

Haim Gordon and Rivca Gordon

Living with the Horror of Evil: A Sartrean Perspective

In Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* the horror of the evildoer, Kurtz, at his own deeds emerges as crucial to the story. Yet few authors have followed Conrad's intuitions and attempted to describe in detail the intricacies of living with the horror of one's evil way of life. Jean Paul Sartre is an exception. Unfortunately, Sartre's dealing with the horrors of the evildoer has not been discussed and rarely mentioned. Few have learned from his valuable insights. This essay is a brief attempt to suggest what can be learned from a few of the insights about living with the horror of one's evil deeds that appear in Sartre's fiction and drama.

Sartre seems to agree with many of Conrad's thoughts concerning Kurtz's bewitching power. As in *Heart of Darkness*, Sartre's fiction shows that underlying the imaginary reality that the bewitching evildoer creates, underlying the evildoer's ongoing attempts to create a Manichaean world, underlying the ostentatious pride and sentimentality that frequently accompany these attempts—underlying all the tricks of consciousness and the whirligigs that the evildoer embraces often lurks a horror of the evil that one is doing. This horror rarely rises to the surface. In the case of Conrad's Kurtz, it emerges moments before his death.

But there are problems. Although Conrad has presented a stark and penetrating portrait of Kurtz, it is hardly a full portrait. Throughout the period of his evildoing, we know very little about the workings of Kurtz's mind. From his young Russian admirer we learn a bit about how he bewitched himself and others. We do know, however, that Kurtz

impressed many people as, potentially, a profound and visionary political leader. Thus bewitching evil, even when accompanied by some sense of the horror of one's deeds, can often impress masses of people as being visionary and profound. How does this happen? Furthermore, how can one intuitively grasp such bewitching evildoers?

To give even a partial answer to the above questions, one must go beyond Conrad. Here is where Sartre's writings are enlightening. In them we find vivid descriptions of the mode of being of the evildoer who, not fleeing from lucidity, daily lives with the horror of his or her evil deeds, while convincing his or her encompassing milieu to accept the evil that he or she instigates. We shall begin this essay by presenting what can be learnt from such a description. Next we shall show that by even partially understanding such an evildoer's consciousness, we can often discover clues that reveal his or her embracing of evil. Then we will suggest what can be learnt from Sartre about how one grasps such evil intuitively. And finally, we shall show how Sartre's emphasis on hating evil and on living authentically with the horror of evil helps a person to perceive the evil which he or she encounters, and to confront it.

Someone may here ask: How does Sartre define horror? In Sartre's writings, a person's consciousness can recoil in horror either through a magical alteration of the world, or through a lucid and pure apprehension of a terrible situation where human freedom is being blatantly destroyed. When I comprehend with horror the inmates at a shelter for the homeless or in a refugee camp, or when I am overcome by horror when facing a starving child, I can be magically changing the entire world into a place where evil, suffering, and forlornness reign unabated. Or I can lucidly apprehend the situation for what it is with its horrible violation of human freedom and dignity. I can shudder, because I recognize myself as existing in this horrible magical world; I can also shudder from clearly seeing the evil that human beings inflict upon each other. One should add, however, that in his fiction Sartre also shows horror emerging in more complex and intimate situations. For instance, both Roquentin in *Nausea* and Daniel in the trilogy *Roads to Freedom* seem to have a horror of their own flesh. In the latter case, this horror arises from a perceived rather than a real evil. Nevertheless, Daniel's response creates a world of evil, which, in turn, creates its own horror.

Our presentation of the dialectics of living with the horror of evil will reveal that Sartre has done much of the work for us. His portrayals of the consciousnesses of evildoers are unique. One encounters in his writings evildoers, who play with horror, yet impress those whom they encounter as being sensitive, caring, and supporting. Discussing these evildoers will give some hints of how one can intuitively grasp such bewitching evil. Sartre indicates, however, that such grasping is not at all simple.

Consider the portrayal of Daniel in *Roads to Freedom*. Horror is indeed one of his prevalent moods and states of mind, a suave homosexual who delights when he can bring suffering upon his so-called friends. Throughout the trilogy, Daniel quite often grasps himself as an evildoer, a bewitcher, vile and pernicious; at times horror accompanies this grasping of himself. Within this self-destructive situation, he frequently seeks relief from his acknowledgment of himself as evil by playing with his horror. For instance, the entire incident in which the reader is introduced to Daniel in *The Age of Reason*, the first volume of the trilogy, when he attempts to drown his beloved cats in the murky waters of the Seine, is a playing with his horror.

