No Exit Study Guide

No Exit by Jean-Paul Sartre

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Introduction

Jean-Paul Sartre's *No Exit* is considered by many to be the author's best play and most accessible dramatization of his philosophy of existentialism. Sartre wrote the original draft in two weeks at the Café Flore in Paris. Titled *Huis clos* in the original French, it was first produced in Paris's Vieux-Colombier Theater. At the time, during World War II, this part of France was occupied by Nazi Germany. Sartre deliberately wrote *No Exit* as a one-act play so that theater-goers would not be kept past the German-imposed curfew. Many forms of entertainment, including plays, had to be approved by German censors. During rehearsals, clearance to perform the play was given and taken away several times. Despite such setbacks, *No Exit* opened in the spring of 1944, and it was an immediate success. The original production played in Paris for several years, even after the war ended and Paris was liberated. Parisian audiences appreciated Sartre's subtle message of resistance and implied subversiveness. Critics, however, gave it mixed reviews, mostly because of the social and political climate of the time. The fact that Inez was a lesbian was an extremely controversial point for both audiences and critics alike.

No Exit was translated into English (and is sometimes known as *Behind Closed Doors),* and made its Broadway debut in 1947. In general, American audiences were not as appreciative as their European counterparts. Some critics did not know what to make of the play and its themes. Others thought that the play stretched the fundamental concept to its breaking point. Still, most appreciated the clever concept: three people confined to a drawing room as their punishment in hell. Despite these mixed reviews, *No Exit* was voted the Best Foreign Play in New York in 1946.

Author Biography

Jean-Paul Sartre was born on June 21, 1905, in Paris, France. He was the only son of Jean-Baptist Sartre, a French naval officer, and his wife, Anne Marie. Sartre's father died when he was only 15 months old, and Sartre and his mother moved in with her parents in Paris. His grandfather, Charles Schweitzer, doted on him and instilled a love of literature. Sartre did not attend school; instead, his grandfather, a language professor, taught him and arranged for tutors. Sartre began writing stories during this time. Religion played a key role in his education; his grandfather was a staunch Protestant while his grandmother was Catholic. An atheist, Sartre did not believe in either religion, but retained some of the ideals of both. This influence is felt in *No Exit,* which is set in Hell.

After his mother remarried in 1916, Sartre began attending school and excelled in his studies. He studied philosophy at the University of Paris where he met his life-long companion, Simone de Beauvoir, an author and scholar. After graduation, Sartre served in the army for two years, then taught at lycées (French high schools) for several more. While teaching, Sartre continued to study philosophy and develop his own. In 1938, Sartre published his first novel, a largely autobiographical book titled *Nausea* (published as *La Nausée* in French). The success of this book brought him some notoriety in France. Like many of his fictional works, including *No Exit, Nausea* explores Sartre's philosophical and political ideas in a fictional setting.

When World War II broke out in Europe in 1939, Sartre again served in the French army and was taken as a German prisoner of war (POW) for several months in 1940-41. After his release, Sartre returned to Paris and participated in the Resistance, a French underground movement that worked against the Germans occupying the country. Sartre continued to study philosophy, and in 1943 he published *Being and Nothingness* (known in French as *L'Être et le néant*). In this book, Sartre develops his philosophy of existentialism, arguing that each human is alone in the world and thus totally free to make his or her own choices to define and re-define himself or herself, but is ultimately morally responsible for his or her actions. They do not have to stay in the roles society has defined for them. These aspects of existentialism are also explored in *No Exit,* written in 1944.

In addition to *No Exit,* the second play written by Sartre, he also wrote a handful of other dramatic works, several screenplays, short stories, and novels. The bulk of Sartre's writing after the end of World War II is nonfiction. Many of these works reflect Sartre's refinement of existentialism as well as his increasingly Marxist political views. Sartre refused both the Nobel Prize for literature and the French Legion of Honor for his writings. His output decreased due to failing health in the late-1970s, and Sartre died in Paris on April 15, 1980, of uremia.

Plot Summary

No Exit opens with a valet leading Joseph Garcin into a drawing room. The small room has three couches and a mantelpiece with a bronze statue on it. Garcin is surprised by the room and its contents. He expected instruments of torture, not a window-less room. The room upsets him and he asks why they did not leave him at least a toothbrush. The valet finds his concerns silly, like the concerns of all the other guests, because they have no need for such human concerns. Garcin guesses that they will never sleep in this room, and notices that the valet never blinks. Garcin becomes further upset when he finds out that the lights are always on. Before the valet goes, Garcin asks if the bell works. The valet tells him it works only intermittently, then exits.

Garcin is left alone for a few minutes, then the valet returns with Inez. After the valet leaves again, Inez thinks that Garcin is to be her torturer. Garcin is amused, and assures her that he is not. Garcin notices that there are no mirrors in the room. Garcin suggests they be polite to each other so that they can survive in the small space, but Inez refuses. They are silent for a moment, and Garcin twists his mouth around. This annoys Inez, who is curt with the man. They both agree that they have not yet begun to suffer. Inez paces while Garcin sits down. His mouth twitches again and he covers it with his hands.

The valet enters again with Estelle. Garcin looks up and is about to uncover his mouth whenEstelle begs him not to. She has mistaken him momentarily for someone whose face had been mangled. After the valet tells her that no else is coming, Estelle comments on the colors of the sofas. She insists on taking the couch that Garcin is sitting on because it better matches her dress. Inez immediately tries to get Estelle's attention, telling her that she wishes that she had some flowers to give her. Estelle has died yesterday and she can see her funeral. She tells them that she died of pneumonia, Inez died from the fumes of gas stove, and that Garcin was shot with twelve bullets in his chest. Estelle is uncomfortable with the word "dead" and insists that they use the term "absentees."

Garcin shares that he is from Rio, and he describes what he sees. His wife is waiting for word about him in front of a barracks. Garcin becomes rather warm and begins to remove his jacket. Estelle stops him, saying she cannot stand a man in shirtsleeves. She asks Inez's opinion, and Inez replies that she does not care much for men, period. Estelle believes a mistake has been made in putting the three of them together, but Inez believes that everything, including the room, was planned to the last detail.

Garcin believes they should talk about why they are there, and Inez seconds the idea. Estelle is reluctant, but tells the others that she married an older man for the sake of her younger brother. Then she met a younger man with whom she fell in love. She does not believe this is a sin. Garcin asks if a man should stand by his principles. He tells them about the pacifist newspaper he ran, and that they shot him for believing in this. Inez implies that she does not believe that Garcin and Estelle are telling the whole truth, and

they are in hell because they are damned. She believes that they are each other's torturers.

Garcin suggests that they remain silent to counteract this, and work out their own means of salvation. After they agree to this and there is silence for at least a few moments, Inez begins to sing. Estelle tries to fix her makeup, but she realizes that there is no mirror for her to look in. Inez says that she will act as Estelle's mirror for her, and does so. Inez's forthrightness embarrasses Estelle, and she asks for Garcin's help. Garcin ignores them for awhile, until it becomes intolerable. He begs them to be silent, but they will not. Estelle tries to get his attention as a man, and Inez wants Estelle's attention. Inez points out they cannot ignore each other.

Garcin sees the wisdom in Inez's words, and begins to fondle Estelle's neck. This makes Estelle uncomfortable. Garcin believes that each of them should be totally honest about why they are there, for this might save them. Garcin admits he was mean and abusive to his wife. Inez describes her affair with a woman named Florence. Inez lived with her cousin and his wife, Florence. Inez seduced her away from her cousin, and he died in a tram accident. Inez told Florence that they killed him, and eventually Florence turned on the gas stove one night and killed them both. Inez admits she is a very cruel person.

Estelle still says that she has no idea what she has done. After some goading by the other two, Estelle admits she had a baby with her lover that she did not want. She murdered the infant in front of him and he killed himself over the incident. Estelle's husband knew nothing of the baby or the lover, and she returned to his side after the suicide. She tries to cry, but finds that tears do not flow in hell.

