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The Theatre of Arthur Adamov

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Thesis submitted  
for the  
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## SUMMARY

### The Theatre of Arthur Adamov

The thesis is divided into three parts and a conclusion, with the addition of two Appendices and Bibliographies. Part I contains a short account of Adamov's life (1908-1970). This account deals with those biographical details most important for an understanding and appreciation of Adamov's plays. It indicates his circumstances at the time of writing each play and also contains some discussion of his literary work outside the theatre.

Part II contains a critical study of the first ten plays under five separate headings. The nature and origins of Adamov's early themes and dramaturgy are discussed, and particular attention is devoted to Le Ping-Pong (1955) in the later pages of Chapters three and four. This section not only establishes a great similarity of themes and dramatic treatment in these early plays, but also attempts to point forward to Adamov's later development.

Part III contains a first chapter examining the origins and implications of Adamov's development from the theatre of the Absurd to the committed theatre in the late nineteen-fifties, followed by a detailed study of Paolo Paoli (1957), Le Printemps 71 (1960) and Off Limits (1969) as well as discussion of the other plays written after Paolo Paoli. There is also a chapter on Adamov's radio plays and his adaptation of Gogol's Dead Souls.

The conclusion reiterates briefly the most important features of Adamov's theatre, emphasising the fundamental unity of his work, his

developing but constant protest against the enslavement of Man by modern industrialised society, and his ceaseless experimentation with dramatic form.

PART I An account of Adamov's life with a chronological  
record of his works

## PART I

Chapter 1 'Jeunesse'

Arthur Adamov's life presents a combination of suffering and self-awareness that calls to mind his Russian origins and a whole tradition of Russian writing from Dostoievsky to Solzhenitsyn. Suffering of one kind or another was the most real and most persistent experience of his life. It was out of this experience that he created much of his work, the dramatic as well as the autobiographical. The affirmation of suffering as the only certainty of human existence was made on the opening page of his first published work, L'Aveu:

Tout ce que je sais de moi, c'est que  
je souffre.<sup>1</sup>

and it reappeared thirty years later in his other great autobiographical work, L'Homme et l'Enfant. In his introduction to this, he explained:

Je ne me suis souvenu que des événements les plus  
sombres... Multiplicité des images au relief  
violent, parce que dans les moments où le temps  
lui-même s'efface, une certitude s'impose: celle  
d'exister.<sup>2</sup>

Both books are filled with an extraordinary catalogue of sufferings caused by obsessions, drug addiction, alcoholism, nervous illness, imprisonment and solitude. But these sufferings were never sought after or treasured; he was always an unwilling martyr, with the

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<sup>1</sup> L'Aveu, Paris, 1946, p.19. (This first section is dated 1938.)

<sup>2</sup> L'Homme et l'Enfant, Paris, 1968, p.7.

result that Adamov resembles more closely than any other modern author, his great friend Antonin Artaud's description of true artists as:

Des suppliciés que l'on brûle et qui font  
des signes sur leurs bûchers.<sup>3</sup>

Some months before Adamov's death, Gallimard republished L'Aveu, followed by some brief scenes or reminiscences in a volume entitled Je... Ils...<sup>4</sup>. These 'récits' deal with the same sufferings and obsessions as L'Aveu, but they are presented without the philosophical speculation surrounding the accounts of neurosis in the earlier book. It is from Je... Ils..., L'Aveu, and L'Homme et l'Enfant that most of the biographical information concerning Adamov comes. L'Homme et l'Enfant is especially valuable, since it goes back to his childhood, and there is very little to be learned from other sources about his first forty years before he became a playwright.

In this thesis, I am chiefly concerned with Adamov's theatre, and, from this point of view, L'Homme et l'Enfant is again extremely valuable. Adamov stressed in his introduction that the book was not an attempt at recreating his life; instead, he had written a literary autobiography, picking out the preoccupations and obsessions that were important for an understanding of his plays and his philosophy, leaving out everything else. It is particularly difficult to separate Adamov the man from Adamov the dramatist, partly because his own dreams and experiences formed the subject-matter for many of his plays, and partly because his

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<sup>3</sup> Antonin Artaud, Le Théâtre et son Double in Oeuvres Complètes, vol.

4, Paris, 1964, p.18.

<sup>4</sup> Paris, 1969.

own personal equilibrium came to depend on his ability to write. In Part I of this thesis, I have therefore drawn very heavily on L'Homme et l'Enfant and also on his diaries, some of which were printed in L'Homme et l'Enfant, some of which are still unpublished. This first Part, as well as providing relevant information concerning Adamov's life, also contains a brief discussion of his important works outside the theatre, always keeping in mind their importance in illuminating his dramatic work.

Arthur Adamov was born on 23rd August 1908 in Kislovodsk in the Caucasus. His father, a wealthy Russian of Armenian origins, owned a number of oil wells, and for Adamov's first six years the family were living a life of luxury in Baku on the Caspian Sea. He was accompanied, from the earliest age, by a French 'demoiselle', as was traditional in such families, and received all his education in French-speaking schools, so that although he did not live in France till the age of 16, French was always his first language.

Writing in L'Homme et l'Enfant about his first six years, Adamov showed how early he was afflicted by the obsessions that were to dominate his later life; or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that what Adamov remembered of his childhood was governed by his obsessions which were already in force at an early age. The book reveals a passionately single-minded intelligence whose later preoccupations can be seen to stem from early childhood in much the same way as Sartre's can in Les Mots.

One of the first things he mentioned, as if it had been with him

from birth, was his preoccupation with suicide:

J'ai voulu me suicider à vingt ans, puis à  
trente, puis avant d'atteindre la quarantaine.<sup>5</sup>

His death by suicide was finally to occur at the age of 61.<sup>6</sup>

The two things he remembered being most frightened of in his childhood were poverty and growing up. At first there seemed little enough cause for the first worry, but by the time he was fourteen, the family fortunes had been lost and Adamov remained in difficult financial circumstances for the rest of his life. The second fear, that of growing up, dominated him for a very long time; it is implied in his description of his first forty years as 'Jeunesse'. His inability to grow up, to break loose from the emotional domination of Father, Mother, Sister, is the clearest single influence on his theatre.

One of the elements of childhood that he was afraid to abandon was his system of superstitious rites which affected the most banal details of his every-day life and which were reinforced by the fear of terrible sanctions; these were never entirely to lose their power over him. Like many children of the period, he was solemnly warned at a very early age by his father that he would go mad if he masturbated and he received further superstitious indoctrination from his sister who made him afraid to venture into certain parts of his room:

Je n'osais pas aller du côté des fenêtres,  
m'approcher du radiateur, regarder sous mon

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<sup>5</sup> L'Homme et l'Enfant, p.14.

<sup>6</sup> On the night of Saturday-Sunday 14th-15th March 1970.

lit. Si je transgressais ces interdictions,  
j'étais perdu.<sup>7</sup>

The extraordinary power these things exerted over him foreshadows the obsessed figures in his plays, like Le Mutilé of La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre, forced to go through incomprehensible rituals in obedience to terrifying forces outside his control. Even the sexual obsessions manifested by certain characters in his plays and by Adamov himself in later life can be discovered in a small episode experienced when he was just six, and recorded in precise detail:

Une jeune Américaine (18 ans), rousse aux  
jambes minces, prend plaisir à torturer un  
chat. Une autre, une Anglaise (17 ans), blonde,  
le prend entre ses bras, le cajole, le console...  
Je m'identifiais au chat.<sup>8</sup>

In different forms, these two girls were to reappear again and again in his plays and his obsessions.

In June 1914 Adamov's father, who was an inveterate gambler, moved his family to Germany in order to be closer to the gaming tables of the spa resorts. On the outbreak of war, they moved to Geneva, where they passed from grandeur to poverty in the space of eight years. Here Adamov got his first taste for the theatre, watching the Pitoëffs, who were friends of his parents, acting Macbeth.

In L'Homme et l'Enfant, he again traced the awakening of obsessions which in later life were to dominate him: masochism, after falling off a bicycle:

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<sup>7</sup> L'Homme et l'Enfant, p.15.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.16.

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Mes genoux nus rouges, sanglants, exposés sur  
la table des Clouzot. Ma honte et un drôle  
de plaisir.<sup>9</sup>

Or the fascination with split personality and the fear of 'the other':

Un film ... Dr. Jekyll et Mr. Hyde, m'épouvante,  
surtout les séquences où le Dr. Jekyll,  
changeant de visage, devient l'autre.<sup>10</sup>

By 1922, the remains of the family fortunes had almost disappeared, the oil wells had been gambled away or nationalised, most of the family jewels had been sold and the family had to return to Germany, "paradis des miséreux".<sup>11</sup> They stayed in Mainz for two years, during which Adamov attended the French lycée. At this susceptible age of 14-16 he was already indulging in the most solitary forms of erotic experience, masturbation, masochist fantasies, failing to integrate these into any form of personal relationship:

Séparation absolue déjà entre l'érotisme et  
tout ce qui de près ou de loin peut ressembler  
à de l'amour.<sup>12</sup>

This separation also was to dominate his work; there are many examples of eroticism and masochism in his plays, but hardly a single example of the love which he so desperately desired and which he finally found after the Second World War.

During this important period in his development, the young Adamov's home life was unstable in the extreme. The decline in his parents' circumstances alone must have made a profound effect on the adolescent

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.21.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.20.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.22.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.24.

who as a child had been terrified of poverty. He particularly hated the humiliation of frequently having to search out his father at the casino (at the instigation of his mother) and listen to his lying excuses for his failure to return home<sup>13</sup>. The hatred which he built up for his father produced a counterbalancing guilt complex from which he suffered all his life.

Finally, in 1924, when he was 16, his parents moved to France, settling in Paris after a brief stay at Bourg-la-Reine. His father had great plans that he should become an engineer and Adamov's refusal to comply with this ambition fed the fires of his guilt complex as can be seen in Le Sens de la Marche where his feeling of not living up to what his father expected of him is vividly dramatised.

The next period of Adamov's life, running till the outbreak of war in 1939 was spent locked in the world of his obsessions; he recorded little in L'Homme et l'Enfant that fell outside his desperate quest for sexual fulfilment or his involvement with the fringe of Paris literary and political life. Apparently he never took a job and was often reduced to extreme poverty. But the café-centred life he led gave him time for very wide reading and brought him into contact with many of the well-known literary figures of the time.

Much of the part of L'Homme et l'Enfant covering this period reads like a fairy tale in which Adamov is continually being rescued from a seemingly hopeless situation by a saviour who turns out to be some well-

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.25.

known writer. For instance, at a demonstration in favour of Sacco and Vanzetti in 1927, he was saved from a mob lynching by the intervention of a man in a trench coat whom he later discovered to be Georges Bataille. Later on, he was officially expelled from France for his part in the demonstration, only to be saved at the last moment by a telephone call from Malraux to the minister. He wrote some surrealist poems that were liked by Eluard<sup>14</sup>, but he was not accepted as a member of the group and his disappointment at being excluded from one group or another grew into a permanent obsession.

Adamov began to develop a close relationship with the son of another Russian emigré family, with whom the Adamovs had been friends for some time. Their friendship was to be the basis for the couple of Arthur and Victor in Le Ping-Pong. Together, they decided that the best way of making contact with girls was to form a dramatic group, and they put on some plays in a programme which was the occasion of Adamov's first dramatic effort:

Mains Blanches, qui dure cinq minutes. Une fille,  
montée sur une chaise, prend la main d'un garçon  
également monté sur une chaise, la lâche, la  
reprend. Le théâtre de la séparation déjà.<sup>15</sup>

With 'Victor', he also published a review called Discontinuité. Together they pursued girls, but when Adamov finally persuaded one of them to sleep with him, he found that he was incapable of having intercourse and the knowledge of this 'impotence' drove him to greater reliance on

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<sup>14</sup> Published as 'Poèmes', Cahiers du Sud, 20ème année, août 1933, pp.438-439.

<sup>15</sup> L'Homme et l'Enfant, p.29.

masochistic erotic fantasies.

Much of his energy at this time was absorbed by his efforts to establish a relationship with a woman, efforts which nearly always ended in frustration, misunderstanding, suffering. But the style of his account in L'Homme et l'Enfant is never self-pitying, always controlled and evocative. There are evocative descriptions of, for example, the Montparnasse café 'le Dôme', or the first night of Strindberg's A Dream Play produced by Artaud,<sup>16</sup> a conjunction of forces that was to have considerable influence on him.

As time went on, he had a little more success in his attempts to create a stable relationship with a woman, but he continued to be hindered by poverty, police persecution because he was an alien, inability to escape from dependence on his family, and guilt at his sexual inability which helped to bring out his latent masochism. His descriptions of these things present many close parallels with the events and characters of the plays. For example, his first great love affair, with Irène, was bedevilled by his inability to supply her needs, both material and sexual. They set up house near his parents:

Comme cela, je n'aurai que deux pas à faire pour  
aller chercher à la maison la côtelette russe  
que 'maman' a préparée pour nous. Pas sorti  
de la famille encore!<sup>17</sup>

Several characters in his plays are incapable of escaping from the domination of a mother, and lose a wife or lover in the process.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp.34-35.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.39.

There was clearly some ambivalence on Irène's side of the relationship; she had other lovers while living with him, sometimes to pay off the debts they had accumulated, and afterwards she would describe her liaisons to Adamov. His situation, dependent on this woman who was both tender and cruel to him, resembles that of many of his plays' central characters. The nickname of 'Ern' which Irène gave to him stuck with him for the rest of his life, and it is no accident that the two cruellest women in his early plays are named Erna and Irène.

In 1933, his father committed suicide, perhaps because of a severe gambling loss. This suicide had a profound and lasting effect on Adamov. L'Homme et l'Enfant simply gives the bare details:

Je détestais mon père, c'est donc moi l'ai tué.  
 Pendant au moins une année, j'en étais sûr.  
 Je ne suis pas jusqu'à présent sûr du  
 contraire.<sup>18</sup>

A stronger impression of its emotional impact can be gained from observing the reactions of Henri to the Father figure in Le Sens de la Marche or the account given by A. of his father's death in Comme nous avons été.

He travelled a certain amount, going to Portugal and then to Ireland at the invitation of a friend named Cramer. He went, in both cases, partly to escape financial difficulties, but began to hate Cramer because he saw him as a father figure. In any case he was always drawn inevitably back to Paris, the only place in which he could ever really

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.45.

feel at home. On a visit to Czechoslovakia he discovered the erotic delights of submitting himself to the whims of prostitutes; he also discovered that he was unable, in his writing, to use any word including the letter M. He was terrified. As war approached, his conditions, material and mental were deteriorating. He was subjected to continual harassment by the police for not having renewed his alien's 'carte de séjour'. He thought of going to fight in the Spanish Civil War, but could not make the decision, partly for fear of the effect it would have on Agathe, with whom he was living at this time. But about this time, he also began to receive his first commissions for literary work, translations of Rilke and Jung.

On the outbreak of war he left Paris for the South of France, where he was finally arrested on May 8th, 1941. The charge was "Entendu tenant des propos hostiles au gouvernement de Vichy".<sup>19</sup> In L'Homme et l'Enfant he passed over the war period in a few pages. The memory of his internment in the concentration camp at Argelès-sur-mer was perhaps too painful to be dwelt on, but, still more important, the memory of his own passive acceptance of his lot was not welcome to him in his later, committed frame of mind. However, the experience of life in this camp, coming as the culmination of twenty years spent as a refugee, was to provide him with the imaginative raw material for creating the peculiar atmosphere of his early plays, all of which take place in what has been described as 'l'univers concentrationnaire'.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.66.

He was saved from the horrors of the camp by the assistance of some Marseilles Quakers. He returned to Paris, where he remained for the rest of the war, writing L'Aveu, and looking after Roger Gilbert-Lecomte, who died in a state of extreme poverty and drug addiction. In L'Homme et l'Enfant he confessed that his failure to engage in any resistance activity was the result of what he called 'la paresse' and of a wilfully pessimistic attitude towards political activity. As his early plays demonstrate, he believed that the efforts of the idealistic revolutionary and of the sadistic fascist would both end in exactly the same result: a repressive police state founded on terror. What he meant by 'la paresse' is not very clear. Partly, no doubt, it was the product of this fatalistic attitude towards political activity, partly his obsessed, Mother-dominated mental state which made it impossible for him to undertake any genuinely independent action, and the guilt feelings that became associated with this, partly perhaps the consequence of his considerable use of drugs at this time. For all these reasons, and despite the fact that, as he said in L'Homme et l'Enfant, he was not so politically naive as he liked to pretend, he was simply incapable of making a deliberate commitment to militant activity. Just as he had been unable to make the decision to leave for the Spanish Civil War, so he could not make the decision to join the Resistance. This is brought out in a curious way by his phrase:

Mais quoi, anti-allemands, aux côtés de Mauriac,  
Aron, Saint-Exupéry?<sup>20</sup>

The sort of conviction which enabled these men to act was precisely

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.79.

what Adamov lacked, and indeed opposed at this stage.

As he had nursed Gilbert-Lecomte through his last painful months of existence, so he rescued another friend, Antonin Artaud, helped him to get away from the Rodez asylum, and continued to befriend and help him until his suicide. He wrote very movingly of Artaud who for a long time remained for him "la vérité du théâtre",<sup>21</sup> and a strong influence on Adamov's own theatre.

The first section of L'Homme et l'Enfant ends with the liberation of France, the start of his work on La Parodie, and his meeting with Jacqueline Atrousseau. For Adamov, the national liberation was accompanied by the start of a long-awaited personal one: at last he became able to establish a stable relationship with one woman, the one who was to become his wife; at last he was able to dominate his obsessions sufficiently to write about them and thus to liberate himself from them still more.

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<sup>21</sup> See Ici et Maintenant, Paris, 1964, p.84.

PART I

Chapter 2 Early non-dramatic work 1935-1946

L'Aveu was published in 1946; its various sections bear different dates running from 1938 to 1943. As this might suggest, the ideas expressed in the book give evidence of a continuous process of change and development. In a note written just before publication, Adamov stated that even the preface, which he had written in 1943, was no longer a true reflection of what he believed. The book is a meditation on two main themes. Firstly on his own state of mind, through which he hoped to attain self-knowledge and to share with others the burden of his anguish; this is the principal subject matter of the first two parts, entitled 'Ce qu'il y a' and 'L'Humiliation sans fin'. Secondly, it is a meditation on the state of the culture and civilisation of the period in which it was written: 'Le Temps de l'ignominie', and 'Journal', the last two parts of the work, open out onto this wider theme without abandoning the personal preoccupations of the first two parts. Since the period was one of ignominy for France, his own personal obsessions with humiliation and degradation form a particularly effective counterpoint to his commentary on the events of the time. A few biographical details appear, and certain incidents only briefly touched on in L'Homme et l'Enfant are described in great detail. There is, for example, the extraordinary account of his submission to a prostitute who wanted to paint his face. This was referred to in three lines in L'Homme et l'Enfant<sup>1</sup>, but in L'Aveu it was described in searing detail<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> L'Homme et l'Enfant, p.62.

<sup>2</sup> L'Aveu, pp.64-67.

However, the book is not so much a collection of 'Souvenirs', like L'Homme et l'Enfant, but rather a detailed investigation of states of mind: his own, and those he discovered in people around him.

In this way he achieved not only a piece of writing of remarkable power (Martin Esslin called it a "Dostoievskian masterpiece"), but also two things which were to be of great importance to his development as a dramatist. The first was a personal liberation. He discovered that by describing his mental torments, he achieved some measure of liberation from them. Indeed it seemed almost the only thing that could help him:

Mon seul recours est d'écrire, d'en faire  
part pour ne plus l'éprouver toute entière,  
m'en décharger pour une part si petite soit-  
elle.<sup>3</sup>

This process of liberation was one that was to exert its therapeutic effect more and more successfully as he began to write plays.

The second important thing he achieved in this book was the first step towards a formulation of a philosophy of the Absurd, not in the systematic manner of Camus' Mythe de Sisyphe, but rather in the allusive and intuitive manner also characteristic of Beckett's writing at this time, a formulation which in its later dramatic form, was to become one of the most important contributions to the development of the French theatre after the war.

