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## SARTRE'S CRITIQUE OF PATRIARCHY

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Philosophical analyses of the works of Jean-Paul Sartre usually focus on his theoretical writings, with his literary fiction treated as merely popularizing ideas whose full articulation can be found in those theoretical works. It is certainly true that Sartre wanted to use novels, plays, and films to bring his philosophy to a mass audience. But that is compatible with developing some ideas through those media. Indeed, his regular reliance on miniature stories to articulate and substantiate philosophical claims in his theoretical writings suggests that he found fiction especially conducive to this purpose. His strong emphasis on dialogue and character interaction in his plays and screenplays matches the formal structures of those vignettes in his theoretical works. Using drama in this way would allow him to develop an idea through a range of situations without being constrained by any theoretical formulation of that idea, while reaching a wider audience than would read his theoretical writings.

This article will show that Sartre did indeed produce distinctive philosophical analyses through his literary work. Specifically, it will show that a sophisticated and insightful critique of western patriarchy evolves across four of his dramatic works written between 1944 and 1946. This critique presents social norms of femininity and masculinity as causes of violence, coercion, and epistemic injustice, operating within an economic and racialized social hierarchy, and owing their force to both bad faith and oppression. At least two of his subsequent dramatic works continue to develop this line of thought. Feminist analyses of Sartre's work have not identified this critique, precisely because they have focused on his theoretical writings and have not found any explicit articulation of it there.<sup>1</sup> The reception of Sartre's

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<sup>1</sup> The landmark text in feminist analyses of Sartre's work remains *Feminist Interpretations of Jean-Paul Sartre*, ed. by Julien S. Murphy (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999). The editor's Introduction (pp. 1–21) places these essays in the context of earlier feminist work on Sartre, making clear the exclusive focus on his theoretical writings. Mary Edwards has recently argued that passages in Sartre's later theoretical writings display a previously overlooked sensitivity to specifically misogynist forms of oppression ('Sartre and Beauvoir on Women's Psychological Oppression', *Sartre Studies International*, 27 (2021), 46–75). Edwards is concerned solely with theoretical writings and so attributes these ideas to the influence of Simone de Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe*. It is undoubtedly true that Beauvoir influenced Sartre in uncountably many ways and her comprehensive existentialist treatise on patriarchy is one reason why Sartre might not have felt any need to present his own analysis in theoretical writing. Even so, the passages Edwards cites develop themes from the dramatic works discussed in this article.

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be one's essential nature.<sup>3</sup> Garcin is vainglorious, proud of his personality. Estelle is vain, proud of her appearance. Sartre has personified these varieties of pride as characters whose sexes align with the grammatical genders of the terms for these forms of pride – *l'orgueil* and *la vanité* — and whose pride consists in wanting to demonstrate their instantiation of the gender norms that align with their sex.

Given this, what are we to make of Inès? She is very confident in her intelligence, perhaps seeing herself as intellectually superior to the other two. We could read her as instantiating a third form of pride — *l'arrogance*. But this would overlook an important aspect of the play. Garcin and Estelle are examples of Sartrean bad faith: their forms of pride consist in identifying some aspects of themselves as their defining natures, ignoring or denying other aspects.<sup>4</sup> Inès, by contrast, does not seem to be in bad faith. Her self-descriptions seem entirely correct. She challenges the bad faith of Garcin and Estelle not only by reminding them of things that do not fit their respective self-images, but also more deeply by making the Sartrean declaration that they do not have inner defining natures and are each the sum of their own actions.<sup>5</sup>

It is through these lines that Sartre critiques the patriarchal norms of masculinity and femininity. The play sets out Sartre's idea that people like to see themselves as defined by an innate nature rather than by their choices and presents this as an explanation of why people try to exemplify those norms, why they fail to do so, and why this failure is distressing. This is the play's central feminist theme. This struggle to identify with patriarchal norms provides the play's narrative structure. The hero of the play, the character who presents Sartre's views, is a woman who does not even try to conform to her society's norms of femininity.

