateman?

AMERICAN PSYCHO

BRET EASTON ELLIS



3 Critical context: the reception of the novel American Psycho.

- Read the following excerpts of reviews.
- Individually: choose the two comments you find most convincing and the one you find most surprising.
- In pairs: discuss your choices.

Comment 1:

For all the **viscera** and **gore** he [Patrick Bateman] spills, this Wall Street monster is not a flesh-and-blood character, nor is it a realistic world that his **demented** narrative creates. There are too many devices that transform it into a lifeless abstraction. There are the **relentless** fashion notes that identify the designer of every stitch of clothing nearly every character wears." [...] "As for the notorious sex and mutilation scenes: the relentless and horrifying energy that seems to have gone into their creation betrays the mind not of a **leering** sensualist or a cynical pornographer but rather of a cartoonist trying to animate Tales From the Crypt, the comic book of the 1950's that tried in its clumsy way to make black humor of human physicality.

Since the people involved are unreal and the physiology of what is done to them impossible, it is not so difficult to conceive of their scenes as a Tom and Jerry cartoon with human body parts."

Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, The New York Times, March 11, 1991

Comment 2:

"American Psycho vividly makes the case that society is responsible for creating the **warped** aspirations of people like Patrick Bateman. Bleak, funny and unsettling, this savagely clever satire forces us to confront issues we'd rather ignore. Even more relevant now than when published in 1991, American Psycho is essential reading."

Dan McNeil, 2004.

<http://www.laurahird.com/newreview/americanpsycho.html>

Comment 3:

"You ever seen a video nasty, all you sweet people who get upset because Bret Easton Ellis, in a novel of 399 pages devoted almost entirely to the obsessive consolations offered by a society, itself in the grip of a psychotic fit of sado-masochism, scattered throughout a novel **delineating** why the serial killer kills, actually describes the detail of the killings. Why have you got so **squeamish** all of a sudden?

Of all the things you ought to censor, should have censored – because we now live in a world so terrible, so full of 'Abandon Hope' scrawled blood red on our city walls, someone has to start crying 'enough' – why pick on wretched, brilliant Bret

Easton Ellis? Young BEE? I'll tell you why. It's because there's always been someone in the other books **to play lip service** to respectability: to the myth that the world we now live in is still **capable of affect**. The serial killer gets discovered, punished, stopped. There are people around to throw up their hands in horror, who can still distinguish between what is psychotic and what is not. Justice is done. There is remorse. Just not in American Psycho. And we hate him for saying it. In American Psycho not so. Nobody cares. Slaughtered bodies lie undiscovered. The city has fallen apart. Nobody takes much notice. The police have other things to do. Those who are killed don't rate – they are the powerless, the poor, the wretched, the sick in mind, the sellers of flesh for money: their own and other people's."

Fay Weldon, "An honest American psycho", The Guardian, 1991

4 Literary context: postmodern literature.

There is little agreement on how to define postmodern literature accurately. However, certain common features are acknowledged: one is amoral and normless social behaviour, another one is the description of society as fragmented, chaotic, disconnected and accidental. It is therefore also natural that some of the characters in postmodern literature show narcissistic **traits** such as excessive self-centredness, an obsession with appearances and a focus on immediate pleasure.

Find elements in "Killing Child at Zoo" that make it a postmodern text.

5 Reception: Controversy.

When American Psycho was published, it caused a lot of controversy. Some critics opposed it because of its portrayal of extreme violence and murder.

Watch the clip from YouTube and in pairs find at least two arguments for and two against introducing censorship. Divide the class into two parts; a pro-censorship and an anti-censorship part. Place six chairs in the middle with three chairs on each side. The debate begins and the students take turns participating. When you have contributed with an argument, you vacate the chair and another student takes over.

INTERAKTIV 1.3 Bret Easton Ellis on censorship.



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UD1gb4NXsZA>

Why Not Everyone Is a Torturer, by Stephen Reicher and Alex Haslam

REICHER & HASLAM

1. Stephen Reicher is Professor of Social Psychology and Head of the School of Psychology at the University of St Andrews. He has been chief editor of the *British Journal of Social Psychology* and has published numerous books on social psychology. Steve Reicher is broadly interested in the issue of group behaviour.
2. Alex Haslam is Professor of Social Psychology at the University of Exeter. He has been chief editor of the *European Journal of Social Psychology* and has published numerous books on social psychology. In 2005 he received the European Association of Social Psychology's Lewin Medal for research in social psychology.