Inez tries to comfort Estelle. In her grief, Estelle allows Garcin to take off his coat. Garcin thinks the next step is to try to help each other for that is the only way they can save themselves. Inez does not want Garcin's help. She starts to have her own vision of the room where she died. Someone is looking at it. When the vision is over, she refuses to try to help him because she is too rotten. She says she cannot even feel sorry for herself. Still, she agrees not to harm him if he will leave her and Estelle alone. But Estelle wants his help. Inez says that she will be Estelle's forever, but Estelle ignores her. Estelle asks Garcin to take her in his arms, but Inez signals for him not to do that. Garcin complies, but Estelle rejects Inez, spitting in her face. Inez threatens Garcin.

Garcin seizes the opportunity to approach Estelle. Estelle fawns on him, taking him for what he is. They nearly kiss. Garcin begs Estelle to trust him, but she is evasive. Garcin admits he ran away to Mexico to evade military service. He asks if Estelle thinks he is a coward, but she says he must decide that for himself. Garcin begs for Estelle to have faith in him, but she laughs at him. She loves him because he is a man; his cowardice is immaterial to her. This upsets Garcin, and he says he is disgusted by both of them.

Garcin goes to the door and rings the bell. He pounds on the door, while Estelle begs him not to leave. Estelle says that if the door opens, she is leaving, too, rather than stay with Inez. The door suddenly opens, and Garcin is immediately afraid. He will not leave,

nor will he help Estelle push Inez out of the room. After shutting the door, he further explains that Inez understands cowardice, and he must convince her that he is not a coward. Estelle and Garcin align themselves together, and Inez is hurt. She calls him a coward, reminding him of the power she has. Garcin moves away, saying he cannot be with Estelle while Inez is watching. Estelle tries to stab Inez with a paper knife, but it does nothing. Inez says they are dead and stuck there forever. The three of them laugh, and as it ends, Garcin says, "Well, well, let's get on with it."

Part 1

Part 1 Summary

A Valet shows Garcin into a room decorated with antique furniture, including three sofas upholstered in different colors, and a large bronze statue. Garcin asks where all the instruments of torture are, but the Valet laughs and suggests that Garcin is joking. Garcin notices there are no mirrors or windows, nothing that can offer a reflection. He then complains that he hasn't been allowed to keep a toothbrush. The Valet comments calmly that there really isn't any need for a toothbrush. Garcin notices that there is no bed and realizes there is not a need to sleep in the same way, just as there is not need for brushing his teeth. He asks what's outside the room. The Valet tells him passages, more rooms, and stairs. Garcin tries to move the statue, but discovers that it's immovable. He wonders if it's possible to turn out the lights and Valet replies that it rarely happens. Garcin says," It's always daylight" and notices that the Valet doesn't blink. One has to "live" with one's eyes open all the time, Garcin thinks. The Valet asks whether Garcin needs anything else. Garcin asks whether the Valet will come if the bell is rung, but the Valet tells him that the bell doesn't always work. Garcin discovers a paper knife, but doesn't understand why it is in the room.

A moment or two later,rGarcin tries to ring the bell and tries to get the door open; the Valet reappears and brings in Inez. He appears surprised when she says nothing but tells her that if she has any questions she can ask Garcin, then leaves.

Inez asks Garcin about where Florence is. When he tells her he has no idea, she says it doesn't matter; she won't miss her at all. Inez believes Garcin is to be her" torturer," except Garcin introduced himself as a journalist and writer. He asks her what a torturer looks like to her. She tells him that a torturer looks frightened - that she knows from watching herself in a mirror. Garcin suggests they be very polite with each other and that will ease their situation a great deal. She accuses him of being afraid, saying there might have been a point to being afraid "before." He says it still *is* before; the suffering hasn't yet begun. They settle down to wait.

After a few moments of silence, the door opens a third time. The Valet admits Estelle, who had expected Garcin to be someone with a ruined face - she is surprised to see that his face if fine. Estelle asks the Valet if anyone else is coming and he tells her, "No.". She laughs about the ugliness of the furniture, and complains that the one sofa left for her is the wrong color to go with her dress. Inez offers her sofa but Estelle refuses, hinting that Garcin's might be better. Garcin gets up and then offers the sofa to her. Estelle suggests they introduce themselves, and then Estelle dismisses the valet.

Inez flirts with Estelle but Estelle focuses on a vision she's having of her funeral. She teasingly urges her sister to cry, and makes a comment about how her friend Olga isn't crying because she doesn't want to ruin her makeup. Inez asks whether Estelle suffered, and says she was only half conscious while dying of pneumonia. She adds her

husband's not at the funeral, but is at home, prostrate with grief. Inez reveals she was killed because of a leak from a gas stove, while Garcin tells that he was shot twelve times in the chest. As Estelle and Inez react with shock, he comments that he's not good company "among the dead." Estelle says she prefers the word, "absent." Then, in the same way as Estelle saw her funeral, Garcin sees his wife waiting for news of him. He describes her as always wearing black and complains that she always got on his nerves. He sits on Estelle's sofa and holds his head in his hands.

Part 1 Analysis

This section of the play performs two primary functions: exposition and foreshadowing

The exposition has two components. First, it clearly establishes, without using the actual word that these characters are dead and are in hell. This is done by the Valet's ironic commentary on the word "life" and the characters' various references to "before;" by repeated references to torture and suffering, which are characteristics of hell; and by the various mini-tortures as suggested in the Valet's conversation with Garcin (no blinking, no sleeping, no turning out the lights). Later in the play, other aspects of the setting, such as the constant heat reinforce this idea. We become intrigued because we generally have the same preconceptions of what "hell" is, as do the characters, but we are also discovering that hell may have other aspects and definitions. The play's purpose is to offer other definitions of hell. Its theme is Garcin's ultimate definition of hell which occurs later in the play.

The second component of the exposition is the establishment of the basic traits of three central characters and the ways they reveal the play's central conflicts. We discover quickly that Estelle is vain and selfish, and that Inez is outspoken and attracted to women. Immediately, these two characters set up a relationship based on sexual games and politics. Garcin is less vividly drawn in at this point, but we do get the sense that he's cocky and over-confident. This sets the other two characters against him right from the beginning. We also discover how each of the characters died - the bare minimum of information at this point. This relates to the second primary function of this scene - foreshadowing.

The characters' references to their deaths, to their relationships and to their lives all offer suggestive hints about their respective stories and what brought them to hell. These all foreshadow the dramatic action of the play revealing each of the characters r layers of bravado, defensiveness and confidence peeled away until we see their respective truths. Another aspect of foreshadowing is the reference to the paper knife. This foreshadows the scene where Inez stabs herself repeatedly and proves she can't be killed again. A third aspect of foreshadowing is the repeated mention of torture, which foretell the torture that each of the characters will put the other through. The thematic statement occurs later in the play that "hell is other people."

The unmovable bronze statue is a symbol of eternity, of the unchanging judgment that has brought these souls to hell and will keep them there forever. Another important

symbol is the human eye which comes to represent, as the play progresses, watchfulness and judgment. In this section of the play we hear how the Valet's eyes don't blink and how Garcin realizes that his don't either, which suggests that the watchfulness and judgment here in hell and specifically in this room are as eternal as the bronze statue.

Part 2

Part 2 Summary

Estelle speaks sharply to Garcin because he's sitting on her sofa. He apologizes, saying he was getting himself in order and suggesting the others do the same. Inez says she's already in order. Estelle says nothing, but again speaks sharply to Garcin when he tries to take off his jacket. She says she can't stand seeing men in their shirt-sleeves.

She, Garcin and Inez bicker over how to handle the heat and debate whether they've met each other before. Estelle asks whether either Garcin or Inez ever attended a country party at the home of one of her friends. Garcin reveals he's always lived in Rio. Inez tells her she was a postal clerk and was therefore unlikely to move in Estelle's circles; the snobbish Estelle reacts with distaste to both of them. They discover that time passes differently on earth than it does in this room as Estelle sees Olga preparing for bed. Garcin sees his former colleagues relaxing with cigars at the end of their day, and Inez sees her room being shut up.

