

# Enslavement of the Other: A Study of ‘No Exit’ and ‘The Respectful Prostitute’

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**Abstract:** Man’s life started with Adam and Eve, who were enjoying in the Garden of Heaven, until they became aware of ‘self’ as a separate entity. They became enslaved by the Other, due to which the Fallen Man stumbles and lost the Paradise. Same process of Being, Self-awareness, and enslavement is evident in Jean Paul Sartre’s philosophy of existentialism. This study is an attempt to explore Sartre’s concept of Self and Other. For this purpose Sartre’s No Exit and The Respectful Prostitute has been analyzed to explore the dilemma of modern man of enslaving others. This analysis has been conducted in the light of Sartre’s views of Being and Nothingness (1943). The study reveals that in this modern world, the only way to survive is being for others.

**Keywords:** Beings, Self, Others.

## 1. Introduction

Freedom as a basic human concept is the only force driving the world around today. Freedom as a concept is studied and explained by many critics and play writes. Sartre, being a modern writer, provides a different understanding of human existence and freedom. Sartre in modern theatre has been an innovation, not absolutely novel but he stretched their roots back to classicism. Sartre talks about a comprehensive theory of individual responsibility, which he based upon his existential ontology. He is of the view that there are always two types of being: being- in itself and being for itself. For Sartre being in itself is the unconscious while being for itself is the consciousness. Sartre claims that the absence of human consciousness would be absence of being in itself in the world, because human consciousness is collectively and individually constructs the reality of the world. Sarthe also claims about nothingness of the consciousness is nothingness of a person. Sartre views that a person is constructed by his own choice. He says in *Being and Nothingness* that:

“We often conceive that we have the obligation to make ourselves be what we are called. Thus a waiter, Sartre states, attempts to play the role of a waiter .... But, Sartre notes, the waiter knows that being a waiter is only a role for him and that his consciousness is not identified with his role (11).

Sartre seems to be concerned only with the awareness of a person to be an object. His claim that a person is nothing is a way of expressing a person’s knowledge about awareness of himself rather than saying if a person really exists or not.

The same theme of being and nothingness and reality of human character is been very important in his works. He focuses this same concept in different directions in his works. This study aims to focus Sartre’s *The Respectful Prostitute* and *No Exit*. This study will analyze the major theme of Sartre’s philosophy of human consciousness about enslaving others, as different characters in both the plays are portraying the enslavement of other.

## 2. Literature Review

Existentialism is a philosophy of life which holds life, experience and everything that is considered normal in

traditional view of life as ordered, planned and containing certain grand purpose and design in it, to be elusive and absent. Sartre's philosophy of existentialism deals with the concept of being, self, and other. He believes that we exist because we are; it means that we have some choices in our lives. In his essay *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre explains the concept of being and self, and the relationship of self with Other. He explains that the cause of a relationship is not the attraction of another person, but rather how that person makes them feel by looking at them, and in order to maintain and control one's own being, he must derive the other. In such situation when individuals become a source of pain to each other to prove their control they experience 'sadistic and masochistic' attitudes, and believe themselves to be enslaved. According to Sartre: "If I represent myself as him, I am not he; I am separated from him as the object from the subject..." (103). But in *No Exit* the case is opposite, here one is becoming the reflection of the other, and this is what Sartre called the enslavement of being.

Arthur C. Danto (1975) makes a valuable effort to interpret *Being and Nothingness* in the vocabulary of analytical philosophy. Danto pays full attention to the Sartre distinction of reflective and pre-reflective consciousness, and his concept of bad faith. He puts an important question on the defense of Sartre's philosophical position, specifically either the peculiarity between reflective and pre-reflective consciousness can be used in the same way as Sartre requires or not. Tomescu also describes the Sartre philosophy of self and other and claims that one of the major proponents of existentialism is the encounter in terms of fight between self and other. He presented the reciprocal relation of Sartre's Self and Other and presented the idea that the Self and Other are constituted in relation with each other, and their relation is based on substitutability.

Contrary to these interpretations of Sartre, Russell has presented Sartre's view of Other in a different way with a psychoanalysis of *No Exit's* characters. He states that Sartre undervalues the physical pain and believes on the mental torture, as Garcin shows: "Where are the instruments of torture, the racks, the red-hot pincers?" The hell described by Sartre is not a physical place but the torture of other people. He opposes the Sartre's idea of 'free will' and shows the fact that this is a kind of self-deception to consider oneself free.

Many writers, philosophers, and critics have discussed Sartre's philosophy of Being and Other, but only few have analyzed and interpreted his works on the basis of that philosophy. This study will elaborate the Sartre's concept of Other in the light of his plays *No Exit* and *The Respectful Prostitute*, where characters have become enslaved of others and seek their existence by the eyes of others.