Adamov's meditations on his own mental states reveal, among other

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.26.

things, how much of his material for the early plays was drawn from his own personal obsessions. He always acknowledged this when talking or writing about his plays, but nowhere else did he analyse these obsessions in such detail.

At the very foundation of his consciousness lay an acute awareness of suffering and of isolation expressed in what Esslin called "a brilliant statement of the metaphysical anguish that forms the basis of Existentialist literature and of the Theatre of the Absurd":

Ce qu'il y a? Je sais d'abord qu'il y a moi.  
Mais qui est moi? Mais qu'est-ce que moi?  
Tout ce que je sais de moi, c'est que je  
souffre. Et si je souffre c'est qu'à l'origine  
de moi-même il y a mutilation, séparation.  
Je suis séparé. Ce dont je suis séparé, je  
ne sais pas le nommer. Mais je suis séparé.<sup>5</sup>  
(A footnote adds: Autrefois, cela s'appelait  
Dieu. Maintenant, il n'y a plus de nom.)

The anguish expressed here underlies everything that Adamov ever wrote, and although it took on different forms, sometimes more metaphysical, sometimes more materialistic, his works could be seen as one perpetual effort to investigate this anguish and to come to terms with it.

The idea of an awareness of suffering as the most fundamental certainty of human being was stressed repeatedly in the book:

La piqûre de la pointe aiguë de la souffrance seule  
tient éveillé. Si l'homme n'était pas supplicié, il  
dormirait d'un sommeil sans espoir.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, London, 1962, p.66.

<sup>5</sup> L'Aveu, p.19.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.24.

Thus all the important characters in Adamov's early plays suffer; and they live for us only because they suffer and can express their suffering. In every case, their suffering stems at least partly from separation. They are separated from themselves and from each other, as we shall see. But above all, they are cut off from a meaningful existence in a universe where their desires and aims would correspond to the realities around them. In some characters, this state of being cut off is expressed quite literally by physical mutilation, as in the case of Le Mutilé in La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre.

Adamov's vision of the universe was even more terrifying than this would suggest, for not only was he cut off from all meaningful harmony with his surroundings, but these were teeming with malevolent powers which were positively hostile to him and which demanded constant propitiation. His life was lived in a state of total submission to superstitious rituals designed to protect him from these nameless powers. Much of the book recounts his struggle to resist his urge to perform these rituals, a struggle which only ended by increasing their hold over him. The ritual that recurred most frequently involved wood, earth and fire. For example:

Baiser le bois de ma canne, toucher le sol de la  
paume de ma main, faire jaillir la flamme d'une allumette.<sup>7</sup>

He devoted considerable space to the elucidation of the symbolic meanings contained in these and other gestures. He had clearly dwelt for a long time on them, almost cherished them. But the power they held

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.80.

over him made them as frightening as the rituals to which Le Mutilé finds he must submit:

Ces gestes inutiles resteraient inoffensifs si leur souci constant, la crainte de les oublier une seule fois n'envahissaient tout le champ de ma conscience, ne rongeaient, peu à peu, le temps de ma vie, exilant toute liberté.<sup>8</sup>

We have seen from L'Homme et l'Enfant that such fears formed some of his earliest memories. The same is true of another dominating obsession: sexual masochism. He recalled childhood memories of bicycling barefoot till the pedals cut his feet and also of stripping his clothes off and lying naked on a pavement, terrified, yet longing for someone to catch him in this degrading position. Later this developed into an incurable desire to be humiliated by the most despicable prostitutes. He felt guilty, but did not know what crime he should expiate and so his longing for absolution became fixed on the act of humiliation itself:

Le goût de la chute n'a pas de fin. Tombé au bas du monde, je veux découvrir les tréfonds où m'effondrer plus bas encore, sous la femme. Je veux être plus bas que ce qui est bas.<sup>9</sup>

Woman represented for him:

L'image de tout ce qui, venant d'en bas, possède l'attrance du gouffre.<sup>10</sup>

The most remarkable parts of the book are those describing the agonised hours he spent wandering round the poorest cafés, till he found a prostitute who would allow him to kiss her feet and then kick him in

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.86.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp.60-61.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.60.

the face while he grovelled beneath her, like N. in La Parodie.

With this desire for degradation, he experienced a sense of complete isolation; but the isolation of all human beings, an important theme in his early plays, is something which was only gradually borne in on him, as he slowly came to believe that all men felt as lonely as he himself did. At first he was conscious only of his own sense of isolation which he saw variously as separation from what once was called God, from the world, from others, from a lover, even from himself: "Entre moi et moi, il y a toujours écart."<sup>11</sup> And this 'écart' becomes an 'écartèlement', a 'crucifixion' of man who can only grasp his own existence through consciousness of his own suffering at being torn apart.

But towards the end of the book, this developed from a private to an all-embracing view of human existence:

Je crois comprendre que je ne suis pas seul à me sentir seul, et alors se confirme mon sentiment que la peur est au fond de tout. Je saisis l'insuffisance d'une représentation du monde où je serais l'unique sujet pensant. Maintenant je vois se dresser autant d'autres qu'il y a d'existences distinctes. Et chaque existence est un mur.<sup>12</sup>

This sense of universal isolation completed Adamov's despairing vision of the world. But the gloom and despair did not quite envelope all, since two small possibilities for escape appear in the course of the book. The first is found in the healing power of love. The book

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.23.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.126.

contains many appeals to a woman who is never named, but for whom he feels an overwhelming love. Although separated from this woman, he was sure that if only he could rejoin her she would be his salvation. His description of her provided a counterbalance to the emotions aroused in him by the prostitutes:

Le pur contact de ton corps éloigne de moi  
l'angoisse. Tu rends vaines désormais les  
conjurations par le bois et la flamme... C'est  
toi, la haute flamme blanche au grand jour.  
Toi aussi, la forêt profonde et secrète ...  
Je ne veux ni être humilié par toi ni t'humilier.  
... Plus de victime, plus de bourreau. ... Deux  
êtres qui s'aiment, communient dans l'unique  
sacrifice de l'amour.<sup>13</sup>

Since the book was written between 1938 and 1943, the woman concerned was presumably Agathe. L'Homme et l'Enfant tells us how he met her in 1935 and lived with her for a while but became separated from her by the war. He made a dangerous journey to see her once in 1940 but then did not see her again till after the war was over and L'Aveu written. But it is not so important to identify the woman as to see how already love represented for him the one healing power that he believed in. When, after the war, he met Jacqueline Autrusseau with whom he was able to build a real love-relationship, the first condition for his mental recovery was finally fulfilled.

The second ray of hope was provided by his ability to express himself, albeit with great difficulty, which gave him a feeling of sharing some of the burden and helped him to come to terms with his

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp.99-100.

neurosis in two different ways. First he was able to escape from his feeling of complete futility, since he came to believe that he had something important to say. Secondly, he was able to justify his neurosis on the grounds that it confers on its victims a 'lucidité suraiguë':

La névrose touche à la fois la sainteté et la folie par leur point commun: l'idée fixe. L'idée fixe peut faire d'un homme un véritable aliéné ... Mais elle peut aussi devenir la contemplation fixe qui lui permet d'accéder, à travers la singularité de son mal, aux grandes lois générales où s'inscrit la plus haute compréhension du monde.<sup>14</sup>

As we shall see, he already saw himself as a poet, and stated: "Les voies de la névrose sont celles mêmes de la poésie".<sup>15</sup>

However, L'Aveu was only a first, rather blind step along this road. After about 1945, supported by the love of Jacqueline Autrusseau, he was able to achieve liberation from his obsessions through his writing, but during the war years he was passing through a crucible of suffering and humiliation, cut off from Agathe, uprooted from Paris, captured, imprisoned, released, living in constant insecurity, so that it is not surprising to find the small ray of hope far outweighed by the fatalism which is ever-present in L'Aveu. It is in the introduction that he first used the phrase 'le côté incurable des choses' and he traced back through the book his growing conviction of the futility of all human effort:

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., pp.57-58.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.89.

Je me doutais déjà qu'il n'est pas donné à  
l'homme de trouver le chemin qui le mène au but.<sup>16</sup>

He felt desperate remorse at his lost opportunities and lack of achievement and it was only in his belief that the duty of the writer was to share the despair of the age, so as to understand and denounce it, that he could find justification. In his meditation on the events of the time, he revealed a vision which closely paralleled and was conditioned by his own sufferings and obsessions, but which also revealed a certain lucidity, an ability to use the privileged insight conferred on him by his sufferings to put his finger very accurately on certain aspects of the times he was living through.

His meditations are characterised by a profusion of apocalyptic imagery and considerable interest in the world's great religions, an interest which stemmed partly from his own sense of a need for absolution and longing for the power of prayer. He resembled Artaud in his nostalgia for a whole order of society in which what he called the 'sacer' still held sway, and Man could find harmony in the regular rituals of church or temple which bound all together in an ordered and purposeful universe. But like Artaud, Camus and many others, he felt there was no longer any hope to be found in the old forms of the sacred as embodied in religious systems:

Les anciennes sagesses sont perdues, les formes  
oubliées à jamais. Le mal est accompli, il n'y a  
plus rien à faire. Pas de salut de ce côté.<sup>17</sup>

These are the opening sentences of the last three paragraphs of

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.10.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.115.

'Le Temps de l'ignominie', dated 1939-1940. The same paragraphs, slightly adapted, appear in the introduction to his translation of Rilke's Livre de la Pauvreté et de la Mort<sup>18</sup>. In L'Homme et l'Enfant Adamov mentioned this translation, saying that as early as 1935, he was depending on the money he would get for it. And since his introduction is dated 1940, he must have been working on it or thinking about it for at least five years. This period coincides with the time when he was beginning to write L'Aveu, and so it is interesting to compare Rilke's poem, and especially Adamov's introduction to it, with the ideas he was putting forward in L'Aveu.

He saw Rilke as an archetype of the modern artist who was both 'témoin' and 'martyr'. In him, he found someone who shared his reverence for religious and etymological origins:

La grande originalité de Rilke, c'est de remonter aux origines.<sup>19</sup>

and also someone who was animated by the same fears and passions:

Dans le monde, il voyait la peur qui est toujours  
peur de la mort, et puis l'amour, et puis plus rien.<sup>20</sup>

From Rilke's poem about the lost values of death, self-denial, poverty, Adamov drew his conclusions of despair, using, as indicated above, almost identical words to those on page 115 of L'Aveu. But here he

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<sup>18</sup> Rainer-Maria Rilke, Le Livre de la Pauvreté et de la Mort, Alger, 1941. (Collection 'Fontaine', directeur Max-Pol Fouchet, no.1.)

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. (This publication has no page numbers.) Both underlinings are Adamov's.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

concluded the passage differently, stating particularly clearly the centrality of the death of religion in bringing about this process of degradation:

Aujourd'hui, à chaque homme reste une tâche, arracher toutes les peaux mortes, les dépouilles sociales, se dénuder jusqu'à se trouver lui-même.  
 Le temps des noms vivants est mort, bien mort. Dans la nuit, plus de noms, plus de formes.  
 C'est maintenant même qu'il convient de lire l'oeuvre de Rilke, parce qu'elle pose dans toute son horreur le problème qui nous rend fous, parce qu'il dit le mal qui nous tue: la mort des religions.<sup>21</sup>

In the light of this view that the death of religion was largely responsible for the desperate state of mankind, it is interesting that during this period he had also been working on a translation of Jung. The work he translated was Le Moi et L'Inconscient<sup>22</sup>. This deals particularly with Jung's theories of the collective unconscious and the inherited need for God and we may assume it had some influence on Adamov at this period, although he repudiated Jung in the fifties and remained hostile towards his work for the rest of his life. Clearly, at this time, he was attracted by Jung's semantic interpretations of dreams and his interest in the similar images which appeared from the depths of widely differing people's minds. In 1968 he saw his interest in Jung, however slight, as self-indulgent speculation:

Il fallait s'attendre à ce que Jung rapplique:  
 "le sexe est bien le centre de l'homme, mais

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid. The first paragraph quoted also appears in L'Aveu, p.115.

<sup>22</sup> Carl Gustav Jung, Le Moi et L'Inconscient, Paris, 1938. (A translation with occasional footnotes giving cross-references.)

non le centre suprême." Puis il va s'agir  
d'autres plans, de plans supérieurs, etc.<sup>23</sup>

But Adamov's speculations in L'Aveu, including his remarks on religion, were not of a totally gratuitous nature: they reveal a passionate belief in the dignity of Man, which remained with him all his life, although it was later expressed in less idealistic terms. It was this belief that made the degradations and humiliations of the time so horrible. He quoted various examples of ancient societies in which the dignity of Man was preserved by regular public rituals designed to teach him his true nature.<sup>24</sup>

There are a few passages in the book where the vision of unspeakable degradation is matched by a vision of great splendour. In such passages, he was always conscious of what he believed to be the poet's rôle: that of revealer and interpreter:

La mission essentielle de tout poète est de  
dévoiler l'esprit caché dans les apparences  
en nommant chaque chose par son nom.<sup>25</sup>

The description of a sunset, for example, was set down both for the beauty of the thing, and for the symbolic significance he found in it. His interpretations of symbols were passionate in the extreme and frequently couched in the rhetoric of idealism which he was later to reject entirely. Thus, for example, he described the star of David, which had become a sign of shame to be worn by all Jews, with a

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<sup>23</sup> Je ... Ils ..., p.11.

<sup>24</sup> see e.g. L'Aveu, p.112.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp.105-106.

passionate account of the meaning behind the locked triangles of the star:

C'est la base horizontale des eaux d'en bas, appelées par le feu du zénith, c'est l'horizontalité du ciel d'en haut appelé par le feu du centre, c'est l'ardeur mâle comblant l'abîme de toute féminité, c'est l'afflux qui joint la haute maison de lumière du père à la caverne des mondes creusée dans la nuit mère, la grande matrice obscure.<sup>26</sup>

Just as this splendid symbol had become degraded to the point of being used for racialist purposes, so every description evoking any splendour was set in a context of conditions profoundly hostile to it: conditions of total degradation. And it is on these that most of the book concentrates. To Adamov, it seemed as if none of the things that once had given meaning to life were left. Instead of the grand, integrated vision, he found only degradation and isolation. Not only had the great religions and philosophies lost their power, but more serious still, he felt that language itself had been degraded. And though he could denounce this tragedy, it was a difficult task, since to do so he had to use language for a purpose it had not been intended to fulfil:

Tentative désespérée, car le langage a été créé pour glorifier, pour énoncer, et non pour dénoncer.<sup>27</sup>

Adamov was very sensitive in matters relating to language or to words. In L'Aveu he spoke of words as one might speak of living creatures, and

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p.113.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p.105.

it was with a strong sense of sympathy that he described the violence done to them:

Les mots, ces gardiens du sens ne sont pas immortels, invulnérables. Ils sont revêtus d'une chair saignante et sans défense. Comme les hommes, les mots souffrent. Toutes les formes du mal attaquent, atteignent leur vie faible et fragile comme la vie humaine. Et le mensonge les blesse au coeur. Il en va des mots de nos vocabulaires vieilliss comme de grands malades. <sup>28</sup> Certains peuvent survivre, d'autres sont incurables.

And yet despite their sickness, Adamov interrogated them passionately, searching desperately for their original meanings which had held such power. L'Aveu contains frequent examples of etymological investigation in an attempt to throw light on such words as 'faute' in the sense of guilt or sin. This enabled him to link the sense of guilt to the root cause of all suffering: the sense of isolation:

Dans le mot faute, il y a d'une part, faille, absence (faute de), et, d'autre part, l'idée de tomber (le fall germanique). Faute, c'est donc absence et chute. Mais précisément absence et chute c'est l'aspect terrible de la séparation. <sup>29</sup>

For someone with this sensitive appreciation of words, the final despair is expressed by the inability to apply any word or give any name. Thus he entitled one section of the book Le Temps de l'Ignominie and commenced it:

Ignominie: ce qui n'a pas de nom, l'innommable. <sup>30</sup>

n/ Beckett has used the term 'L'In<sup>k</sup>ommable' in a similar way to denote that which continues beyond despair and is therefore beyond definition.

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28 Ibid., p.45.

29 Ibid., p.57.

30 Ibid., p.105.

This concern for words is what lay behind his later preoccupation with language, which is all the more remarkable, since in his plays he never allowed himself to be intoxicated by words but maintained a strict control and focussed attention on the words themselves, continuing the process of investigation and interrogation. L'Aveu is the only example of a work by Adamov in which he occasionally allows a proliferation of words to become over-complicated or mystifying. That this happened at all is no doubt, partly because of the extraordinary apocalyptic nature of his overall vision in the book, which he had discarded by the time he came to write plays, although the mental scars it had left were still visible.

Like other poets who have lived through great catastrophes, he clearly believed that things had reached the point where the ultimate degradation must at last be leading to a regeneration of the world. It was in this attitude that the two sides of his vision, the splendour as well as the degradation could be united. His language, while not specifically Christian, had frequent religious overtones, some of them sufficiently Biblical to remind one of D.H. Lawrence after the First World War. As Lawrence saw the reign of God the Son coming to an end, so Adamov talked of:

La nuit profonde où dans l'universelle ignorance  
le règne du Fils a pris fin.<sup>31</sup>

He was suggesting here that what was being lost was the communication that could exist between Man and God when God was revealed in the very form of Man. But more often the language used implied a general rather

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p.115.

than specific religious significance.

The duality in his thought at this time, the despair at what is, along with a sort of desperate hope in what could be, was present in all areas of his thought. We have seen, for example, how Woman was both the lowest of the low, and the one saviour. The most paradoxical thing about Adamov's attitude at this time was that while formulating this extraordinary statement of the Absurd, he also believed in the coming of a new age, which was to be the chief theme of his review L'Heure Nouvelle, as its title implies. Both at a personal and at a collective level, Adamov was struggling to use the lesson learnt from the anguished experience of the Absurd, hoping that it would provide a foundation for the great renewal:

Peut-être, tout le morne discours vidé de sens  
que rabâche l'humanité sans flamme d'aujourd'hui,  
sonnera-t-il au coeur du veilleur solitaire dans  
toute son horreur et son absurdité sans bornes et  
alors cet homme comprenant soudain qu'il ne  
comprend pas commencera à comprendre.<sup>32</sup>

Although this formulation still bore the marks of a somewhat romantic idealism, it was from this belief in the need to "tear away the dead skin", to denounce everything that had lost its meaning or become perverted, that the spark of revolt was kindled, a revolt that was to sustain him for the rest of his life:

Je ne peux pas me résigner au monde, dire qui  
à ce qui est, louer la justice de tout. Je ne  
le peux ni ne le veux. ... Je vois la seule

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.114.

dignité de l'homme dans l'insoumission de son  
esprit aux lois du monde.<sup>33</sup>

The spirit of revolt evident in this passage is very similar to the idea of revolt that Camus draws as one of the conclusions of the Absurd in Le Mythe de Sisyphe. And it is from this spirit that all of Adamov's later work can be seen to stem. Refusing to accept the domination of his obsessions, he continued to write, liberating himself bit by bit. Denouncing the futility of life, paradoxically exerting passionate efforts to show the fundamental pointlessness of both passion and action. Then gradually, as he becomes more and more liberated from total despair, discovering the more limited 'lois du monde' against which he could revolt; discovering also a more positive function for language: to reveal certain specific abuses of language and show up their mystifying power in precise examples rather than despairing of all possible verbal forms.

Shortly after the war, Adamov was given the job of editing a literary review published by Editions de Minuit and entitled L'Heure Nouvelle. Although his work on this review falls into the period which he later rejected, along with L'Aveu and his early plays, he still attributed some value to it, if only for its poems. In L'Homme et l'Enfant he described it thus:

Textes théoriques, confus, nuls. Poèmes très  
beaux.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.147.

<sup>34</sup> L'Homme et l'Enfant, p.80.

Adamov was always fascinated by poetry. His first published works were poems and although he did not return to poetry, it continued to be one of his major interests: he paid much attention to Brecht's poems and retained a life-long admiration for Rimbaud, whom he called "celui qui a réinventé le langage poétique".<sup>35</sup> In the thirties and forties he was deeply attracted to such poets as Ribbemont-Dessaigues, Gilbert-Lecomte, Char, Thomas, Prévert and Artaud, and it is from this rather exclusive selection that the majority of the texts were drawn.