They ask each other why they've been sent to hell and put together in this room; Inez suggests they all be honest. Estelle immediately protests that she's only there because somebody made a mistake. She tells how she married a much older man and was happy for a while, but fell in love with a younger man who asked her to run away with him. She says there was nothing to send her to hell for that. Garcin tells how he ran a pacifist newspaper when there was a war on and got shot. Inez scornfully suggests that they all stop playing games and just tell the truth about what they did, saying they're all guilty of something - otherwise they wouldn't be there. She realizes that the reason that they're all in this particular room is to torture each other, as opposed to hell having one official torturer for everyone. Garcin promises that he will never torture the others and suggests they go to their individual sofas, stay there, make no noise, and not look at each other. Inez and Estelle agree, Estelle reluctantly.

Part 2 Analysis

Tensions build between the three central characters, and the plot moves forward with Inez's realization that the three of them are to be one another's' torturers. This first stage of the play's thematic statement is spoken later by Garcin that, "hell is other people." Garcin, Inez and Estelle not only torture each other in this room but their stories reveal that they tortured other people in their previous lives. Hell is not the only place where hell - it is other people.

We discover more about the nature of hell. As we see the characters watching life back on Earth unfold without them, we see Garcin, Inez and Estelle learn that life goes on without them. As each of them learns this lesson, they all react badly realizing that

they've got nothing left but themselves and each other. This makes them all afraid and angry, which leads them to continue torturing each other in various ways.

The eyes become symbols of watchfulness. In this section what the characters see of life about earth challenges and changes them in ways that will be repeated and deepened later in the play.

Part 3

Part 3 Summary

Inez sings quietly to herself as Estelle puts on some powder and lipstick. She looks in her bag for a mirror but can't find either one. She asks Garcin if he has any kind of mirror - he doesn't answer. Inez says she has one, but discovers that it's disappeared just like Estelle's. Inez then volunteers to be Estelle's mirror, asking her to trust that she'll tell her the truth about how she looks. Estelle seems reluctant, but looks deeply into her reflection in Inez' eyes. She says she's too tiny to see herself properly and asks for Garcin's help. Garcin ignores her. Inez guides Estelle's hand as she puts on lipstick and when the lipstick is painted on; she describes Estelle's mouth as crueler. Estelle becomes upset and asks how she can trust Inez, who says she wants them to be good friends. Estelle reveals she doesn't make friends with women easily. Inez takes that to mean she doesn't make friends with postal clerks. She lies to Estelle about there being a pimple on her chin. When Estelle becomes upset, Inez suggests that she should be nice to her and that she'll be nice to Estelle in return. In spite of herself Estelle is flattered by Inez's attention, but still wants attention from Garcin.

Garcin admits that he's heard every word of their conversation, but he hasn't been listening become someone in his office has been talking about him, and he's been trying to hear. He suggests that they all ignore each other; saying he can see where talking with each other is going to lead. He sits with his hands over his ears but Inez grabs them, and says it's impossible for them to ignore each other; they are in the same room together and are constantly present in each other's minds. She says she prefers to deal with her hell face to face.

Garcin gives in, joins the others, and suggests that any attempts at politeness are a waste of time. He challenges the others to be completely honest about why they're there. Estelle protests that she doesn't know. Garcin admits to treating his wife badly, verbally abusing her in the hopes that she'd respond in some way, bringing home his mistresses. Inez responds by admitting she broke up the marriage of her friend Florence (the woman she mentioned to Garcin when she first appeared). The despairing husband, who was Inez's cousin, was run over by a tram. Florence moved in with Inez, who describes herself as cruel and unable to get on without making other people suffer, and says she made Florence suffer to the point that one night she turned on the gas in their apartment and killed both of them.

Garcin and Inez ask Estelle what she is guilty of, and Estelle says she does not know. Inez and Garcin pressure her into revealing who she was afraid of when she first arrived. Estelle tries to run out, but the door won't open, no matter how hard she pulls on it. Finally she admits that when she came in, she thought Garcin was her young lover who shot himself in the face when he found out she killed their baby. She attempts to cry but there are no tears in hell. Inez tries to comfort her, and Garcin apologizes, asking Estelle to not be angry with him. Inez says he looks like a hanging judge. Garcin

says he would like to be able to see himself in a mirror. Estelle reveals that she's not angry with Garcin, but Inez asks if she's angry with her. Estelle says she is.

Part 3 Analysis

The torture begins in earnest in this section as Inez tortures the vain Estelle with a lie about a pimple. Inez and Garcin torture Estelle into revealing the painful truth about her actions. Estelle's denial contrasts vividly with Inez's matter-of-fact acceptance of what she's done and Garcin's apparently intense remorse. These three levels of guilt clearly relate to the of key symbol mirrors.

Mirrors appear again and again in this play. Estelle is obsessed with them, Inez carries one, but it doesn't seem important to her, and Garcin refers to them after first asking about them at the beginning of the play. Mirrors represent how these people have fooled themselves into beliefs about who and what and why they exist. If one puts this together with the sequence in which Inez acts as Estelle's "mirror" and the thematic statement that hell is other people; we start to believe that the reason hell is other people, is that other people can reflect our delusions back to us, destroy them, and make us see the truth about ourselves. In other words, hell is the bare truth.

The more obsessed the characters in this play are with their appearance, the more likely they are to be in denial about that bare truth. Estelle is desperate to see herself, and she's the one desperate to be perceived as innocent. Garcin is less obsessed with his own innocence than he is with his image as a pacifist hero, but he's still deluded - although not to the same point as Estelle. This is why he only casually concerned about the lack of mirrors. Only Inez has no illusions about what she's done, and only Inez doesn't seem to care how she appears to others; therefore she doesn't really care about there being with no mirrors in the room.

This all relates to the previously discussed use of eyes as symbols of watchfulness and judgment. The characters are constantly looking at themselves, judging themselves, and examining themselves. Their eyes represent their obsession with their self-image, while the reflections seen by those eyes (whether they're in mirrors or in the actions of others as explored below) show them what they really should be seeing.

The fact that Estelle cries, but sheds no actual tears, suggests that any remorse she's showing at this point is artificial. It also suggests that her remorse has less to do with the people she's hurt than with her feeling sorry for herself and trying to manipulate the others, particularly Inez. Finally, it suggests that there is no room for genuine remorse in hell, that grief is pointless. A person is there for a reason and that person is going to face that reason through the actions and reactions and torturing of other people. This idea of hell increases in potency as the next section progresses.

Part 4

Part 4 Summary

As Estelle holds her head in her hands, Garcin tries to convince Inez to let go of her role as torturer. As he's speaking Inez watches angrily. Back on earth her room is rented to a young couple that begins to make love. She suggests to Garcin that there's no way to avoid the traps that have been set for all three of them in this room; tells him she's never been the sort of person to let go of anything, but promises to not do him any harm if he promises to leave her and Estelle in peace.

Estelle asks Garcin to make the same promise since she can't stand the thought of being alone. She has a vision of another of her young lovers dancing with Olga. Estelle becomes more and more upset when she sees Olga telling him the truth about killing her baby and her other lover killing himself. She goes to Garcin and asks him to hold her - but he refuses, saying she should be seeking comfort from Inez. Estelle hates the idea of being in another woman's arms. Inez tries to change her mind by calling her the romantic names she was called by her young lovers. Estelle spits in Inez's face.

Garcin agrees to comfort Estelle and takes her in his arms. Inez tries to convince Estelle to free herself, but Estelle happily prepares to make love as Garcin lowers her to her sofa. Inez tries to pull Garcin off but he pushes her away. Inez tells him their agreement is off, but promises that her turn to torture the others will come.

Garcin is just about to kiss Estelle when he suddenly sits up. Estelle tells him to pay no attention to Inez, but Garcin tells her he's listening to his colleagues back on earth talking about what a coward he was. He tries again to kiss Estelle - what his colleagues are saying takes too much of his attention. Suddenly he tears himself away from them and asks Estelle if she trusts him. She tells him she can give him everything about herself but trust, and asks why it's so important. He tells her the real story of his death - how he was trying to leave Rio so he could start his pacifist newspaper in Mexico, and how he got pulled off the train and put in prison. He tells that while he was in solitary confinement, he asked himself over and over again whether he was a coward or whether he really was living up to his pacifist ideals. He wonders whether Estelle thinks he's a coward, but Estelle says it doesn't matter as long as he kisses well. Garcin tells her that as long as there's one person who doesn't believe he's a coward, he'll be safe. Estelle says that he doesn't have a coward's body, looks or voice and that she loves him. He tells her that now that they'll be able to get out.

