

Jean-Paul Sartre's Theatrical Existentialism: A Technical Analysis of *A Puerta Cerrada* and *La Puta Respetuosa*

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The publication of Jean-Paul Sartre's dramatic works under the collective volume **A Puerta Cerrada / La Puta Respetuosa** (specifically the renowned Biblioteca Clásica y Contemporánea N°685) represents a pivotal moment in 20th-century literature. These two plays, though distinct in their settings and immediate themes, serve as the laboratory for Sartre's existentialist philosophy. While *A Puerta Cerrada* (No Exit) delves into the ontological torture of human presence, *La Puta Respetuosa* (The Respectful Prostitute) applies existentialist ethics to the sociopolitical landscape of racial injustice and class-based coercion. For the scholar and the technical reader, these works are not merely scripts but structural representations of **phenomenological ontology** and **social critique**.

The Theoretical Framework: Existentialist Phenomenology in Drama

To understand the depth of these works, one must first analyze the philosophical framework Sartre established in his magnum opus, *Being and Nothingness* (1943). The transition from abstract philosophy to the stage allowed Sartre to demonstrate the concept of **The Look (Le Regard)**. This concept posits that the presence of another human being transforms the subject into an object, stripping away their total autonomy and forcing them to see themselves through the eyes of the other.

Key Philosophical Mechanics

- Facticity vs. Transcendence: The struggle between the concrete realities of one's past (facticity) and the ability to project oneself into the future (transcendence).
- Bad Faith (Mauvaise Foi): The act of lying to oneself to escape the terrifying responsibility of absolute freedom.
- The Other as Hell: The realization that individual identity is perpetually mediated and judged by external consciousness.

A Puerta Cerrada: The Anatomy of Eternal Confinement

Premiered in May 1944 at the Vieux-Colombier, *A Puerta Cerrada* is a masterclass in minimalist technical construction. The play adheres to the classical unities of time, place, and action, but subverts them by situating the narrative in a Second Empire drawing room in Hell. There are no torture racks or pits of fire; the technical apparatus of punishment is the presence of the other characters.

Character Matrix and Dialectic Function

Each character in the play represents a specific failure of the self-project, designed to clash with the others in a closed loop of psychological friction:

Character	Core Conflict	Manifestation of Bad Faith	Thematic Role
Joseph Garcin	Cowardice vs. Heroism	Seeks validation from Inès to prove he is not a coward.	The struggle with public image.
Inès Serrano	Cruelty as Clarity	Accepts her status as "damned" but uses it to manipulate others.	The lucid, sadistic observer.
Estelle Rigault	Objectification	Requires the male gaze to feel she exists.	The vanity and denial of physical guilt.

Technical Analysis of the "No Exit" Mechanism

The technical brilliance of the play lies in its **triangular structure**. In a binary relationship, one might find a temporary equilibrium. However, Sartre introduces a third party to perpetually disrupt any alliance. When Garcin attempts to find solace in Estelle, Inès provides the judging gaze that reminds him of his cowardice. When Estelle seeks Garcin's desire, Inès provides the jealousy that prevents satisfaction. This is a **self-sustaining feedback loop** of emotional entropy.

La Puta Respetuosa: Socio-Political Existentialism

First performed in 1946, *La Puta Respetuosa* shifts the focus from the metaphysical to the terrestrial. Set in the American South during the Jim Crow era, the play explores how systemic oppression utilizes **Bad Faith** to maintain the status quo. The title itself is a paradox, highlighting the protagonist Lizzie MacKay's internal struggle to remain "respectful" to a social hierarchy that devalues her and demands her complicity in a racial murder.

The Logic of Oppression

The play operates on a procedural logic where the "Truth" is treated as a secondary commodity to "Social Stability." The Senator represents the manipulative force of the ruling class, using rhetorical devices to convince Lizzie that her testimony against an innocent Black man is a duty to the state and its "noble" white citizens. Here, Sartre analyzes how individuals surrender their moral agency to **collective myths**.