Pre-reading

1 Discuss whether you think the statements about torture are true or false:

- a. I could never under any circumstances torture another human being.
- b. The people who torture others are mentally sick.
- c. If I was in a group which accepted torture, I would accept it as well.
- d. It is easier to abuse people from other cultures than it is to abuse people from my own culture.
- e. Torturers are victims of special circumstances.
- f. We cannot judge soldiers who torture prisoners. It is their commanding officers who are to blame.
- g. If torturers feel that their actions are approved of and necessary, they will be more inclined to behave in obnoxious ways.
- h. If I was isolated from my family and friends, it would be easier to participate in torture.
- i. It doesn't matter how we speak of other people, we still treat them the same way.

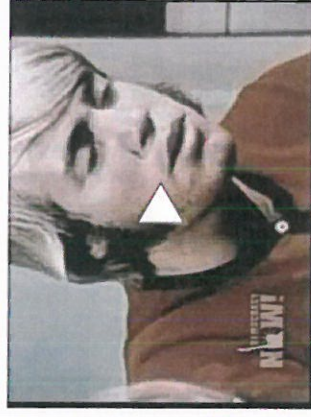
2 **Matrix groups:** students are numbered 1-4. At home find information about Abu Ghraib (students 1), Hannah Arendt

(students 2), Adolf Eichmann (students 3), and My Lai (students 4). In class, students 1, students 2, students 3 and students 4 compare notes with students with the same number and add information to their own notes. Then in new groups of students 1-4, tell each other what you have found out about your topic.

3 The Zimbardo experiment:

- a Watch the Zimbardo experiment.
- b Take notes individually and choose three factors which you consider the most important in changing ordinary students into torturers. Discuss your choices in groups.
- c What was the effect of the experiment on the 'prisoners'?

INTERAKTIV 1.4 The Zimbardo Experiment



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZojYx8nwjFQ>

4 Vocabulary. Match word and explanation (paper hand-out).

5 Language:

- a What do you think it means to 'soften up' the prisoners for interrogation?

b A euphemism ['ju:fəmi:zəm] is an expression that is gentler or less direct than the one normally used. E.g. 'pass away' is a euphemism for 'die'. Why would a euphemism like 'soften up' be used in this connection? Who would use it? Can you think of other euphemisms used in connection with war or atrocities?

Why not everyone is a torturer

So groups of people in positions of unaccountable power naturally resort to violence, do they? Not according to research conducted in a BBC experiment. The photographs from Abu Ghraib prison showing Americans abusing Iraqi prisoners make us recoil and lead us to distance ourselves from their horror and brutality. Surely those who such acts are not like us? Surely the **perpetrators** must be **5** twisted or disturbed in some way? They must be monsters. We ourselves would never condone or contribute to such events.

Sadly, 50 years of social psychological research indicates that such comforting thoughts are deluded. A series of major **10** studies have shown that even well-adjusted people, when divided into groups and placed in competition against each other, can become abusive and violent.

Most notoriously, the 1971 Stanford prison experiment, conducted by Philip Zimbardo and colleagues, seemingly

15 showed that young students who were assigned to the role of guard quickly became sadistically abusive to the students assigned to the role of prisoners.

Combined with lessons from history, the disturbing implication of such research is that evil is not the preserve of a 20 small minority of exceptional individuals. We all have the capacity to behave in evil ways. This idea was famously developed by Hannah Arendt whose observations of the Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann, led her to remark that what was most frightening was just how mild and ordinary he 25 looked. His evil was disarmingly banal.

In order to explain events in Iraq, one might go further and conclude that the torturers were victims of circumstances, that they lost their moral compass in the group and did things they would normally abhor. Indeed, using Zimbardo's 30 findings as evidence, this is precisely what some people do conclude. But this is bad psychology and it is bad ethics. It is bad psychology because it suggests we can explain human behaviour without needing to scrutinize the wider culture in which it is located. It is bad ethics because it absolves 35 everyone from any responsibility for events – the perpetrators, ourselves as constituents of the wider society, and the leaders of that society.

In the situation of Abu Ghraib, some reports have indicated that the guards were following orders from intelligence 40 officers and interrogators in order to soften up the prisoners for interrogation.

If that is true, then clearly the culture in which these soldiers were immersed was one in which they were encouraged to see and treat Iraqis as subhuman. Other army units almost 45 certainly had a very different culture and this provides a second explanation of why some people in some units may have tortured, but others did not.



GROTESQUE FUN

Perhaps the best evidence that such factors were at play is the fact that the pictures were taken at all. Reminiscent of the 50 postcards that lynch mobs circulated to advertise their activities, the torture was done proudly and with a grotesque

sense of fun.