Inez laughs, telling Garcin that Estelle doesn't care whether he's a coward as long as he's a man. Estelle tries to convince Garcin that she's lying, but he doesn't believe her, saying that he hates both of them. He tries to leave, pounding on the door. He would prefer any physical torture than the mental and emotional torture he's going through now. Estelle begs him to stay, and Inez tries to get her to see how cowardly he really is. Suddenly, the door opens.

Part 4 Analysis

Visions of life back on earth trigger extreme actions from the three main characters in this section of the play. Inez's vision of her room being rented, Estelle's vision of another of her lovers dancing with Olga and Garcin's vision of his colleagues talking about him all show them as knowing uncomfortable truths about themselves. This is another aspect of the central image of mirrors and reflections - what the characters see of their lives once they have dies reveals to them the truth.

Inez's vision shows her how temporary and transitory her relationship with Florence was. Estelle's vision shows her how self-centered and superficial she was. Garcin's vision reminds him of how much of a coward he was by running away from the war instead of facing it head on. All three visions trigger anger and fear which result in Inez, Estelle and Garcin lashing out at each other in their habitual ways. Inez becomes cruel, Estelle becomes sensual, and Garcin becomes seductively vulnerable. This all reinforces the idea that the hell of other people is the hell of being honest about what they see and destroying r self-delusions.

The door suddenly opening is the play's dramatic and emotional climax. At this point, in the play, all three of the characters have been stripped of their illusions about themselves. As a result they have been judged as worthy of being free to go. However, since we already know that what lies outside the door is basically more of the same, we know that they're not really going to leave hell, they're just going to leave the room. This suggests that the purpose for their being put there in the first place has been accomplished - they've stripped away each other's illusions and are all now fully aware of who they are and what they've done.

Part 5

Part 5 Summary

The door has opened, but nobody moves. Inez laughs, saying the three of them are inseparable. Estelle tries to push her out but Inez struggles to stay. Garcin pulls Estelle off, saying he's staying because of Inez. A shocked Inez says they might as well close the door since nobody's going to leave. Garcin closes the door, and tells Inez that because she's the one who understands cowardice and cruelty and evil, she's the one from whom he has to get reassurance that he wasn't a coward. He tells her that Estelle doesn't count. Inez tells him it won't be easy, but Garcin says they've got lots of time, wondering whether it's possible to truly judge another's life on the basis of one action. Inez says it's perfectly possible, saying that one's life is nothing but what one does - not what one believes, not what one hopes, but what one has done at the moment of death. He doesn't have an answer for that. She taunts him, saying that he's now in her power but that he'll never be able to fully convince her.

Estelle tells Garcin to kiss her, that way he'll have his revenge on Inez. Garcin agrees, and goes to Estelle. Inez taunts him again, calling him coward again and saying he's a dog, doing just what his mistress tells him.

Garcin walks away from Estelle and goes to the bronze ornament on the fireplace. He says that looking at it convinces him that he's in hell, and realizes that hell is not fire and brimstone, or continuous torture. He pronounces instead "hell is other people."

Estelle tries again to get him into her arms but Garcin pushes her away, saying that he can't love her with Inez watching. Estelle grabs up the paper knife and stabs Inez repeatedly. Inez just laughs, reminding Estelle that they're already dead. When Estelle drops the knife Inez stabs herself with it over and over. Nothing happens. This makes all of them realize that they really are dead, and they really are there forever. They burst into laughter, collapse onto their sofas, and gradually fall silent.

Garcin looks at the other two and suggests they get on with it.

Part 5 Analysis

Why do none of the three inmates of this room leave when the door opens? They all need something from the other they haven't gotten yet. Garcin needs absolution and under-standing from Inez, Inez needs love and affection from Estelle, and Estelle needs to have sexual power over Garcin. None of these needs have been met and because of this, the characters have truly become inseparable, as Inez suggests.

The fact that these three people are stuck in this room together because of need suggests another aspect of the play's theme. Like Estelle, Inez and Garcin, people need things and want things from other people, very often things that those other people can't

or won't give. This makes people do extreme things and say extreme things to get their needs and wants fulfilled, but at the same time the feeling of being wanted and of being needed is something that often becomes overwhelming, frustrating and too much responsibility. This suggests that the basic give and take of human relationships is another reason that hell is other people.

When Inez calls Garcin a coward, she's not only taunting him because of what he did on earth. He's also taunting him because he's taking the easy way out; taking refuge with Estelle and taking revenge on Inez instead of facing the truth of what Inez is saying about him. This is why Garcin isn't able to follow through on kissing Estelle; he knows that what Inez is saying is true.

Garcin's mention of the bronze statue at this point in the play reinforces the idea that the statue is a symbol of hell, and the fact that it is permanent and unchangeable. It also tells us what we've seen of the three relationships- that the torture that Inez, Garcin and Estelle have just put each other through is just the beginning, and will be just as permanent and unchangeable.

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Characters

Joseph Garcin

Garcin is the first of the three dead people to enter the drawing room. Prior to his death, he was a newspaperman in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. He was shot twelve times because he tried to avoid serving in the military. He is a pacifist, and he tells Inez and Estelle that is why he was condemned. Garcin is polite, keeping his coat in on the stuffy room because Estelle cannot stand a man in shirtsleeves. Garcin tries to make the situation tolerable, suggesting that they all keep quiet. This does not work, however, as the three continue to hound each other. He reveals that the real reason he is in hell is that he abused his wife and fled to Mexico to avoid military service. His former friends in Rio are now calling him a coward. Garcin desperately wants Inez to see him as a hero and strives to change her opinion of him. In contrast, Estelle seeks his attention and he continually rebuffs her. When the door to the drawing room opens, he has the opportunity to leave, but he is afraid of the unknown and he still has not proven himself to Inez. His inability to act on the opportunity of the open door represents his inability to change or to learn from his mistakes, one of the reasons why he is in the room in the first place.

Estelle Rigault

Estelle is the last of the "absentees" (her preferred term for their deceased state) to enter the room. Before her death, she was a beautiful young society woman married to a rich older man. Estelle is demanding, insisting on taking the sofa that best matches her dress. At first, Estelle says she does not know why she is in hell. She believes it is an error. Estelle is superficial, concerned with her makeup and her appearance and almost immediately discovers that the room has no mirrors. Though Estelle died from pneumonia, it is revealed that she is in hell because she drowned her newborn daughter in front of the man with whom she was having an illicit affair. The lover subsequently killed himself over the incident, and Estelle returned to her husband. Though Inez tries to console Estelle, Estelle is repulsed by Inez and concerned only with Garcin, ingratiating herself to him and trying to seduce him. When Inez pushes her too far, Estelle tries unsuccessfully to stab her with a paper knife. This incident makes Estelle realize that she is indeed stuck in hell for eternity.

Inez Serrano

Inez is the second person to enter the drawing room. Before her death, she worked as postal clerk in Paris. When Inez first comes in, she thinks that Garcin is to be her torturer. He dispels her fears immediately, but she remains hostile to him throughout the play. On the other hand, Inez is attracted to Estelle from the moment she enters the room. She tries to win Estelle's favor several times but to no avail. Garcin tries to win

Inez's favor, but she thinks he is a coward. Unlike the other two, Inez is realistic about her reasons for being in hell. She lived with her cousin and his wife, Florence, and Inez seduced Florence away from her husband. Florence's husband died in an accident, and Inez tortured Florence by claiming they had killed him. Inez died when Florence turned on the gas stove, consciously committing a murder/suicide. Inez knows she is sadistic and acknowledges that she received pleasure from making Florence and her husband suffer. Unlike Garcin and Estelle, there is no one left in life who is thinking about her. The only vision she has from her life is the empty room where she died. Inez is the first to realize that they are each other's torturers, and relishes the role from the first.

Valet

The valet escorts each of the characters into the drawing room. It is unclear what he is; more than likely he is a demon. He is amused by the others' preconceived notions of hell as well as their need to cling to their humanity. He does not blink, which is Garcin's first realization about the nature of his new existence, and possibly symbolic of the fact that in hell, one is not able to close one's eyes or turn away from the truth anymore. The valet tells Garcin that the bell used to summon the servants only works sporadically. This fact may indicate that one crucial element of hell, in Sartre's definition, is not being heard by others.