The first number of the review was dated simply 1945, the second, undated, appeared in 1946. Each number was to have a particular theme: the first attempted to give a broad summary of contemporary trends, artistic, philosophical, political. The theme of the second was given as 'Le problème religieux', that of the third was originally to have been 'Le problème de la sexualité et particulièrement de la névrose'. But when the second number appeared, the problems of sexuality and neurosis had been put off to number four and number three was to deal with 'Le problème du langage'. These four titles cover all Adamov's preoccupations at the time; his work on the review provided him with an important exercise in thinking out his ideas during this vital period, and we can see, in the way he approached them, how he developed the awareness of his own case and the ability to work from his particular experience towards statements of general validity.

In a long opening editorial entitled 'Assignation', he pursued

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<sup>35</sup> Private Interview, 12.9.69. Adamov also devoted a page of his journal (22 mars 1968) to Rimbaud.

the preoccupations of L'Aveu: the despair over the loss of the 'sacer', the degradation of ideals and of words. He analysed even more keenly than in L'Aveu the desperate state of affairs where there is no meaning in the universe for man to find:

Ce ne peut être pour rien que depuis environ un siècle, toute expérience vraie s'est traduite par un cri.<sup>36</sup>

His analysis of the representation of suffering in modern art was both passionate and sensitive; through his analysis of paintings, Picasso's 'Femme qui pleure' for example, one can see the way his own creative ideas took shape. One of the most important comments he had to make was that the modern artist gave pride of place to the representation of absence rather than presence, 'l'innomé' over 'le nommé':

La phrase de Cézanne: 'les objets sont des accidents de la lumière' ... la métaphysique de l'absence dans l'oeuvre de Mallarmé.<sup>37</sup>

This idea of a 'literature of absence' expressing itself through 'le cri', was clearly what he saw himself creating in his first plays. He finished his editorial by saying that they would publish only:

Les témoignages du dépouillement qui caractérise l'époque.<sup>38</sup>

Some extracts from L'Aveu were published and there was a short note by Adamov on the preeminence of poetry among literary forms, followed by poems by Roger Gilbert-Lecomte, Michel Bourdel, Henri Thomas, Armen

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36 L'Heure Nouvelle, no.1, 1945, p.5.

37 Ibid., p.5 (footnote).

38 Ibid., p.6.

Lubin, Jacques Prévert.

Marthe Robert, who helped Adamov to edit the review, wrote a very interesting piece on Kafka in which she used terms which echo very closely the preoccupations and language of Adamov. For example, she showed how Kafka brought out:

L'Impossibilité de vivre et ... la solitude  
implacable à laquelle l'homme moderne est condamné.<sup>39</sup>

She also contributed her translation of a short story by Kafka to the second volume of L'Heure Nouvelle.

Among the other items in the first number of L'Heure Nouvelle, was an introduction by the editors to the work of Roger Gilbert-Lecomte followed by some extracts of his work. The introduction quotes him as saying:

La souffrance, rien que la souffrance au fond  
de tout être vivant témoigne de la vie ...  
L'angoisse, le premier et le plus vieux  
sentiment humain, est fonction même de la  
conscience.<sup>40</sup>

This is very close to the expression of the link between suffering and consciousness at the beginning of L'Aveu,<sup>41</sup> and is one of the points at which we can most clearly see what an influence Gilbert-Lecomte exerted over Adamov in the late thirties and early forties when he was beginning to write. It must have been largely thanks to his friendship with Gilbert-Lecomte and Artaud, both of whom he admired enormously,

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.22.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p.33.

<sup>41</sup> L'Aveu, p.24. Quoted above, p.5.

that he gave in during this period to the temptation to see himself as a visionary. It is a temptation which he had always understood, but one which he kept strictly under control for the last twenty years of his life. In a sentence from one of Gilbert-Lecomte's texts published in number two of L'Heure Nouvelle, entitled La Lézarde, we see precisely summed up the vision which lay behind Adamov's work on the review, as it had lain behind L'Aveu:

Si toutes les vieilles institutions lézardées ne sont pas déjà tombées en poussière, c'est que n'est pas encore née la nouvelle synthèse qui les anéantira dans la fureur.<sup>42</sup>

It must have been desperately disappointing to Adamov, having shared such apocalyptic visions, to discover that after all, no brave new world was forthcoming.

But perhaps the most interesting item in L'Heure Nouvelle for Adamov's later dramatic development as a playwright is a fairly long examination by his friend Henri Thomas of some of Artaud's most important themes entitled 'Le Théâtre Mort et Vivant.' In this article, Thomas tried to be as faithful as possible to Artaud, quoting him wherever possible. It was the quality of intense life in everything of Artaud's that he was most keen to stress. He quoted Artaud's own definition of cruelty as:

Cette rigueur, et cette vie qui passe outre et s'exerce dans la torture et le piétinement de tout, ce sentiment implacable et pur, c'est cela qui est la Cruauté.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> L'Heure Nouvelle, no.2, 1946, p.33.

<sup>43</sup> L'Heure Nouvelle, no.1, p.50.

It is worth comparing this with an analysis of cruelty in the second number, signed by Adamov and Marthe Robert, in which cruelty is defined as the meeting point which links man to the all-powerful laws of the universe and therefore to the source of all life. They are very keen to point out that this conception of cruelty has nothing to do with the sadistic brutality which characterised the German guards in the Nazi prisoner of war camps. Adamov made this point again in his 'Introduction à Antonin Artaud', published in 1947, where he pointed out that, for Artaud,

Tout ce qui agit est une cruauté. C'est sur cette idée d'action poussée à bout, et extrême que le théâtre doit se renouveler.<sup>44</sup>

He saw the function of the theatre of cruelty as distinctly purgative and one which should extend beyond the narrow limits of the theatre out into everyday life.

A considerable personal friendship grew up between Adamov and Artaud, and I have tried to show in Part II, Chapter 1, what similarities there were between the two men's views on the theatre. The first work which Adamov did for the radio was an appreciation of Artaud's book on Van Gogh, and it is particularly interesting to see that Artaud wrote a piece in praise of L'Aveu, an extraordinary exalted poem, which, by its very means of expression, helps to shed light on Adamov's attitude to metaphysical problems at this stage of his life:

...ce quelque chose donc qui a été laissé dans l'au-delà de nous-mêmes, et qui fait que l'au-delà existe mais ne fait plus partie de nous-mêmes, je veux dire, de la physique intrinsèque,

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<sup>44</sup> 'Introduction à Antonin Artaud', Paru, no.29, avril 1947, p.8.

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archaïque de notre anatomie.

Cet au-delà comme un quelque chose entre l'humour noir et le coq-à-l'âne qui pleure, et qu'on appelle mais Arthur Adamov va vous le dire, car je crois que le livre d'Arthur Adamov a été écrit, et qu'il pleure l'assassinat prénatal de la poésie.<sup>45</sup>

The first number of L'Heure Nouvelle concluded with one or two book reviews including one of Georges Bataille's L'Expérience Intérieure by Adamov. Once again, he returns to his favourite themes, the inadequacy and degeneracy of all contemporary forms, whether they be linguistic, religious, philosophical or social, and the value of a metaphysics revealed by personal neurosis.

The second and last number pursued much the same themes and was made up of the same type of material. Indeed, Adamov stated in the opening paragraph that:

Le but de ce second cahier est de rendre explicite, en s'appuyant sur des exemples, tout ce que nous avons déjà affirmé.<sup>46</sup>

It is headed by three editorial pieces, two by Adamov, the first entitled 'Le Refus' and the third, 'Une Fin et un Commencement', the latter being a paraphrase of some of the ideas of L'Aveu. The second is the piece 'Sur la Cruauté' already mentioned. The pattern of the rest of the review is as before, articles, literary or philosophical, texts, poems and book reviews. In this volume, however, they are all linked by the central theme of religion. Again the dominant idea is the death of religion and the plight of Man denied it, but the editors

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<sup>45</sup> 'L'Intempestive Mort et L'Aveu d'Arthur Adamov', Cahiers de la Pléiade, no.2, avril 1947, pp.138-140.

<sup>46</sup> L'Heure Nouvelle, no.2, p.3.

also gave proof of a positive interest in wide varieties of mystical experience, including articles on Meister Eckhart, The Tibetan book of the dead, Karl Jaspers among others. It is interesting to see that in 'Une Fin et un Commencement', Adamov ascribes modern Man's sense of impotence not only to the death of religion, which he says stemmed from the discovery that there were different religions with equally valid claims, but also from the discovery of the relativity of science:

Hier encore empli d'orgueil par les promesses de la science, l'homme est placé brutalement devant la froide révélation de son impuissance. Mais c'est précisément de la conscience de son impuissance que l'homme moderne tire sa force.<sup>47</sup>

The last sentence could be compared with the line quoted above from L'Aveu,<sup>48</sup> in which Adamov stated that only in the knowledge of our real ignorance can we proceed:

Alors cet homme comprenant soudain qu'il ne comprend pas commencera à comprendre.<sup>49</sup>

The attitude which draws some strength from the knowledge of its own impotence is characteristic of N. in La Parodie and was an important part of Adamov's thinking at this time.

For someone looking back on Adamov's career L'Heure Nouvelle is of great interest, since it demonstrates his extraordinarily single-minded ability to draw together all the literary sources of his preoccupations at the time: Artaud, Kafka, Gilbert-Lecomte, etc. But

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p.14 (footnote).

<sup>48</sup> see above, p.30.

<sup>49</sup> L'Aveu, p.114.

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much of it is confused, even pretentious, and this very single-mindedness gives it a somewhat claustrophobic atmosphere; it is not really surprising that as a literary review it failed to find a public. Too many of its ideas were ahead of its time, others too visionary or too extreme. Furthermore, Adamov's unwillingness to print contributions from any but a very select few meant that the general effect was bound to be somewhat narrow. His idea of the review was excessively élitist. He believed that his collaborators and his readers could never hope to be anything but a minority and so he was prepared to print only those contributions which did not shy away from the anguish of the Absurd, but faithfully revealed it and tried to build on it.

At this time, he was still very concerned with metaphysical speculation and with the study of ancient religions and, as he remarked in the preface to Je ... Ils ... , he was in the habit of spending a great part of his time in the musée Guimet.<sup>50</sup> His concern with the ancient world religions had also led him to experiment, like Artaud, with drugs, although he never discussed the subject of drugs at any length in L'Aveu. His attitude to life was completely devoid of political consciousness. The degradations of the world around him were denounced from a standpoint of moral or religious disgust, not from any political position.

However, he was nearing the end of his 'metaphysical' period which really belonged to the pre-war era: the two friends who had done most to lead him in this direction, Artaud and Gilbert-Lecomte, were both

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<sup>50</sup> Je ... Ils ..., p.10.

dead; L'Heure Nouvelle only survived for two issues. As new activities began to occupy his life, the hold of drugs and neurosis began to wane, and with it his love of metaphysical speculation and interest in religion. He was beginning to receive more commissions for literary work: with Marthe Robert he started on a long series of Radio programmes which covered most of the world's great poetry and drama; he made an adaptation of Dantons Tod for Jean Vilar. Most important of all, he began to write his own plays. As we shall see in Part II, these at first drew heavily on the themes and preoccupations of L'Aveu, but gradually they gave way to other concerns. The evolution in Adamov's ideas can best be seen in the development of his plays, at first making an important contribution to the 'theatre of the Absurd' and then gradually building on and developing the techniques of the avant-garde in the service of a theatre concerned more and more with the real world, the 'here and now'<sup>51</sup>, and less and less with metaphysical speculation.

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51 NB the title of his work Ici et Maintenant.

## PART I

Chapter 3 'Tardive Maturité'

The final page of the 'Jeunesse' section of L'Homme et l'Enfant mentions the two things that were capital in his beginning on his first play, La Parodie. One is the incident which suggested to him the subject of the play:

A la sortie du métro Maubert-Mutualité, un aveugle mendie. Deux midinettes passent, fredonnant la rengaine bien connue: 'J'ai fermé les yeux, c'était merveilleux.' Elles ne voient pas l'aveugle, le bousculent, il trébuche. Je tiens l'idée de la pièce que je veux écrire: La Parodie. 'Nous sommes dans un désert, personne n'entend personne' (cf. Flaubert).<sup>1</sup>

This account of a little scene witnessed in the metro is of great interest for a number of reasons. First of all because it enacts so precisely the central image of Adamov's own obsessive dreams: a poor, helpless man being kicked around by two worthless girls. Many of his plays were to start from an image suggested by a fairly trivial happening, which struck him so forcibly because of the resonances it had with his own dreams and obsessions. In this case it is the masochist situation with the added element of terror since the man is blind and therefore uncertain about what is happening to him.

Secondly, it is of course interesting as an image of the ideas of absence and non-communication which lie behind all the theatre of the Absurd. Thirdly, it exemplifies Adamov's love of the small,

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<sup>1</sup> L'Homme et l'Enfant, p.84.

finely observed detail which could be called a poetic detail, since it can be magnified to have a general validity. In 1955 when he was writing the 'Note Préliminaire' to his Théâtre II, he commented with a hint of irony on this very fact:

Autrement dit, d'un phénomène vrai entre d'autres,  
je tirais une 'métaphysique'.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, he continued, even in his most socially committed plays to draw a point of general validity from the evocative, concrete detail. Finally, the passage quoted above contains a typically elliptic literary reference thrown in at the end, in such a way as deliberately to evoke in the mind of the reader the whole method and outlook of Flaubert, a writer he admired enormously, particularly in L'Education Sentimentale and in Bouvard et Pécuchet.

The second fact which was to be of capital importance is recounted in one sentence:

Marthe me fait connaître Jacquie T., celle  
que j'aime, celle qui sera 'le Bison'.<sup>3</sup>

The second section of L'Homme et l'Enfant entitled 'Tardive Maturité' covers the period running from 1948 to 1967, starting with his first attempts at having La Parodie produced and ending, like the first part, with 'le Bison' in this simple phrase:

Bison, je t'aime.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Théâtre II, p.8.

<sup>3</sup> L'Homme et l'Enfant, p.84. Jacqueline, later Adamov's wife, was at this time married to a M. Trehet. Normally she wrote using her maiden name, Jacqueline Autrusseau, as a pseudonym. The one exception was L'Agence Universelle (see list of radio work).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.161.

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This section is particularly interesting for a student of Adamov's theatre since it provides information about the circumstances of the various productions of his plays and about his own attitude towards them. The most important thing about Adamov from his own point of view was his theatre, and it is around this that everything in the second part of L'Homme et l'Enfant hinges. In this chapter, I shall attempt to give a skeleton outline of the events in Adamov's life which were important for his development as a dramatist from about 1948 until about 1963. This will include accounts of the productions of his plays in order to establish a chronology, and a certain amount of information about Adamov's literary formation which seems essential for a basic understanding of his development as a dramatist. Much of this will be picked up again and studied in detail in the course of the second and third Parts of the thesis devoted to the plays themselves.

The period between 1948 and 1950 was a particularly harrowing one for Adamov as he worked on L'Invasion and then tried to get first La Parodie, and then both plays produced.<sup>5</sup> As well as begging for money to finance the productions of his plays, he also had to beg to keep himself alive while he went on writing. The one compensation during this period was seeing his adaptation of La Mort de Danton performed by Vilar at the second Avignon festival in 1948. His controlled description of the memory suggests how strongly it must have affected him:

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<sup>5</sup> La Parodie was already being rehearsed for performance in the Spring of 1948, but it could not be staged for lack of funds (see L'Homme et l'Enfant, p.87).

Mon adaptation de La Mort de Danton, magnifiée par le plein air. Il fait du vent, les drapeaux claquent, les acteurs crient. Pour la première fois, j'entends, dites en public, des phrases que j'ai écrites.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, despairing of getting his two plays produced, since no money was forthcoming, although Vilar was already interested in L'Invasion and Blin in La Parodie, he followed Vilar's advice and had the plays published with introductory notes by a number of well-known people. This edition, published by Editions Charlot in 1950, contained a letter by André Gide and 'témoignages' by René Char, Jacques Prévert, Henri Thomas, Jacques Lemarchand, Jean Vilar, Roger Blin.

The publication of the two plays helped to make Adamov known and, finally, sufficient money was raised for productions of L'Invasion and La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre which had been completed by this time.

La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre was the first to open on the 11th of November 1950. It was produced by J-M. Serreau at the Théâtre des Noctambules, but at 6 p.m. as a sort of matinée, less risky than being performed every evening at the normal Paris hour of 9 p.m. It continued until just after Christmas. Almost simultaneously, Vilar produced L'Invasion for afternoon matinée showings at the Studio des Champs Elysées, the first performance being 14th November, 1950.

Both plays aroused wide critical interest, despite the awkward times of their performances. The reviewers were very divided and the violent reactions for or against set the pattern for almost all of

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<sup>6</sup> L'Homme et l'Enfant, pp.87-88.

Adamov's plays. Part of his difficulties arose from the fact that not one of his plays was approved by the prestigious bourgeois press and it is interesting to see that long before the plays contained any political content, Gautier and Kemp were already hostile. In his review of La Grande et La petite Manoeuvre Gautier complained of not being able to understand, and one is tempted to think that his life-long hatred of Adamov was probably formed in that first evening when he simply felt baffled. Kemp also found it boring and made the rather surprising complaint:

Comme c'est commode de charger le spectateur de penser à la place des personnages.<sup>7</sup>

To many critics this would seem a quality rather than a defect. However, many of the reviewers received the play favourably, such as Jean Nepveu-Degas in L'Observateur, Marc Beigbeder in Le Parisien Libéré, Renée Saurel in Combat, and Jacques Lemarchand in Le Figaro Littéraire. All of these praised the play, some very warmly like Lemarchand who was criticised by Gabriel Marcel in Les Nouvelles Littéraires for his enthusiasm. Neither this nor L'Invasion was a commercial success but they aroused a good deal of interest and more than one reviewer suggested that here at last was an author who might bring about the long-awaited revival of French drama.

It is worth remembering that this production came over two years before the opening night of En Attendant Godot (Jan 1953) and that in the same year the first performance of Ionesco's first play, La Cantatrice Chauve provoked similar reactions and was also a commercial

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<sup>7</sup> Le Monde, 17 novembre 1950.

failure, though recognised as important by some, including Lemarchand. It is very much to Lemarchand's credit that he alone of all the critics at that time really understood the theme of human isolation presented through cruelty and humour that was to be the unifying characteristic of all the dramatists of the Absurd.

The state of Paris theatre in the late forties and early fifties, when Adamov began his career, was both deplorable and exciting. It was deplorable in that apart from the plays of Sartre and Camus, very few good new plays were receiving full-scale productions, so that new writers like Adamov had the greatest of difficulty in getting their works performed. But it was exciting in that there were a number of small theatres which operated regularly on shoe-string budgets and did manage to mount good, cheap productions of new plays, such as the production of La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre by Jean-Marie Serreau at the Théâtre de Noctambules. Adamov himself evoked the excitement of this period in

L'Homme et l'Enfant:

Quelle belle époque que celle des années 50!  
Nous étions obligés de mendier, nous parlions  
de monter une pièce sans même savoir dans  
quel théâtre elle serait agréée, sans même  
nous douter non plus que nous serions réduits  
à la donner à des heures impossibles, à des  
six heures du soir! Mais nous nous faisons  
tous, Serreau, Roche, Blin bien sûr, d'autres,  
moi-même, une idée à peu près semblable de ce  
que devait être le théâtre.<sup>8</sup>

It is interesting to see this attitude corroborated by Dominique Nores, who suggested that the lamentable state of French theatre in

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<sup>8</sup> L'Homme et l'Enfant, p.97.

the sixties was due to the disappearance of many small experimental theatres such as the Babylone (closed in 1954), Noctambules (1956), Théâtre de Poche of André Cellier (1956), and La Huchette, which has become a 'musée Ionesco' since 1957. She pointed out that these small theatres played a vital rôle in Adamov's development since it was not until his fifth play that he was able to attract a big enough audience for a play to show some return on the money spent on it. She also spoke of the excitement of the period:

Aux meilleurs jours, un échange s'établissait entre regardants et regardés, entre la lucidité des spectateurs et la cruauté du spectacle, et cette échange créait une réalité nouvelle qui forçait les assistants à déceler l'inexplicable sous le quotidien. Le théâtre retrouvait une de ses grandes fonctions oubliées: il dérangeait.<sup>9</sup>

Adamov's plays were certainly designed to have this disquieting effect, and the theatrical conditions of the time undoubtedly helped him to achieve this.