Those in the photos wanted others to know what they had done, presumably believing that the audience would **55** approve. This sense of approval is very important, since there is ample evidence that people are more likely to act on any inclinations to behave in obnoxious ways when they sense – correctly or incorrectly – that they have broader support.

So where did the soldiers in Iraq get that sense from?

60 This takes us to a critical influence on group behaviour: leadership. In the studies, leadership – the way in which experimenters either overtly or tacitly endorsed particular forms of action – was crucial to the way participants behaved.

Thus one reason why the guards in our own research for **65** the BBC did not behave as brutally as those in the Stanford study, was that we did not instruct them to behave in this way.



"Many guards in our experiment did not wish to act – or be seen to act – as bullies or oppressors."

Zimbardo, in contrast, told his participants: "You can **70** create in the prisoners feelings of boredom, a sense of fear to some degree, you can create a notion of arbitrariness that their life is totally controlled by us, by the system, you, me – and they'll have no privacy ... In general what all this leads to is a sense of powerlessness."

OFFICERS' MESSAGES

75 In light of this point it is interesting to ask what messages were being provided by fellow and, more critically, senior officers in the units where torture took place? Did those who didn't approve fail to speak out for fear of being seen as weak or disloyal? Did senior officers who knew what was going on **80** turn a blind eye or else simply file away reports of misbehaviour?

All these things happened after the My Lai massacre, and in many ways the responses to an atrocity tell us most about how it can happen in the first place. They tell us how **85** murderers and torturers can begin to believe that they will not be held to account for what they do, or even that their actions are something praiseworthy. The more they perceive that torture has the thumbs up, the more they will give it a thumbs up themselves. So how do we prevent these kinds of **90** episodes? One answer is to ensure that people are always made aware of their other moral commitments and their accountability to others. Whatever the

pressures within their military group, their ties to others must never be broken. Total and secret institutions, where people

95 are isolated from contact with all others are breeding grounds for atrocity. Similarly, there are great **100** dangers in contracting out security functions to private contractors which lack fully **105** developed structures of public accountability.

POWER VACUUM

Another answer is to look at the culture of

110 our institutions and the role of leaders in framing that culture. Bad leadership can permit torture in two ways. Sometimes leaders can actively promote oppressive values. This is akin to what happened in Zimbardo's study and may be the case in certain military intelligence units. But **115** sometimes leaders can simply fail to promote anything and hence create a vacuum of power.

Our own findings indicated that where such a vacuum exists, people are more likely to accept any clear line of action

which is vigorously proposed. Often, then, tyranny follows **120** from powerlessness rather than power. In either case, the failure of leaders to champion clear humane and democratic values is part of the problem.

But it is not enough to consider leadership in the military. One must look more widely at the messages and the **125** values provided in the community at large. That means that we must address the anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiment in our society. A culture where we have got used to pictures of Iraqi prisoners semi-naked, chained and humiliated can create a climate in which torturers see **130** themselves as heroes rather than villains.

Again, for such a culture to thrive it is not necessary for everyone to embrace such sentiments, it is sufficient simply for those who would oppose them to feel muted and out-of-step with societal norms.

LEADERS' LANGUAGE

135 And we must also look at political leadership. When administration officials talk about cleaning out "rats' nests" of Iraqi dissidents, it likens Iraqis to vermin. Note, for example, that just before the Rwandan genocide, Hutu extremists started referring to Tutsi's as "cockroaches". Such use of **140** language again creates a climate in which **perpetrators** of atrocity can maintain the illusion that they are nobly doing what others know must be done. The torturers in Iraq may or may not have been following direct orders from their leaders,



but they were almost certainly allowed to feel that they were
145 behaving as good followers.

So if we want to understand why torture occurs, it is
important to consider the psychology of individuals, of
groups, and of society. Groups do indeed affect the behaviour
of individuals and can lead them to do things they never
150 anticipated. But how any given group affects our
behaviour depends upon the norms and values of that specific
group.

Evil can become banal, but so can humanism. The choice
is not denied to us by human nature but rests in our own
155 hands. Hence, we need a psychological analysis that
addresses the values and beliefs that we, our institutions, and
our leaders promote. These create the conditions in which
would-be torturers feel either emboldened or unable to act.

We need an analysis that makes us accept rather than
160 avoid our responsibilities. Above all, we need a
psychology which does not distance us from torture but which
requires us to look closely at the ways in which we and those
who lead us are implicated in a society which makes barbarity
possible.

