



Unsexing the Bourgeois: The Lesbian Resistance of Inez in *No Exit*

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Abstract: The three characters of *No Exit* are variations of Sartre's central existential philosophy. However, it is essential to redraw the contours of this thought, reorienting ourselves to Inez's perspective as a feminist, lesbian, proletarian, subaltern narrative of resistance. For this, she undertakes the strategy to unsex the heteronormative-bourgeois hegemony—along with other subsidiary socio-economic-political policies. She exposes their vacuous class respectability and charade of gender construct, superimposed by the patriarchal superstructure which Garcin and Estelle failed to fulfil. Misogyny and class prejudices whet Inez's class consciousness that amalgamate with her sexual enterprise and covert designs to capture power, concomitantly reinventing the status quo.

Keywords. Unsexing, Bourgeois-Heteronormativity, Hegemony, Subaltern, Lesbian Resistance

Introduction

Sartre's *No Exit* brings together three individuals post-death in a modernised hell (building with rooms and passages) for eternal cohabitation. The three individuals are the bourgeois heterosexuals Garcin and Estelle, obsessed with norms of propriety and proletarian lesbian Inez for crimes of ill-treating one's wife, infanticide and psychological abuse that leads to two deaths. Interpretations have usually equated Inez as an individual equal to Garcin and Estelle without adequate consideration of their sexual and socioeconomic differences. The postmodern world vests Inez's sexual orientation and class identity with an equally important meaning to shape her resistance narrative that has a bearing on the central politics of the play. Since Sartre never clarified the causes that could sour a relation enough to be hell for someone, this paper indicts the unequal power dynamics between hegemony and subaltern, bourgeoisie and proletariat, heterosexuality and homosexuality as the causes responsible for the creation of hell where Garcin and Estelle as hegemonic bourgeois-heteronormativity occupy the power locus from which Inez undergoes a tripartite displacement as a working-class lesbian woman. Each character's actions boil down to power politics, intertwined with a sexual motive of seduction. Estelle seduces Garcin to validate her attractive quotient. Although Garcin flits between the two women, he attempts to coax Inez to validate his identity of courage and respectability. Inez relentlessly seduces Estelle to combat the heteronormative-bourgeois hegemony, adopting the strategy of unsexing—stripping off of patriarchal, heteronormative standards of gender construct—against the bourgeois characters to strive for power and identity as part of her lesbian resistance.



Setting

The Second Empire style possesses a French aristocratic relevance, establishing the hell-space as a bourgeois setting since this luxurious style could only have been afforded by a wealthy capitalist. A bourgeois household demands the bourgeois notion of respectability, a reason why Garcin is affronted by the valet's insolence, demanding him to be polite since Garcin's class superiority is disturbed. The valet's insolence and pride stem from his familiarity with hell-scape realities – absence of torture instruments and toiletries – that Garcin is unaware of. This knowledge endows the valet with a certain power over Garcin. A class conflict ensues, jeopardising Garcin's image of manly courage to redeem which he boasts a facade of bravado of facing the situation. Hence, the hell-scape displays a propensity to challenge the gender-class constructs with the valet as a precursor to Inez. All three characters possess a conferred, egalitarian ownership of the room, rendering it a bourgeois family-setting. In the patriarchal familial hierarchy, the man occupies the topmost rung with the woman below. Though both Inez and Estelle are women, they do not occupy the same position. Estelle's contempt of Inez as a post-office clerk relegates Inez to the lowest echelon. Inez counters this marginalisation by infantilising Estelle as pet, "[p]oor child" (28), "little sparrow" (41).

Garcin questions the necessity of keeping a paper-knife in hell, underscoring his utilitarian bourgeois apperception of the world that determines worth. Functional utility of objects based on essence preceding existence is in stark contrast to humans' "existence precedes essence" (Sartre 290) – encountering oneself first, defining afterwards. Reimagining hell as a building with innumerable rooms and passages critiques the mechanistic world of man-made construction as infernal, drawing an analogy between the claustrophobic, incarcerated setting with bad faith and Modern existence. Since Garcin cannot sleep and dream any more, he reminisces his past dreams of open-air green fields as an attempt to liberate himself. The absence of mirrors – a metaphor of bourgeois artificiality – is strongly felt by the socially-trained Garcin and Estelle who being conscious of their appearance, tailor their manners to suit genteel decorum.