Within the next few months, Adamov completed two more plays, Le Professeur Taranne, written in "two days and three nights", and Le Sens de la Marche, which took much longer, and with which he was far less satisfied. As a general rule it cost him endless weeks of agonising effort to complete a play, and Le Professeur Taranne, which Ionesco along with many others regards as his most successful play, was the only exception to this rule.

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<sup>9</sup> Dominique Nores, 'Situation du jeune théâtre', Les Lettres Nouvelles, no.32, février 1963, pp.218-221.

Together, he and Jacqueline Autrusseau continued painfully scraping together a living. Recognition was slow in coming, and although he had already had two plays performed in 1950, it was not until June 1952 that his first play, La Parodie, was finally produced by Roger Blin at the Théâtre Lancry on 5th June 1952. The production aroused less interest from the critics than had the other two in 1950. Lemarchand in the Figaro Littéraire wrote extremely warmly, calling it "belle, émouvante", and saying, "l'auteur a mis dans cette Parodie un peu de son sang et de ses larmes". He also recognised in the play, prophetically, certain signs of optimism, "un optimisme beaucoup/profond que conscient".<sup>10</sup>

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L'Observateur also carried a sympathetic review by Nepveu-Degas, but Le Figaro complained of boredom, and there was no review in Le Monde, Combat or Les Nouvelles Littéraires.

The failure of La Parodie caused Adamov considerable anguish and reinforced, to some extent, the hold of his neuroses, as can be seen from an episode recounted in L'Homme et l'Enfant, in which a visit to a prostitute in Hamburg was spoken of as compensation for the failure of his play.<sup>11</sup>

In the first few months of 1953, Adamov had three plays performed. On 18th March, Planchon gave the first performances of Le Professeur Taranne and Le Sens de la Marche. This first production, praised by people who saw it, including Adamov himself<sup>12</sup>, hardly received any

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<sup>10</sup> Le Figaro Littéraire, 14 juin 1952.

<sup>11</sup> L'Homme et l'Enfant, p.105.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp.106-107.

attention in the national press. Planchon was still almost unknown and the decentralisation movement had hardly begun. Le Professeur Taranne was put on in Paris a year later in May 1954 at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre. It was part of a triple bill including Comme nous avons été and Mon Colonel by Gegauff. This time, the reviews were consistently laudatory, as well from critics who understood the play, like Lemarchand and Nepveu-Degas, as from those who plainly did not, like Gabriel Marcel.

Also in Spring 1953, Tous contre Tous was put on by Jean-Marie Serreau, also at the 'Mardis de l'Oeuvre', the first performance being on April 14th. Critical reaction to this performance was good, and it was the first of Adamov's plays to have a real success with the public. The play was not so difficult to understand as some of the earlier ones, the general subject of racial persecution was still fresh in people's memories of the German atrocities against the Jews, and the Absurd context in which it was set was becoming more familiar. Adamov summed the situation up:

La critique est élogieuse, le public plutôt content. Mais j'aime de moins en moins la pièce.<sup>13</sup>

The reviews were, in fact, very good indeed: there were positively enthusiastic reviews from Gabriel Marcel (Nouvelles Littéraires), Renée Saurel (Les Temps Modernes), Marcelle Capron (Combat), Jacques Lemarchand (Figaro Littéraire), and others. Even Le Figaro was not entirely hostile, calling it, "cette oeuvre 'blême'", but "presque

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.106.

envoûtante".<sup>14</sup>

Marcel went so far as to say that he preferred it to En Attendant Godot because it had a warmth and a quality of pity in its despair. It is ironic that this kind of comparison, which Adamov so desired, was made only about one of his inferior plays, which he did not feel had succeeded. Jean Duvignaud, who had written a very warm and serious review of Adamov's first three published plays in Critique, again praised Tous contre Tous in La Nouvelle Revue Française.

At this point, Adamov seemed all set for success. He had eight original plays and three successful adaptations to his credit and seemed at least as likely to achieve recognition as Ionesco or Beckett. There was a revival of La Mort de Danton at the Théâtre National Populaire, which raised sufficient money for him to take a holiday in Italy with 'le Bison', and it was during this holiday that he got to know Bernard Dort who was to become a life-long friend and his most perceptive critic.

Furthermore, it seems likely that had Adamov continued to write in the same style, he would have become as successful as Beckett and Ionesco did in the second half of the fifties. But his writing was undergoing a process of change. In L'Homme et l'Enfant, he passed in silence over the Paris production of Le Professeur Taranne and the writing of Comme nous avons été and Les Retrouvailles. Doubtless, the memory of these was eclipsed by that of the work he put in on Le Ping-Pong and the hopes he placed in this play, only to have them dashed

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<sup>14</sup> J.-B. Jeener in Le Figaro, 16 avril 1953.

when it was not a great success.

It is one of the tragedies of Adamov's life, that the only time he was able to belong to 'une bande', through the habitual grouping in the early fifties of Adamov, Beckett, Ionesco, it was only to find that they beat him to the prize, and moreover that he was unable to remain part of the group because of his conversion to a more committed type of theatre. It was just at the point when success was coming the way of the new 'Theatre of the Absurd', that his attitude underwent a profound change:

Je voyais déjà dans 'l'avant-garde' une échappatoire facile, une diversion aux problèmes réels, le mot 'théâtre absurde' déjà m'irritait. La vie n'était pas absurde, difficile, très difficile seulement. Rien qui ne demandât des efforts immenses disproportionnés.<sup>15</sup>

He began to be impatient with the reigning avant-garde theatre, feeling that it was wrong to produce a fatalistic art concentrating on the incurable aspects of life, when it could be performing a useful function in dealing with those aspects that were in some sense curable.<sup>16</sup> The complex influences contributing towards this change can only be fully understood by studying the plays, but one important factor was certainly the influence of Roger Planchon. The double bill of Le Sens de la Marche and Le Professeur Taranne had been the third production in his newly opened Théâtre de la Comédie, and in 1953 and 1954, Adamov spent some time in Lyon working with Planchon on adaptations

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<sup>15</sup> L'Homme et l'Enfant, p.111.

<sup>16</sup> The terms 'curable' and 'incurable' were used by Adamov himself, see e.g. Ici et Maintenant, p.129 and below, note 17.

of Kleist's Der Zerbrochene Krug and of Marlowe's Edward II. As well as being a period of intense activity (he was engaged on adaptations, radio work and his book on Strindberg, as well as writing his own plays) this was a time during which he was beginning to question his own beliefs and methods in the light of his discovery of Bertolt Brecht, and of the growing 'théâtre populaire' movement, in which Planchon was playing an important rôle. The impact which these had on Adamov is discussed in greater detail in Part III, Chapter 1.

In 1955 the second volume of his Théâtre was published by Gallimard with a prefatory 'Note' in which he officially turned his back on all of his early theatre with the sole exception of Le Professeur Taranne. One of the important factors to which he ascribed his conversion was his growing concern with what he called 'les problèmes réels' in the quotation given above. In the ten years since the war, he had gradually become more detached from his neuroses and, in the process, longed to come to grips with 'real' problems instead of the phantoms of his mind. There was a certain natural logic in this development, but he made his change of style seem more abrupt than it was by the vigour with which he denounced his early plays. In an interview given at the beginning of 1958, for example, he said:

... ce ne sont pas les pièces empreintes d'un mystère-bidon, flottant dans l'éternité la plus vague, qui nous montreront l'épouvantable et magnifique progression de l'être humain à travers des obstacles et des écueils dont les uns sont liés à sa condition d'homme, les autres à l'état d'une société bien définie. Comédie ici. Drame là. Un grand théâtre moderne et

et véritablement populaire devrait pouvoir montrer ce double aspect, curable et incurable des choses.<sup>17</sup>

This shows the violence of his rejection of 'absurdist' theatre, and his insistence on the need to distinguish the 'curable' from the 'incurable'.

It is also possible to see this growing interest in the 'curable' in his book on Strindberg which was published in 1955, the year of the first production of Le Ping-Pong, and written during the preceding year. It is quite short and selective, omitting Strindberg's historical plays, and his "féeries, pauvres tentatives d'évasion, où tous les thèmes se retrouvent, certes, mais affadis, amaigris, presque méconnaissables."<sup>18</sup> The plays he devoted most attention to were The Father, Miss Julie, Creditors, The Road to Damascus, Advent, The Dance of Death, A Dream Play, and the four plays of his 'Chamber Theatre', especially The Ghost Sonata. The book contains a large amount of quotation; as one dramatist writing about another, Adamov preferred, where possible, to let Strindberg speak for himself, rather than to speak about him.

The book is of great value, both as a generally illuminating study of Strindberg, and as a pointer to the precise nature of Strindberg's influence over Adamov. He insisted on the obsessive nature of Strindberg's plays, on the ideas of debt and payment, guilt

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<sup>17</sup> 'Avec Paolo Paoli Arthur Adamov définit un nouvel art poétique', Le Monde, 19 janvier 1958. Interview by Claude Sarraute.

<sup>18</sup> Strindberg, Paris, 1955, p.7.

and imposture, and of absence in his work; he showed the very close relationship between Strindberg's autobiographical works and his plays, the essentially theatrical nature of his ideas, and his perpetual need to exhibit himself on the stage. In his introduction, he admitted that the book revealed as much about his own ideas as it did about Strindberg's, and I have tried to show in Part II precisely what it is that Adamov's early plays owe to Strindberg.

It also contains a valuable comment on the kind of literary influence to which Adamov was subject:

Mais pour s'inspirer d'un autre, encore faut-il ressentir ce que cet autre a ressenti.<sup>19</sup>

Since Adamov had already said, in his introduction, how much inspiration he drew from Strindberg, we can assume that when he described Strindberg's hopes and fears, his obsessions and longings, he was describing something which he, too, had experienced in some measure. There is a passionate quality in his writing which underlines this.

Very similar to the tone and pattern of his book on Strindberg, was much of Adamov's radio work, which again frequently concerned writers who exerted some influence on him. During the early fifties, he and Marthe Robert composed a large number of programmes of literary appreciation and discussion. There were programmes on the history of poetry and of drama, on Kafka, Büchner, Flaubert, Nerval, Gogol, among others, and Adamov also did a number of adaptations of Russian and

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.62.

German plays<sup>20</sup>. With Marthe Robert, he also published, in 1953, the complete theatre of Büchner. The text of the broadcast on Flaubert was published later in the Cahiers Renaud-Barrault<sup>21</sup>; the others can be consulted only at the O.R.T.F. in Paris. It is regrettable that they are not more easily available because these programmes are invariably interesting, both as studies of the writers concerned, and also for what they tell us about Adamov himself. Particularly interesting in the latter respect is a programme on Dostoievsky which Adamov wrote some years later, in 1965<sup>22</sup>, since it shows how important Dostoievsky had been for Adamov's literary development:

u/ y  
Dostoievsky, je l'ai lu à douze ans, relu à vingt ans, et plus tard encore, et enfin ces dernières semaines ... comment rendre compte de cet immense personnage, du cerveau duquel sont sortis tous les personnages qui hantèrent ma jeunesse, et pas seulement la mienne, celle de toute une génération?

Describing Dostoievsky, he stressed particularly the characteristics with which he himself felt in sympathy: his ambivalent attitude towards his father's death, feeling liberated by it, and yet also guilty for it; his dual rôle as "bourreau de lui-même et juge de ses propre juges". Here he quoted Baudelaire:

Je suis la plaie et le couteau  
Je suis le soufflet et la joue.

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<sup>20</sup> For a list of this work, see the bibliographies at the end of this thesis.

<sup>21</sup> 'L'Art et la vie de Gustave Flaubert', Cahiers Renaud-Barrault, no.59, mars 1967, pp.66-105.

<sup>22</sup> 'Féodor Mikhaïlovitch Dostoïevsky. L'Effrayant, l'effrayé'. (seen in O.R.T.F. typescript.)

As in Strindberg, he also made a point about literary influences:

Les influences, si fortes soient-elles,  
deviennent, de par la nature profondément  
originale de l'artiste, quasi méconnaissables.

This was certainly true of Adamov. A few influences are extremely clear in his work, such as those of Strindberg, Artaud, Brecht, and these will be discussed in detail in subsequent sections, but Adamov's culture was so broad that many of the influences on him were so far transformed as to be no longer recognisable. It was a consequence of his late start as a dramatist that by the time that he began to write plays, he had already had time to digest thoroughly those influences that were most important to him. Only in very rare cases did he discover a writer who was to influence him after he had begun to write plays; the only examples are Brecht, O'Casey and O'Neill. The influence of the last two was not extremely important: he discovered them through the translations of their theatre into French which occupied much of his wife's efforts during the late fifties and early sixties, and although he talked about them a good deal, their real influence on his work was slight.

The other writers whose work was most important to him will be found in the lists of adaptations, articles and radio plays at the end of this thesis, and many of these will also be picked up in the process of studying Adamov's plays. The only important names that do not figure there are those of Freud and Kafka (which had always been Marthe Robert's specialities), Marx, Brecht and Scott Fitzgerald.

One further factor that was of importance in Adamov's adoption of

a new dramatic style in the mid-fifties was the growing importance he assigned to humour. In Strindberg, he criticised the Swedish dramatist for his "absence totale d'humour". He was beginning to realise that it was important not only to set his plays in a precisely defined time and place, but also to be able to stand back from his obsessions so as to achieve "assez de recul pour qu'une partie de lui-même pût juger l'autre, et en rire".<sup>23</sup>

In fact, in Adamov's plays the development towards the real setting and the discovery of what he called "le rire vainqueur"<sup>24</sup> came almost simultaneously. This is not really surprising, since both can be seen as part of a process of detachment from self, of ability to see and to understand the problems existing outside the self in the real world around. Writing his next play, Le Ping-Pong, he made a conscious effort to unite these two things. He said, for example, that the subject of the play was "l'épouvantable et comique agitation des hommes autour de n'importe quel leurre. L'appareil à sous, par exemple."<sup>25</sup> It was clearly most important for him, as part of a process of liberation from neurosis, not only to write about the real world, but also to exploit a comic vein. As well as indicating personal detachment, this was an effective method of criticism, which thus enabled him to define a positive stand towards objects and organisations in the real world.

Having taken the first step towards naming real objects in Le

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<sup>23</sup> Strindberg, p.82.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p.82.

<sup>25</sup> 'Le Ping-Pong. Balles et répliques d'Arthur Adamov', Le Monde, 2 mars 1955. Interview by Claude Sarraute. (My emphasis on comique.)

Professeur Taranne, he no longer found this an impossible task, but unlike Le Professeur Taranne, Le Ping-Pong was not based on a dream, did not flow directly from his subconscious mind, and cost him an enormous effort to write. It marked the beginning, not only of a new style, but also of a tendency to overwrite. Whereas his early plays had mostly been less than normal length, most of the subsequent ones were rather more than normal length.

Once the struggle to finish the play was over, he again had to struggle to get it produced. According to his account, it was R.-J. Chauffard, the actor, who finally persuaded Jacques Mauclair to put it on at the Noctambules on March 3rd, 1955. In L'Homme et l'Enfant, Adamov stated that all the reviews except for that of Lemarchand were bad. This was far from the truth; many of them were indeed damning, but there were also many critics who praised the play, including J. Nepveu-Degas in France Observateur, M. Beigbeder in Carrefour, G. Verdot in L'Aurore, B. Sabran in Dimanche Matin. There was a very enthusiastic review from Henri Magnan in Le Monde which concluded:

Adamov? ... Une qualité qui vous empêche de dormir mais vous donne à rêver.<sup>26</sup>

There was also a very appreciative review in L'Express (unsigned) which talked of the play's similarity with Bouvard et Pécuchet. Lemarchand, who also mentioned Flaubert's work, did not in fact write one of his more favourable reviews, though he was, as always, warmly appreciative. The play was by no means a flop and ran for nearly two months, but its failure to achieve a long run filled Adamov with

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<sup>26</sup> Le Monde, 5 mars 1955.

despair and he felt he had reached the end of a period:

Je crois que c'est à partir de ce temps-là que  
j'ai désespéré, cru à un mauvais sort qui  
s'acharnait contre moi.<sup>27</sup>

He had achieved a certain measure of liberation from his sexual obsessions. He had reached a point where he was able to write plays about the real world. But curiously enough it was at this point that he said he finally despaired. He had escaped from personal despair, only to find that the instrument of his escape, his writing, was not accorded by others the importance which it had to have for him.

There were a number of reasons for the crushing sense of failure which overwhelmed him despite his relative success. In the first place, the majority of his productions had not been given in normal circumstances, but in the context of an exceptional series like 'Les Mardis de l'Oeuvre'. But it was not just that his plays had not always received full-scale production. He had been attempting, for more than seven years, to establish a new dramatic idiom: now he found that this idiom had finally received recognition and proved a success, but in the hands of other dramatists. Whereas Ionesco's early plays, for example, were being performed again and again, his were ignored.

In addition his outlook on life had changed, so that he was at once disappointed by his lack of success as a playwright and also convinced that the philosophy behind his early plays had in any case been wrong. This explains why he insisted so strongly on his conversion

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<sup>27</sup> L'Homme et l'Enfant, p.116.

to a doctrine of the social usefulness of theatre, and poured such scorn on his early works. He was disgusted with the theatre of the Absurd, both at a profoundly emotional, no doubt partly subconscious level (through his own failure to achieve success) and at a rational level through his change of beliefs.

It was in this mood of despair that, in order to earn some money, Adamov took on the job of ghosting a book by Eugène Le Moult entitled Mes Chasses Aux Papillons which appeared late in 1955. This gave him the subject for Paolo Paoli, a play about the events leading up to the First World War. He spent a considerable time reading up documentary material on the period, and found it a particularly difficult play to write, but it was finally completed on 31st December, 1956.

The production of the play by Planchon at Lyon (first night: 17th May, 1957) was very successful, so much so that Planchon decided to take it to the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier the following Spring as his first Parisian venture, but, from the very first, the play encountered difficulties of a political nature. These are all related in a very amusing and remarkably detached way in L'Homme et l'Enfant. The trouble came from the Commission des Arts et des Lettres, and from P.-A. Touchard in particular. If Adamov is to be believed, Touchard saw a rehearsal of the play at Lyon and afterwards tried to put pressure on Planchon to abandon it, but later, under the influence of Jacques Lemarchand, agreed that after all it should be performed. It was a great success in Lyon because it corresponded exactly to the type of theatre Planchon was aiming for: a committed theatre that was not merely committed, but also genuinely dramatic and could appeal to a wide-ranging public,

popular as well as intellectual.

In Paris, at the Vieux-Colombier, the play was again a success, despite shocking reviews from Gautier and Kemp, but the Commission des Arts et des Lettres hinted that Government subsidies for the Vieux-Colombier might dry up if they kept the play on too long. The play has not been produced again in Paris. There was little notice taken in the national press of its first production at Lyon in 1957. Only Lemarchand took the trouble to travel down to see it and he wrote a very appreciative review for the Figaro Littéraire. But on the occasion of its opening in Paris on January 22nd, 1958, it provoked a complete polarisation of the press on political lines that is reminiscent of what occurred over certain of Sartre's plays in the mid-fifties.

Gautier, Kemp and Marcel all heaped violent abuse on the play, Kemp complaining that during 'La Belle Epoque':

On s'est trompé dans la bonne foi; on n'était pas 'méchant' et c'est méchanceté que de vouloir nous le faire croire.<sup>28</sup>

At the other end of the scale, Guy Leclerc of L'Humanité called the play 'cette grande pièce démystifiante', and added, accurately enough,

Un auteur vient de se jeter à l'eau. Il ne va pas manquer de 'braves gens' pour lui appuyer sur la tête, et des deux mains, faites-moi confiance. Ne les laissez-pas faire.<sup>29</sup>

But in between these two poles, there were many who considered

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<sup>28</sup> Le Monde, 24 janvier 1958.