Themes

Choices and Consequences

Though nothing will change for any of the characters in *No Exit,* the choices they made while they were living are directly responsible for their sentence in hell. Each one of them made irresponsible and immoral choices during his or her lifetime. Garcin teased and abused his wife. He also brought home another woman and slept with her while his wife was in the house. She served them coffee in bed. While married, Estelle ran away with her young lover. She bore him a child, then murdered it in front of him. He later committed suicide because of the incident. Inez was a sadist. She lived with her cousin and his wife, Florence, and seduced her away from him. When her cousin died in a tram accident, she tortured the wife by saying that their affair led to his death. Inez's actions led the wife to turn on the gas stove during the night, murdering them both. Each character chose to commit theses crimes, and for these crimes they were condemned. Consequently, they will torture each other over their weaknesses for eternity.

Appearances vs. Reality

Two of the characters in No Exit hide behind façades for much of the play, unwilling to admit the real reason they are condemned to hell. Only Inez is willing to acknowledge from the start that she is a cruel person. Though Garcin worries about his cowardice from the first moments of the play, he says that he is unsure why he is in hell. He rationalizes that he stood up for his pacifist principles and that is the reason he was put to death by his government. In reality, Garcin was trying to escape to Mexico to avoid serving in the war, and he was extremely mean to his wife. He admits these two incidents only after goaded. Estelle does not understand why she is in hell at all, at least at first. She thinks it is some sort of error since she died from pneumonia. Like Garcin, she only acknowledges the truth□that she murdered her baby and drove a man to suicide□when pressed by the other two. Reality, in this play, is facing up to the truth about oneself.

sub Self-definintion and Interpersonal Relationships

Throughout the rounds of conversation that comprise *No Exit,* the characters are forced to define themselves through their relationships with each other. Their eyes are constantly open (there is no blinking in hell). The lights are always on. There are no mirrors. They are stuck in the same, small, stuffy room together. These conditions force each person to interact with the other two, and look for some acknowledgement about who they are. Garcin wants Inez to believe he is not a coward. Estelle wants Garcin to be a man for her. Inez wants Estelle to be attracted to her. Since no one will get what they want from another without conflict from the third, their interlinking desires ensure

an eternity of torture. Garcin believes that if they work together, there might be some kind of redemption. But their conflicting personalities ensure that this will be impossible.

Death and Permanence

What makes the situation in *No Exit* so desperate is the fact that Garcin, Inez, and Estelle are dead. They are permanently in hell, and permanently in the drawing room with each other. During the play, they are afforded an opportunity to leave when the door opens unexpectedly. However, they are too afraid of the consequences to leave. Similarly, they cannot change or grow as people because they are dead. They are forced throughout eternity to "live" with the choices they made in their lives. They will forever rationalize these choices to each other.

Style

Setting

No Exit can be called an existentialist play and a philosophical drama. The action takes place in hell, which is represented as a hot and stuffy drawing room, with the only entrance a door that is locked. There is a bell to ring for servants, but it works only intermittently. The room is decorated in Second Empire style. A heavy bronze statue sits on a mantle, but it is too heavy to move. There are three sofas of different colors for the three characters to sit on. There is also a paper knife next to the statue, but no books. There are also no mirrors or windows. This tight setting forces the characters to constantly see each other, and thus engage in torture.

Furthermore, the drawing room is somewhat unremarkable, except that it is in hell. In depicting hell as a familiar setting, Sartre suggests that hell is more of a state of mind than a place. There is nothing particularly hellish about the drawing room itself; instead, it is the combination of personalities in the room that makes the experience so hellish for Garcin, Estelle, and Inez.

Symbolic Props

The few objects in the room have symbolic meaning, especially in defining the characters. The sofas are of different colors□wine-colored, blue, and green□and Estelle insists on taking the blue one because it best matches her dress. This symbolizes her superficiality. Estelle also uses the paper knife to stab Inez. This is ineffective and leads to Estelle's acceptance that she is truly dead and in hell. The bronze statue serves a similar purpose for Garcin. The statue represents how escape is futile because it is too heavy to move. Garcin is also concerned about the bell, and if it works, more than the other characters. The bell symbolizes a link with the outside world, but it does not always ring.

Visions

The characters all have visions about what is going in the world they left. Though these visions are unseen by the audience, they represent the last links to the living world for the characters. Garcin sees two different parts of his former life. He has visions of the newsroom where he worked. His co-workers are calling him a coward, which upsets him greatly. Garcin also sees the wife he mistreated. She stands outside the prison, awaiting word of his fate, then learns that he has died. Later, she dies. Estelle's visions always include her friend Olga. Estelle sees her own funeral and burial, where Olga escorts Estelle's sister, who can only manage a few tears. She later sees Olga with Peter, a young man who admired Estelle in life. Olga tells Peter about the crimes that Estelle has committed, and he is shocked. Unlike Garcin and Estelle, there is no living person who cares about Inez. The only vision she sees is of the room where she and Florence

died. She views it twice: once when it is empty and dark, and a second time, when potential renters come in to look the place over.

Three Unities of French Drama

No Exit follows the classical rules of unity of action, time, and place. The play takes place in the length of time it takes to perform it. There is only one course of action, and everything in the setting works towards that one end. The action is also confined to one place, the drawing room. There is nothing extraneous about any aspect of the play; it is focused to one purpose.

Historical Context

World War II engulfed Europe beginning in 1939. Nazi leader Adolf Hitler took power in Germany and embarked on an aggressive military campaign as early as 1936. He began annexing European states by 1938. France declared war on Germany in 1939, and Hitler invaded and conquered France by 1940. The war in Europe ended in the spring of 1945, and Paris was finally liberated.

Daily life was difficult in France during World War II. A large part of France was occupied by Nazi Germany, including Paris, where Sartre lived. Because France was an occupied country, life, in many ways, was at a standstill. In Sartre's hell, too, life was very static. France's occupation also led to shortages of everything, including heat and electricity. Sartre makes an ironic comment on this situation by having an overabundance of heat and light available in hell. German censors controlled the plays performed in the theater and the movies shown in the cinema.

During the occupation, France was ruled by the Vichy government. It was ostensibly semi-independent but still under Nazi control. French people who worked with the Nazis were called Collaborators. The prewar pacifists Garcin talks about were often considered Collaborators. Many French citizens fought the Nazi control by participating in the Resistance. The Resistance was an underground movement that began soon after the Nazis took over Paris. Charles de Gaulle, a government official in the French government before the occupation, organized a French government in exile in Great Britain. In 1940, he called for French citizens to resist the Germans via a radio broadcast. Though only a few people in France heard him speak, a Resistance was formed.

The Resistance was not formally organized, but it took on many forms. It worked to block delivery of supplies and men to Germany. French citizens were conscripted by the Germans when they needed people to work in factories and the like. Many such draftees took to the hills in France and worked against the Germans. Other French citizens passed military intelligence to Great Britain and other Allies, helped British pilots who were shot down by the Germans escape, and wrote and distributed anti-German pamphlets. Sartre was active in the Resistance. At the end of World War II, it was thought that the Resistance contributed to the liberation of Paris.

The wartime atmosphere also created a change in the intellectual climate. The reality of war forced intellectuals to make political choices. This was reflected in the literature of the day. A poetry of the Resistance was developed with a direct language, and Paul Valéry was regarded as the best of these. Sartre was influential in the literary scene, and his philosophy of existentialism became the theory of the Resistance. Existentialists believed in the liberty of humankind and that everyone is endowed with a certain responsibility for their lives. *No Exit,* an existentialist play, is regarded as a symbol of the liberation of Paris.

Critical Overview

When *No Exit* was first produced in Paris in 1944, the critical response was mixed, due in part to the political climate of the time. Much of France was occupied by Germany. Sartre was identified with the Resistance, the French underground movement that sought to overthrow the German occupation. *No Exit* was regarded by many as subversive, full of in-jokes and subtle wartime criticism. Critics might have been afraid to openly praise such a play for fear of repercussions, though *No Exit* was produced by permission of German censors. Those critics who favored the Germans or collaborated with them would not have wanted to praise something this controversial. Several critics, including André Castelot, called for censoring the play.