### *The reception of 'Huis clos'*

This narrative structure has gone largely unnoticed in writing about the play. Introductions to it and deeper scholarly analyses of it generally agree that there are three characters all facing the same predicament: they are in Hell, torturing one another by refusing to confirm one another's views of themselves. The narrative is generally understood as a morality tale about the importance of focusing on our own aims in life without too much regard for how other people see us.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Sartre, *L'Être et le néant: essai d'ontologie phénoménologique*, ed. by Arlette Elkaim-Sartre (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), pp. 302, 329–30. Subsequent citations are marked *EN*. Original version first published in 1943.

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed explanation of Sartre's conception of pride as a form of bad faith, see Jonathan Webber, *The Existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre* (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 121–26.

<sup>5</sup> 'On meurt toujours trop tôt — ou trop tard. Et cependant la vie est là, terminée; le trait est tiré, il faut faire la somme. Tu n'es rien d'autre que ta vie': Inès in *Huis clos*, p. 165. For her accurate and uncompromising self-description, see p. 144.

<sup>6</sup> William Barrett's *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1961), which was widely read for decades, contains this interpretation and describes the play as 'illustrating the three evils of cowardice, Lesbianism, and infanticide' (p. 226). For more sophisticated versions of the standard reading, see: Robert C. Solomon, *Dark Feelings, Grim Thoughts: Experience and Reflection in Camus and Sartre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 177–79, 187–90; Gary Cox, *Sartre and Fiction* (London: Continuum, 2009), pp. 132–39; and David Detmer, *Sartre Explained: From Bad Faith to Authenticity* (La Salle, IL: Open Court Press, 2009), pp. 149–56.





injustice is a close cousin of 'mansplaining', where a man assumes that a woman needs something explained to her. However, it is a different phenomenon, for which the terms 'bropropriating' and 'hepeating' have been suggested.<sup>12</sup>

There are two responses involved in any occurrence of this phenomenon: the response to the woman initially making the point; and the response to the man subsequently making the same point. Only the first of these occurs within the play itself. Garcin does not simply ignore Inès's claim that they will torture one another, but actively dismisses the idea: 'Je ne serai pas votre bourreau'.<sup>13</sup> He sets out a plan for silently reaching salvation, and attempts to enact it. Estelle agrees with the plan, but soon returns to worrying about her appearance, though she is now concerned that Inès might torture her. Eventually the conversation between Inès and Estelle draws Garcin back in and the three of them move on to confessing the reasons for their damnation. The idea that they are torturing one another only resurfaces much later, when Garcin announces it as his own. The play ends almost immediately, leaving no time for the other characters to respond to the idea or to his presentation of it as his own discovery.

The second response occurs in the play's reception. The usual understanding of the play as building up to Garcin's eureka moment attributes to a man something that a woman had already said.<sup>14</sup> Sartre has cued his audience to focus on Garcin, as we have seen, and has further facilitated this reception by ending the play just after Garcin announces his revelation. Sartre seems to have deployed his technical expertise as a playwright to include audience members themselves in an enactment of this form of epistemic injustice. Doing so has allowed him to demonstrate, rather than merely to illustrate, the phenomenon, though with the risk that this demonstration might pass unnoticed.

<sup>12</sup> The term 'epistemic injustice' was coined by Miranda Fricker in *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). This form of epistemic injustice is an example of what Fricker calls 'testimonial injustice', where the speaker's word is taken less seriously because she is a woman. Jessica Bennett suggested the label 'bropropriating' for this form of epistemic injustice: 'How Not to Be "Maninterrupted" in Meetings', *Time*, 14 January 2015, <<http://www.time.com>>. Nicole Gugliucci suggested 'hepeating' in a tweet that went viral (see Zameena Mejia, 'How to Combat "Hepeating" at Work, according to a Harvard Professor', *CNBC Make It*, 11 October 2017, <<http://www.cnbc.com>>). It is unclear who coined 'mansplaining', but it gained currency in response to Rebecca Solnit's essay 'Men Explain Things to Me', *Tom Dispatch*, 13 April 2008, <<https://tomdispatch.com/rebecca-solnit-the-archipelago-of-arrogance>>. Solnit has since argued that the emergence of this and related terms is useful, but the phenomena they name should be understood as aspects of a single pervasive inequality of voice rather than merely a set of similar occurrences: 'The Serious Side of "Mansplaining" Has Been Lost. That's Where the Harm Begins', *The Guardian*, 9 February 2023, <<http://www.theguardian.com>>.