<sup>29</sup> L'Humanité, 22 janvier 1958.

the play seriously and sensibly. Above all, Adamov was at last being written about on a wide scale; he had made an impact on the Parisian consciousness that was greater than he had achieved with any of his earlier plays, even if it was something of a 'succès de scandale' because he had turned toward communism. More important was the fact that two serious discussions on the play were organised, the texts of which were both reprinted in current reviews, and subsequently in Ici et Maintenant. One included Sartre, Butor, Vailland and Adamov, the other Barthes, Dort, Jacques Leclerc, Regnaut, Vannier. There were serious and very useful articles on the play in such Journals as Esprit, Les Temps Modernes, Théâtre Populaire.

Théâtre Populaire was particularly interesting at the time, since many important critics wrote for it: Barthes, Dort, Dumur, Regnaut, Vannier among others. During its existence in the fifties and early sixties, it helped to give impetus to the idea of popular theatre and to crystallise the various theories and provide a forum for discussion. It published a number of items by Adamov: four of his plays, Le Professeur Taranne, Paolo Paoli, Le Printemps 71, La Politique des Restes; four translations, La Cruche Cassée by Kleist, Le Pélican by Strindberg, Les Ennemis by Gorki and Les Ames Mortes by Gogol. It also published his two most important articles on the theatre: 'Théâtre Argent et Politique', and 'De Quelques Faits'. Adamov's position in the tradition of French 'théâtre populaire' is discussed in Part III, Chapter 1, which includes a fuller account of the importance of Théâtre Populaire.

The section of L'Homme et l'Enfant which begins with May 13th,

1958 is entitled 'Théâtre, Argent, Politique, Obsessions'. It is interesting to see how in retrospect he added the fourth item 'Obsessions' to the three he had already linked in his article. Looking back some ten years later he seems to have realised that he was never as free from these obsessions as he had thought at the time.

He mentioned Jacqueline Atrousseau's decision after the return to power of General de Gaulle to join the Communist Party. But although profoundly anti-Gaullist, his reluctance ever to make a clear-cut decision affected him once more, and he could not follow her lead:

Je pense aussi bien sûr entrer au Parti mais  
j'hésite. Sur certains problèmes je ne suis  
vraiment pas d'accord avec lui.<sup>30</sup>

Nevertheless, this was the beginning of the most aggressively committed period of his life. He felt so strongly about de Gaulle's return to power that he came nearer to direct political action than at any other time by writing four short political propaganda plays whose aim was, like the medieval 'soties', to make a political point through the use of grotesque humour.

It was also the period when he was writing his most pro-communist play, Le Printemps 71. The documentation for this play took even longer than for Paolo Paoli, and writing it demanded an even greater effort. But he was able to use the material he had discovered in the Bibliothèque Nationale for an anthology of the Commune which was

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<sup>30</sup> L'Homme et l'Enfant, p.127.

published by Editions Sociales in 1959. The difficulties he experienced in writing the play itself were reflected in his growing reliance on alcohol and the increasing number of his visits to prostitutes. Although he had started work on Le Printemps 71 in 1958, his next play to be produced was an adaptation of his translation of Gogol's Les Ames Mortes, put on by Planchon, first at Villeurbanne on the 22nd of January, 1960 and then in Paris at the Odéon on the 21st of April of the same year.

The excitement of working with Adamov on this and other adaptations was recalled by Planchon in 1970, after Adamov's death<sup>31</sup>, but Adamov himself hardly made mention of this work in L'Homme et l'Enfant; neither did he mention his large output of translations, adaptations, and radio work. The omission of these things from L'Homme et l'Enfant, in which he devoted so much space to his own theatre, shows how strongly he desired to be considered as a dramatist in his own right, rather than as the accomplished scholar that he also was.

The production of Les Ames Mortes in 1960 was interesting as it was the last occasion on which Adamov and Planchon collaborated. The reviews were mostly good and many praised the strength and economy of Adamov's text, but many also complained that the production was overloaded and gimmicky. Paul Morelle, for example, said that on reading Adamov's text, he had found it "clair, rapide, nerveux, fougoux,

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31 "Que n'avons-nous filmé ou enregistré ces heures! Kafka, Büchner étaient là, saisis au bord du vide. ... chaque jour, au cours d'interminables conversations, il traquait les "secrets" du théâtre moderne. Nous étions là bouche bée à recueillir les miettes." Les Lettres Françaises, 25 mars 1970, p.5.

corrosif, vigoureux"<sup>32</sup>, but that it was dulled by the unnecessary richness of production details, especially the false noses worn by all the actors, which tended to reduce them all to the level of caricatures.

Adamov echoed this criticism in L'Homme et l'Enfant, but it is worth pointing out that at least one detail of the production was new to the French stage: the use of filmed material to link the scenes and supply the epic dimension which was necessarily lost from the text when adapting Gogol's 'poem' for the stage. Here Adamov and Planchon were borrowing a technique used thirty years earlier by Piscator in his productions of Rasputin or Schweyk, but which was new in France and provided an interesting development of the use of photographic material in Paolo Paoli.

But Adamov was going through a difficult period and for one reason or another his disapproval of the production sparked off a quarrel which ended in him breaking off his association with Planchon. At roughly the same time, he signed the 'manifeste des 121' for which he was banned from television or radio. The ban on radio work did not last much more than a year, but the ban on television lasted longer, and even after it was lifted Adamov was always regarded with considerable (and justified) suspicion by the more faithful Gaullists in the O.R.T.F. All this meant a serious diminution in his income at a time when he was having to pay large fines to the tax inspector for having failed to make the right declarations at the right times. Luckily, he

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<sup>32</sup> Libération, 23 avril 1960.

had friends in English, German and Belgian radio, who helped him by putting on performances of his works and paying him in foreign currency which was not liable for French income tax.

Finally, he completed Le Printemps 71 at the end of 1960, but was not hopeful about its chances of production:

Qui montera cette pièce, non seulement anti-bourgeoise, agressive, mais de plus, coûtant des fortunes? Mégalomane, je serai puni.<sup>33</sup>

The first production of the play was given at the Unity Theatre in London and was described by Adamov as a massacre, although he was grateful to the company for their efforts. It seems that they totally misunderstood Adamov's ambivalence towards the Communards in this play, criticising their faults as much as admiring their achievements. Instead it was produced simply as a heroic fresco of the Commune.

It was not until the Spring of 1963 that Le Printemps 71 was given a full-scale Paris production, when Claude Martin was able to put it on at the Théâtre Gérard Philipe, Saint-Denis with the help of funds from the Communist Party. It had in fact already been performed in extracts produced by André Steiger at the Mutualité for the ninetieth anniversary of the Commune on March 21st, 1961. It had been published in an early form in Théâtre Populaire, no.40, 1960, and then by Gallimard in 1961, so that for many of the critics, the first night at Saint-Denis on 26th April, 1963 was not their first acquaintance with the play. The reviews were split into political camps even more clearly than with Paolo Paoli, the Communist sympathisers praising it

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33 L'Homme et l'Enfant, p.138.

and the right-wing press claiming that it was one-sided or boring or both. It is interesting to see that even at this late stage, some still held the opinion that had been aired about almost every one of his early plays, that although this was not a masterpiece it pointed forward to the masterpiece that Adamov was sure to write next time. Before its French production, the play had also been put on in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia which gave some encouragement to Adamov though withholding the one thing he really wanted, recognition in France.

This failure to achieve recognition in France was further illustrated by the production history of La Politique des Restes, written in 1961-2, but not performed in France until 1967. Its first production was on 31st May 1963 at the Unity Theatre, as The Scavengers. The second was given by the Städtisches Theater, <sup>L</sup>Leipzig in 1965, and the third by the Stabile Teatro of Genoa in 1966. The play made very little impact in France. Bernard Dort wrote a warm and interesting review for Les Temps Modernes after seeing the Italian production, but there was a dearth of serious comment after the French production of the play by José Valverde at the Théâtre Gérard Philipe at Saint-Denis in November 1967.

During this period of Adamov's life, running from soon after the war to about 1964, when his alcoholism began to make serious inroads on his health, he had achieved an enormous output of work. As well as his plays, translations, adaptations, radio programmes, he also wrote four original plays for radio. If questioned on these, he claimed that they were mere hack-work for money, but a closer examination shows that there is more to them than this would suggest, as I have tried to

show in Part III, chapter 3.

This period saw a remarkable development in Adamov's writing, from the deliberate use of neurosis and the generalised symbolism of dreams as images of an absurd universe in which Man was condemned to suffer 'incurably', to a style which concentrated on certain things which it insisted, were 'curable', and which sought to place the action of the play in a precise historical context. However, it also saw the failure, in commercial terms, of Adamov's theatre, which did not quite achieve the required 'break-through' with Le Ping-Pong or Paolo Paoli.

There were many reasons for Adamov's failure to enjoy the fruits of the sudden success of the 'Absurd' theatre in the late fifties and sixties, both political and circumstantial. But perhaps the most important cause was to be found in himself, in his mental make-up as an expatriate Russian. He could never allow himself to settle down to the comfortable exploitation of a single style; he was always questioning, pursuing fresh ideas. As Planchon commented:

Certains écrivains s'accouident sur leurs oeuvres  
pour prendre une pose. Adamov s'est toujours  
présenté à nous démunis.<sup>34</sup>

In fact his artistic development followed the same pattern as his childhood wanderings with his family: constantly moving from one place to the next, and constantly more 'dépouillé'. This was not a calm quest, but rather a manifestation of instability and a nostalgia for an old order now beyond reach. Although he could hardly remember his birth-place in the Caucasus, the fact that his formative early years

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<sup>34</sup> as above, note 31.

had been spent in the circumstances of a rich Russian family never ceased to haunt him:

Chambres spacieuses, vous avez été le lieu  
de tout ce va et vient. Le passé aimé,  
vécu, ne nous lâche pas.<sup>35</sup>

Such memories, combined with that of the implacable withdrawal during his adolescence of all that might have given him stability, were influences that remained with him all his life. For most of his life he retained the 'passeport Nansen' which conferred on him the title of 'apatride', and only in 1957 did he take French citizenship. Moreover, when he did so, it was to avoid his perpetual difficulties with the police rather than because he had 'arrived' in either the literal or the figurative sense. Not until the very end of his life did he buy or rent a flat, always preferring to live in a hotel.

When Le Printemps 71 received its first production in London, Adamov was already beginning to evolve in yet another new direction. La Politique des Restes was the first move in this direction which he was to follow for the remaining years of his life. It was an attempt to integrate political comment and the precise historical situation with a use of personal neurosis and dreams, showing the necessary links existing between these two areas. In 1964, he wrote that the theatre must be:

contraint de se situer toujours aux confins  
de la vie dite individuelle, et de la vie  
dite collective. Tout ce qui ne relie pas  
l'homme à ses propres fantômes, mais aussi,

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<sup>35</sup> 24 janvier 1969.

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mais encore à d'autres hommes, et partant,  
à leurs fantômes, et cela dans une époque donnée  
et, elle, non fantomatique, n'a pas le  
moindre intérêt, ni philosophique, ni artistique.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> In his postface to Ici et Maintenant, p.240.

PART I

Chapter 4 The last years (Including discussion of the 'Journal' and Je... Ils...)

The remainder of Adamov's life was marked by a succession of illnesses, some curable and some incurable. His health, which had for so long withstood the strain of his irregular life, was finally destroyed, partly by his excessive drinking. In the Winter of 1963-1964, he had reached the point where he needed "au moins trois bouteilles de bière allemande et un ou deux gins pour entrer dans la journée qui vient"<sup>1</sup>.

Realizing that he would have to have treatment, he consulted Michel de m'Uzan, the psycho-analyst husband of Marthe Robert, who recommended a colleague. Adamov was to continue a course of 'psychothérapie' with him until his death, though always full of the gravest doubts as to its value for him<sup>2</sup>.

But despite the growing hold of ill-health and alcoholism, he travelled a good deal, went to Cuba in 1963 as a special guest for the anniversary of the revolution, then to Edinburgh for the festival, where Paolo Paoli was performed by the Oxford Theatre Group and where

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<sup>1</sup> L'Homme et l'Enfant, p.152.

<sup>2</sup> In some ways, it seems possible that this hastened his suicide. For a man who, like Adamov, had learned to live with his obsessions, had found a precarious equilibrium, it was difficult, maybe dangerous, to dig back into painful childhood experiences. Bernard Dort is of this opinion and I am indebted to him for the idea.

he joined in the sessions of the conference of modern European writers<sup>3</sup>. In the Spring of 1965, he spent a term as guest lecturer at Cornell University. This, and a shorter visit he had made to the States in 1959 for the American production of Le Ping-Pong, enabled him to form the impressions of America that were to lead to Off Limits.

Late in 1965, he had pneumonia which prevented him from accepting an invitation by the Moscow writers union. This was followed by oedema, a form of dropsy, and on top of these illnesses, he was involved in a serious car accident. In May 1966, he went into hospital for a course to cure him of his alcoholism on the advice of his psychoanalyst. But although the cure was successful, his mental and physical health continued to deteriorate. In October 1966 he was in hospital once again with fits which were diagnosed as attacks of Jacksonian epilepsy, and inexplicable pains in the legs. His nervous system was clearly damaged, but the exact nature of the disturbance could not be identified. He became more and more terrified of his own inexplicable physical state, which included attacks of trembling, amnesia and semi-paralysis.

Early in 1967, when he came out of hospital, he and Jacqueline moved out of their hotel in the rue de Seine and into a flat in the rue Champollion, their first permanent home. This, too, disturbed him;

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<sup>3</sup> The newspaper reports of this conference are very disappointing, but Bamber Gascoigne had an appreciative paragraph about Adamov in The Observer, calling him "one of the most winning personalities of the conference". 8th September 1963.

he felt that if such a drastic change had to be made in their pattern of life, it meant that something was fundamentally wrong. In June 1967, he was back in hospital yet again with pleurisy complicated by tuberculosis. It took nearly a year, some of which he had to spend in a Swiss sanatorium, to cure him of this, but the pains in his legs continued to mystify the doctors and to cause him more and more suffering. He became increasingly haunted by the thought of suicide, by the memory of others (including his father) who had committed suicide.

Despite everything, he continued to write, indeed this continued, as he had said in L'Aveu, to be his only source of respite. In the last five years of his life he completed four new plays. He also returned to non-dramatic writing: throughout his long period of illness in 1965 and 1966, when it seemed as if he was losing his sanity, he felt the need to keep a journal. The first section of the 'Journal', starting in December 1965, overlaps with the last section of the 'Souvenirs' in L'Homme et l'Enfant, entitled 'Maladie'. A prefatory note to L'Homme et l'Enfant explains that the first hundred and fifty pages of 'Souvenirs' were added later, in 1967, since it helped him on coming out of hospital to look back and try to set his past life in order:

La lumière du passé, était encore moins  
impitoyable que celle du présent, du trou  
noir où j'émergeais à peine.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> L'Homme et l'Enfant, p.7.

His 'Journal' falls into nine sections, all comparatively short, with gaps, sometimes of several months between the sections. The first six sections, running from December 1965 to August 1967, were published in the second half of L'Homme et l'Enfant; the remaining three are unpublished as yet. They are grouped under the title of Hier Déjà and are as follows: 'Journal VII, mars-octobre 1968', 'Journal VIII, janvier-avril 1969', 'Journal IX, octobre-novembre 1969'.

It is interesting to compare the journals with L'Aveu, that earlier non-dramatic product of Adamov's anguish and need to communicate. In the first work, his style was complex, very self-conscious about the meaning of words and their 'sacred origins'; his discussion of his states of mind was metaphysical, apocalyptic in tone. In the journals, on the other hand, he achieved a style that is simple and 'dépouillé' in the extreme, but that seems to touch greater depths. It was a conscious refinement of style, carefully worked over:

Je découvre tardivement la beauté de la prose.  
La phrase telle que je la cherche: courante,  
presque coulante, mais en même temps si neuve  
qu'elle arrête, étonne. Les 'et', les 'mais',  
les 'car', on n'en a pas besoin, qu'ils s'en  
aillent.  
La hâte toujours émeut.<sup>5</sup>

Where his aspirations had before been immense and his concerns universal, he was now more modest, aiming for simple, objective description. His basic aims in writing both L'Aveu and the journals were similar, but in the intervening years something had been gained.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.204.

First and foremost he had found Le Bison. Secondly, he had achieved a precisely defined position vis-à-vis the surrounding world and had come to believe in the need to look outward as well as inward. Thus although he was, in his last years, once more terrified of powers he did not understand, struggling with pains which seemed to separate him from the lower half of his body like Le Mutilé, he nevertheless refused to allow this to make him give up hope. He held firmly to a Marxist interpretation of political events, though this was not a slavish attitude: he did not hesitate to condemn the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, among other things<sup>6</sup>. To stay alive, he had to maintain a minimum of optimistic belief in the 'curable', but equally, he was determined not to falsify reality in the interests of dogma.

Stylistically, the journals tried to contribute to this measured aim by rendering the experience of the moment in all its vividness and complexity, both as a single moment of experience and as part of a development in time. In this he was pursuing an aim that had pre-occupied him since the early nineteen-fifties and which was to be refined still further in Je... Ils.... Explaining why he personally preferred the 'Journal' to the 'Souvenirs' in L'Homme et l'Enfant, he said:

Il y a une vérité du moment même qui nargue la reconstitution, qui nargue le passé et qui, narguant le passé, se tourne d'une certaine manière vers l'avenir; tout en étant absolument le présent.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See below p.79, note 15..

<sup>7</sup> 'Entretien avec Arthur Adamov', Les Lettres Françaises, 3 juillet 1968. Interview by Jacques Henric.

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As a consequence of the journals, Adamov's last five years are the best documented years of his life. A complete picture of the man emerges from the succession of intensely described moments. He discusses his dreams and obsessions, showing how the old obsessions still had a hold over him. Sometimes the very choice of phrase reminds the reader of the roots of some obsession in L'Aveu: "Jusque-là mais pas plus haut"<sup>8</sup> for example, takes us back to the experience recounted in L'Aveu, pp.64-67. At regular intervals, he mentioned in the journals the host of small rituals with which he still had to surround his daily life. The contradiction involved in his continuing to placate powers he no longer believed in came out in a 'cri de coeur':

Qui suis-je? Celui qui clame son athéisme,  
ou celui pour qui un petit bout de bois rose,  
son crayon, un de ses crayons, représente toute  
la vie possible, permise? ... Ou cet autre  
en moi qui t'aime pour de bon. Dites, puissances,  
telles que je vous imagine, dites que c'est lui  
le vrai, et, en fin de compte, l'incomparable.<sup>9</sup>

And yet, in several places, he showed that his superstitions were at least a sign that the life-urge was still stronger in him than the death-wish:

Tant qu'elles sont là, dures, opaques, rien  
n'est perdu, le combat continue.<sup>10</sup>

But the struggle was very finely balanced. Again and again he came back to his preoccupation with suicide, meditating on the suicides of

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<sup>8</sup> L'Homme et l'Enfant, p.186.

<sup>9</sup> 30 juillet 1968.

<sup>10</sup> 5 février 1969.

Kleist, Maiakovsky, Nerval, his father, and on the different methods, principally drowning and sleeping pills. But nearly always, the thought of Le Bison freed him of such thoughts:

Sans elle, malgré toute ma trouille, je me tuerais, tout est trop difficile. Mais il y a elle, et il y a cet être que nous avons nommé le Proson: elle et moi. Cet être-là, qui est de nous deux réunis, je ne veux pas qu'il meure. Faites qu'il revive... Voilà que je m'adresse au Seigneur, ou aux puissances. Mais après tout, cela m'est égal. Une seule chose ne m'est pas égale: le Bison, ma grande petite fille, mon amour.<sup>11</sup>

Large parts of the journals are devoted to her, as he describes her actions, observes her with the close attention of loving dependence. Having no 'family', she is both mother, wife and daughter to him, and these varied roles, in which he sees her, express her all-enveloping importance for him.

But as well as this, the journals reflect the man who, to calm his physical desire required the cruelty of prostitutes or the company of young girls whom he met by chance in the St. Germain cafés: simply to talk to them, maybe to kiss their hands or their bare feet gave him satisfaction. And yet he never 'searched for pleasure' like Vailland in the last years of his life, indeed, he pointed out, in an interview devoted to Vailland, how little real pleasure this procured. In the same interview he insisted that:

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<sup>11</sup> L'Homme et l'Enfant, pp.225-226.