(2004)

While-reading

COMPREHENSION AND ANALYSIS

- 1 Check what the text says about the statements in pre-reading 1.
- 2 Explain the following quotations:
 - a "evil is not the preserve of a small minority of exceptional individuals" (ll. 19-20)
 - b "His evil was disarmingly banal" (l. 25)
 - c "Leadership - the way in which experimenters either overtly or tacitly endorsed particular forms of action - was crucial to the way participants behaved." (ll. 61-63)
 - d "Tyranny follows from powerlessness rather than power" (ll. 119-120)
 - e "Evil can become banal, but so can humanism" (l. 153)
- 3 Sum up what factors can change ordinary people into torturers.
- 4 What does it take to prevent atrocities like the ones mentioned in the article? Also consider the implications of the Zimbardo experiment.
- 5 Make a rhetorical analysis of the article. Your analysis must include the following aspects:

- a What information do we get about the writers of this article? Find examples in the article that show their background. How does this information influence our understanding of the article?
- b Find examples of rhetorical questions. What effect do they create?

OVERALL QUESTIONS

- 1 Why do the writers refer to Hannah Arendt and Adolf Eichmann?
- 2 List some of the qualities of the article. Substantiate your views with examples from the text. You may find some of the following words useful:
clear – concise – confusing – intellectual – amusing – provocative – traditional – pedagogical – educational – informative – irrelevant – complicated
- 3 What is the function of the article? What do you think the writers want to achieve?
- 4 Check BBC News on the internet. What is your impression of the site? How does this influence your impression of the article?
- 5 What role does language play in making torture possible? Give examples from the article and from your own everyday life.

TEXT-RELATED ASSIGNMENT

1 Written assignment: letter to the editor.

Write a letter to the editor where you defend the soldiers who abused Iraqi prisoners. (Use about 150 words.)

Find information about the New York Times and read examples of letters to the editor. NB: You may need to set up a user name and password to access the New York Times archives.

Helpful links:

The New York Times writer's guidelines for letters to the editor:

<http://www.nytimes.com/ref/membercenter/help/lettertoeditor.html>

New York Times letters editor, Thomas Feyer, provides detailed answers to questions about what kinds of letters get published:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/23/opinion/23READ.html?ex=1141189200&en=1fd8b7f8078f4183&ei=5070>

WIDER CONTEXTS

1 Psychological and cultural context: evil. Discussion and references to other texts.

Are the soldiers who tortured the Iraqi prisoners evil? Is man evil? Discuss. Read the article "Bad or Mad?" p. 6 and/or look at the quotations on pp. 3-4 for inspiration. You must substantiate your point of view by referring to other texts.

2 Political context: Harold Pinter's poem "American Football".

Read Harold Pinter's poem "American Football" and discuss Mark Billington's comments to it.

American Football (1991), by Harold Pinter
(*A Reflection upon the Gulf War*)

Hallelullah!

It works.

We blew the shit out of them.

*We blew the shit right back up their own ass
And out their fucking ears.*

It works.

We blew the shit out of them.

They suffocated in their own shit!

Hallelullah.

Praise the Lord for all good things.

We blew them into fucking shit.

They are eating it.

Praise the Lord for all good things.

*We blew their balls into shards of dust,
Into shards of fucking dust.*

We did it.

Now I want you to come over here and kiss me on the mouth.

Mark Billington's comment:

"What Pinter is clearly doing in *American Football* is satirising, through language that is deliberately violent, obscene, sexual and celebratory, the military triumphalism that followed the Gulf War and, at the same time, counteracting the stage-managed euphemisms through which it was projected on television. General Schwarzkopf talked of 'surgical bombing' and 'collateral damage'. Perry Smith, a retired general and CNN analyst, claimed that the Gulf War would 'set a new standard' in avoiding civilian casualties. When an Iraqi air-raid shelter was hit, American officials quickly went on television and claimed that it was 'a command-and-control facility'. Death was smothered in the language of technology and bureaucracy. But as the New

Yorker reported on 25 March 1991, Operation Desert Storm not only involved massive civilian casualties but 'battle carnage on a scale and at a pace equal to some of this century's most horrifying military engagements'. Pinter's poem, by its exaggerated tone of jingoistic, anally obsessed bravado, reminds us of the weasel-words used to describe the war on television and of the fact that the clean, pure conflict which the majority of the American people backed at the time was one that existed only in their imagination. Behind the poem lies a controlled rage: that it was rejected, even by those who sympathised with its sentiments, offers melancholy proof that hypocrisy is not confined to governments and politicians."

From *Life and Work of Harold Pinter* by Michael Billington, Faber and Faber 1996

Does this add to your understanding of "Why not everyone is a torturer"?