This playing with horror partially resembles the playing with one's situation that Sartre describes in *Being and Nothingness*, in the section on bad faith. There Sartre writes: "The child plays with his body in order to explore it, to take inventory of it; the waiter in the cafe plays with his condition in order to realize it" (102). It is evident that Daniel plays with his horror in order to explore it and to partially realize it, at least this is what occurs when he rides for an hour in a streetcar with his three cats closed firmly in a basket, knowing that he has decided to drown them in the Seine. But while the young child's playing with its body is usually an innocent act of exploration, Daniel's playing with his horror is crucial for the self-bewitching process that he continually initiates—it helps to alleviate the dread of his Evil and of his homosexuality being discovered, it assists him to not focus on his self-repugnance, and it seemingly diminishes the anguish that accompanies his horror.

We have here a pattern of bad faith which supports and helps constitute Daniel's constant bewitching of himself. In this pattern, Daniel flees from the horror of his evil being-in-the-world and self-bewitching into a realm of self-initiated horror; he senses that by playing with this horror, he will succeed in somewhat diminishing the dread that always

encompasses him. And this diminishing of the dread of horror allows him to continue to bewitch himself.

At this point one may ask, what is the imaginary reality that Daniel creates in the process of bewitching himself? Why does this reality arouse his horror? Furthermore, how is horror linked to the acts of the bewitcher? And finally, how does Sartre suggest that we can intuitively perceive the evildoer who plays with his horror?

The fictitious reality that Daniel strives to create in *The Age of Reason* is that he, Daniel, is a wonderful, caring person, who wants sincerely to assist his friends, and especially to help Marcelle. Archangel, Marcelle calls him. He knows that this is a fictitious reality that insidiously conceals his evil intentions and inclinations, for instance, his wish to manipulate Mathieu into marrying Marcelle, knowing that he will suffer intensely from this marriage. Daniel also knows that his fictitious reality is merely a devious parasite upon the everyday harsh reality of his life. To sustain this fiction of himself Daniel must be smooth, cunning, eloquent. Indeed, it seems that he has trained himself carefully so that it will be very difficult to grasp intuitively his evil intentions. He is an expert at manipulating the conversation; he cynically leads Marcelle, her mother, and many others to admire his mask of goodness, even while he is physically repelled by the odor, the smile, and the flesh of many of these admirers. When speaking with Mathieu about Marcelle's unwanted pregnancy, he drips with sugary guile, striving to cloak his duplicity under a seemingly warm, solicitous, supportive attitude. In short, as an evil person he is a professional who seems to leave no tracks.

Or does he? Consider the fact that Daniel strives always to be in control of the situation in which he finds himself. Any situation. He almost never lets go. Even when he plays with his horror in solitude, he strives for control. We know the reason that the evildoer cherishes this constant control. It ensures that one will be able to give the best interpretation to all of one's deeds, including vile deeds. Also, the horror can thus be restrained, especially since one soon learns that horror can be dizzying—like vertigo, it can lead a person to leap into unwarranted situations. (Sartre discusses in detail the ontological problem of always striving to be in control of yourself and the situation—of never letting go—in *Saint Genet*, *The Words*, and other writings. Yet it is evident that the problem had already emerged in his fiction.)

For Daniel, however, there are also pragmatic considerations for his striving never to let go. By being in control, one can quite often shrewdly manipulate others and inflict suffering upon them, one can slyly bewitch oneself, and one can still, hopefully, evade the harsh judgment of others. In Daniel's case, his being in control also ensures his ability to sustain the fictitious and bewitching reality that he has created.

But it is this relentless striving to control one's situation which may often disclose the bewitcher. (Even on his deathbed, Conrad's Kurtz hardly ever relinquished control.) One can often intuitively perceive this constant striving to not relinquish control, even if the bewitcher attempts to conceal this behavior through a suave demeanor and to come up with cunning responses. A person who strives always to be in control expresses no joyous spontaneity; no genuine joy in life or love of this world wells up in him or her. Furthermore, when encountering a person who strives always to be in control, if one relates to him or her openly, dialogically, as Mathieu relates to Daniel, one will note no dialogical response. Put succinctly, as Sartre showed in detail in *Saint Genet*, the bewitcher does not share.