The BBC adaptation replaces Sartre's lavish aristocratic Second Empire furniture with a bare minimalist setting, perhaps critiquing the replacement of one exploitative regime (aristocracy) with another (bourgeoisie). The movie fashions the setting as a Modern art gallery to critique elitist bourgeois lifestyle of leisure, inaction and complacent intellectualism that fundamentally goes against the crux of Existentialism, which places importance on action and responsibility. Modern art encapsulates the fragmentary Modern existence signified by the movie's two disjointed art-pieces while the third is painted as a whirlwind, possibly symbolising the Sisyphean cycle and eternity. Human rationality fails to fathom eternity without the aid of measurement parameters that fashion eternity as time – a resource capitalised by the bourgeoisie to maximise utility and profit. Eternity distinguishes itself from measurable time as a hegemonic superstructure that cannot be measured, unlike time, for utilisation nor can be easily understood by human cognition. Eternity is an indefinite deferral of measurement and thereby utility – the materialist modes of human reasoning. Eternity is an abstract continuum.

Existential Perspective



Sartre, in an interview, had accepted the paradox of being a “bourgeois writer” and a “revolutionary activist” (Sartre, *Talking* 275)ⁱ. As an existentialist and playwright, Sartre can be hailed as the avant-garde of the philosophical-intellectual ambit. Roland Barthes opines that the avant-garde comprises a small section of the bourgeoisie, dependent on bourgeois money. Hence, there is no “political contestation,” as the avant-garde contests the bourgeoisie ethically in “art or morals” (139) partly explaining Sartre's paradox. Although Sartre was well-involved in French politics, it was often criticised as discursive non-action. Perhaps to defend Existentialism from being criticised as a bourgeois contemplative philosophy, Sartre deliberately places Inez, a working-class woman to espouse the core idea: “You are – your life, and nothing else” (43). Sartre contends Existentialism as a philosophy of action. A proletarian can best illustrate this fundamental truth since though every class requires action for survival, blue-collar workers depend more regularly on arduous labour while the wealth of the bourgeoisie creates a propensity towards leisure, even decadence, something the working classes cannot afford. Inez laughs at Garcin's way of setting his life in order through post-death complacent contemplation and secret observation of his colleagues on earth which satirises the bourgeois lifestyle of comfortable inaction.

Sartre's revolutionary zeal was honed when he identified with other war-prisoners of being on an equal plane during the Nazi occupation of France. In fact, Sartre's Existentialism is quite egalitarian and socialist in essence since it accentuates individual responsibility, evaluating the impact of one's choices on oneself, others and the image of humankind as a whole before one acts on their choices thereby balking nonchalant liberalism and solipsism by acknowledging the plurality of perspectives, propelling the individual to question their “right to act in such a manner that humanity regulates itself” (Sartre 293) following the individual's action as a standard. The individual's introspection and dilemma constitute the Sartrean anguish Garcin experiences in retrospection over his act of leaving for Mexico when called upon to fight that he fears was a cowardly move. This anguish “does not prevent their acting” but “is the very condition of their action” (294) – the reason why Inez deliberately chooses to pursue Estelle despite knowing that it would lead her to eternal torment. Sartre's philosophy permeates Garcin's statement of being “linked together inextricably” (29); one raises their hand, others feel a tug. Similarly, Inez accuses Garcin of having soiled every sound, intercepting it on its way. Garcin attempts an evasive strategy to ignore each others' presence but Inez underscores he “can't prevent [his] “being there” (22). His inaction would also be an action; whether he wills it or not, his existence would have a bearing on others.

In Sartre's dynamic of the Being-For-itself, Being-For-Other and Third, the ‘Other’ is only a look for the For-itself – “my transcendence transcended” because one is always seen in “irresolvable relations with instruments” like “seated-on-a-chair” (*Being* 263). The “act of being-looked-at” includes alienation and the realisation “that it is impossible for me to see” myself seated (263), while others can, explaining Inez's accusation of Garcin of having stolen her face; he knows it and she does not. This is the crux of their ontological war.

Since Garcin enters first, we tend to align our perspective with him as For-itself with Inez as Other and Estelle Third. Inez, by flattery, tries “forming a community” with Estelle as “they-subject” (415) which in Sartrean parlance is a subject-state constituted by more than one individual (Inez and Estelle) and experienced by the object (Garcin) who is being-looked-at by the they-subject. Initially