Numerous French critics, regardless of their political views, agreed that the core idea of the play was brilliant. But there was controversy among critics and audiences alike over the brutality of the crimes committed by the characters as well as the character of Inez herself. Openly lesbian characters were unusual at the time.

No Exit was first produced in the United States on Broadway in December, 1946. American critics and audiences shared some of the French concerns over the characters, but many did not know what to make of the play as a whole. Wolcott Gibb, writing in *The New Yorker,* attributed the play's success in Europe (the play was also a hit in London) to the Europeans' "temperament." Gibb dismissed *No Exit* as "little more than a one-act drama of unusual monotony and often quite remarkable foolishness." The critic for *Newsweek* was not as negative, calling the play "weird and fascinating." Like their European counterparts, many American critics were intrigued by Sartre's concept of hell, but many Americans thought the play became repetitious near the end. Joseph Wood Krutch of *The Nation* took this view. He wrote, "Chief among the virtues is a genuinely macabre quality which makes itself felt most effectively during the first fifteen minutes. Unfortunately, like most plays based upon a conception which can be effectively stated in a few words, *No Exit* suffers from the fact that the interest tends to decline steadily from the moment the conception has been grasped."

One point that the American critics of the time debated was the nature of existentialism, since *No Exit* was regarded as an existentialist play. The philosophy was relatively new and not completely understood in the United States. Since its original productions, existentialism has become widely studied and discussed by scholars. The play has been debated in these terms. *No Exit* and its themes are now better understood, and the play is generally regarded as a classic. Unlike most of Sartre's other plays, *No Exit* has retained an accessibility because it is not rooted in a specific time and place.

There has been an extensive critical debate over the meaning of the play's most famous line, "Hell is other people." Many believe it means that interpersonal relationships are inevitably hellish. Others, including Sartre, disagree, arguing that it means people are too dependent on other people's opinions of them. Critics and scholars also have debated the meaning and nature of Sartre's hell, comparing it to other literary depictions. In an essay Jacques Guicharnaud contributed to *Sartre: A Collection of*

Critical Essays, he wrote, "the play is not a metaphor of Hell but that the image of Hell is a metaphor of the hopeless suffering of individuals in search of their definitions in the eyes of others, yet constantly brought back to themselves."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

In this essay, Petrusso discusses the theme of cowardice and how it affects the plot of Sartre's play.

The three characters that are condemned to the hell in *No Exit* all have one thing in common: each of them displays cowardice. Cowardice means they lack courage. Joseph Garcin, the pacifist newspaper reporter, and Estelle, the young socialite, both lacked courage in their lives, and in hell, they cannot face the truth about themselves. Inez is at once a more complex yet more simple character. She believes she is a sadist, and her actions more than prove that. But a sadist needs others to torture, and Inez cowers from aloneness. No matter what their differences, all three of them share one act of cowardice at a key moment in the play. The door to the drawing room opens, offering an unknown opportunity, but none of them is brave enough to leave. In understanding each character, and what hell does for them as a whole, the reason why they make that decision becomes clearer.

Garcin's cowardice is the most obvious of the three and takes several forms. When he was alive, he was an editor at a newspaper in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. Garcin was a pacifist, and he was put to death for his convictions. These are the first two facts Garcin presents about himself to the women in hell. Garcin agrees with Estelle at first; they do not know why they wound up in hell. He thinks it's a fluke. Garcin asks at one point early in the play, "do you think it's a crime to stand by your principles?" But Garcin is ultimately forced to admit the truth about himself. He was cruel to his wife, going as far to bring another woman into their home and sleeping with her while his wife was upstairs. To make matters worse, his wife served Garcin and his lover coffee in bed.

The other truth about Garcin is his most literal cowardice. Though Garcin was indeed a pacifist, he acted on his beliefs in a spineless manner. Instead of staying and exclaiming his pacifist beliefs in Brazil, Garcin jumped on a train to Mexico, where he intended to start a pacifist paper. He was caught by officials near the border, imprisoned and shot by a firing squad for trying to run away from military service. But even in his cell while he awaited his fate, Garcin rationalized that "If I face death courageously, I'll prove I am no coward." Inez asks him how he faced it, and Garcin admits, "Miserably. Rottenly." This is compounded by the fact that from hell, Garcin can hear his colleagues at the paper talking about him and calling him a coward. Garcin did not have enough time in life to correct this image of himself, and he regrets it.

Estelle's cowardice takes on similar forms. In her life, she married a rich older man because she was poor and needed help taking care of her younger brother. Roger, an impoverished young man, became enamored with her, and she fell in love with him. They carried on an affair, and Roger wanted to have children with Estelle. She became pregnant by him and delivered a baby without her husband's knowledge. But Estelle did not want the baby, so in one cowardly act, she murdered the infant in front of its father. Roger was so distraught that he committed suicide. Estelle cannot admit her cowardice had a suicidal effect on him. She claimed "It was absurd of him, really, my husband

never suspected anything." Instead of facing her crime, she chose to be superficial and cowardly. She eventually died from an unrelated illness, pneumonia.

Even more than Garcin, Estelle is in denial about her reasons for being in hell. She even cowers from the word "dead," insisting on the phrase "absentee." She thinks there has been some sort of clerical error that led to her being in this room with the others. "Just think of the number of people who□who become absentees every day ... probably they're sorted out by□by understrappers, you know what I mean. Stupid employees who don't know their job. So they're bound to make mistakes sometimes." She does not have the courage to face truth in either life or death but is forced to by Garcin and Inez. This is reinforced by Estelle's vision of her friend Olga, who is still alive. Olga tells Peter, another young man who admired Estelle in life, about Estelle's indiscretions.

Inez does not show cowardice in the same way as the other two. From the first, she accepts her fate in hell. She believes that she deserves to be there. She says that she was not human, even when she was alive. When Garcin asks for her aid in defeating "their devilish tricks" by helping him, she replies, "Human feeling. That's beyond my range. I'm rotten to the core." In life, Inez was a self-described sadist. She lived with her cousin and his wife, with whom she began a lesbian affair. The cousin was distraught and eventually died in a tram accident. Inez tortured Florence by telling her that they killed him together. Florence eventually killed both herself and Inez by turning on the gas stove during the night.

Inez's sadism is the core of her cowardice. She needs someone else to torture to be sadistic. Though she despises Garcin and desires Estelle, she needs both of them to be recipients of her sadism. Inez wants to control Estelle as she did Florence, and use her to punish Garcin. Garcin puts himself at the mercy of Inez, wanting her confirmation that he is not a coward. Inez needs these kinds of relationships. She engineers them in the course of the play. Though it is never explicitly stated, Inez is afraid to be alone. Without others, she cannot exist. This comes into focus late in the play when Garcin and Estelle try to ignore Inez and kiss. Inez squeals in agony, saying anything to break them up, just so she can be part of the action. She does not have to be at its center, but she must control it in some way.

The three characters' cowardices come to a head during a moment of crisis for Garcin. He decides to accept Estelle's advances towards him, but only if she has faith in him that he is not really a coward. Inez forces Estelle to admit that she likes him simply because he is a man. She cannot assure him he is not a coward, because she does not understand what he wants from her. Garcin is appalled and starts banging on the door to escape from the two women. While Inez tries again to seduce Estelle, Estelle says she will leave with Garcin. All of a sudden, the door flings open and Garcin nearly falls into the passageway. Garcin and Estelle hesitate, but then do not leave. Inez finds the situation outrageously funny, and starts to laugh. Estelle tries to push Inez out, and Inez cries, "Estelle! I beg you let me stay. I won't go, I won't go! Not into the passage." Garcin says that he is staying in the room for Inez's approval, and shuts the door.

This exchange shows how each of the characters cowers from the unknown. Garcin needs Inez to confirm he is not a coward. Estelle will not leave without Garcin. And Inez resists going out into the passageway where there might not be anyone for her to torture. They would rather be in a small, stuffy, overheated room with people they do not like or trust than to be caught in the passageways of hell. There is more certainty in a room that is always alight, where they can never blink or rest, than in the unknown of the hallway. They accept at that moment that their eternal fates are linked together. They can face the truth about themselves, but they cannot face the unknown. Their cowardice has a new dimension.