<sup>13</sup> Sartre, *Huis clos*, p. 134.

<sup>14</sup> Returning to the recent descriptions of the play mentioned above: Detmer focuses almost exclusively on Garcin and does not mention that Inès has already made the point that Garcin makes at the end of the play (*Sartre Explained*, pp. 147–57); Solomon comes close to noticing that Inès is not in the same predicament as the other two main characters (*Dark Feelings, Grim Thoughts*, pp. 171–72), but his overall prioritization of Garcin prevents him from developing this thought; Cox does say that Inès makes the point earlier that Garcin makes at the end of the play, but still describes the play as building towards Garcin's realization (*Sartre and Fiction*, pp. 134, 138).

*'Les Jeux sont faits'*

A similar phenomenon occurs in the reception of Sartre's film *Les Jeux sont faits*, written shortly after *Huis clos* and premiered at the 1947 Cannes Film Festival. In this romantic comedy, which presents a particularly haunting image of life after death, the two central characters, Ève and Pierre, die at the same time, meet in the realm of the dead, and fall in love. They are informed that there must have been a clerical error, since they should have met while still alive. They are allowed to return to life for twenty-four hours and if by the end of that time they are genuinely committed to one another, they can remain alive, but otherwise they will die again at that point.

The film does not have a happy ending. Ève and Pierre attend first to unfinished business. Ève tells her husband she is leaving him, but does not succeed in persuading her sister to stay away from him. Pierre almost succeeds in persuading his comrades to postpone the insurrection they had planned for that day, since he has discovered that the dictator is aware of their plans and intends to ambush them, but the first phase of the plan goes ahead before he has been able to prevent it. By the end of the film, Ève has given up on her sister and is looking forward to her new life. Pierre, however, decides to remain with the insurrection, perhaps thinking that his commitment to Ève has already been demonstrated. The dictator's spy shoots Pierre for a second time. Ève dies at the same moment.

Despite this clear difference between them, the two characters are routinely described as both failing to let go of their past and thereby failing to demonstrate their love for one another.<sup>15</sup> Why does this happen? Why do audiences miss the female character's success in demonstrating her love for the male character and instead see her simply as echoing his failure? In this case, Sartre has not cued his audience to focus on the male character. Ève is the first character we meet. She delivers the final line. In the penultimate scene, when Pierre tells Ève that he will be part of the insurrection, she pleads with him not to do this, because risking his life demonstrates that he is not committed to her. In the final scene, she says that he didn't really love her. Why are these statements, which are clearly in line with her own behaviour towards her husband and sister, overlooked in the film's reception?

It has always been normal in movies for lead characters to be male. It may also be that audiences saw Pierre's project of political insurrection as more significant than Ève's project of love, especially so soon after the Second World War ended.