Je ne pense pas que la drogue ou l'alcool  
 puissent constituer un instrument de connaissance  
 ... ce n'est que pour échapper à l'angoisse que  
 l'on se drogue ou que l'on boit.<sup>12</sup>

Adamov had been through the experience of both drink, and, earlier in his life, drugs. He had abandoned both in turn, believing that they could not in themselves bring knowledge, and that there was a better way of escaping anguish: by achieving a balanced life. A person of extremes, he was always ready to condemn his own extremism (though of course he had nothing but scorn for those who live in a 'safe and moderate' manner, as M. le Modéré showed). For example, the separation between love and eroticism, which had its roots in his earliest memories and expressed itself in masochism, was not something he could ever be content with or proud of. One of the last entries in his journal reads:

Elle est à la longue bien morne, la séparation absolue que j'ose établir entre le désir physique et la gentillesse, la connaissance attendrie d'un être humain. Pourquoi ai-je besoin que les filles ne soient que des objets inertes, des êtres que je manoeuvre et qui me manoeuvrent? C'eût été tellement plus simple si...<sup>13</sup>

And yet his uncompromising approach towards these obsessions, in particular his treatment of masochism earned him the following praise from André Pieyre de Mandiargues reviewing L'Homme et l'Enfant:

Son triomphe est dans une sorte de retournement qui permet de remonter plus haut que le point de départ et d'apercevoir le bien, l'amour et

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<sup>12</sup> L'Expérience du gouffre', Entretiens, no.29, 1970, p.69. Interview about Roger Vailland by Max Chaleil.

<sup>13</sup> 6 novembre 1969.

généralement toutes les catégories positives  
de la vie dans leur état de pureté originelle.  
... dans cette victoire, je me plais à voir un  
des plus beaux succès de la littérature.<sup>14</sup>

For him, Adamov's was "une vie réussie", because although he was still struggling with the same problems as in L'Aveu, these had been integrated into a broader vision without compromising their immediacy or their truth.

In the passages of the journals devoted to the outside world, there is a clear difference from anything that had gone before. The tone is neither despairing as in L'Aveu, nor aggressively communist as in the 1958-1964 period: instead, he struck a balance between the two. He continued to see anti-communism as public enemy number one, but allowed his disappointment with the Soviet form of communism to be expressed where he felt it was important. For example, he refused to see the Sino-Soviet border disputes as anything but a criminally stupid wrangle; he condemned unequivocally the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia:

... l'erreur politique, la goujaterie est telle  
aujourd'hui qu'il n'est pas question d'hésiter.  
Je ne suis pas un humaniste. J'étais pour  
l'écrasement par les tanks soviétiques de la  
contre-révolution hongroise. Mais le Parti  
tchèque n'est pas le parti hongrois.  
"Devant chaque situation nouvelle, penser à  
nouveau" (Brecht).<sup>15</sup>

Again, he condemned the fact that Russia could befriend the Algerian régime that was capable of imprisoning a communist poet:

Je lis Bachir Hadj Ali, toujours incarcéré et  
torturé dans les camps du 'progressiste' et

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<sup>14</sup> Le Nouvel Observateur, 3 juillet 1968.

<sup>15</sup> Septembre 1968.

'socialiste' Boumédienne. Que ses poèmes sont beaux! L'un d'eux surtout, dédié à sa femme, intitulé Tenir.<sup>16</sup>

At the same time the atrocities of the capitalist world continued to draw loud protests from him particularly the Greek colonels' regime and the war in Vietnam. He expressed disgust at the general resurgence of nationalism all over the world, although he made one exception:

Certes, un peuple est là qui donne l'exemple, qui rappelle les vrais grands moments: le peuple du Nord- et du Sud-Vietnam. Penser à lui et faire pour lui le maximum.<sup>17</sup>

As well as noting down his reactions to political events, he talked of writers, especially Brecht and Flaubert. In the case of Brecht, he was delighted to discover his late poems and with them, he felt, a whole new personality. He also made a remark about Brecht which seems to imply a shared experience:

Martin Esslin a eu raison de souligner que si Brecht a adhéré au communisme, c'était en grande partie pour fuir les obsessions personnelles.<sup>18</sup>

The work of Flaubert's to which he came back several times was L'Education Sentimentale, for him the greatest novel of the nineteenth century. In this work, he found not only a moving account of Frédéric Moreau's ineptitude, missed opportunities and lost illusions,

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16 L'Homme et l'Enfant, p.235.

17 Ibid., p.231.

18 Ibid., p.169.

but also a style which he clearly wished to emulate:

La phrase résumée, serrée, celle surveillée  
par l'intelligence, la poésie, la vraie.<sup>19</sup>

The one-word title of Bachir Hadj Ali's poem Tenir sums up his attitude in the journals. Since salvation was not in the end to be found by blindly following any one ideology, a man could only 'hold on': "Marcher les yeux fermés, marcher toujours. Tenir."<sup>20</sup> He had found a precarious balance which had to be maintained at all cost and the image of the balance, or the scales, occurred in the journals as he imagined, on the one side his despair and anguish, on the other the enormous weight necessary to counterbalance these:

Il faut, sur l'autre plateau de la balance, poser  
un poids immense.  
C'est toi, ma petite, toute mince fillette aux  
yeux brillants, que je pose pourtant sur cet  
autre plateau.<sup>21</sup>

Similarly, his statements on other matters tended to exhibit a certain balanced tension instead of their former belligerence. The structure of the following remark contains an example:

L'anti-communisme est une maladie; malheureusement  
son remède n'est pas le communisme.<sup>22</sup>

And the last section of the 'Journal' to be printed in L'Homme et l'Enfant closes with a picture of the stoical attitude to which he aspired, which again contains the image of a balancing act:

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19 20 mars 1969.

20 L'Homme et l'Enfant, p.235.

21 Ibid., p.226.

22 In a private interview, June 1968.

Je me souviens de ce jongleur d'un petit cirque de Bretagne.

L'homme ne pouvait pas rattraper à la fois ses deux balles, alors il en sortait de ses poches trois, quatre, cinq, et, hagard, les lançait d'un seul coup. Il n'était pas en état de les rattraper toutes.

Sous les rires, les huées, la sueur baignait son front.

Ne pas être ce jongleur-là. Mais poursuivre le jeu. Même si on a manqué une balle, en lancer une seconde encore.

Le défi ferme, mesuré.<sup>23</sup>

As well as providing an illuminating picture of Adamov the man, his journals contain valuable insights into his own plays. His next play to be completed, in 1966, was Sainte Europe, which he had already mentioned in the last few pages of L'Homme et l'Enfant. This is one of his least successful plays, and he was well aware at the time that his work was deteriorating:

J'ai pourtant l'impression pénible de travailler dans la confusion, l'alcool fait son travail.<sup>24</sup>

He discussed a projected play, La Chanson des Malheureux, which he had already mentioned in an interview as far back as 1963<sup>25</sup>, but which he never completed. It was to have been about the Weimar republic and was to have charted the origins of Nazism, both in the public failure of 'social democracy' and in the private failure of

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23 L'Homme et l'Enfant, p.245.

24 Ibid., p.153.

25 Peter Gelbard, 'An interview with Adamov', Drama Survey, vol.3, no.2, October 1963, pp.252-256.

individuals to overcome their obsessions. He stated that his reason for abandoning this play was that he had been able to say in Off Limits what he had been meaning to say in La Chanson des Malheureux. However, considering that Adamov had personally experienced life under the Weimar republic, and considering the similarities between his work and that of the German Expressionists who were writing at that time, it seems a pity he never wrote the play.

He discussed Le Ping-Pong à propos of his old friend and fellow-emigré called Serge, who was the prototype for Victor in that play, and he mentioned its revival by the Théâtre Populaire De Lorraine in 1966-7, speaking of it with evident affection. He was also greatly encouraged by the first production of La Politique des Restes which was performed in Saint-Denis where Le Printemps 71 had been done four years before. His joy at this was disproportionate, almost pathetic:

Alors c'est vrai, on va jouer La Politique des Restes. Enfin je verrai une pièce de moi en France, en français.  
Ceux de Saint-Denis, qu'ils soient remerciés.<sup>26</sup>

But he was unable to see the production, having to remain in the sanatorium.

He also talked at some length of M. le Modéré, written partly as a result of his feeling that he had to write something to keep himself sane and ward off suicidal despair. He commented ironically:

Ecrire cette clownerie dans l'état où je suis!  
Certes, les clowns pleurent.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> L'Homme et l'Enfant, p.232.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p.226.

M. le Modéré was produced by a faithful friend of Adamov's, André Steiger, in the boulevard Théâtre des Mathurins. It opened on 25th September, 1968 and received a fairly good press, but did not at first attract large audiences. After three weeks, when the numbers were beginning to increase and the actors were becoming more polished, the directrice decided that the moment had come to cut her losses. Adamov's journal for 24th November had some very bitter comments about this. However, he looked resolutely forward to Off Limits which was to be produced by Gabriel Garran as part of his season at the Théâtre de la Commune, Aubervilliers, starting on the 25th January 1969.

The play had been written in the months between the end of 'Journal VI' in August 1967 and the beginning of 'Journal VII' in March 1968. The journal for 24th January 1969 contains some penetrating notes on Off Limits in which he summed up his reactions to the rehearsals he had been following and to the play itself. I have quoted from these in Part III, Chapter 5.

These notes also show how much he was hoping for success; as always, he thought of the first night rather as a magical occurrence. If it brought success, then all his problems would be solved, and success would also follow in his fight against despair and neurosis. But the reviews were disappointing. Gautier's insults surpassed even what he had written about Paolo Paoli; the more discerning critics who had followed Adamov's work for some time, like Lemarchand and Dumur, expressed chiefly their disappointment with Garran's production. Lemarchand, while admiring certain aspects of the play itself, called the production

'un triste massacre' and Dumur went so far as to doubt whether it could ever be successful on stage:

A la lecture on comprend mieux quel poème Adamov a voulu écrire. Pouvait-il être traduit en langage scénique?<sup>28</sup>

Poirot-Delpech in Le Monde, and Claude Olivier in Les Lettres Françaises, while not quite so damning for the production, both commented on the peculiar difficulties of staging Adamov's plays.

However, the disappointment of the Aubervilliers production was partially compensated for by a production very shortly afterwards at the Piccolo Teatro, Milan, reflecting the considerable success that Adamov's plays have had in Italy. This production set the play on the deck of a ship which was to represent America drifting uncontrollably. Adamov approved of this production:

Plus elle s'éloigne de moi et plus elle grandit, retrouve la beauté déposée en elle. Ce grand pont de navire où la figure de proue, d'un rose de sucre d'orge, est la statue de la liberté; ce grand pont où tour à tour chacun disparaît dans la cale, revient, remonte, se perd, se retrouve, il est là, sous mes yeux, visible, magnifique.<sup>29</sup>

He had been working on his last play, Si l'été revenait, since late 1968, and it was completed in 1969. At first it had been entitled L'Etat providence, and was to have been principally devoted to showing the contradictions inherent in the social democracy of Sweden, the country with the greatest material prosperity in Europe and the

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<sup>28</sup> Le Nouvel Observateur, 3 février 1969.

<sup>29</sup> 2 mars 1969.

highest suicide rate. But gradually, this early idea became transformed into a play about a family, as claustrophobic as any of his early 'family' plays, and considerably more complex. So complex, in fact, that he exclaimed:

Que cette pièce a été difficile à écrire!  
J'entremêlais les noms des filles, je me perdais  
dans les analogies des situations.<sup>30</sup>

It was not only the complexity of the material that gave him difficulties. He was profoundly uncertain about how to continue as a playwright. Although he never admitted this, his attempts at linking material from obsessions with political realities became less successful, the more he drew on obsessions that were uncommon or difficult to identify with. His last plays show him falling back more and more on his private neuroses, a development which culminated in Si l'été revenait which is entirely made up of dream sequences. This was partly prompted by a conscious attempt to recapture what he had achieved in Le Professeur Taranne, a play drawn entirely from a dream, but which nevertheless existed in its own right, escaping from the allegorical symbolism of his early plays:

Plus de paraboles! Qu'un monde s'impose où  
des êtres bougent, crient, rient, pleurent,  
pour leur seul compte.<sup>31</sup>

But he was uncertain how to achieve this, and commented ironically:

Il est très bien d'avoir deux, trois, quatre  
manières, mais encore faut-il pouvoir s'en

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<sup>30</sup> 12 octobre 1969.

<sup>31</sup> L'Homme et l'Enfant, p.203.

sortir, sortir. Quelle porte toucher, pousser?<sup>32</sup>

He even thought of abandoning the theatre for prose:

Fuir le théâtre, écrire de la belle prose  
tranquille, m'installer en somme, dans une sorte  
de grotte. Mais la grotte, n'est-ce pas la  
mort? Et la machine folle, hallucinée, la vie?<sup>33</sup>

But as always, he was incapable of becoming 'established', and besides, his fascination with the theatre was as strong as ever. It was doubtless his inability to make any progress on his new play that finally drove him to take his life in March 1970. The play was to have been about Ferdinand de Lesseps, a subject he had sketched out many years previously in 'Théâtre, Argent et Politique'. But he found it too difficult. Perhaps the return to a historical subject was too difficult to make after the very private searching through his own dreams and obsessions in Si l'été revenait.

The latter play was broadcast on the radio in December 1969 and again shortly after his death, but it has not yet been produced on the stage and there are no concrete plans to do it. Indeed, it is difficult to see how it would work on the stage; it is more like an extended poetic monologue than a play. There is very little action, it is the least 'theatrical' of all Adamov's works from that point of view, and there is less conventional characterisation than in any of the other plays. The characters seem to flow into one another, their outlines seem deliberately blurred. And because the play repeats the same obscure

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32 14 mars 1969.

33 29 janvier 1969.

story in four different 'dreams', it is as Adamov himself said, "quasi-indéchiffable à la première lecture."<sup>34</sup>

The last book to be published in Adamov's life time was Je... Ils... in the Summer of 1969. After the success of L'Homme et l'Enfant and its obvious links with L'Aveu, he felt tempted to go back to that first record of the obsessions that still tormented him, and to discover in what way his perspective had changed. His view of the change was summed up in the book's title; in the first half of the book he re-published the text of L'Aveu with no change at all. This was 'Je', the part written entirely in the first person, in which he felt he had been excessively introspective and frequently self-indulgent. The second half consisted of what he called 'récits': brief erotic scenes or dreams described from memory, some of them the same scenes that he had described in L'Aveu. But this time they were all written in the third person ('Ils') and exhibited the same concern for objective description, the same lack of emotional commentary that had characterised L'Homme et l'Enfant.

The accounts of his sexual perversions contained in these stories are far more brutal than anything in L'Aveu. For the first time he gave a clear, concrete picture of his state of neurosis: "Toutes ces histoires sont la même, reprise à l'infini dans un jeu de miroirs, où la peur et la tristesse se regardent dans les yeux."<sup>35</sup> He no longer attempted to justify them; he tried simply to describe them, to make them live as

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<sup>34</sup> 12 octobre 1969.

<sup>35</sup> Je ... Ils ..., p.163.

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 vividly as possible, "nommant chaque chose par son nom".<sup>36</sup> This was the function of the poet as described in L'Aveu, and in the 'récits' Adamov added a new dimension to his concept of poetry. He had already insisted in 1958 on "l'incroyable poésie que contiennent les faits eux-mêmes"<sup>37</sup>, and that "la poésie, la vraie, est toujours liée à la particularisation la plus extrême"<sup>38</sup>. The concern for facts and details was a vital part of both 'Journal' and 'récits', but he added the notion of 'l'ellipse' to these in answer to a question concerning the place of eroticism in his work:

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 Les rapports entre érotisme et écriture ne me semblent possibles que si l'on adopte la forme de l'ellipse... parce que celui-ci (érotisme) ne devient tel que s'il est poétique; or je ne conçois pas de poésie sans ellipse.<sup>39</sup>

Dort, in his review, pointed out the constant alternation between the vividly experienced instant, and the passage of time. He remarked that in his 'Souvenirs' and 'Journal', Adamov had achieved the impression of a vivid, timeless moment by describing everything in the present tense. In the 'récits', all the scenes are in the past tense, but there is an alternation between the past definite and the imperfect, between the fragmentary gestures of the characters who cannot establish a durable pattern of relations, and the world around them which goes on:

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36 L'Aveu, p.106.

37 Ici et Maintenant, p.44.

38 'Avec Paolo Paoli Arthur Adamov définit un nouvel art poétique', Le Monde, 19 janvier 1958. Interview by Claude Sarraute.

39 Interview by Jacques Henric. See above, note 7. (For a full discussion of Adamov's notion of poetry, see below Part II, chapter 5,

C'est le destin même de la cérémonie érotique qui le veut: chaque geste est le produit d'un désir profond, il le satisfait sans l'épuiser; il s'épuisera en vain à le satisfaire. Impossible alors de ne pas se rappeler Flaubert qu'Adamov admire tant.<sup>40</sup>

The reference to Flaubert is not a vague one; Adamov himself had written:

On peut dire que toute la vie de Frédéric Moreau se déroule entre le 'pas encore', le 'trop tard' et le 'déjà plus' ... le roman n'est, en somme, que la description scrupuleuse de l'effondrement de son présent. ... La destruction du présent résulte directement des passages brusques de l'imparfait au passé défini; du mélange du présent et de l'imparfait; du double emploi de cet imparfait, pris tantôt pour relater les événements passés, tantôt pour rendre les pensées des personnages.<sup>41</sup>

These 'récits' together with the 'Souvenirs' and the journals, constitute a remarkable 'remise en question' of Adamov's whole life, a turning back on his life to survey the precise nature of his obsessions, his work, his place in the world. He had come through a full cycle from L'Aveu to Je... Ils...:

... (dans L'Aveu) je mentionne le 'caractère exemplaire de mon mal' ... Je vois encore aujourd'hui mon mal, mais je ne vois plus son caractère exemplaire.<sup>42</sup>

His detachment from neurosis was as complete as it could ever be. He had arrived at a point where he could view it objectively, unpretentiously, without shame or false self-justification. His late

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<sup>40</sup> 'Au delà de L'Aveu', Les Lettres Françaises, 30 juillet 1969.

<sup>41</sup> 'L'art et la vie de Gustave Flaubert' (with Marthe Robert), Cahiers Renaud-Barrault, no.59, mars 1967, pp.66-105.

<sup>42</sup> Je... Ils..., p.11.

prose works may well continue to be read when all but his best plays have been forgotten. They are in themselves not a justification of, but a compensation for suffering, since they show that however isolated a man may be from his fellows, however great his suffering, he can still, by creating a faithful image of it, communicate something of his experience.

Adamov's life cannot be summed up in a few words. It is not mere chance that he had, as he said, two, three, four different styles of writing; he had a protean quality, never able to settle back, satisfied, on his past achievements, but always searching for the new form which would give a truer image of the balance he was constantly trying to strike between past and present, private and public, the 'insolite' and the 'quotidien'. His attitude to literary success was a complex combination of two opposites: in a sense he desperately wanted it, bitterly resented not having achieved it, and believed it would have solved all his ills, but, equally, he was totally indifferent to it and he could never bring himself to cultivate the right people or assure himself of friends in high places.

He was full of such contradictions. All those who knew him well speak of his extremely child-like quality, both in his trusting approach to the world and to others, and also in his inability to escape from family influences implanted at a very early age. And yet he had a depth of experience and culture which few adults attain. Again, he was an intensely 'religious' person (Ionesco claimed he was the most religious person he knew); he could never rid himself of his

vision of the universe peopled by hostile powers which had to be placated; and yet he was ferociously anti-christian, always insisting vehemently on his atheism.

Such contradictions could be endlessly enumerated. The one really constant characteristic which can be seen running through his life was his tendency toward self-destruction. This appeared very early in his life with his delight in self-inflicted pain and reappeared in his constant struggle against the temptation to suicide and the masochistic practices which had such power over him precisely because they were a 'mithridatisation de la mort': by tasting destruction in small doses, he hoped to conjure away the fear of total destruction. He did not in the end succumb to it until he felt his life's work had ceased to progress.