Indeed, Daniel always attempts to evade authentically giving of himself, to shy away from sharing with others his true thoughts, or painful frustrations, or disturbing weaknesses. The same is true of Franz Gerlach, the major character in Sartre's play *Altona*, who flees the horror of a torturer and murderer, the butcher of Smolensk, into a self-imposed imprisonment. Franz Gerlach and Daniel both know very well the price of sharing one's thoughts, frustrations, and weaknesses with another. It means acknowledging the freedom of that other and allowing him or her to assume at least partial control of the situation. It also means allowing the other person to pass judgment upon one's attitudes, deeds, and way of life. For Daniel and Franz Gerlach it means being branded as evil by the other's look.

That is true even though the sources of Franz Gerlach's horror differ greatly from the sources of Daniel's. The origin of Franz Gerlach's horror is the youthful memory of his discovery of a concentration camp near his home, built on his father's land with his father's approval. Sartre seems to indicate that later, as an officer in the Wehrmacht, Franz personally creates a situation that parallels his original horror at the discovery of the concentration camp. He becomes the butcher of Smolensk. The source of

his horror is very much in the public realm, which is probably why in his tapes Franz appeals to the public of the year three thousand to justify his guilt. In contrast, Sartre describes Daniel's horror as welling up within his body and constantly accompanying his attraction to young men. Of course, Sartre knows that society's condemnation of homosexuality very much influences Daniel's horror; still, unlike Franz Gerlach, it is Daniel's own body which is one of the sources of his horror. Despite these differences, Sartre repeatedly shows that what unites both evildoers is the need never to share authentically.

When Daniel discloses to Mathieu, at the end of *The Age of Reason*, that he is a homosexual, it seems at first that he wants someone else of his milieu to know the truth about his sexual inclinations. But it soon becomes evident that this is not a genuine sharing. That implies a mutual generosity, as Sartre pointed out in *Saint Genet*. Daniel is not generous. He does not want to share with Mathieu the frustrations, the suffering, and the horror that constitute his life as a homosexual. Nor does he wish to share with him the reasons he decided to marry Marcelle after she broke up with Mathieu. Daniel is exposing, not sharing. He exposes an intimate aspect of his life; but he dares not share his feelings or beliefs, or thoughts, or wishes, or hopes. For one major reason: genuine sharing would require that Daniel tell about his evil intentions and wishes, it would require disclosing his delight in making other people suffer—in short, it would require sharing aspects of his evil deeds and inclinations, which are intertwined with his life project. Daniel lacks the courage for such a genuine sharing. Much the same can be shown about Franz Gerlach's disclosing of himself to Johanna.

The results are a counterfeit sharing, a pseudo-sharing—which is not a sharing at all. Daniel talks about himself as if he were a finished product—he is a homosexual, much as this chair is a Louis XIV chair. Of course this attitude is in bad faith, since Daniel seems to see himself as a fixed thing, rather than as a living consciousness. Consequently, his homosexuality overwhelms him. He does not present himself as a free consciousness, who can decide every moment how to project himself into the future. In short, he refuses to see that, in a sense, he is not a homosexual or a coward, but a consciousness that can freely and responsibly choose a new project every moment. Such bad faith, of course, makes genuine sharing almost impossible.

What is important in our context is that Daniel is not sharing the process of his life, a process which his freedom sustains and about which one can consult with one's friends. Daniel is definitely not consulting with Mathieu about how to continue his life. At times the reader wonders: Is not this fake act of sharing merely another game that Daniel plays with himself, another way of playing with his horror? Sartre seems to insinuate that this is the case. In this encounter one senses that Daniel has so bewitched himself to be suave and acceptable that he has lost the ability and the art of sharing. What is more, Daniel soon grasps that even his deliberate and limited disclosing of himself, even his pseudo-sharing with Mathieu will become a new source of frustration, because he now has lost control of an intimate part of his life. The book ends with both Mathieu and Daniel knowing that because of this disclosure, which makes almost no impression on Mathieu, Daniel will hate Mathieu.