Inez attempts a power-sharing partnership with Estelle to marginalise Garcin. This is thwarted as Estelle hates Inez who hates Garcin, aligning with Sartre's: the "Third looks at the Other who is looking at me" (416). This metastable state decomposes when Garcin allies with Estelle "to look at the other" as "We-as-subject"ⁱⁱ (416) when Garcin reciprocates Estelle's attraction to avenge himself. To understand Inez's struggle, we need to reorient our perspective with Inez as For-itself, Estelle Other and Garcin Third. Garcin, the Third as the bourgeois-heterosexual man, brings about the existence of the "oppressed class" (421) by his look. Since Inez fears complete incarceration and isolation, she must "look at the Third" "to confer an object-state upon him" (416). So, when Estelle spits in Inez's face, Inez directs her antagonism at Garcin because she can "experience upon the Other and apropos of the Other the Third's transcendence-transcending" (416). Inez finds Estelle "no longer [belonging] to [her]...an object for another transcendence" (416). This is what Inez means when she realises, without any need of ocular proof, that Estelle would be making every sound to attract Garcin's attention. Inez also experiences herself "looked-at by the Third while I look at the other" (416) when Garcin favours Inez, rendering Inez unable to "keep" Estelle "in an object-state" (417) – a reason why she rejects Garcin so as to maintain her possessive grip over Estelle.

Inez weaponises attraction to conquer Estelle but her enterprise falls through because Estelle is attracted to Garcin and dislikes Inez. Both Inez and Garcin occupy object-states in Estelle's world but it is not homogeneous, involving a power imbalance. Garcin as Estelle's object of attraction holds an elevated position than Inez who alone is Estelle's object of repulsion that prevents Inez from identifying with Garcin. In Estelle's world, Inez occupies the lowest rung. Garcin as Estelle's object is slightly below her (theoretically speaking) yet virtually an equal for if Garcin reciprocates Estelle's attraction, he theoretically gains an upward mobility while Inez remains trapped as the lowest in their miniscule class structure.

When Estelle visibly recoils at Inez's profession, Estelle becomes the Third whose gaze begets the class consciousness in Inez. Inez's occupation ushers in the dynamic of the collective, becoming an Us-object as one of the postal clerks – through her awareness of the collective – who are relegated by the Third's gaze. Sartre believed that since experienced as shame, it would ultimately disintegrate with the For-itself reclaiming its selfhood, suppressing the Us-object. However, in "strongly structured cases" like "class consciousness" the "project of freeing oneself from the 'Us' must involve the "project of freeing the whole 'Us' from the object-state by transforming it into a We-subject" (422). This forms the crux of Inez's struggle for power against the incumbent bourgeois hegemony to liberate herself and the 'Us' from the subaltern object-state.

Twentieth-Century Lesbian Existence

Webber in *Rethinking Existentialism* points out that Ralf Tognieri had underscored how Inez's original French name, Inès, comprises the last two letters of Garcin and first two of Estelle. Hence, Inez is central to the play in breaking the hegemonic heterosexual-bourgeois continuum. Inez doesn't mention her place of origin but her name is preponderant in Spain, Portugal and France. Spain oscillated between bouts of legal discrimination against homosexuality – that peaked under Francoist dictatorship – and relaxation of legal prejudice while Portugal had codified homophobia into stringent laws criminalising homosexuality with imprisonment. France demonstrated more



homosexual repression than other countries. Even feminists promoted their “role as mothers,” subtly condemning “lesbian visibility” (Bard 158). Christine Bard emphasises how Simone de Beauvoir “suggested that living a lesbian life was a ‘feminist’ choice,” “social and political” (159), justifying Bard’s argument of lesbianism as a conscious political construct in French feminism.

Tamara Chaplin demonstrates how pockets of French Sapphic-cabaret subcultures offered a butch-femme performance dynamic where women who had initially taken up a masculine role due to job requisites, got involved in lesbian relationships outside the cabaret. Despite these exceptions, France was mostly repressive especially in 1942 when the Vichy government raised the age of consent for homosexuality to twenty-one while that of the heterosexuals remained at thirteen. This is important to understand Inez’s suffocating social milieu that causes her to feel trapped so much so that she squirms—like the serpent in Brauner’s painting *The Palladist*—when Garcin approaches Estelle with a sexual intent, reminding Inez of the impossibility of free expression of her sexuality. Since a resistance simply based on sexual desires would not suffice for “those whose struggle to survive is laced with sexual oppression”, it requires highlighting the “class dimensions of (sexual) identity and desire” (Hennessy 202). Hence, Inez’s lesbian resistance must involve a class resistance. To combat the hegemonic power structure, the subaltern chooses cruelty as her weapon of rebellion for successful expression of her homosexual desires which otherwise would have been repressed by the socio-normative structure, frustrating her freedom, dignity, authenticity. Inez’s revolutionary spirit is even calcified in her Whitefriars song. When Inez claims her inability to function without making people suffer, she posits a survival strategy and necessity, not genetically coded but a conscious choice. Case-in-point: Inez’s admission of fright as a torturer implies a split in her self wherein a detached objective glance was repelled by the corporeal manifestation of her cruelty. This dissonance must have impelled her to make a conscious choice which renders her “rotten to the core” (29). “Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself” (Sartre 291).