<sup>15</sup> This reading occurs, for example, in a newspaper review of the film upon its opening in the USA with English subtitles: 'Existentialism Expounded in Movie', *The New York Times*, 2 February 1949, <<https://www.nytimes.com>>. For more recent examples, see Linda A. Bell, *Rethinking Ethics in the Midst of Violence: A Feminist Approach to Freedom* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1993), pp. 181, 216; Colin Davis, 'Sartre and the Return of the Living Dead', *Sartre Studies International*, 11 (2005), 222–33 (pp. 224, 227, 230–31); Sam Coombes, *The Early Sartre and Marxism* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008), pp. 35–36; and Jeremy Ekberg, 'Invisible Ghosts: *Les Jeux sont faits* and Disembodied Consciousness', in *Pre-reflective Consciousness: Sartre and Contemporary Philosophy of Mind*, ed. by Sofia Miguens, Gerhard Preyer, and Clara Bravo Mirando (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), pp. 495–506 (pp. 498, 504). A variant on this reading has the protagonists as Sartrean heroes retaining their past commitments to collective freedom even at the cost of their own individual freedom: O'Donohoe, 'Introduction and Notes', pp. lii–lviii.

In defending his decision in the penultimate scene, Pierre evinces two aspects of Sartrean bad faith. In saying that he cannot ('je ne peux pas') leave his comrades, he treats his own commitment as though it is a fixed feature of himself rather than something he can change. And in saying that he has no right ('j'ai pas le droit')

<sup>19</sup> 'Freedom and the Origins of Reasons' in my *Rethinking Existentialism* (pp. 39–56) elucidates and critiques this aspect of Sartre's theory of freedom.





Nellie, by contrast, has a clear understanding of her projects and situation. She recognizes that her difficulty in navigating her misogynistic environment is partly due to her fidelity to her values. At one point, she considers abandoning those values, commenting that it would then not really be her who survives.<sup>22</sup> She recognizes that she can abandon everything that is important to her but that doing so would be abandoning herself, her character and perspective on life, her own

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agency. This is what she means when she tells Georges that ‘on ne peut rien *vouloir*, quand on crève de faim’.<sup>23</sup> When your situation is that bad, you no longer have the luxury of acting in line with your goals and values.<sup>24</sup>

This screenplay has something like a happy ending. Through his recognition that another doctor is behaving just as he had in response to an earlier epidemic, and inspired by Nellie’s attitude of authenticity, Georges emerges from his despair into a new project of actually being a doctor. This is an example of a Sartrean conversion, where the remnants of an old project are repurposed to a new end; ‘où le projet antérieur s’effondre dans le passé à la lumière d’un projet nouveau qui surgit sur ses ruines et qui ne fait encore que s’esquisser’ (*EN*, p. 521). Meanwhile, Nellie has taken on gainful employment as a nurse. They start working together to treat typhus patients in full knowledge of the risk this poses to them both. We are left wondering how this works out.

### ‘Les Orgueilleux’

Sartre wrote *Typhus* and *Les Jeux sont faits* under commission from Pathé during 1943 and 1944. They had invited him to pitch stories that would help to unify the French people once the war was over. Of the ideas that Sartre sent, they selected only these two to be worked up into full screenplays. However, on reading the completed works they decided against making either film. It is not entirely clear why. The director Jean Delannoy managed to persuade another film company, Les Films Gibé, to make *Les Jeux sont faits*. Pathé retained the rights to *Typhus*, which remained on the proverbial shelf for a few years until the director Yves Allégret took its two central characters and one pivotal scene as the basis of a new story.

Allégret’s film, *Les Orgueilleux*, is a tale of love dawning between a wealthy woman named Nellie and an alcoholic former doctor named Georges during a meningitis outbreak. The two lead characters are French, but the story takes place in Mexico and the dialogue switches between French and Spanish. It was released in 1953 and credited Sartre as the author of its story. After a version with English subtitles came out, Sartre was shortlisted for the 1957 Academy Award for Best Writing, Motion Picture Story.<sup>25</sup> He refused this nomination on the grounds that the film did not tell the tale he had written. But the extent of the difference between his unpublished screenplay and Allégret’s film was not clear to anyone

<sup>23</sup> Sartre, *Typhus*, pp. 148–49; original emphasis.

<sup>24</sup> Sartre soon developed this point into the idea that desperate hunger is experienced as a need for freedom in his short polemical article ‘Avoir faim, c’est déjà vouloir être libre’, *Caliban*, 20 (October 1948), pp. 11–14.