### 3. Analysis and Discussion

The nature of man always compels him to compile all his energies and efforts to satisfy his ego and self, when it comes to self-consciousness, self always demands to be protected, to

be praised, to be exalted, and be respected. The achievement of all these objectives requires a dependence on others, strength and skill of people is required to protect self or ego, to keep it esteemed high one needs to maintain a reflection of one's self in others eye and mind, and to preserve one's self one needs to have mortality conferred on posterity. Hence it leads to the fact that human beings or man in common terms is always forced to live in a state of enslavement to survive in human society with his self-consciousness.

Jean Paul Sartre's use of term "existence" also appears to be somewhat concerned with the same issue of dependence on others. Self, as we have talked about, is always having an aspect of depending on others and their words, and one is watching through other's lens. So the idea of one's self keeps changing with the promoting or demoting words of others and to maintain a higher esteem one has to bribe others all the time with mercy, courtesy, love, smiles, hate, cooperative gestures and unlimited list of things. Sartre's plays also have a theme of enslavement to others as their integral part. In his play *The Respectful Prostitute*, there is a situation where a white skinned man killed a Negro man by shooting him. To get white man free from the charge of murder, his friends frame another plot against the Negro and his imaginary friend that they were trying to rape a white skinned respectful prostitute and the murderer shot one Negro to protect that woman. For the proof, they try persuading the respectful prostitute to help them and sign the statement. The woman, a respectful prostitute, Lizzie, refuses to accept their story and claims that the Negro is innocent. Fred tries to enslave her by his status, as he says "I'm Clarke's son... Senator Clarke" (143). He attempts to make her dependent on him by money, his status, and race. Lizzie still doesn't accept the proposal of telling wrong story in front of the judge, and at the same very moment John and James, who claims to be the police officers, appear in Lizzie's rooms and try to frighten her by saying that they will lock her in jail for prostitution. John: "you brought him here last night, right? You know that prostitution is against the law?" (147). Still they were unable to enslave her in their words, but the appearance of White Senator on stage change the whole scenario. The Senator with web of his charismatic scheme of words portrays a vibrant picture of a sobbing, grieved, and shameful white mother having white hairs compels Lizzie to say that:

"As things stand, it's too bad the nigger didn't really rape me... It would have meant so much to you, and it would have been so trouble for me" (148).

Along with the picture of begging mother, James, the Senator paints such a picture of Thomas, the accused, with his slippery words and praises that the Lizzie is automatically turned to sign the required statement in his favor to the court, which she later regrets. The Senator shows her a very different aspect of the murderer: "a hundred-per-cent American...Harvard...a firm bulwark against the

Communists, labor unions, and the Jews” (150), which makes her go their way by enslavement of his words and prospers of being respected and praised by the Thomas’ mother, and to be adopted by the town. The Senator says “If you sign, the whole town will adopt you...All the mothers in it” (150). After that she regrets and decides to help the Negro when he comes to her door for safety and asks her to hide him. She hides him and asks him to fight the White men looking for him, but he refuses to do so and repeatedly says “I can’t shoot white folks” (154), and run from there with the arrival of Fred. Later on, she herself tries to shoot Fred nonetheless fails to do so, and Fred commented on her:

“We have made this country, and its history is ours... Can you dare to shoot all of America? A girl like you can’t shoot a man like me, who are you? What do you do in the world? Do you even know who your grandfather was? I have a right to live”(156).

She is again entrapped by the words of White man, Fred, who promises her to provide:

“I’ll put you in a beautiful house, with a garden, on the hill across the river. You’ll walk in the garden, but I forbid you to go out; I am very jealous. I’ll come to see you after dark, three times a week - on Tuesday, Thursday, and for the weekend. You’ll have nigger servants and more money than you ever dreamed of; but you will have to put up with all my whims, and I’ll have plenty!”(158-9).

During that conversation another very important stance came forward that is enslavement of Negroes in the United States. When Lizzie says, the nigger didn’t do anything; Fred’s reply “A nigger has always done something” (9), depicts the real picture of enslavement of Negroes in the Whites’ society. The Negro is the single example of all the enslaved people in the society. His enslavement is apparent in the datum that, even being on the threat of life, when Lizzie asks him to shoot white folks, he says “I can’t shoot white folks.” This gives the evidence of his acceptance to the dominating ideology. The submission of Lizzie, the prostitute, also symbolizes the same. Sartre in this play makes a sweeping statement about the humankind by the symbol of Prostitute and says that she accepts the privileges of humanity while not to frame an innocent, but to be acceptable in the society and to raise her self-esteem higher in the eyes of those who really does matter she agrees to do so, and ends up in the arms of autocrat. Sartre’s another play *No Exit* is also an example of the conscious enslavement of human beings. The title of the play itself is the reflection of the psychological and physical dependence of humans on an inescapable chamber in the hell with a door. This play of Sartre becomes the most powerful exhibition of human suffering of depending on others, in a need to see own reflection in others’ eyes. The play takes place in a chamber, where a strange Valet brings three newly

dead protagonists, Garcin, Estelle, and Inez, to be punished, as it’s a part of the hell. Instead of their expectations the room was free of traditional devices of punishing the residents of hell. The strange triangle of the residents starts confronting their crimes and justifying their worldly deeds by replacing with new deeds of winning praises of fellows in the hell. Estelle, who had deceived her husband in her life by having a child with her love, justifies herself by winning love of Garcin, while Garcin, who in his life has been proved a cowardice, justifies himself by securing respect of cynical Inez. Inez on the other hand tries to secure the love of Estelle, being a lesbian. But every single one of them fails to do so, as they refuse to respect, care or pity each other, and every act of setting is disturbed by the presence of the third as a mirror, presenting them an image of themselves, “such black and grained spots/ As will not leave their tinct.”