One final contradiction in Adamov's character must not be overlooked: despite all his anguish, he had a profound sense of humour, as will be clear from a study of his plays. He was also a spontaneous story-teller and could keep an audience entertained indefinitely when he chose. Luckily, one or two examples have been preserved in the tape library of the O.R.T.F.: recordings of interviews he gave on 'France Culture' for Mme. Claire Jordan's weekly programme. Among these is an account he gave of the first night of Strindberg's Dream Play which proves his wonderful talent for telling a dramatic, humorous story. The material is the same as that given in his account on pages 34-35 of L'Homme et l'Enfant, but expanded to meet the needs of the story, and delivered with a sure sense of timing.

People who knew him during the last year of his life say that he looked like a man who knew he was dying. The calling into question of his most fundamental ideas that he achieved in his late prose works certainly suggests that he was conscious of the need for a summing up. And yet, the remarkable thing about this activity was that it was in no way backward-looking; all his efforts were, on the contrary, turned towards the future, towards the means by which he could continue the struggle: "le défi ferme, mesuré". In this phrase or in the image of the juggler evoked on the last page of L'Homme et l'Enfant, we can see a man who reached the limits of suffering, but who fought against it with all his might. When reminded of Artaud's phrase about the true artist, which I quoted at the beginning of Chapter 1, he noted in his journal the following comment:

Le jeune Anglais ... a été bouleversé par  
L'Homme et l'Enfant ... C'est le témoignage,  
ajoute-t-il, d'un homme qui, comme le disait  
Artaud, fait des signes sur son bûcher.  
Seulement voilà, je ne veux pas être brûlé vif.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> 24 juillet 1968.

PART II A critical study of Adamov's first ten plays from  
La Parodie to Le Ping-Pong

## PART II

Chapter 1 Stage

For his early plays, up to Le Ping-Pong, Adamov took the same themes that had preoccupied him in L'Aveu. His anguish, his sense of isolation, his moments of intense awareness of reality, his preoccupation with the decay of language, his domination by suffering and his desire to humiliate himself before women, all of these found a natural means of expression on the stage. Two things in particular pointed to his adoption of the theatre. One was the very dramatic means of expression to be found in L'Aveu itself, whose themes were presented in short, often violent scenes of action, the other was Adamov's own profoundly exhibitionist tendencies, which he had analysed and exemplified in L'Aveu, and which he dramatised in one of his most successful plays, Le Professeur Taranne.

Geneviève Serreau brought these two things together in a comment on the appropriateness of the stage for the expression of the things that Adamov wished to say:

Où, mieux qu'au théâtre, ces brusques révélations d'un réel plus vrai que le réel pourraient-elles s'exprimer? Et n'est-ce pas en les exhibant - fût-ce par masochisme - face au public, sous les projecteurs de la scène, que l'on peut espérer se délivrer des cauchemars qui vous hantent?<sup>1</sup>

As she suggested, Adamov was motivated by two distinct urges: the urge

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<sup>1</sup> Geneviève Serreau, Histoire du Nouveau Théâtre, Paris, 1966, p.67.

to convey to others his own heightened vision of reality<sup>2</sup>, and the urge simply to express himself, to confess, to expose his obsessions, because only in so doing could he find relief from them.<sup>3</sup>

Adamov stated that it was his contact with the plays of Strindberg that was decisive in giving him the urge to write for the stage. In his study of Strindberg, he referred to his theatre as "son entreprise d'auto-disculpation"<sup>4</sup>; Adamov's theatre was for him a similar undertaking. In the same work, he asked:

Que veut essentiellement Strindberg? A la fois  
s'affirmer, s'exhiber, prouver, se dérober.  
Où peut-il mieux satisfaire ces désirs qu'à la  
scène?<sup>5</sup>

In describing Strindberg's approach to the theatre, Adamov was fully conscious that he allowed his account to be coloured by his own preoccupations, "tirailé entre l'attirance qu'exercent sur lui les fantasmes de la folie, et la peur qu'il a de s'y abandonner."<sup>6</sup>

As in L'Aveu, the need to express himself remained basic if Adamov was to retain his sanity. In writing for the theatre this need was the more fully satisfied because of the concrete dimensions of the stage; his work became a genuine exhibition of, not simply an account

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<sup>2</sup> See below Chapter 5, pp.242ff.

<sup>3</sup> See above Part I, Chapter 2, p.16.

<sup>4</sup> Adamov, Strindberg, Paris, 1955, p.50.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.47.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.45.

of, his neuroses. In his use of the stage, Adamov was thus keen to exploit as fully as possible its power to concretise images or obsessions.

In L'Aveu, he had already stated a belief that verbal expression was not sufficient, the added dimension of 'le geste' was needed:

Tout mouvement de la pensée, pour être réel  
et doué de vie, doit se traduire et se répercuter  
par le geste, qui lui répond dans l'ordre du  
symbole.<sup>7</sup>

It was important to him that his thoughts should live in gesture, both to provide himself with a more potent relief, and so that his obsessions could be expressed in behaviour which would enable others to understand some general truth. His discovery of the theatre was thus both natural and inevitable, since only in the theatre do thoughts achieve the concrete, three-dimensional form of action.

Adamov's plays were written to be performed, not to be read. When he published La Parodie and L'Invasion in 1950, having failed to get them performed, his 'Avertissement' provided a clear outline of why he felt that production on the stage was so vital for them:

Le théâtre tel que je le conçois est lié  
entièrement et absolument à la représentation ...  
Ce que je veux au théâtre et ce que j'ai tenté  
de réaliser dans ces pièces, c'est que la  
manifestation de ce contenu coïncide littéralement,  
concrètement, corporellement avec le contenu  
lui-même.  
... les gestes, les attitudes, la vie propre du  
corps ont le droit de se libérer de la convention  
du langage...  
Dans cette poussée du geste pour son propre

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<sup>7</sup> L'Aveu, p.102.

compte, dans son irresponsabilité, je vois  
apparaître une dimension dont le langage seul  
ne peut rendre compte...<sup>8</sup>

Adamov's theatre, profoundly original from the start, wished to substitute for witty dialogue, or the attempt to prove a philosophical thesis, a more vigorous theatre which would embody, in concrete images of the stage, the senselessness of the human condition. This non-discursive, literal style is one which has since become familiar as a large body of 'theatre of the Absurd' has grown up. Adamov was the first to stress the importance of 'le geste' as a means of bringing renewal to what all the critics of the forties agreed was a moribund French theatre.

Duvignaud was one of the first to understand this new theatre; in 1953 he called it

un art du geste... une épreuve de force qui...  
demande au visage humain de porter les profondes  
mutilations de l'existence collective<sup>9</sup>

He pointed out, like Esslin ten years later, that

The Theatre of the Absurd has renounced arguing  
about the absurdity of the human condition;  
it merely presents it in being - that is, in  
terms of concrete stage images. This is the  
difference between the approach of the phil-  
osopher and that of the poet.<sup>10</sup>

Like a poet, Adamov was striving for a perfect integration of subject-

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<sup>8</sup> La Parodie. L'Invasion, Paris, 1950, pp.22-23. This important preface will hereafter be referred to by its title: 'Avertissement'.

<sup>9</sup> Jean Duvignaud, 'Un Théâtre de la Persécution', Critique, t.9, no.68, janvier 1953, p.22.

<sup>10</sup> Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, London, 1962, p.18.

matter and form: thought and gesture were to coincide in the literal form of a simple, violent, direct stage action which would, like poetry, embody a maximum of suggestive power.<sup>11</sup>

Profoundly original as this was, it would be wrong to picture Adamov as totally isolated from anything that had gone before in the French theatrical tradition. The influence which is clearest in these early plays is perhaps that of Strindberg. But an equally important influence was that of his great friend Antonin Artaud. He expressed his admiration for Artaud in L'Homme et l'Enfant (especially p.82) and in three articles published at different times.<sup>12</sup> In the most important of the articles, entitled 'Introduction à Antonin Artaud', he made three main points about Le Théâtre et son Double and these will serve as a useful starting point for an examination of the influence of Artaud on Adamov.

The first was that Artaud's conception of the theatre extended far beyond the limits of the stage or auditorium and called into question the basic principles of life itself. The second was that the dramatist must not rely on the spoken language, but evolve a new stage language employing all the means of expression available in a performance. The third was the concept of 'cruelty'.

The first of these is perhaps the most widely known of Artaud's

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<sup>11</sup> The 'poetic' aspects of Adamov's plays are discussed in Chapter 5.

<sup>12</sup> 'Introduction à Antonin Artaud', Paru, no.29, avril 1947, pp.7-12. 'L'Oeuvre indéfinissable d'Antonin Artaud', K, juin 1968. 'Parce que je l'ai beaucoup aimé', Cahiers Renaud-Barrault, nos. 22-23, mai 1958, pp.128-129.

ideas. It is also the one most important for Adamov, since at this time he was not interested in any literature or view of the world that fell short of the visionary, or dealt with less than the whole human condition. Indeed, it was part of the originality of Adamov's plays that they called into question the whole of Man's reason for being. Artaud believed, as did Adamov, that Western culture had become degenerate and lifeless through being cut off for too long from the sacred sources of life as expressed in religions, ceremonials and other manifestations of a social order united in obedience to an accepted divine authority.

This belief is to be found everywhere in Artaud's work and it appears as a leitmotif throughout Le Théâtre et son Double. In many ways, his way of expressing this cultural degeneration was similar to Adamov's descriptions in L'Aveu. The following sentences from Le Théâtre et son Double, for example, show the same attitude and same style that Adamov later adopted in L'Aveu:

Nous vivons une époque probablement unique  
dans l'histoire du monde, où le monde passé  
au crible voit ses vieilles valeurs  
s'effondrer. La vie calcinée se dissout par  
la base.<sup>13</sup>

Artaud's tone, even more than Adamov's later, was apocalyptic:

Le théâtre comme la peste est une crise qui  
se dénoue par la mort ou la guérison.<sup>14</sup>

Adamov's theatre did indeed embody a crisis, his own crisis which had

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<sup>13</sup> Antonin Artaud, 'Le Théâtre et son Double', in Oeuvres Complètes, tome IV, Paris, 1964, p.139. (Mostly written in the early 1930's, Le Théâtre et son Double was first published in 1938.)

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.38.

always shown signs that its dénouement might be in suicide, though for a time, it clearly turned towards the cure.

For Artaud, the theatre was not merely a place where a mirror could be held up to life, but a sacred temple from which should flow the source of life itself. His own life was devoted to making a gigantic protest:

Protestation contre l'idée séparée que l'on se fait de la culture, comme s'il y avait la culture d'un côté et la vie de l'autre; et comme si la vraie culture n'était pas un moyen raffiné de comprendre et d'exercer la vie.<sup>15</sup>

Picking up this idea of protest, Adamov made it clear in his 'Note' to Théâtre II how much he owed to this view of the theatre:

Nourri du Théâtre et son Double, écoeuré surtout par les pièces dites psychologiques qui encombraient et encombre encore toutes les scènes, je voulais élever ma protestation.<sup>16</sup>

Both were striving for a medium and a statement more all-embracing than was provided by the theatre of their time. But despite the vigour and passion of Artaud's theory, he did not manage to bring into being the new theatre he dreamed of. It was not until the fifties that an appreciable body of plays appeared which did not rely on a plot of psychological intrigue but tried to present a complete picture of the human condition in all its aspects. The precise nature of Artaud's influence on the other playwrights of the fifties is perhaps debatable, but in so far as his dreams were at all realisable, theirs was the

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.14.

<sup>16</sup> Théâtre II, Paris, 1955, p.9. This preface will hereafter be referred to by its title: 'Note'.

kind of theatre Artaud had demanded: one which made a complete break with nineteenth and early twentieth-century dramatic convention in favour of something more all-embracing. He described this type of theatre as similar to the Eastern theatre "à tendances métaphysiques" rather than the Western theatre "à tendances psychologiques."<sup>17</sup>

The word 'métaphysique' was an important word in Artaud's writing and one to which he gave varying meanings. At times he used it to mean the equivalent of 'all-embracing'. For example, he admired the 'metaphysical' Eastern theatre because it appealed to all the senses and all levels of consciousness; it became for him "la métaphysique en activité".<sup>18</sup> He meant that the themes of the performances touched on all aspects of life and expressed themselves through all the available means: sound, light, gesture, movement, etc. It was just such a combination that Adamov was striving for in his first plays and he described it, in terms which recall Artaud, as:

Un théâtre vivant, c'est-à-dire un théâtre  
où les gestes, les attitudes, la vie propre  
du corps ont le droit de ... aller jusqu'au  
bout de leur signification profonde.<sup>19</sup>

A second meaning conveyed by Artaud's use of the word 'métaphysique' was that of cosmic significance. He said, for example, that behind all attempts to create a new theatrical language, there should be

Une sorte de tentation métaphysique réelle, un  
appel à certaines idées inhabituelles... idées

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<sup>17</sup> Artaud, *op. cit.*, p.54.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p.54.

<sup>19</sup> 'Avertissement', pp.22-23.

qui touchent à la Création, au Devenir, au Chaos,  
et sont toutes d'ordre cosmique.<sup>20</sup>

This shows Artaud at his more obscure: he is thinking here of the same theories that he put forward in 'La Mise en Scène et la Métaphysique' where he pleaded for a theatre which, by using a language completely its own, could attain a measure of abstraction which would enable it to stand in its own right and escape the necessity for verbal analysis. What he had in mind here is probably more faithfully exemplified by the Living Theatre than by Adamov, though one should of course point out that the intervention of the cosmic powers of Creation and Destruction are by no means excluded from Adamov's theatre and have a particularly important part to play in La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre.

In other places, Artaud used the word 'métaphysique' less obscurely, suggesting that the theatre should be metaphysical in the sense that it should deal with first principles. This is a more commonly accepted definition of the word and is expressed through the more easily recognisable idea of a 'remise en cause':

Le théâtre doit poursuivre, par tous les moyens,  
une remise en cause non seulement de tous les  
aspects du monde objectif et descriptif  
externe, mais du monde interne, c'est-à-dire  
de l'homme, considéré métaphysiquement.<sup>21</sup>

One of the most original elements of the theatre of the Absurd and of Adamov's theatre in particular, is that it exemplifies just such a

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<sup>20</sup> Artaud, op. cit., p.107.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., pp.109-110.

'remise en cause'. Adamov's own obsessions and preoccupations led him to consider Man metaphysically in this sense of questioning the fundamental principles of his interior life, the powers that govern him and his chance of escaping the universal law of death. In this way he was also responding to Artaud's first demand for a return to the sources of life itself.

The second important demand which Adamov found in Artaud was for a new stage language. New theatrical material, he believed, could only be expressed through a new theatrical convention and the best living example Artaud found of the metaphysical theatre he desired was provided by the Balinese dancers who performed at the 'Exposition Coloniale' of 1931. The inspiration he gained from watching these dancers was important for him in a number of different ways. They attracted him because their drama, taken in its entirety, fulfilled his ideal of "la métaphysique en activité". But he was perhaps principally excited by the fact that they expressed themselves through an entirely new language having little or nothing to do with the spoken word, thus fitting with his belief that:

C'est la mise en scène qui est le théâtre.  
beaucoup plus que la pièce écrite et  
parlée.<sup>22</sup>

Words, he said, had for too long been seen as the only means of theatrical expression, whereas in fact they were the least important. The Balinese dancers provided for Artaud the example of a theatre

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p.49.

which had no need of words: it had evolved its own language which was specifically and uniquely of the theatre, a language whose basic units were not words, but signs, gestures, movements:

En somme, les Balinais réalisent, avec la plus extrême rigueur, l'idée du théâtre pur, où tout, conception comme réalisation, ne vaut, n'a d'existence que par son degré d'objectivation sur la scène.  
 ... Les thèmes sont vagues, abstraits, extrêmement généraux. Seul, leur donne vie, le foisonnement compliqué de tous les artifices scéniques qui imposent à notre esprit comme l'idée d'une métaphysique tirée d'une utilisation nouvelle du geste et de la voix.<sup>23</sup>

Adamov's insistence on the need for his plays to be seen in action is very close to this idea of "objectivation sur la scène". In his 'Avertissement', he demanded that "la manifestation de ce contenu coincide littéralement, concrètement, corporellement avec le contenu lui-même."<sup>24</sup> The example he gave was of someone in the position of Le Mutilé in La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre suffering from a mutilation of personality which is therefore expressed in literal, physical mutilation. He could have taken other examples from the plays he was publishing; in La Parodie, for example, N.'s attitude of passive resignation is conveyed by his position on the stage which is supine for most of the play. Of course Adamov differed from Artaud in the place he ascribed to language. He believed it could be presented in a new light rather than eliminated entirely, as will be clear in Chapter 3.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp.64-65.

<sup>24</sup> 'Avertissement', p.22.

The third fundamental idea alluded to by Adamov in his assessments of Le Théâtre et son Double was the idea of cruelty. "L'idée de la cruauté", he said, "intervient et éclaire tout le livre."<sup>25</sup> Adamov was at pains to insist that this is not a sadistic type of cruelty but a conception which makes 'cruelty' almost synonymous with 'life'. Artaud was perpetually misunderstood on this as on other points and he included in Le Théâtre et son Double two letters in which he had tried to make it absolutely clear what he meant by cruelty. He said:

J'emploie le mot de cruauté dans le sens d'appétit de vie, de rigueur cosmique et de nécessité implacable.<sup>26</sup>

He appeared to use cruelty to mean two different things: the realities of the universe around us and an attitude which man can aspire to when faced with these realities. Since ideally these two things would coincide, he was able to use the same word for both. Thus we find, for example, in the quotation given above that 'nécessité implacable' seems to mean almost exactly what the Greek Tragedians meant by 'Dikē': he saw the universe as composed of forces which work in a given way, a way which is not necessarily comprehensible to Man, but which he ignores at his peril:

Nous ne sommes pas libres. Et le ciel peut encore nous tomber sur la tête. Et le théâtre est fait pour nous apprendre d'abord cela.<sup>27</sup>

But as well as using the word 'cruauté' to convey this idea of an overall necessity to which all must submit, he also used it to convey

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<sup>25</sup> 'Introduction à Antonin Artaud', p.8. (See note 12.)

<sup>26</sup> Artaud, op. cit., p.122. (See also p.137.)

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p.95.

the attitude of the initiate:

Mais théâtre de la cruauté veut dire théâtre difficile et cruel d'abord pour moi-même.<sup>28</sup>

And again, in a letter to Jean Paulhan, he said:

La cruauté est avant tout lucide, c'est une sorte de direction rigide, la soumission à la nécessité.<sup>29</sup>

So 'cruauté' conveyed both the idea of necessity and the acceptance of it; and the two things taken together were seen as "appétit de vie"<sup>30</sup> since "tout ce qui agit est une cruauté".<sup>31</sup> This seems contradictory until we realise that for Artaud all real contact with life is dangerous. The appetite for life involves a certain acceptance of terror. It involves an acceptance of anarchy, "l'esprit d'anarchie profonde qui est à la base de toute poésie,"<sup>32</sup> a return to disorder so that men might once again drink at the springs of life. And since the most powerful and deadening weapon evolved by civilization to keep life under control was the written language, its claims had to be denied, it had to be shattered and a new means of communication found:

Briser le langage pour toucher la vie, c'est faire ou refaire le théâtre.<sup>33</sup>

Adamov's belief that words themselves had degenerated perhaps

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28 Ibid., p.95.

29 Ibid., p.121.

30 Ibid., p.122.

31 Ibid., p.102.

32 Ibid., p.51.

33 Ibid., p.18.

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owes something to Artaud's vendetta against language, his determination that it must be destroyed and recreated. This attitude possibly had something to do with Artaud's difficulty in expressing himself. But the way he used words was always semi-poetic, as can be seen from the extracts given above. Rather than making a strict analysis of the words he used, he would work for a deliberate ambiguity, using words as a poet uses them in order to awaken in the minds of his readers, the maximum of allusion to other levels of meaning and association.