<sup>25</sup> George Bernard Shaw and Bob Dylan are the only people to have been awarded both a Nobel Prize and an Oscar to date. Given that he turned down the Nobel Prize for Literature and disowned this film, Sartre came very close to being the only person to *refuse* both a Nobel Prize and an Oscar to date. However, in a fittingly Sartrean twist, the winner of the Oscar for which Sartre was nominated did not even exist. It was won for a film whose credited author was a pseudonym used by Dalton Trumbo because he was on the Hollywood blacklist for refusing to co-operate with the House Un-American Activities Committee. There was never again an Oscar in that category. Trumbo was eventually acknowledged as the real winner of that Oscar eighteen years later in 1975. A further seventeen years after that, he was also acknowledged as the true author of *Roman Holiday*, which had won the same Oscar in 1953. Trumbo is best known as the author of *Spartacus*.

else. Sartre had not retained a copy of his screenplay and it was considered lost for half a century. A copy surfaced more than twenty years after Sartre's death and was published to critical acclaim in 2007. It is now clear that Sartre was right to deny authorship of Allégret's film's story, which is politically diametrically opposed to the one he wrote.

Sartre's screenplay is set in the British colony of Malaya, which is now part of Malaysia. Allégret's film is set in Mexico long after the end of colonialism. Sartre's story explores the racialized contours of an epidemic by contrasting its differential effects on the colonizer and colonized populations. For example, one scene cuts back and forth between singing in a segregated whites-only bar and singing at a Malay funeral. In removing the colonial contrast between two distinct communities, Allégret has entirely excised this dimension of the story.

Moreover, within this colonial context, Sartre's story has Nellie made destitute by the patriarchal structures of her own European society and the caprice of her European partner. She is then humiliated, coerced, and assaulted by men in her own European community. Noticeably, she is never under any threat from the Malay population. But in Allégret's film, Nellie is made destitute by being robbed by a Mexican and is then under threat of coercion and assault by only one man, the Mexican owner of the hotel she is staying in. Allégret has replaced Sartre's focus on the structural and individual misogyny of Nellie's own European society with crude stereotypes of Mexican men.

In some respects, Allégret's film even positively indulges the sexist attitudes that Sartre's screenplay was designed to expose. Sartre had presented Nellie as a resourceful woman who earned her own living, first by singing in nightclubs and then as a nurse. Allégret has removed this counter-patriarchal dimension of her character by making her independently wealthy. And in two lengthy scenes of his film, Nellie is in her hotel room wearing only her underwear.

The feminist themes of *Typhus*, themes that also structure *Huis clos* and *Les Jeux sont faits*, are not merely missing from Allégret's film, but are roundly opposed by its indulgence of sexist and racist attitudes. Sartre had very good reason to disown the film. Even so, his name was not removed from the film's official information or the list of Oscar nominees. It remains in both those places today.<sup>26</sup> Given that Allégret's film was commercially as well as critically successful, this can only have encouraged a misperception of Sartre's interests and work among its audiences. Indeed, the association between Sartre and the film persists: the cover art for the English translation of the screenplay, first published in 2010, incorporates an image used in the film's publicity, a shot of Nellie undressed and lying on her bed. The misattribution of this film to Sartre may well have helped to obscure the feminism in his dramatic fiction.

<sup>26</sup> See *The Proud Ones*, IMDB, <<https://www.imdb.com>>, and Oscars, 29th Academy Awards, 1957 <<https://www.oscars.org/oscars/ceremonies/1957>>.