Cruelty is not merely her individual identity but strongly intertwined with her class and sexual identities; a rival political strategy of her lesbian resistance vis-à-vis hegemonic bourgeois-heteronormativity. In fact, queer theory itself is “a site of struggle, not a monolithic discourse” (Hennessy 53) where “race and class are always thoroughly inscribed within sexual self-definition” (Halberstam 260)ⁱⁱⁱ. Inez’s class resistance is thoroughly inscribed in her lesbian resistance as: a lesbian-proletarian resistance. To ensure the preservation of her identities she must dismantle the bourgeois-heteronormative hold on hegemonic power through her counter-offensive of strategically unsexing the bourgeois, possible because Inez is located between the traditionally-feminine Estelle and traditionally-masculine Garcin. Inez attempts forging a lesbian continuum with Florence and Estelle as a woman-identified experience of “giving and receiving of practical and political support”, “bonding against male tyranny” (Rich 649) of Inez’s cousin and Garcin. She successfully dissolves the patriarchal institution of marriage between her cousin and Florence as her form of “*marriage resistance*” (649) and successfully hinders Garcin and Estelle’s heterosexual mating. Inez transgresses prescriptive heteronormativity, usurping her brother’s hegemonic position as Florence’s spouse^{iv}, challenging patriarchal gender norms and power dynamics as a precursor to her post-death unsexing. Inez actualises the ‘Lesbian Existence’—breaking the homosexual taboo, rejecting compulsory heterosexuality, involving “direct or indirect attack on male right of access to women” (649). Thwarting the man’s easy accessibility to women (Garcin’s over Estelle, Inez’s cousin’s over Florence)



initiates her lesbian resistance. Lesbian existence suggests the “historical presence of lesbians and [their] continuing creation of the meaning of that existence” (648). This meaning is Inez’s lesbian-proletarian identity established via her resistance. In fact, her lesbian resistance becomes her identity. Her identity is also established in the end as Logos – the origin of meaning – in hell-space as she replaces bourgeois-heteronormativity as the authority that creates meaning since bourgeois-heteronormativity fails to provide a satisfactory answer to post-death realities of time and eternity.

The Unsexing

Overdependence of the bourgeoisie on respectability begets strict conformity to heteronormative marriages that serve the utilitarian function of property inheritance along the patrilineal line of descent so that property remains within the bourgeoisie, preserving its superiority, thereby allying the bourgeois with the heteronormative. Estelle, though poor, became a bourgeois through marriage, evident via her lifestyle references to cabarets and generalising comment of everyone going to the Dubois-Seymours’ parties, indicating her singularity of worldview that considers everyone a bourgeois. Inez’s enquiry into the Dubois-Seymours’ vocation denotes her socioeconomic class where a salaried job is a requisite. Garcin ran a pacifist newspaper, unequivocally belonging to the business class with the bourgeois mind-set of adherence to conventional dictums of bravery and uprightness for respectability. His insistence to be “extremely courteous” (9) underscores the bourgeois artificial facade of social interaction that Inez rejects. Similarly, Estelle finds the word dead ‘crude’ instead using ‘absent’ as euphemism. Garcin introduces himself as a man of letters, denoting his pride over his intellectual quotient, thereby viewing himself as human capital which goes with his idea of being an able-bodied, valiant man possessing excellent good health, intellect, daring, constantly bent on improving his skill-set to be a better-performing productive asset. This is a classic utilitarian bourgeois way of thinking wherein he evaluates his worth contingent on how resourceful he is to the socioeconomic structure. Inez unsexes Garcin to detonate his complacent image as a well-performing asset, exposing him to be a cowering liability who could not defend his country when called upon to do so.

Proprietorship of earthly assets govern Garcin when he, exuding pride, believes his coat, smeared with his blood, has transformed into a “museum-piece,” “scarred with history” (24), an artefact of historical-cultural relevance to be calcified in public memory and historical discourse. However, he discovers Gomez and his colleagues denounce him as a coward which he believes will be ultimately fossilised as “legend” (39), regretting his inability to memorialise himself via his coat and join the ancestral lineage of able-bodied men proclaiming their masculine power of a valiant heritage instead being relegated to the fringes, having to resort to Estelle to regain his lost power through her validation who too needs him to validate her attractive feminine persona because Estelle discounts Inez’s attraction as that of a woman’s, thereby exposing Estelle’s internalised misogyny and heteronormativity – reminding one of Atwood’s statement of the internalised male gaze wherein a woman is a man inside watching a woman, being one’s own voyeur. Estelle too evaluates her attractiveness and femininity through a male gaze. The aforementioned rationale based on which Garcin and Estelle seek one another’s validation confirms their unsexed identities because it exposes their false facade of masculinity and femininity. Inez deliberately taunts Garcin as a “weakling, running to women” (44) for consolation to flay his tough-man gender construct.