For most of the play, the threesome come to grips with who they are and why they are in hell. They learn that they can only face the truth with each other. Their fates, as Inez points out, are intertwined. There are no mirrors in which to see themselves. They can see who they are only through the eyes of another. Such self-realization combined with the circle of tension will occupy them for eternity because they can do nothing about their crimes. Growth is impossible because they are already dead. Inez says, "One always dies too soon□or too late. And yet one's whole life is complete at that moment, with a line drawn neatly under it, ready for the summing up. You are your life, and nothing else." Their punishment is to see their lives and their crimes judged by the others forever. To live the life of a coward is bad enough, but to "live" as one for eternity is even worse.

Source: A. Petrusso, for *Drama for Students,* Gale, 1999.

Critical Essay #2

Brown reviews the English translation of No Exit, *discussing Sartre's portrayal of Hell and how it compares to modern perceptions and those presented in classic literature*.

As if the contemporary world were not reason enough, there is also *No Exit,* a new play by Jean-Paul Sartre, to make hell highly topical as a subject just now. M. Sartre's hell is quite a different place either from the hell to which life of recent years has exposed people everywhere, or that to which literature and the drama have accustomed us.

Tantalus, old and withered, standing in a pool up to his chin, and in his terrible thirst lapping at the water which disappears eternally just as he is about to moisten his parched lips. Sisyphus, his body arched everlastingly against a rock which he must push up a hill, only to find at the crest that it rolls down again and he must recommence his labors. Tityos, stretched on the earth, his giant hands powerless to move, as vultures on either side of him plunge their beaks into his flesh and pluck at his liver. These are among the classic images of the punishments of the damned. Ever since Odysseus looked upon them, they or their kind have haunted men's minds.

Dante added to these images his own longer catalogue of horrors in "The Divine Comedy." What is more, most of us are brought up even now to picture a Christian hell in terms of variations of these themes. Stoke the furnaces of Gehenna; add demons, pitchforks, and brimstone; but, above all, let the flames roar and include the agonies of eternal roasting, and you have some approximation of that hell of physical suffering in describing which hosts of ministers have not only exercised but demonstrated their fictional talents.

Why fictional talents? Because, as we are tempted to forget, the hell which the Thunderers of the Sawdust Trail have always loved to depict in every lurid detail as if they were travelers just returned from there, is hard to find in the Bible. Apparently as a notion, fearsome and corrective, it shared one, and only one, trait with Topsy. It "jes' growed."

It grew out of man's natural fears, out of his knowledge of pain, out of his conviction that Satan in his great power must exceed even man's inventiveness at cruelty. It came as an inheritance from, and an extension of, mythology. It blossomed by association, because Gehenna was a valley near Jerusalem used for the disposal of garbage.

To prevent disease, this refuse was burned, and constant flames flared there. The intellectual step connecting the disposal of garbage with the disposal of humans who, so to speak, were also refuse, was a simple one. The belief in purification through fire must be as old as fire itself. Hence the nostril-choking flames of Gehenna became almost inevitably for the imaginative the sulphurous flames of hell. But hell as it is usually pictured□hell as many people envisage it□is apochryphal. One of the most terrible reflections on man's nature is the torture he has been able to imagine in God's name.

No punishments known to Hades or "The Inferno," or dear to the traditionalists of the "Old-time Religion," are worse than the tortures to which the lost souls in M. Sartre's *No Exit* are condemned. M. Sartre's is a very special, post-Freudian, post-Briffault hell. In its choice of inmates and range of torments, it is French. It is French in its flavor, too; French in its intellectual agility; French because even in such sulphurous surroundings neither the eternal triangle nor "La Garçonne" has been forgotten. They have merely gone underground.

Yet Gallic as it is, it is more than that. It casts its oblique light on the thinking of a Europe wearied and ravaged by these past years. For this very reason it is comparable in its interest to a book so dubious in its detail, though evidently so valid in its general tone, as Curzio Malaparte's "Kaputt."

"The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven," says Milton's Satan. M. Sartre's hell is free of active physical cruelties. It gets along without scourges, flames, or furnaces. No devils intrude, pitchforking the damned into the gaping bicuspids of a smoking "Hell-Mouth" as they did in the old Mystery plays. They do not have to. Beelzebub is already in full possession of the brains of the three lost souls in this intellectual guignol. The punishments with which M. Sartre appalls and intrigues us are all mental, a fact which does not lessen their pain.

The first misery suffered in his House of the Dead is claustrophobia. Hell, says one of his characters, is other people. It is also ourselves, because, in spite of what M. Sartre may preach as an Existentialist, as a dramatist he holds individuals accountable for their own doom. His hell is likewise the fearsome fate of being compelled to live with two other unbearable persons in a small windowless room. Not only this, but also of seeking help in vain from these companions, and then being engulfed all over again in the same pattern of repeated meannesses.

The room into which M. Sartre's condemned are led by a satanic bellboy is a forbidding place. Had the devil been a stage designer, he could not have done a better job at exercising his spell than Frederick Kiesler has done for him. Mr. Kiesler's setting is an interior, ugly and out of joint. Yet it is more than this. Palpably it is meant to make self-destruction impossible. Though it is not one, it has the feeling of a padded cell and is as constricting as a straitj acket.

It is a tawdry living room seen in nightmarish terms. But it is also a dungeon, made the more unendurable because its furnishings do not confess its function. In spite of being lighted, there is in it something of that "darkness visible" which was seen after the Fall by Milton's Satan. This makes itself felt terribly, for example, at the moment when we learn that behind the curtains which promise a window, a view, and even some hope of escape, there are only imprisoning bricks where there should be glass.

The three people M. Sartre sentences to torturing one another with their obsessions and their memories are not a pretty trio. One of them is a Lesbian because of whom a girl has committed suicide. The second is an American nymphomaniac who has betrayed her husband and her lover. The third is not only a collaborationist, at one moment

swaggering, at the next sniveling, but a sadist who has brought misery to his wife. What they undergo for an hour and a half in their shifting antagonisms and relationships is an anguish macabre and terrible, though nonetheless absorbing.

George Jean Nathan has wisely pointed out how much half-baked Wedekind and Strindberg there is in M. Sartre's script. Almost everyone who has seen *No Exit* has realized that during the last ten minutes the play drags and the attention wanders. Certainly, M. Sartre's play is not all it might and should be as a drama. For me, at least, it suffers, in addition to its own insufficiencies, because of the intermittent colloquialisms of Paul Bowles's translation.

Even so, I found *No Exit* one of the most interesting of the season's offerings. I, for one, would rather sit before it than a monthful of such shopworn fables as "The Fatal Weakness," "Happy Birthday," or "Present Laughter." At least it abandons the familiar stencils and grapples with an unusual idea. A mind is at work in it; a mind, alert, audacious and original, which has been touched by the agony of the modern world.

The evening *No Exit* affords is not designed for those whose only demand of the theatre is that it take over where the soap operas leave off; that it bolt its doors on the unpleasant; or that it function as a public nursery where adult kiddies can be left untroubled for an hour or so to play with toys which cannot hurt them. In spite of what is too special in them for the play's good, the sinners in *No Exit* can claim one radiant virtue. They shatter the ordinary formula. They supply playgoers with escape *from* escape, rather than escape itself. In the words of a man who, though royal, was not a Prince of Darkness, this is "a consummation devoutly to be wish'd."

Moreover, as adult theatre, M. Sartre's play has been given an adult production here. A certain fear of inviting the baneful siren of the Black Maria may at times inhibit the acting (as apparently it did not either in Paris or London). But the production has been sensitively and, for the most part, unflinchingly directed by John Huston. It is admirably acted by Peter Kass as the bellboy, Claude Dauphin as the collaborationist, and Annabella as the homosexual. As the frenzied American Ruth Ford has her excellent moments, too, though she lacks the fire Tallulah Bankhead would have brought to the part without any stoking.

Source: John Mason Brown, "The Beautiful and the Damned, in the *Saturday Review,* Volume 29, no. 52, December 28, 1946, pp. 26-29.