We can now suggest why Daniel's created fictitious reality arouses his horror. This created reality does not include the possibility of sharing, and Daniel is smart enough to know this fact. Indeed, no imaginary reality can be shared, because genuine reciprocity can only come into being in the real world, not in an imaginary reality. (The same is, of course, true about Franz Gerlach's imaginary reality.) It is, therefore, not surprising that Daniel's life is the epitome of aloneness. Indeed, Sartre shows that under Daniel's smooth, cunning, well-tailored responses lies a profound aloneness which is fertile ground for the appearance of horror.

* * *

Above we indicated that, according to Sartre, a person's consciousness can recoil in horror through a magical alteration of the world, or through a lucid apprehension of a terrible situation. Someone may ask: What is the source of the difference between these two manners of experiencing horror? Sartre does not articulate a precise answer to this question, but a close study of his fiction suggests that trust in the world makes the difference. A person who totally distrusts the world, like Franz Gerlach or Daniel, will quite often endow the world with those magical qualities that justify horror at one's own evil being. On the other hand, for a person who trusts the world, even if not fully, like Johanna in *Altona*, or Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, horror can be a way of attaining lucidity

and recognizing one's freedom and responsibilities. Conrad even suggests that Kurtz seemed to have regained some lucidity on his deathbed, as he was willing to trust at least one person in the story: Marlow.

In the case of Daniel, or of Franz Gerlach, horror is quite often dialectically linked to his endowing the world with the magical qualities it needs so as to be a hideous threat to one's being-in-the world. This magical world, each man believes, will somehow diminish the vertigo that each experiences when recalling the fact of his past evil or reviewing the possibility of his future evil deeds. In the case of Johanna, her horror at the evil of Franz's being the butcher from Smolensk changes Franz from a possible lover into a hideous threat to her sense of responsibility. Through her horror she has regained lucidity and with it some responsibility for her relationship to the world. Indeed, her horror is accompanied by a shudder of vertigo when she recognizes the profound evil of the person with whom she was willing to share her life.

This hideous threat to one's being-in-the-world, this horror that is dialectically linked to a magical world that one incessantly creates, seems always to accompany the bewitcher. Sartre suggests that the bewitcher knows that the fictitious reality that one has created so as to bewitch oneself and others is merely a trick; it is an attempt to conceal one's evil deeds. On the other hand, a person who has emerged, even momentarily, from bewitchment can suddenly shudder in horror, because he or she suddenly comprehends his or her being-in-the-world, as one surveys a landscape of destruction from a towering cliff and is struck with dizziness because wherever one looks one encounters oneself as evil. We now understand the dialectic of Daniel's flight from any possibility of genuine sharing with other persons. He flees because he fears the horror in the look of his partners in this world; he prefers the aloneness that allows for his horror of himself to emerge continually. The same is true of Franz Gerlach.

Why is sharing so important? Sartre rarely indicates the reason directly, but it underlies the dialogue between Mathieu and Daniel at the end of *The Age of Reason*. Authentic sharing of one's life with another person is the path to affirmation of one's freedom, and to the possibility of forgiveness. It seems that Conrad's Kurtz senses this situation intuitively; that may be the reason that on his deathbed he constantly discloses his past thoughts, ideals, and dreams to Marlow. Daniel also

senses the power of sharing. But his disclosure to Mathieu is a conditional sharing, which is not a sharing at all. He seems to solicit the tepid affirmation of his homosexuality offered by Mathieu so as to be able to despise him. As mentioned, perhaps Daniel is merely playing again with his horror of being discovered and hence is unwilling to accept any affirmation. What is evident, however, is that Daniel does not even entertain the possibility of asking to be forgiven for his evil deeds, for his insidious manipulating of Mathieu and Marcelle. The same is true, again, of Franz Gerlach. His also is a conditional sharing; he also never entertains the possibility of asking forgiveness.

An aloof and supercilious aloneness, an inability to share, flight from affirmation and from the possibility of being forgiven—these attitudes and modes of existence can, at times, be perceived intuitively. What is more, these attitudes and modes of existence are often disclosed through simple words and daily acts. Daniel drinks himself into stupefaction almost every night in order to forget his aloneness, his homosexual inclinations and gratifications, and his horror. Franz Gerlach again and again records the same bland false message on a tape so as to silence his aloneness, and supposedly to seek a belated affirmation of his perverse description of reality by the inhabitants of the thirtieth century.