A case-in-point of bourgeois respectability and decorum, Garcin fusses over his toothbrush because loss of personal hygiene causes a loss of rank and human dignity to that of animals. Since a lower-ranking valet points this out, Garcin must declass him as “beastly,” “bad mannered” (5), apparently for his paralysed eyelids but betraying the exclusionist construction of the bourgeoisie where non-bourgeois are bestial, unsophisticated, sub-human. When Garcin initially wanted to take off his coat due to the sweltering heat, Estelle is horrifically repulsed, treating it as ungentlemanly, an indecent working-class gesture but after she was goaded into revealing her crime, she lets him take it off, renouncing any pretence of bourgeois gentility, implicitly relegating herself and Garcin to the beastly sub-human position—a process that Inez catalyses for she was the first to compel everyone to confront the truth and as Webber rightly underscores was only reiterated later by Garcin. Webber describes this epistemic injustice as congruent with modern terms: bropropriating and hepeating. Inez ensures both Estelle and Garcin are instrumental in their own unsexing; the coat, a symbol of bourgeois gender roles, is stripped off Garcin’s back, indicating a metaphorical emasculation, rendering him “naked” (30) as he accepts to Inez after the revelation of their saga of sin.

Inez counters Garcin’s avoidance of one another by promoting a project of conflict^v. Though hatred is often described as a repulsion—true of Estelle’s for Inez—it is also a raw magnetic pull, condensing the struggle between centripetal and centrifugal forces. Inez gravitates towards Garcin but truly in the form of a confrontation vis-à-vis Garcin. This captures the woman-man, homosexual-heterosexual, proletariat-bourgeois dichotomous friction where the former constituent of the pairs are drawn to wrest hegemonic power from the latter. In fact, Inez undergoes a tripartite dislocation from the power nucleus being a woman, homosexual and proletarian post-office clerk, rendering her a subaltern in Gramsci’s words as diametrically opposite and perennially subservient to the “ruling” (55) “hegemonic and dominant groups” (53) until “ ‘permanent’ victory breaks their subordination” (55). Failing to fight when his country needed him, Garcin resorts to play-pretence of a soldier, assuming the role of a commanding officer, issuing orders to subaltern officers to be silently vigilant, programmed automatons. He espouses inaction, the bourgeois ideology of complacent, introspective “self-communings” (17) to scavenge his class identity under threat from Inez. It also partly explains Garcin’s vexation with his wife whose “martyred look” (12) reflected a quality he lacked. Garcin views Inez as the ideal archetype of manly courage. His recognition of her experiential knowledge of dilemma, dissonance, turmoil implies tacit admiration for her disillusioned, courageous acceptance of truth. A product of internalised heteronormativity, Garcin views Inez adopting a traditionally masculine role—for he never considers women as rational beings but passive silent recipients or objects of sexual gratification—that gives his affinity for her a homoerotic dimension. Inez’s presence unsexes him, concomitantly begetting a non-thetic^{vi} consciousness of his inability to fulfil patriarchal constructs of machismo. The unsexing is not in the conservative meaning that homoeroticism strips a man of his masculinity but in the sense of emasculating false, manly standards of patriarchy and heteronormativity that both the bourgeois characters have internalised. Estelle is unsexed by Inez’s attraction for it reflects her transgression of prescriptive feminine standards that she had violated by actualising what Lady Macbeth only claimed—a mother committing infanticide. Estelle’s deep-seated, latent fear of being demonised unfeminine is embodied in Inez who is attracted to her “diabolical” (20) look. Estelle’s xenophobic fear of Inez is the superego’s detestation for the id. Hence,



she attempts to collaborate with Garcin to further her political-sexual motive to heal her wounded sense of self and femininity.