Critical Essay #3

In this excerpt, Krutch discusses the worldwide popularity of Sartre's play, affirming its appeal as both an intellectual treatise and an entertaining work of theatre. Of the work's virtues in the latter category, Krutch praises the play for a "genuinely macabre quality."

No Exit (Biltmore Theater) is the English version of a phenomenally successful French play by Jean Paul Sartre, high priest of existentialism. The scene is hell, the running time only a little over an hour and a quarter, and the total effect that of a rather ingenious shocker of a sort which would not have been out of place on the program at the Grand Guignol a generation ago. Three people□a Lesbian, a male collaborationist, and an American playgirl who murdered her child□find themselves after death shut up together in a hotel room. They enter at once upon a brief cycle of disputation in the course of which each manages to torture the other; then, as the cycle begins to repeat itself exactly, the curtain goes down. The three, it is evident, will pass eternity going over the same painful ground again, and again, and again. Since they will never sleep, hell, as one of them says, is merely life with no time off.

Of existentialism I know only what I read in the papers□including *The Nation*. It is, I have been told on various occasions, the theology of Kirkegaard with God left out; the conviction that though the world is both evil and without meaning nothing much can be done about it; and, finally, the determination to reject society while acting as an atomic individual. So far as I can see, it neatly combines the disadvantages of religious faith with those of nihilistic atheism. It seems, in other words, to assert moral responsibility while at the same time insisting that virtue has no reward, and it thus enables M. Sartre to revive the ancient proclamation, "There is no God and I am his prophet." But if this summary is inadequate, the fact is of no great importance at the moment, since no more□indeed hardly that much□could be deduced from the present play, whose virtues and limitations are obvious enough even to a spectator who has received no previous indoctrination.

Chief among the virtues is a genuinely macabre quality which makes itself felt most effectively during the first fifteen minutes, when the central conception is being presented and the atmosphere of horror being established. The ugly room, furnished in rather expensive bad taste and hideously lit by an unshielded chandelier in the ceiling, is just small enough to generate in the spectator a disconcerting claustrophobia, and as the victims are introduced one after another we share to some real extent both their nervous apprehension and the horror with which they realize the implications of their situation. Baudelaire talked about the *frisson nouveau,* and though it is no longer exactly new the shiver or thrill can still be provoked. Unfortunately, like most plays based upon a conception which can be effectively stated in a few words, *No Exit* suffers from the fact that the interest tends to decline steadily from the moment when the conception has been grasped and the playwright begins to try to fill in with sufficient material to stretch the action out beyond playlet length. In the present instance the revelation at the very end that the action is to repeat itself exactly through all eternity does provide an effective curtain, but up to that moment the tension has been going down rather than

up, and there is no very good reason why the whole should not have been presented in half the short time now given it.

The popular French actor Claude Dauphin, who has been brought over to undertake the leading male role, gives a very effective if necessarily unpleasant performance as the bad-tempered, cowardly, neurotic, and self-despising collaborationist. Indeed, he seems to feel and transmit the emotions called for to a degree never-approached by Annabella and Ruth Ford, who play competently enough the other two principal parts. But not even the genuineness of his performance can conceal the fact that the main action itself is not very different from that of a sensational triangle play as, let us say, Bourdet or even Bernstein might have written it. It is one thing to say that hell will merely be life lived eternally and without respite. It is another to illustrate that statement by an action not essentially different from one which has been presented many times by dramatists who were saying merely that life is sometimes hell, not□what is really quite different□that hell is life.

To compare the reaction of an American audience with what is said to be the reaction of Parisians is to realize how much the success of the play in France must be the result of the special state of the post-war mind. Here it was being discussed during the one brief intermission merely as a *tour deforce,* a sensational novelty; there it obviously means something to a population whose pessimism has become not so much an intellectual conviction as a neurotic derangement. Existentialism would appear to be less a philosophy than a state of mind, and less a state of mind than a state of nerves. "Hell," said Shelley, "is a city much like London," but that does not make Shelley an existentialist, for the simple reason that he was neither cold, nor hungry, nor defeated. And the difference makes the artistic as well as philosophical difference between "Peter Bell, III," *and No Exit*.

Source: Joseph Wood Krutch, review of *No Exit* in the *Nation,* Volume 163, no. 24, December 14, 1946, p. 708.

Adaptations

No Exit was filmed in French as *Huis Clos* in 1954. It starred Arletty, Nicole Courcel, Louis De Furies, and Jean Debucourt.

The play was adapted for film again in 1962, starring Rita Gam as Estelle and Viveca Lindfors as Inez

Topics for Further Study

Research Sartre's philosophy of existentialism. Discuss *No Exit* in terms of this theory.

Explore the history of the time and place in which *No Exit* was written□German-occupied Paris during World War II. How do you think these conditions influenced Sartre when he wrote *No Exit?*

Compare to other depictions of hell in art, music, literature, and other plays. One possible book is Dante's *Inferno*.

Compare *No Exit* to *The Victors,* another play by Sartre that takes place in a single room and concerns the torture of others. Discuss possible reasons why No Exit has retained its popularity and *The Victors* has not.

Compare and Contrast

1944: In occupied France, German censors must approve plays before they are allowed to be performed.

Today: A controversial rating system has been put in place on television programming in the United States. The labels are primarily for parents, to inform them of content that may not be appropriate for children.

1944: Many plays and movies are concerned with World War II and its effects on society, either explicitly or implicitly.

Today: World War II continues to be a popular theme in television, movies, and literature. One of the biggest box office successes in the United States in 1998 is *Saving Private Ryan,* which re-enacts the D-Day invasion at Normandy, France.

1944: The philosophy of existentialism develops in France, which has been devastated by two world wars, as a way of dealing with the nature of good and evil and one's responsibility in life and as an explanation of the nature of being in general.

Today: Existentialism continues to be influential in literature and the arts, mainly as its ideas have been co-opted by more recent movements, such as the Beats, who believe that one is responsible only to oneself.

What Do I Read Next?

Being and Nothingness, a nonfiction book published by Sartre in 1956 in translation, explicates his early theories on existentialism. It was originally published as *L'Être et le néant* in French in 1943.

Man and Superman is a play published by George Bernard Shaw in 1904. It is set in hell.

Devils, Demons, Death, and Damnation, is a book published in 1971 by Ernst and Johanna Lehner. It features images of hell throughout history.

The Victors, another play published by Sartre in 1948, also concerns a small group of people confined to a small room. They are French Resistance fighters who must decide the meaning of their own deaths. It was originally published in French as *Les Morts sans sépulture,* c. 1946.

Old Times, a play by Harold Pinter published in 1971, is centered around three characters. In a relatively unadorned set, the three engage in a sexual power struggle.

The History of Hell, published by Alice K. Turner in 1993, discusses images of hell in art and literature throughout history.

Further Study

Barnes, Hazel E. *Sartre,* J.B. Lippincott Company, 1973.

This is a critical overview Sartre's life and work.

Champignay, Robert. *Sartre and Drama,* Summa Publications, 1982.

A comprehensive analysis of Sartre's work in the theater, including *No Exit*.

Cohn, Ruby. "No Exit (Huis Clos)," in *From "Desire" to "Godot": Pocket Theater of Postwar Paris,* University of California Press, 1987, pp. 36-51.

This book discusses the background of plays and their productions. The essay on *No Exit* includes details on the writing, casting, and critical reception.

Contat, Michel, and Michel Rybalka, editors. *Sartre on Theatre,* Pantheon Books, 1976.

This is a collection of documents written by Sartre on theater, including his own plays.

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Gibb, Wolcott. "Dream Boy," *The New Yorker,* December 7, 1946, pp. 61-64.

Guicharnaud, Jacques. "Man and His Acts," in *Sartre: A Collection of Critical Essays,* Prentice-Hall, 1962, pp. 62-72.

Krutch, Joseph Wood. A review of *No Exit* in *The Nation,* December 14, 1946, p. 708.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *No Exit* in *No Exit and Three Other Plays,* Vintage, 1976,pp.1-47.

"Three in a Room," *Newsweek,* December 9, 1946, p. 92.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

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When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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