Man is a social animal and in order to survive in the society, he is bound to some patterns that have been set by the others. Sometimes living with others becomes a kind of reliance upon them either one rely on the others or make others to rely on him. In *No Exit*, Estelle and Garcin are the ones who condemn themselves in order to avoid being free. For example, at a certain place, Garcin is not allowed to take his jacket off by the two women and he simply obeys, although the room temperature is very high. There are no mirrors in the hell so eyes of each other are used for the purpose of watching one’s self. When Inez and Garcin meets for the first time she says that Garcin’s mouth looks “grotesquely frightened” (4) and he lets her define his essence. Similarly when Estelle looks up for the mirror to see her reflection and to make herself believe of her existence, Inez proposes that she will act as Estelle’s mirror by saying: “Suppose I try to be your glass? Come and pay me a visit, dear” (10), and Estelle agrees without realizing that she is giving her essence in her hands and allowing others to define her. Inez, known of her power asserts that Estelle is having a pimple, while in actual she is not having that, but Estelle believes her. This little incident shows that how Inez has enslaved her. Sartre believes that human consciousness is free to choose its own essence, yet Garcin and Estelle are unable to choose their free essence, they surrender their free will to other people. It’s only Inez who chooses her free essence because she claims that she is always “painfully conscious” of herself in her mind, she doesn’t need any kind of mirror that leads her essence, and she rejects to lie, calling herself “a damned bitch.” Sartre believed that suffering was an essential step in affirming one's existence, writing, "Life begins on the other side of despair."

Garcin and Estelle are still living with their past, and their life on earth. Garcin elucidates his fate as the evaluation of his past actions by other people. Still he is following the axioms of his fellows about him, he says:

In six months' time they'll be saying: "cowardly as that skunk Garcin." You're lucky, you two; no one on earth is giving you another thought. But I \_\_\_ I'm long in dying (21).

This exposes the dependence of Garcin on others thoughts, he is unable to judge himself that either he is coward or not, and rely on others who can assure him that he is not a coward. He asks Estelle to give him faith, he says: "If there's someone, just one person... that I'm brave and decent and rest of it\_\_well, that one's persons faith would save me" (p.22). At the end Garcin wants to leave and Estelle begs him not to do so, on that Inez says to Estella: "Don't worry my pet" (p.22). Here 'my pet' is demonstrating the position of Estelle that she has totally loss her essence of being and is on "bad faith." Garcin's capitulation of his free will on other people makes him incapable of leaving that room, the hell, even when the door gets opened. According to Sartre, responsibility for one's choice was so devastating that we are "condemned to be free," a statement factually played out by Garcin's failure to leave the room. Garcin thinks that Inez's judgment is the only proof of his existence, as he says to Inez: "If you'll have faith in me I'm saved" (24).

As Garcin realizes that physical torture is not necessary, only the contemplation of the "other" reduces his individuality, he cannot do anything, even can't kiss Estelle. He says:

So this is hell. I'd never have believed it. You remember all we were told about the torture-chambers, the fire and brimstone, the "burning marl." Old wives' tales! There's no need for red-hot poker. Hell is other people! (25).

Finally all of them have realized that they are creating personal hells for each other, and they understands that "hell is other people," a statement that concludes the dilemma of modern man with an alive self-conscious, and the existentialist dilemma of being objectified by others.

#### 4. Conclusion

Sartre's *No Exit* and *The Respectful Prostitute* in their themes and portrayals of characters belong to his existential philosophy of being-for-itself and being-in-itself. Sartre is sometimes blamed for pessimism and unhappiness, as he himself, in one of his lecture on existentialism, has figured out that in existentialists writing pessimism is not objected rather the austerity of their optimism. Man lacks the confidence and courage to face the sufferings and pains; therefore they favor the impossibility of liberation or freedom. Impossibility of liberation from others is accurately portrayed in Lizzie's signing the statement and ending her up

in the arms of dominating in *The Respectful Prostitute*. The inability of Garcin's leaving that room, seeking his faith in Inez, and Inez as a mirror of Estelle in *No Exit*, is the demonstration of various themes of existence and self, and is the hallmark of Sartrean philosophy of Freedom, and Being and Nothingness.

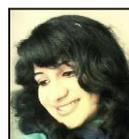
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