Inez quashes the heteronormative construct, usurping Gomez's position in Garcin's perspective. Characteristic of the bourgeois, Garcin offers Inez "instead of class solidarity a larger...natural solidarity, in which the worker and the employer are integrated in a *Mitsein* which suppresses the conflict" (*Being* 429). Garcin fashions this as "human feeling" (29) while it is solipsistic fear at work. Sartre probes the deeper id impulses – a clear Freudian influence – that Inez elaborates as dark motives of "fear," "hatred," "all the dirty little instincts" (38). Garcin wonders whether fear of death was his real motive. So do we: whether Garcin really wants to actively confront the situation in hell or is simply afraid of "disaster" (30)? In the post-truth world, plurality of truths, adulterated with psychological defence mechanisms like rationalisation hinders a single neat answer. Ultimately, action is the only objective that can be known. His solipsism lies in equating Inez with himself as identically rotten and cruel. So, if one has the power to conjure pity, so should the other – a lapse in Sartre's Existentialism that Webber underscores can be resolved by Simone de Beauvoir's Existentialism that explains how desires produced by an internalised "sedimented value" (115) clash with "recently endorsed values" (*Rethinking* 115). This accounts for the differences amongst people and one's inability to change one's actions easily. For Garcin, the battle is between a homogeneous, universalized solipsistic perspective and accepting the plurality of perspectives. For Inez, accepting Garcin's *Mitsein* would entail renouncing her class and sexual identities, leaving her vulnerable to be defined by bourgeois-heteronormativity. Garcin uses salvation as a hegemonic weapon to market his self-image as still capable of eliciting pity as basic human feeling. Inez resists by distinguishing herself from the hegemonic bourgeois-heterosexual class by forming her rival political project to paradoxically borrow bourgeois trade practices, not to subscribe to the superiority of bourgeois ideology but to dismantle the incumbent hegemony by its own weapons. In fact, Inez views bourgeois practices as an abstraction of the hegemony, as simply tactics transmuted into a subaltern weapon – a revolutionary redefinition of the whole class-power structure. It is not an indoctrination into the bourgeoisie as Garcin initially thinks who soon realises that Inez borrows selectively, maintaining herself distinctly from the incumbent regime and heavily relying on her sexuality to script her lesbian resistance as anti-assimilationist. Halberstam believes 'lesbian' is a label of stable identities that requires to be 'queered' since 'queer' is "resolutely anti-assimilationist," critiquing "traditional identity politics" (259). Borrowing capitalist business policies aid her anti-assimilationist lesbian resistance to decentralise heterosexuality, establishing proletarian lesbianism as hegemonic, permanently challenging the semantics of respectable bourgeois-heteronormativity. Garcin's preference for Inez improves her object-state than Estelle but his condescension affronts her since the bourgeois catalyses her positional elevation. Hence, she refuses help, striking a contractual agreement as two equal business partners. Her bargain with Garcin is an epitome of the homo oeconomicus; the *quid pro quo* entails marketing the promise to Garcin that she would refrain from harming him – minimum expenditure – in lieu of Garcin's promise to help Inez secure possession over Estelle – maximum utility – whose devotion to her would be profit accruing. Garcin's acceptance bolsters her foothold in the power domain, so much so that she directs Garcin commandingly who obeys her. For Inez, Estelle is the market she wants to monopolise, thereby resorting to lucrative endorsement of her complete eternal surrender to Estelle in lieu of reciprocity, apparently equal but actually Inez's



systematic conquest. Calling Estelle 'my' glancing stream/crystal is a case-in-point of Inez's queer materialism that views queer reality constituted by language—not matter or thought—since language defines the limits of human knowledge and rationality. The body is treated as a "vehicle of speech acts and discourses" (Morton 2). Barthes opines the desire underpinning all conscious communication to engage the interlocutor, has an erotic suggestion implicating the material body^{vii}. Inez offers Estelle a quid pro quo: accept Inez's lesbian relationship and proprietorship ('my') in lieu of transcending bodily realities from a woman to a glancing stream/crystal through non-normative logic as Inez 'queers' conventional lexicology. Inez competes with Garcin to monopolise Estelle who competes with Inez to monopolise Garcin. Hence, Inez is eager for Garcin to leave when the door opens for after Garcin's exit, Estelle would also cease to function as a competitor, thus eliminating both competitors. Only Garcin does not actively compete with anyone for he is secured of his topmost position in the bourgeois socio-economic-political structure.

Barthes accentuates the "planned syncretism" (138), of the bourgeoisie merging into and constructing the nationhood, excluding the "allogenuous" (138) elements and appropriating the rest. Inez's borrowed bourgeois stratagems—as a capitalist tycoon—align with a political leader seeking totalitarian control. Hence, Inez's lucrative false promises constitute her propaganda to snare Estelle as lark-mirror or predatory hunter through force, fear, craft that takes the form of flattery (welcoming her with flowers), attempt at intimacy (insisting Estelle to call Inez by her name), psychological coercion as revenge strategy against both the bourgeois, hyperbolic falsity that Estelle has been sheltering in her heart for ages, deception to inflict fear or slander when spurned. She hazards an attempt at force but recoils under threat of physical violence from Garcin, the regime, oscillating back to tact and divisive politics, sowing the seeds of distrust between Garcin and Estelle, propelling the former to see through the latter's designs of mystifying her true intentions.