*'La Putain respectueuse'*

Sartre's themes of the epistemic injustice, economic oppression, and outright violence faced by women, which he developed across *Huis clos*, *Les Jeux sont faits*, and *Typhus*, neatly coalesce in his shortest play, *La Putain respectueuse*, first staged in 1946.<sup>27</sup> Lizzie has just arrived in a southern city in the USA, intending to earn her living through prostitution. While she was on the train from New York, four drunk white men sexually assaulted her and then attacked two black men. One of the white men, Thomas, shot one of the black men dead. The other black man escaped. Thomas has been arrested. He claims that he entered the carriage after Lizzie called for help and found two black men attempting to rape her, one of whom then attacked him. The play begins with the man who had escaped, who is not named in the play, arriving at Lizzie's apartment and asking her to tell the judge the truth.<sup>28</sup>

Thomas's cousin and uncle have also found Lizzie, intent on getting her to corroborate Thomas's story. They try bribery, blackmail, and emotional coercion. In the final phase, Thomas's uncle, who is a senator, explains that although Lizzie is telling the truth, what matters is whose life will be ruined — Thomas, a Harvard graduate and captain of industry, or the nameless black man, whom the senator describes as making no real contribution to society — 'il traîne, il chaparde, il chante'.<sup>29</sup> He puts a pen in Lizzie's hand, physically moves her hand to sign a witness statement, and leaves. Lizzie runs after him demanding that he 'Déchirez le papier!'<sup>30</sup>

This first scene continues the exploration of economic structures of misogynistic violence that Sartre had begun in *Les Jeux sont faits* and *Typhus*. The class of railway carriage Lizzie was travelling in would have indicated that she was not

<sup>27</sup> Sartre, *La Putain respectueuse*, in *Théâtre*, 1, 253–98.

<sup>28</sup> Mabogo Percy More suggests that this character has no name in order to dramatize his lack of individual identity in the eyes of the white characters in the play; *Sartre on Contingency: Antiblack Racism and Embodiment* (Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021), pp. 114–15, 148–49. In the 1952 film version, Sartre has named this character Sidney, but this change is consistent with More's interpretation of the play: the film is significantly longer and includes many more black characters in scenes that provide depth to Sidney's individual character ahead of the scenes that are also in the play. This character is no longer the 'invisible man' for the film's audience that he was perhaps intended to be for the play's audience.

<sup>29</sup> Sartre, *La Putain respectueuse*, p. 282.

<sup>30</sup> Sartre, *La Putain respectueuse*, p. 284.



The original version of the play has an unhappy ending that ironically resembles the supposedly happy endings of Hollywood movies of the time. Fred promises Lizzie a big house, a beautiful garden, as much money as she wants, and black

<sup>35</sup> Sartre, *La Putain respectueuse*, p. 296.

servants of her own. She agrees to be his mistress in return.<sup>36</sup> She gains the white elite lifestyle but remains dependent and subservient. This is a betrayal of her principles: she has been assaulted by Fred and his cousin, has tried to resist Fred's and his father's attempts to frame a black man for Thomas's crime, has been physically coerced by Fred's father, and has tried to persuade the black man to shoot Fred in order to escape.

However, she is not simply selling out. She clearly retains an affection for Fred despite everything. She confesses to feeling guilty about opposing him and his family, though she does not know why. Similarly, the unnamed black man says that he cannot shoot Fred. In both cases, he says, it is because Fred and his family are white. Fred later echoes this point: 'Une fille comme toi *ne peut pas* tirer sur un homme comme moi'.<sup>37</sup> Lizzie and the black man have internalized the claimed superiority of white men. They continue to have a deeply engrained respect for Fred and his family, which makes it difficult to act on their own judgements. In this respect, they contrast sharply with Inès, Ève, and Nellie, who all act on their rejection of social expectations without any internal struggle.

Economic oppression, epistemic injustice, misogynistic violence, and racist violence are thus presented as an integrated and mutually supporting system. Yet the play is routinely described simply as concerned with racism in the USA.<sup>38</sup> Even though Lizzie is the titular character and the only character on stage throughout the play, audiences have seen her as merely caught up in interactions between white and black men. The early Cold War context of its first performances certainly facilitated seeing it as a critique of American racism: Sartre was accused, on both sides of the Atlantic, of anti-Americanism.<sup>39</sup> But this does not explain why the play's presentation of this racism as deeply integrated with misogyny has been overlooked. As with *Les Jeux sont faits*, the reception of *La Putain respectueuse* seems to have been influenced by the tendencies to see female characters as merely supporting male leads and to see typically masculine projects as more significant than typically feminine ones.