Comparison of Thematic Structures

The following table compares the structural execution of the two plays within the Losada N°685 edition:

Feature	A Puerta Cerrada	La Puta Respetuosa
Primary Setting	Metaphysical (Hell)	Sociological (US South)
Nature of Conflict	Intrapersonal & Interpersonal	Individual vs. Institutional
Resolution	Eternal Stasis ("Continuons")	Moral Paralysis / Complicity
Key Symbol	The Bronze Ornament / No Mirror	The Revolver / The Class System

Technical Workflow for Literary Analysis

For students and technical researchers analyzing the **Losada N°685 edition**, the following procedure is recommended for a comprehensive evaluation of Sartre's dramatic intent:

1. Isolation of the "Look": Identify specific stage directions where characters react to being watched. Note how their behavior shifts from authentic to performative.
2. Dialectic Mapping: Trace the arguments between Garcin and Inès. Map the logical progression from Garcin's denial to his eventual realization that he cannot escape his own history.
3. Sociopolitical Deconstruction: In *La Puta Respetuosa*, analyze the Senator's speech for logical fallacies. Note the use of appeals to tradition and ad hominem attacks against the marginalized.
4. Contextual Correlation: Compare the 1944 release of *A Puerta Cerrada* with the French Occupation. The play's focus on confinement and judgment mirrors the claustrophobia of wartime Paris.

Existentialist Ethics: The Responsibility of Choice

A core concept in both plays is the **absolute responsibility** of the individual. In *A Puerta Cerrada*, the characters are dead, meaning their "essence" is now fixed by their past actions. They can no longer change; they are their deeds. This is a technical definition of Hell: a state where one's identity is finalized and subject to the eternal judgment of others.

Conversely, in *La Puta Respetuosa*, Lizzie is alive and possesses **transcendence**. She has the choice to tell the truth or the lie. Her struggle is the technical manifestation of **Anguish (Angoisse)**—the realization that nothing, not even the law or social pressure, can force her hand unless she allows it. When she eventually chooses to support the lie, Sartre is showing the tragic victory of social conditioning over existential freedom.

The Role of the Audience

Sartre's theater is often described as a **"Theater of Situations."** Unlike character-driven drama where personality dictates action, Sartre places characters in impossible situations and watches how they exercise their freedom. The audience is not a passive observer; they are the "Fourth Wall" judges, effectively becoming another Inès, looking at the characters and fixing them in their roles.

Case Study: The 2013 Losada Edition (ISBN 9789500306331)

The **Losada/España softcover edition** of 2013 is a significant technical resource for Spanish-speaking scholars. It preserves the classic translation that has influenced generations of Latin American and Spanish playwrights. When analyzing this specific edition, researchers should focus on the **linguistic nuances** of the translation from the original French.

Bibliographic Details

- Editor: Editorial Losada.
- Series: Biblioteca Clásica y Contemporánea (BCC).
- Catalog Number: 685.
- Impact: This edition is frequently used in university curricula to teach the intersection of Existentialism and Modern Drama.

Practical Implications for Modern Dramaturgy

Sartre's technical innovations in these plays continue to influence contemporary screenwriting and playwriting. The "trapped in a room" trope seen in modern thrillers and sci-fi (e.g., *The Sunset Limited* or *Cube*) owes its psychological foundation to *A Puerta Cerrada*. The use of a small cast to explore massive systemic failures in *La Puta Respetuosa* serves as a blueprint for modern social justice theater.

Troubleshooting Common Misinterpretations

In the academic study of these texts, several common errors often arise. It is essential to address these using a technical lens:

- Misconception: "Hell is other people" means other people are annoying.
- Technical Correction: The phrase refers to the ontological necessity of the other to define the self. Without the other, I cannot perceive myself as a whole object, but because of the other, I lose control over my own meaning.
- Misconception: Lizzie MacKay is a weak character.
- Technical Correction: Lizzie is a character in extreme situational pressure. Her failure is not a lack of "strength" but a successful demonstration of how hegemonic power structures manufacture consent.

As we synthesize the elements of Sartre's theatrical work, it becomes clear that *A Puerta Cerrada* and *La Puta Respetuosa* are essential components of a unified philosophical project. By removing the traditional trappings of theater—extravagant sets, complex plots, and clear heroes—Sartre forces the viewer to confront the raw mechanics of human existence. The Losada edition N°685 serves as an enduring vessel for these ideas, providing a gateway into the demanding but rewarding world of existentialist thought.

Ultimately, the study of these plays is a study of **freedom**. Whether trapped in a drawing room for eternity or caught in the lethal gears of a racist society, Sartre's characters remind us that we are always "condemned to be free." The technical precision with which Sartre maps this condemnation ensures that these plays remain as relevant today as they were in the mid-1940s. They challenge us to look in the mirror—or rather, to look at each other—and acknowledge the terrifying, beautiful responsibility of being human.

Baca Juga (Artikel Terkait)

[• The Philosophical Mechanics of A Happy Death: A Technical Analysis of Camus's Pre-Stranger Existentialism](http://alghafgolden.com/philosophical-mechanics-camus-a-happy-death-analysis.pdf)

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