Although Inez's borrowed bourgeois policies catalyse her lesbian resistance, establishing her as a political rival to de facto power-holders, they do not directly aid her triumph which is ushered in by her individual achievements, her ontological epiphanies. If her colonising seduction of Estelle's affective and cognitive apperception of the world had succeeded because of bourgeois manoeuvres, theatre would have been accused of espousing bourgeois ideology in tune with Barthes 'exnomination'—universal promotion of bourgeois culture that refuses to identify itself as bourgeois yet pervading all classes as a lucrative ideology. "[M]eaning flows out of [the bourgeois] until their very name becomes unnecessary" (137). Her mercantile manoeuvres would have caused a compromised victory—an impasse, a Sisyphean cycle of exploitation, damnation, eternal torment, not only frustrating Inez's feminist lesbian resistance, but also subsuming the identity of a hegemonic exploitative regime as a mere replacement.

Inez had wanted de facto control of power but her victory lies in Garcin's de jure^{viii} acknowledgement of her cognitive and experiential superiority where his aim to defeat and convince her is paradoxically couched in securing her honest judgement affirming his self-image—an unequivocal feminist and class victory for her. It is not condescension or validation but the due respect Inez and her resistance deserves. When Inez had pledged to confront Garcin, he did not even deign bestow upon her the status of an equal rival. Later, he hazards to enlist her as an equal partner of empathy but she rejects due to which he spirals into attempting an equal game of challenge.



Moreover, it is Garcin who wants to be seen as an equal by Inez. Reinvigorated, he tries his level best to get Inez to ratify^x his heroism necessary for his redemption, vesting a quasi-spiritual Christian grace in her faith, almost elevating her to the level of God.

When “the oppressed class by...sudden increase of its power posits itself as ‘they-who-look-at’ in the face of...the oppressing class...only then that the oppressors experience themselves as ‘Us’” (*Being* 429). Unable to acclimatise to the onerous task that has, in fact, empowered Inez (the oppressed class), Garcin vacillates back to sexism, allying with Estelle as ‘Us’ in a sexual enterprise to re-marginalise Inez using heteronormativity which in turn is weaponised by Inez in a final shot of unsexing – relentlessly reminding them of their failure in conforming to normative gender constructs like motherhood and toughness, enervating Garcin with the eternal presence of her boring gaze, a powerful version of the female gaze where the individual subsumes the collective, encapsulating the unified power of the oligarchy controlling and mobilising the mass embodied in Garcin’s complete subservience as a “well-trained dog,” (45) culminating in obedient puppetry. Inez is emblematic of the “crowd” (45), mercilessly subjecting Garcin to surveillance not unlike an Orwellian Big Brother and successfully conquering him with her gaze that distils Caesar’s *Veni Vidi Vici*^x – Inez’s strategy right from the beginning.

One limitation is Inez’s inability to win Estelle’s affection so as to transmute the androcentric worldview into a lesbian gaze of the male-dominated world, a reason why Inez strove to ensure both Florence and Estelle saw through her eyes, incessantly reminding the former of her culpability in her husband’s death – symbolic of the death of phallogocentric hegemony. However, Inez’s ultimate aim was to expose the vacuous patriarchal edifice which she succeeds in by Garcin’s final rejection of Estelle, indicating the triumph of her lesbian resistance to dismantle sexual stratification. Ethical grounds are another limitation as Inez is indirectly culpable in two deaths. However, her acceptance of having experienced horror, shame, fear, the emotional turmoil of knowing oneself to be a torturer, experiencing a split-second tenderness for the ordeal of Garcin’s wife, humanises her, proving her to be non-pathological. It does not excuse her crimes nor does she do so but it underscores her cruelty being entwined with sexual repression and prolonged marginalisation as someone whom no one ever admired, starkly drawing out her educational and professional disparity with the well-admired, well-educated, qualified bourgeois, Garcin. Moreover, her unsexing constructively catalyses Garcin’s project of realising his authentic self wherein Inez challenges him, assuming the role of athletic coaches or military leaders mentoring and training cadets. Hence, the subaltern becomes the leader through role reversals and shifts in power dynamics of the class-gender-sexual continuum.

It is, however, the “they” (23) who form the actual Orwellian Big Brother oligarchy, keeping the three under strict surveillance as a rigorous totalitarian regime, in a controlled environment like a scientific experiment to monitor their behaviour and draw inference. This ‘they’ forms the highest authority on jurisprudence, having sentenced them to eternal damnation and having chosen them to be together. The three don’t have the unity to combat this supra-hegemonic power locus that keeps itself an absent-presence but Inez, by fashioning herself as a similarly disembodied presence of “mere breath...a gaze observing you, a formless thought that thinks you” (44), transcends to that supra-real Godhead figure dimension, leaving the bourgeois utterly powerless. By virtue of a proscenium play



that preserves the fourth wall, the audience transforms into a similar absent-presence whose judgement has also been challenged by Inez.