<sup>36</sup> Sartre changed the ending for the film version so that Lizzie and Sidney escape together with the help of the police. He changed it again for the 1954 Moscow production of the play so that the nameless black man escapes and Lizzie phones the police to confess having made a false statement. Sartre later said these new endings were intended to be more hopeful. See van den Hoven, 'The Reception of Sartre's Plays', pp. 99–101.

<sup>37</sup> Sartre, *La Putain respectueuse*, p. 298; original emphasis.

<sup>38</sup> For descriptions of the play that make no reference to patriarchy, see Annie Cohen-Solal, *Sartre: A Life* (London: Heinemann, 1987), p. 242, and Cox, *Sartre and Fiction*, pp. 144–49. For descriptions that briefly mention patriarchy as part of the background of the play's focus on racism, see O'Donohoe, *Sartre's Theatre*, pp. 106–17; Gines, 'Sartre, Beauvoir, and the Race/Gender Analogy', pp. 38–40; and van den Hoven, 'The Reception of Sartre's Plays', pp. 94–101.

<sup>39</sup> O'Donohoe, *Sartre's Theatre*, p. 107. Arthur argues that the tendency to see Sartre's works of the 1940s and 1950s entirely in Cold War terms has occluded his general anti-racism and anti-colonialism (*Unfinished Projects*, pp. 30, 44). *La Putain respectueuse* is a case where this tendency frames his anti-racism as a critique specifically of American racism, rather than racism generally, and occludes his presentation of the integration of racism with misogyny.

Sartre has developed an intricate analysis of the economic, epistemic, and violent dimensions of patriarchy across these four works. *Huis clos* and *Les Jeux sont faits* present violence as an effect of patriarchal norms, but this is strengthened in *Typhus* and especially in *La Putain respectueuse* to the suggestion that one purpose of those norms is to facilitate violence. *Huis clos* presents epistemic injustice without any particular relation to other dimensions of patriarchy, but *La Putain respectueuse* presents it as crucial to upholding the whole system. In these works, Sartre presents economic class as merely shaping the way patriarchy operates. Nellie is working class and Ève is upper class, but both suffer misogynistic violence due to the financial structures of patriarchy. When she becomes an upper-class mistress, Lizzie loses the degree of financial independence she had when she was working class and (illegally) self-employed.

The evolution of this analysis of patriarchy introduces two forms of oppression through the inclusion of a racial dimension. *Huis clos* and *Les Jeux sont faits* have no racial aspect and present patriarchy only as functioning through bad faith. *Typhus* adds oppression as a coercive force external to the individual, especially in Nellie's comment that 'on ne peut rien *vouloir*, quand on crève de faim'. *La Putain respectueuse* adds an internalized form of oppression: Fred and his family explicitly identify with the norms of white masculine entitlement, seeing themselves as having fixed natures and corresponding objective rights; Lizzie and the nameless black man explicitly reject those norms, yet their own desires and outlooks still embody them. Oppressive attitudes originating in the bad faith of the oppressors have here become socialized deep into the minds of people who do not explicitly accept those attitudes, indeed in people oppressed by them.<sup>40</sup>

Why are these themes of economic dependency, epistemic injustice, and misogynist violence not noted in the reception of Sartre's drama? We have seen a number of reasons: Sartre seems to have designed *Huis clos* not only to illustrate one form of epistemic injustice but also to facilitate an audience response that demonstrates it; the screenplay for *Typhus* was lost and Sartre's name was attached to a commercially and critically successful film derived from it that indulges the attitudes he intended it to challenge; *Huis clos*, *Les Jeux sont faits*, and *La Putain respectueuse* were initially received in the context of the Second World War and the nascent Cold War. All of these reasons are underpinned by the expectation that lead characters are male and by the attitude that typically masculine projects are inherently more interesting, both of which reflect the same patriarchal norms that these works critique.