There is one more point to be made concerning the possibility of intuitively perceiving the horror of the bewitcher. Quite often he or she must leap into doing evil because of the horror that is experienced when mentally previewing what they plan to do or imagine themselves doing. It is this previewing, and the hesitancy before the leap which may also be perceived at times. When Daniel travels with his cats closed in a basket on a streetcar in order to drown them, his responses to the little girl on the seat opposite him hint at his previewing with horror his planned deed.

Still, as Sartre shows through the examples of Daniel, Franz Gerlach, and others, intuitively grasping the evil intentions of the bewitching evildoer may be extremely difficult, because they are so smooth and persuasive, and because the reality that they create often reaches out and appeals to the source of their listener's wishes, fears, and wants. Furthermore, since they do not share with others, evildoers hardly ever disclose the horror that accompanies their acts. Indeed, it seems that the only trio of Sartre's evildoers who partially disclose to each other their

horror at what they are doing, are Garcin, Estelle, and Inez in *No Exit*—and they are no longer alive.

Sartre also indicates that through their constant vigilance, through their control of the situation, many evildoers find ways of suppressing the horror that accompanies their bewitching of themselves and of others. One of the prevalent ways is that employed by Senator Clarke in Sartre's play *The Respectful Prostitute*. He bewitches Lizzie, the respectful prostitute, to help him do the evil which an entire white southern community supposedly wants done—to lie to the court about a murder of a negro by a drunken white man. It seems that this adherence to the so-called will of the community may help him to efface almost totally the aloneness and the horror that could accompany his evil deeds, his manipulating of other people, his bewitching acts. It also helps conceal his evil from the intuition of the other.

* * *

At this point in the discussion, someone may still ask: Can we intuitively grasp the evildoer who lives with the horror of his or her deeds? After all, Sartre's writings seem to indicate that, in many instances, it will be extremely difficult.

It is difficult, Sartre seems to say, but not impossible, especially if we are aware of the difficulties. He would probably add that a major reason for the difficulty of intuitively perceiving the bewitching evildoer is that many people relate to the persons whom they encounter quite innocently and without striving to comprehend lucidly the situation in which they find themselves; and it is this innocence and lack of lucidity that the bewitcher ruthlessly exploits. We agree. Sartre is truthfully describing our society when, for instance, he shows that Mathieu and Marcelle do not suspect that Daniel's solicitous caring is merely a mask that conceals his ongoing attempt to manipulate them into a marriage, so that he can delight in their suffering.

Another reason which we have not yet mentioned concerning the difficulty in perceiving the bewitching evildoer who lives with horror is that such a person is often unpredictable, even to the self. Daniel has no idea that he will propose to Marcelle when he comes to her home immediately after his sly promptings have instigated the misunderstanding

between Marcelle and Mathieu; Franz Gerlach has no inkling that he will suggest to his father, at their first meeting after his thirteen years of flight from justice into voluntary confinement, that they commit suicide together. A major reason for this unpredictability is that to bewitch the self a person's consciousness must constantly play games with his or her being-in-the-world. That is how the bewitching evildoer lives his or her freedom. And for the game to be a real game, whose outcome one cannot definitely predict, there must be surprises; as in solitaire, one should never know in advance which card will come up.

In his short story "Erostatus," Sartre focuses on the unpredictability of evil. Paul Hilbert, the story's major character, has for months been bewitching himself and planning to kill innocent people for the fun of it, since he hates humanity. Yet, he continually puts off fulfilling his evil intentions. Furthermore, in the lonely process of bewitching himself, he seems constantly to be setting traps for himself so that he will not evade doing evil. Like Daniel, he seems to enjoy playing with the horror emanating from his evil wishes. And then suddenly, on the intended day, after dawdling in the street for hours with his loaded revolver in his pocket, without knowing why, he starts shooting a fat man who approaches him.

Even if someone shares an awareness of Paul Hilbert's profound aloneness, of his perverse sexual habits, which are an expression of his inability to share, these self-destructive inclinations and behaviors do not necessarily lead to inflicting undue suffering upon others. They can also lead to despair, or perhaps even to a religious conversion. Nevertheless, according to Sartre, for Paul Hilbert, who constantly bewitches himself to become a "black knight," who will maybe be remembered for his rampant destruction, the evil deed is a leap with no way back. In short, very often, until the moment of its performance, the evil deed is unpredictable.