Garcin's vacillations parallel the relapse in the end of *Waiting for Godot*, deflating Vladimir's heroic realisation of existential truth. However, Garcin's vacillations are punctured in the end by his active initiative to confront the problem which seems optimistic as Sartre believed Existentialism to be. Beckett's text preserves the diurnal time-cycle which has been challenged in *No Exit*. Initially eternity is defined as measurable when Garcin states the earthly maxim of getting used to something in time. Gradually, the comparative time disparity on earth and hell aids in dissociating measurement from the bourgeois understanding of time as resource, leading to an epiphany, incredible to the characters, of eternity as an indefinite deferral, a realisation Inez had already realised that eternity is wrongly considered a perverted extension of measurable time in tune with the human definitive way of understanding. In fact, time both on earth and hell forms one single continuum: eternity but bourgeois rationality divides time-on-earth as measurable and time-post-death as immeasurable eternity. This realisation is new to the bourgeois duo because despite the fact that they knew they were trapped for eternity, they had not realised the full extent of its meaning. This realisation impels them to another that their bourgeois-heteronormative identities are superfluous accessories that fail to aid their realisation of the profundity of eternity.

Conclusion

Inez, via her mercantile policies, power stratagems and Garcin's de jure acceptance, successfully unsexes both bourgeois characters off their bourgeois notions of respectability, utilitarianism, time-eternity difference and gender construct. Though Estelle refuses Inez's lesbian continuum to bond against Garcin's male tyranny, Estelle is ultimately defined by Inez's gaze as an object of female attraction, attracted to a man who rejects her due to Inez's gaze^{xi}, failing to be traditionally feminine whose gender identity has been 'queered.' Garcin's acceptance of Inez's gaze – viewing himself as cowardly, non-masculine – by borrowing from Inez's experiential knowledge establishes and mainstreams this knowledge as lesbian-proletarian epistemology that fills the epistemic vacuum created by bourgeois-heteronormativity's incapability to negotiate with the new reality of hell and eternity. This epistemology emerges from Inez's lesbian-proletarian gaze^{xii} and body as the repository of experiential knowledge whose centrality transforms Inez into 'Logos' – the point of origin of meaning – in hell-space whose knowledge is crucial to realise the authentic self. Inez's lesbian resistance is the revolutionary redefinition of her lesbian-proletarian identity as Logos, vesting her 'lesbian existence' with a new meaning as the source of meaning itself as post-death reality derives meaning from Inez's gaze, body and knowledge. Thus, her unsexing and lesbian resistance is executed unto fruition.



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- ⁱ Transcript of Sartre's interviews conducted and compiled by John Gerassi
- ⁱⁱ The difference between they-subject and We-as-subject is of perspective. From Garcin's perspective, Inez and Estelle are a 'they-subject' that he experiences indirectly via his alienation from them as their object. Garcin and Estelle form a 'We-as-subject' that Garcin can directly experience as a subject
- ⁱⁱⁱ Though Halberstam's work focuses on the U.S., her statement is generally true
- ^{iv} There is no mention of a marriage between Florence and Inez but their relationship is almost of spouses
- ^v "fight it out face to face"(23)
- ^{vi} A loan term from Sartre's terminology which he describes as "not to *know*. But it is in its very translucency at the origin of all knowing."(*Being* 69) Sartre illustrates it with an example of counting cigarettes which appears to one as an "objective property"(liii) of that collection, as a fact existing in the world. However, it conceals a "non-thetic consciousness of my adding activity"(liii) for if anyone questions the person as to what they are doing, the person would reply they are counting. This is the "non-reflective consciousness which renders the reflection possible."(liii) Inez's presence shapes this subliminal, non-thetic consciousness as a nursery for his consciousness proper of the failure to fulfil patriarchal masculine standards because the failure to fulfil is something Garcin had all along refused to accept, keeping himself deluded. Even when he sleuthed himself to reveal his real motives, he is unable to account for the truth.
- ^{vii} In Morton's "Queer Materialism"
- ^{viii} Though there is no codified legal system in the hell-space, the de jure epithet and question of ratification implies a tacit unwritten agreement
- ^{ix} Please see (vii)
- ^x Latin equivalent of: I came, I saw, I conquered
- ^{xi} "I cannot love you when she's watching"(45)
- ^{xii} Her gaze replaces mirrors, symbolically the old bourgeois-heteronormative order

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