<sup>40</sup> This account of the development of Sartre's conception of oppression between 1944 and 1946 is consistent with, but does not require, my view that Sartre replaces his initial theory of 'radical freedom' with Beauvoir's theory of project sedimentation between 1943 and 1948; see Webber, 'Sedimentation and the Grounds of Cultural Values', in *Rethinking Existentialism*, pp. 113–30, and Jonathan Webber, 'Rethinking Existentialism: From Radical Freedom to Project Sedimentation', in *Freedom After Kant: From German Idealism to Ethics and the Self*, ed. by Joe Saunders (London: Bloomsbury, 2023), pp. 191–204.



Ultimately, however, the same norms of masculinity and femininity that Sartre designed these plays and screenplays to critique helped to prevent that critique from reaching or being recognized by his audiences. These norms seem to have influenced the audience reception of *Huis clos*, *Les Jeux sont faits*, *La Putain respectueuse*, and *Les Sorcières de Salem* in such a way as to obscure their feminist themes. The same norms seem to have led film producers to excise those themes from *Typhus* and *Le Scénario Freud* altogether, either because they did not understand or did not approve of them, or because they thought their audiences would not understand or approve. The same attitudes, therefore, may well have influenced the reception of Sartre's other works of fiction. If we are not to inherit such distortions, we need to read and watch Sartre's fictional works with fresh eyes.

<sup>46</sup> *Huis clos* was banned from public performance in the UK from the first application for a licence in 1946 up until 1959, on the basis of a report stating: 'I don't suppose anyone would bat an eyelid over in Paris, but here we bar Lesbians on the stage'; cited in Jamie Andrews, "'Existentialist Hu-ha?": Censoring the Existentialists in the British Theatre', in *Sartre and the International Impact of Existentialism*, ed. by Betschart and Werner, pp. 129–49 (p. 140). Productions of *La Putain respectueuse* were allowed in the UK during this time, though with some edits to the script and some policing to ensure there were no departures from the approved version (Andrews, 'Existentialist Hu-ha?', pp. 142–46). Over in Chicago, by contrast, productions of *La Putain respectueuse* had been prohibited by order of the police (van den Hoven, 'The Reception of Sartre's Plays', p. 47).



*Abstract*

Jean-Paul Sartre developed a sophisticated and insightful feminist critique of western society through two plays and two screenplays written between 1944 and 1946 — *Huis clos*, *Les Jeux sont faits*, *Typhus*, and *La Putain respectueuse*. In these works, Sartre explores the relations between economic oppression, epistemic injustice, and misogynistic violence, diagnoses their root cause as the patriarchal norms of femininity and masculinity, and ascribes the power of those norms to bad faith and internalized oppression. This social critique, which includes a racial dimension, informs some of his subsequent fictional and philosophical writings. Sartre's analysis of patriarchy has not been noted in writings about these famous dramatic works, a distortion which seems partly due to those same patriarchal norms.

*Résumé*

Jean-Paul Sartre développe une critique féministe sophistiquée et perspicace de la société occidentale à travers deux pièces et deux scénarios écrits entre 1944 et 1946 — *Huis clos*, *Les Jeux sont faits*, *Typhus* et *La Putain respectueuse*. Dans ces drames, Sartre analyse les relations entre l'oppression économique, l'injustice épistémique et la violence misogyne; postule comme cause profonde de ces phénomènes les normes patriarcales de la féminité et de la masculinité; et attribue le pouvoir de ces normes à la mauvaise foi et à l'oppression intériorisée. Cette critique sociale, qui inclut une dimension raciale, informe quelques unes de ses œuvres de fiction et de philosophie ultérieures. Cette analyse du patriarcat n'est pas relevée dans les écrits sur ces œuvres dramatiques célèbres, omission qui semble attribuable en partie à ces mêmes normes patriarcales.