

Existentialism in no exit



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In his play, *No Exit*, Jean-Paul Sartre examines basic themes of existentialism through three characters. The first subject, Garcin, embraces existentialist ideas somewhat. The second character, Inez, seems to fully understand ideas deemed existential. Estelle is the third person, and does not seem to understand these ideas well, nor does she accept them when they are first presented to her. One similarity amongst the three is that they all at some point seem to accept that they are in Hell for a reason. Garcin admittedly is in Hell because he was unkind and unfaithful to his wife. He however, does not wish he had acted differently, for he says, " I tell you I regret nothing (p. 24)." In this respect of acknowledging and owning up to his actions, Garcin is following existentialist laws. However, he sometimes violates them. For example, he is so preoccupied with the idea that he is a coward that he demands the women to renounce this and declare his masculinity. He is so dependent upon this that he refuses to engage in sexual activity with Estelle until she affirms him. This is anti-existential because according to its principles, he should not have to rely on others for confidence. Inez is in Hell because she had seduced her cousin's wife, then conspired to make his life miserable, until he finally stepped in front of a tram and was killed. Inez also brought a lot of guilt upon her lover, Florence, until she finally committed suicide and killed Inez by poisoning them with gas during the night. Inez does not refute or regret this, as she states, "...I was what some people down there called ' a damned bitch (p. 25),'" and " You know, I don't regret a thing (p. 25)." She also states, "...I prefer to choose my hell...(p. 23)," which advocates the principle that everyone has a free will. She gives a good example of the concept that mankind has a free will, and that few decisions are without any negative consequences when she says, " So now we have to

pay the reckoning (p. 17),” and “...people aren’t damned for nothing (p. 16).” However, she violates the existentialist idea that everything is coincidental, nothing really happens for a purpose, when she persists in telling the others that they have been put there together for a purpose. An example of this is when she says, “ Mere Chance?... Nothing was left to chance. This room was all set for us.” Estelle perhaps had the hardest time coming to terms with her transgressions and existentialist ideas. She is in hell because she committed adultery, from which she birthed and killed her unwanted daughter, driving her lover to commit suicide himself. However, at some points, she almost refuses to believe that she is in hell, like when she says, “ That’s just it. I haven’t a notion, not the foggiest. In fact, I’m wondering if there hasn’t been some ghastly mistake (p. 15).” She also has a preoccupation with her looks and what people think of her: “ No, I can’t do without a looking-glass for ever and ever. I simply can’t (p. 19).” and “ But I wish he’d notice me, too (p. 21).” The latter statement is referring to Garcin, whom she seeks for comfort and pleasure but is ultimately rejected by. There is evidence, however, that she begins to understand existentialist concepts when she accepts her sentence to hell and when she says, “ It’s mere chance that has brought us together (p. 14).” All of the characters came to some belief in existentialist concepts, whether they be deep or more simple. All of them also showed areas where they were not in complete agreement with existentialism. Inez seemed to have a strong belief in owning up to one’s actions, and not deceiving one’s self, while Estelle was the complete opposite, and Garcin somewhere in the middle.