But with the difficulties, as we have shown above, always come possibilities of intuitively grasping that something is amiss. For instance, in "Erostatus" Sartre does give us an additional clue which might help us to perceive persons who bewitch themselves. Paul Hilbert engages himself in what may be called the sorcerer's apprentice syndrome. In this syndrome the self-bewitched person is attracted to an object which, like a sorcerer's wand, beckons to that person, and seemingly empowers him

or her to do evil. Someone may suggest that this object is not different from Macbeth's hallucinatory dagger, "proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain." In "Erostatus" Sartre shows that there is a major difference, however, in that the object that beckons Hilbert to do evil, his revolver, has a being of its own. It is this independent being of the revolver that weighs in his pocket and presses against his hip which seemingly beckons to Hilbert, and magically supports his perversions. Of course, Sartre shows that these are games of living with horror that consciousness plays with itself; but it is precisely such games which, at times, may be grasped intuitively.

In summary, it is indeed often very difficult intuitively to perceive the bewitching evildoer who lives with the horror of his or her deeds. Sartre shows that such a bewitcher constantly flees his or her horror and the disclosing of himself or herself as evil. Quite often this flight is accompanied by a striving to be smooth, cunning, and evasive. Furthermore, the bewitching evildoer frequently knows how to appeal insidiously to another person's innocence and weaknesses, or to that person's dormant wishes.

Yet Sartre's fiction also suggests that it is, at times, possible to perceive intuitively the evildoer who lives with the horror of his or her evil—if one has the daily courage to choose a worthy, honest existence. Such a choice requires that one not fear to confront evil, that one strive to retain lucidity, that one reject the lure of weird and imaginary realities, that one be suspicious of persons who are always in control of themselves and their situation, or who play with their horror, that one is wary of persons who appeal to one's sentimentality and to one's pride. Orestes in Sartre's play *The Flies*, is an example of a person who has chosen to live thus.

We should perhaps add that Sartre's writings also indicate that choosing such a way of life is no simple challenge.

* * *

We could stop here. We have presented a few of the insights that can be gleaned from Sartre on living with the horror of evil and on the entire problem of intuitively grasping evil. Yet we feel uncomfortable; something important is missing. In our guts we sense that in order to

grasp the situation of living with the horror of evil, lucidity and the act of confronting evil are not enough. Somewhere along the road one must also learn to hate evil. With all one's heart.

Sartre suggested no less. One of the most moving scenes in his trilogy occurs in *Iron in the Soul* when Mathieu, together with half a squad of French soldiers stationed in the belfry of a church, try to hold up the advance of a Nazi motor column. When the column appears, Mathieu and his comrades start shooting Nazi soldiers. The Germans regroup and respond with machine guns and cannon fire. Soon Mathieu's comrades are all killed. Alone in the destroyed belfry Mathieu continues shooting, telling himself who each shot is for:

One for Lola whom I dared not rob; one for Marcelle whom I ought to have left in the lurch; one for Odette whom I didn't want to kiss. This for the books I never dared to write, this for the journeys I never made, this for everybody in general whom I wanted to hate and tried to understand.
(225)

Until this moment, we suddenly learn, Mathieu often wanted to hate. Instead, he tried to understand. This trying to understand again and again blocked his ability to see evil and its horrors, to confront it, to struggle against it. Giving his or her understanding to the evildoer is often not only a flight from confrontation, but a manner of compromising with the stark reality of his or her evil deeds. Indeed, Mathieu's relations of understanding, which were devoid of confrontation with Daniel, with his brother, Jacques, and with others, are merely ways in which he compromised with their evil. Hating, of course, means judging—from which Mathieu persistently flees into understanding. And into bad faith.

Yes, Sartre indicates, one should hate evil—because it is evil! This hating helps one to struggle against it. It can also often help one intuitively to grasp evil and its horrible results, and also to apprehend those persons who live with the horror of evil. Such an approach means going beyond the famous scene in Sartre's novel *Nausea*, where Roquentin learns to hate the respectable citizens of Bouville when he encounters their portraits in the museum. It means hating live persons who here and now willingly do evil; it means hating persons whom one encounters, who cross one's path, who influence one's life, and whose way of life persistently threatens, destroys, and abuses the freedom of

others. We know that such a hating is often difficult; it is not prudent. But, as the story of Mathieu reveals, experiencing the horror of evil, hating evil, and acting on one's hatred is often the only way to live one's freedom fully and to preserve one's integrity.

Hence, the two lessons to learn from Mathieu's moment of sudden enlightenment in the belfry: First, since clever and evil bewitchers, such as Daniel, abound, and since the possibilities of experiencing the horror of evil have diminished through our always wanting to understand the evildoer—without sustaining the ability to hate evil, one cannot significantly struggle against it. Furthermore, without hating evil one will find difficult the ability to apprehend it intuitively. Second, a person who dares not hate evil and only wishes to understand the evildoers is often sacrificing his or her freedom and integrity—either on the altar of a cowardly prudence, or so as to bask in the sentimentality and ignorance of the mob, and of the masses who support the mob.

* * *

The wish to understand an evildoer, while refusing to see the horror of his or her deeds is much too prevalent. Consider the Reagan years in the United States. Suddenly homeless men and women, forcefully evicted from their homes, began to live in the streets of all major cities, from Manhattan to Berkeley. This was an immediate outcome of the economic policy of the Reagan administration that decided to throw a party for the rich. A congressional study reveals that, from 1979 to 1987, after adjustment for inflation, the family income of the poorest fifth of the population of the United States declined by over 6 percent, meanwhile rising by over 11 percent for the richest fifth of the population (Chomsky, 84-85). Some of the results were immediate: infant mortality in the slums of American cities now ranks above that of Cuba, Greece, Portugal, and all of Eastern Europe. And, as mentioned, millions of homeless men and women live in the streets.

Yet the saddest result is that the homeless seem to have become part of the accepted environment. Very few people still respond with horror to the fact that these human beings have lost, probably forever, a place that they can call home, where they can retain their privacy and intimate life. Indeed, as we learn from Robert Frost, the homeless have sunk into

the ultimate poverty, since they have no "place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in. . . . Something you somehow haven't to deserve" (38). And their being evicted from such a basic human right does not arouse horror. Nor widespread sympathy. Nor hatred of the people who engineered this evil.

The contrary is true. Many American people were enchanted by Ronald Reagan and his evil assistants, much as Marcelle was enchanted by Daniel in Sartre's trilogy, much as the young Russian was enchanted by Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*. Even today millions of Americans understand and sympathize with the Reagan regime, while shifting their glance away from the abominable degradation of human beings that it brought forth in the world's richest and greatest democracy. In summing up the Reagan years, few articles in the mainstream press mentioned the horror of the homeless as the president's legacy. And if it was mentioned, it was with the sympathy and understanding that such is the outcome of perhaps a minor policy mistake. If anything, the Reagan years show that American society has become very well trained in fleeing from facing the horror that is lying there, in the streets of their major cities. Furthermore, one can say quite clearly that large segments of the people of the United States, including its intellectual elite, and especially its right-wing intellectuals, create for themselves an imaginary reality, which is a mirror image of Franz Gerlach's imaginary reality, in which the homeless are hardly worthy of consideration. These segments refuse to live with the horror that is the outcome of the evils of their regime. Thus, in their indifference to the evil of Ronald Reagan, these citizens of the United States resemble the cruel, avaricious "pilgrims" who accompany Marlow on his voyage to find Kurtz, and who have eyes only for the ivory that Kurtz has plundered.

* * *

Joseph Conrad foresaw such misused sympathy and understanding, coupled with a flight from living with horror, when he described Marlow's meeting with Kurtz's betrothed. Despite his horror at Kurtz's rapacious deeds and wholesale murder, Marlow did not want to destroy the dreams of she who loved Kurtz. Such a flight from living with the horror of evil, perhaps, may be excusable in the private realm, even

though Marlow leaves no doubt in our mind that his was an act of cowardice. But as Sartre repeatedly indicated, and as we have suggested in this essay, this flight can have grave and terrible outcomes when adopted as a way of life suitable for public interaction.

WORKS CITED

Chomsky, Noam. *Deterring Democracy*. London: Verso, 1991.

Frost, Robert. "The Death of the Hired Man." *The Poetry of Robert Frost*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964.

Sartre, Jean Paul. *Being and Nothingness*. New York: Washington Square P, 1966.

———. *Iron in the Soul*. London: Penguin, 1963.