Many other similarities can be detected between the two men. It is interesting to see that Adamov singled out from Artaud's correspondence (C.C.) "sa hantise de ne pouvoir exprimer sa pensée",<sup>34</sup> since this was an anxiety shared by Adamov and described in L'Aveu: "Que le verbe m'abandonne et aussitôt je ne tiens plus debout."<sup>35</sup> The concept of "la séparation" which is so important in L'Aveu has a precedent in Les Nouvelles Révélations de l'Etre.<sup>36</sup> Both men were seen as 'poètes maudits' and both have been denounced as degenerates. Both were enormously ambitious and both suffered terribly from their failure to achieve a complete realisation of these ambitions. Both were dominated at one stage or another by powerful obsessions bordering on insanity, and both experienced additional agonies through addiction to drugs or

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34 'Introduction à Antonin Artaud', p.7. (See note 12.)

35 L'Aveu, p.26.

36 And in his Lettres à Génica Athanasion, published by Gallimard, 1969. On p.89: "séparation de moi-même de chacun de mes membres, de mes organes." See Chapter 2, pp./ for Adamov on 'la séparation'.

drink. It has recently become fashionable for every avant-garde dramatist to claim inspiration from Artaud, and many of these claims must be considered as spurious or superficial. If only by his sufferings, Adamov can make a legitimate claim to the inheritance of Artaud. Artaud himself justified this claim in his article in praise of L'Aveu which was quoted in Part I.<sup>37</sup>

Having looked briefly at Artaud, and at those of his ideas which Adamov considered to be most important, it will be easier to understand the value of the concrete dimensions of the stage in Adamov's plays. We have seen that Adamov, like Artaud, wished to make a protest in his plays. And like Artaud, he believed that this could only be achieved by a complete renewal of the theatre. He was very conscious of evolving a whole new convention, not dealing with moral problems, or social conditions, but with the human condition itself.

In order to shock his public out of their conventional, rationalistic perceptions of the world, he adopted Artaud's principles of violent dramatic action, in which 'le geste'<sup>38</sup>, or the concrete enactment of a dramatic image, was all-important, and the words of the text took second place. As Artaud had said:

Je dis que la scène est un lieu physique et concret qui demande qu'on le remplisse, et qu'on lui fasse parler son langage concret.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> See Part I, pp. 36-37.

<sup>38</sup> As used by Adamov in the 'Avertissement'. (See above pp. 97-98.)

<sup>39</sup> Artaud, op. cit., p.45.

so Adamov stated, as we have seen,

Le théâtre tel que je le conçois est lié  
entièrement et absolument à la représentation.<sup>40</sup>

These principles led him to write dramas of stark contrasts and violent action in which sounds, lights and movement have as important a part to play as the words spoken by the characters. The central theme is always the futility and cruelty of life, but words such as 'solitude', 'isolation', 'suffering' are not articulated. The characters whose passion we witness do not understand their own predicament. There is little character development in the traditional sense; instead there is a rigorous progression of persecution, as the characters are ruthlessly dispossessed of all humanity and finally crushed.

All of the early plays exhibit this inexorable progress towards destruction which can be seen at its most schematic in La Parodie and La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre, since in both of these plays the theme of the general futility of life is presented through the destruction of two very different characters who progress by divergent but complementary paths to their identical annihilation in death.

The very shape of these plays presents a dramatic metaphor of the inevitability of human destruction. Their progression is not a progression in time, but rather a progression to the logical conclusion of complete fatalism; the same situation is presented in an increasingly stark light. As Adamov said in his note about the décor of La Parodie:

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<sup>40</sup> 'Avertissement', p.22.

"Il présente les mêmes choses sous des angles de vue différents."<sup>41</sup> The 'nécessité cosmique' of Artaud finds literal expression in the progressive destruction of N. and L'Employé.

The sheer inevitability of this destruction, which could legitimately be described as cruelty in Artaud's sense, is expressed first and foremost through the shape of the play which presents with mathematical neatness its conflict of opposed forces. On the one hand is L'Employé the eternal optimist, on the other is N., the unshakeable fatalist, and in between them, inaccessible to both of them, are Lili and the other characters which make up her world. The play's thirteen scenes could be expressed, rather like a chess game, as a series of vain attacks by N. and L'Employé on Lili and her world which is always hostile to them and always frustrates their efforts.

La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre is constructed on exactly the same lines, though it does not share quite so schematic a construction since Le Mutilé and Le Militant are not fighting exactly the same enemy. But the general point that their two battles are equally futile is just as important as it was in La Parodie, and indeed the two different types of unpredictable terror against which they fight are explicitly linked in the first tableau when Le Mutilé is forced by a couple of brutal policemen to watch Le Militant being beaten up in a mysterious gymnastic ritual which sets the tone for the rituals which he in turn is forced to go through by the 'moniteurs'.

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<sup>41</sup> Théâtre I, p.10.

The total construction of these plays, then, is governed by what Artaud termed 'L'objectivation sur la scène', and Adamov 'cette poussée du geste pour son propre compte'. The senselessness of human activity, the horror of human suffering, was to be exposed in brief, violent confrontations which sacrificed plot, story, and all the traditional frills of the theatre, in favour of a rigorous, schematic style which subjected everything to the central expressive aim. *Le Mutilé* also provides the best example, the one that Adamov himself used, of how this conception of the theatre governed even the construction of the characters:

Ainsi par exemple, si le drame d'un homme consiste dans une mutilation quelconque de sa personne, je ne vois pas de meilleur moyen pour rendre dramatiquement la vérité d'une telle mutilation que de la représenter corporellement sur scène.<sup>42</sup>

This image of mutilated Man is clearly a very powerful one combining numerous different associations. First, there is the obvious suggestion of the castration fear which is reinforced by the fact that it is his inability to persuade Erna to love him that makes *Le Mutilé* defenceless. Secondly, there is the fear of losing control of oneself made explicit in the immediate cause of each successive mutilation: his inability to keep pace with the orders given to him during the gymnastic sessions. Thirdly there is the fear of the dictatorial voices of the subconscious or of a power transcending Man which speaks through his mind. These are presented in literal form, suggesting the Biblical 'voice of God': audible voices (heard only by *Le Mutilé* and the audience) which boom

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<sup>42</sup> 'Avertissement', p.22.

from the sky.

The progressive mutilation thus pictures the whole theme of the play, as does its shape: it is a picture of Man's hopeless condition, crushed by forces within him and without, all equally beyond his control or comprehension. And this cruel picture is designed to provoke in the audience, privileged to view it from the outside, the realisation that in their own lives they are as helpless as *Le Mutilé*.

But perhaps the most important thing about Adamov's very original form of dramatic construction in these early plays was his efforts to combine dream and reality, what he was later to describe as '*le réel et l'irréel*',<sup>43</sup>. Every one of his plays can be seen as a fresh attempt to find the correct balance between these two worlds, which he also described as '*le monde dit onirique*' and '*le monde objectif*'.<sup>44</sup> It was to achieve this balance that he adopted a dramaturgical style enabling him to bring to life an autonomous world functioning according to its own laws, laws which were partially understood by the dramatist, partially incomprehensible to him.

His episodic dramatic structure, composed of a succession of short scenes changing rapidly from one setting to another, rather as in a dream, was appropriate for plays in which an image or a situation was developed, often in a circular movement, proceeding not by the logic of the time squence, but by a movement of free association as in a dream.

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<sup>43</sup> Ici et Maintenant, pp.115-117.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p.117.

The lack of logical connection between the scenes of La Parodie has been mentioned; Le Professeur Taranne is another example. It presents Taranne facing three different accusations, one after the other. The only logical connection between them is in the logic of Taranne's fears about his own identity. Again, the different episodes of Le Sens de la Marche serve principally to present Henri with different manifestations of paternal authority. The temporal sequence is not as important as the progressive definition of a situation which encloses him so completely that he can only break out of it by violence.

An expression of the link between this kind of dramatic structure and the attempt to create a dream reality can be seen in this extract from Adamov's study of Strindberg:

Strindberg effrayé par ses rêves, est allé au devant de la menace en la matérialisant par une technique qu'il a été le premier à découvrir. Changements à vue du décor, qui sont en même temps changements instantanés des états intérieurs. Il est seulement regrettable que, dans Le Chemin de Damas, comme dans presque toutes les pièces du milieu et de la fin, la froide allégorie, la signification niaise... viennent... chasser la vérité, détruire la poésie.<sup>45</sup>

The above extract combines an expression of the three things which were most important to Adamov: first, the materialising of the dream in order to escape from the fear it exercised over him. Second, the use of a fluid dramatic movement in which a change in exterior circumstances also implies a change in the interior states of the

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<sup>45</sup> Strindberg, pp.62-63.

characters; this is particularly clear in La Parodie, where the décor even changes shape according to L'Employé's changing state of mind.

Third, it reaffirms Adamov's insistence that the play should not mean but be.<sup>46</sup>

Adamov turned his book on Strindberg into something of a tribune for proclaiming the kind of theatre he believed was needed in France at the time he was writing. We have seen that he believed his own reasons for writing plays were the same as Strindberg's, and that it was A Dream Play that made him want to write for the theatre. It seems to have been through contact with Strindberg's work that he first glimpsed how, precisely by using his obsessions, he could create a new theatre. For him, the link between Strindberg's mental illness and his success in the theatre was all-important:

Le théâtre de Strindberg est comme le résultat, détourné bien sûr, mais réel, de la maladie de Strindberg. Nous y voyons triompher, dans leur expression la plus littérale, les obsessions qui l'ont fait le plus souffrir. Chaque pièce a un sens littéral qui la résume toute entière. La Danse de Mort, par exemple, peut se ramener à la danse hagarde du Capitaine, qui passe de l'autre côté pendant qu'Alice joue l'entrée des Boyards.<sup>47</sup>

In exactly the same way, the 'literal meaning' of La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre could be reduced to the final scene in which Le

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<sup>46</sup> Adaptation of a remark by Archibald MacLeish used by Carlos Lynes Jr. in 'Adamov or 'le sens littéral' in the Theatre', Yale French Studies, no.14, Winter 1954-55, p.49. This article forms a useful introduction to Adamov's early plays.

<sup>47</sup> Strindberg, p.68.

Mutilé in his cripple cart frenziedly hurries away to his own destruction, while Erna, professing solicitude, kicks him out into the street. Very many of the plays have endings which sum up the guiding obsession of the play and the action through which it has led the central character, like this last scene with Le Mutilé. In the last scene of Les Retrouvailles Edgar's inability to leave childhood behind reaches a literal conclusion as his mother pushes him into a pram, and the last scene of Le Ping-Pong sums up in an equally literal fashion a whole life of futile devotion to a plaything.

The contact with Strindberg not only convinced Adamov that his 'maladie' could be used to create a new theatre, it also suggested to him the kind of use to which his neuroses should be put: they had to be embodied in the most literal form of stage action possible. There were two reasons for this; in the first place he found that in Strindberg the 'sens littéral' so important for a truly live theatre<sup>48</sup>, proceeded directly from his constant use of his own neuroses as subject matter for his plays:

La présence constante du 'sens littéral'  
résulte d'une autre présence constante, celle  
de l'humiliation, celle de la peur, celle de  
la souffrance.<sup>49</sup>

The other reason was that only if this material, drawn straight

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<sup>48</sup> He called it "ce sens littéral sans lequel il n'est pas de théâtre" (Strindberg, p.69). He also used the phrase in a letter to Carlos Lynes Jr. (see his article quoted above, note 46).

<sup>49</sup> Strindberg, pp.69-70.

from the realms of the subconscious, were treated as realistically as possible, would the necessary balance between 'le réel et l'irréel' be kept. Although these terms were formulated well after the plays were written, one can see with hindsight that they were the governing principles behind the early plays, as well as the later ones. From the first he was concerned with how to use his obsessions, as we have seen. Indeed, it was on precisely this issue of the use made of them, that he took exception to his early plays in the 'note préliminaire' to Théâtre II in 1955. Looking back, he felt that everything he had written before Le Ping-Pong (except Le Professeur Taranne) had been falsified by the same thing that he complained of in many of Strindberg's plays: instead of allowing it to stand on its own in all its ambiguity, he had insisted on imposing a meaning which was governed by his desire to justify himself. Describing his reasons for his satisfaction with Le Professeur Taranne, he said:

63. Je transcrivais simplement un rêve, sans chercher à lui conférer un sens général, sans vouloir rien prouver, sans vouloir ajouter à la disculpation vraisemblablement contenue dans le rêve lui-même, une disculpation intellectuelle ... Si Le Professeur Taranne m'a satisfait et me satisfait encore, c'est parce que je n'ai utilisé aucun des éléments de mon rêve à des fins allégoriques. 50

There was a conflict in the early plays between Adamov's emotional need to externalise neurotic states and his intellectual desire to prove a point. He understood this himself:

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50 'Note', pp.12-13.

j'essayais de lier dans La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre un sentiment que j'avais éprouvé très intensément et un raisonnement.<sup>51</sup>

When he later said "le seul problème est de savoir comment utiliser ses névroses"<sup>52</sup>, he was still concerned with the same problem. The solution was clearly not to abandon the use of material drawn from neurosis: Le Professeur Taranne was successful because of its use of just such material. The problem was how to externalise it without falsifying its original ambiguity.

His development as a playwright was thus not just a matter of freeing himself from neuroses. It was also a matter of being able to stand back sufficiently far from them in order to be able to accept them for what they were, to be less involved in reactions of personal emotion, guilt, love and hate towards them. His development also involved a growing ability to reflect on the neuroses. At first dream- or neurotic images were simply used as illustrations in an attempt to prove the idea of universal futility, which did not grow out of the images themselves, but was quite separate from them. This, as Adamov said, was what he did in La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre.

In the later plays the reflection on the images grew more from the images themselves so that the fusion of content and form which Adamov had demanded in the 'Avertissement' was more completely achieved. This will be further discussed in Chapter 5. For the moment it is sufficient to see the importance of literal expression

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51 Ibid., p.11.

52 Ici et Maintenant, p.131.

of neurosis for Adamov since it necessitated such a radical departure from traditional dramatic practice. He needed to formulate a new dramatic style and here his preoccupations coincided with Artaud's insistence on the need for a new stage language. Like Artaud, Adamov decided he would have to use every resource of the stage which might help it to speak its own 'concrete language'. Sounds, lights, movements, décors, objects were all exploited, and perhaps the most important of all these were the objects, whose expressive rôle became as important as that of people.

Again, this is something which Adamov found in Strindberg, particularly in A Dream Play:

Le Songe consacre aussi l'apothéose dangereuse, mais brillante, des objets élevés au rang de personnages ... les objets vivent d'une vie intense ... Tous ces objets, par la place qui leur est donnée, puis retirée, créent l'atmosphère du rêve, élargissent l'espace, changent le temps. Et les êtres, à leur tour, apparaissent comme des objets, les êtres dont Strindberg a peur, et qu'il montre parce qu'il en a peur, qu'il montre littéralement, comme il les voit.<sup>53</sup>

La Parodie contains objects which do all these things. The objects are in themselves perfectly ordinary: a clock, a cinema, a dance hall, a desk, chairs, a tree. But none of them is treated naturalistically. They appear larger in one scene, smaller in another, the clock has no hands, and the cinema walls are no more than a framework which can be seen through, even walked through. This makes for the dream-like

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<sup>53</sup> Strindberg, pp.55-56.

atmosphere or 'dépaysement' that Adamov demanded in his note on the décor, by introducing a strange note into the presentation of otherwise familiar objects, as Artaud had recommended.

The changes in time and space mentioned in the above description of objects in A Dream Play are also widely used in La Parodie. They can be seen in L'Employé's assumption that the reason why he cannot see the clock hands is because they are moving so fast. They can also be seen in the changing shape of the dance hall. The latter appears first in Tableau 3 and then reappears in Tableau 11 unchanged except that it has shrunk to half its former size. It is common to talk of time as a dimension; here it is embodied in concrete, three-dimensional terms so that it can be seen as a force which continually limits the range of our activities until it finally closes in completely and L'Employé, in his last scene, is entombed, as it were, in a prison cell.

In L'Invasion Jean's papers which cover every available space on the stage are another example of objects 'living with their own intense life', here embodying the anxiety over proliferating disorder which drives both Pierre and La Mère to their different forms of action. The big armchair of La Mère which in the last act demonstrates, by its central position, her position of dominant power, is another example of this use of objects which has a direct antecedent in Strindberg's The Pelican. Perhaps the most striking of all the objects used in this way in the early plays is the pram into which Edgar allows himself to be pushed at the end of Les Retrouvailles. And as with so many of Adamov's images, it recurs in other plays, in the trolley of M. le Modéré and the cripple cart of Le Mutilé; having tipped him into the pram, the

mother kicks him off-stage with a gesture and a laugh which recall Erna's at the end of La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre.

Another example of an object creating a dream-like atmosphere is the map in Le Professeur Taranne which supposedly shows his position at the ship's table of honour but when shown to the audience, turns out to be quite blank. Such objects are symbols, symbols whose meaning is not always precisely definable, but which are presented in all their frightening ambiguity. They are all objects which initially frightened Adamov himself. In the plays, their function is to recreate in the characters the same fear that he had known when he faced them. They also exist to confront the audience with just the same fear; to confront both audience and characters with a world they cannot touch, grasp, control, understand.

But the passage from Strindberg quoted above suggests that the characters, too are treated like objects. Adamov said that Strindberg treated in this manner the people he was frightened of, depicting them from the outside, as he saw them. In Adamov, characters are treated as objects in three distinct ways. The first is similar to Strindberg's. As we shall see in Chapter 3, there are at least two types of character in Adamov's plays, the 'central' characters, whose minds are revealed to the audience, and the 'peripheral' characters, who exist only as projections of the central characters' fears and obsessions. In other words, these 'peripheral' characters are like objects; we see only their external appearance, they have no inner human reality. Such 'object characters' are always menacing; examples can be seen in the policemen of Le Professeur Taranne, or Le Directeur of La Parodie.

A couple of lines from L'Homme et l'Enfant attest the power of such figures to instill fear in Adamov himself. He recalls that when living with Irène, he was always terrified of their Hotel manager because of unpaid bills. The way he is described helps to explain the menacing rôle of the Directeur turned 'gérant d'hôtel' in La Parodie:

Nous n'osons pas passer devant le gérant de  
l'hôtel installé derrière son bureau. C'est  
un juge.<sup>54</sup>

The second way in which Adamov could be said to use characters as objects is by their positioning. Just as the position of La Mère's armchair or the shrinking walls of the dance hall are meaningful, so N's constantly supine position and L'Employé's constant bustle are a literal expression of their attitudes to life. So also is Neffer's position, arrogantly kicking Erna in Tableau 4 and then trembling beneath her table in Tableau 10. There is a particularly disconcerting moment in La Parodie when Le Journaliste suddenly turns upside down and begins to walk on his hands. He seems to find this position perfectly normal, and even suggests walking on his head, but L'Employé shares the audience's 'dépaysement' and becomes terrified:

Sur la tête? Mais vous n'y pensez pas. Vous  
pourriez vous faire remarquer.<sup>55</sup>

Le Journaliste's upside-down position expresses or embodies at its most extreme, L'Employé's inability to control what seems perfectly normal to others.

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<sup>54</sup> L'Homme et l'Enfant, p.40.

<sup>55</sup> Théâtre I, p.28.

Finally, there is a sense in which some of the characters wish to 'be' objects. This is always connected with masochism and will be discussed in Chapter 2.

Although the productions of Adamov's early plays were always stark and austere, partly no doubt out of financial necessity, he nevertheless remained true to Artaud's principle of using all the resources afforded by the stage to provide the most concrete treatment of the theme that was possible. In several of the plays there is extensive use of sound effects, especially whistles, police sirens, machine-gun fire etc., giving the required atmosphere of violent disorders. In Tous contre Tous sound has a particular part to play in the form of the radio which is constantly blaring out speeches by the party chiefs which chart the movement towards more or less official persecution of the refugees in suitably anonymous government language. These speeches were one of the few things Adamov still approved of when he wrote his 'Note préliminaire' to Théâtre II: "il suffit d'ouvrir certains journaux pour les retrouver."<sup>56</sup> Lights also have a part to play, particularly in La Parodie, where they are used to suggest the headlights of police cars sweeping across the stage as a man-hunt goes on, and in L'Invasion, where light takes on a particular symbolic function described in Chapter 3.

The sets were also extremely important, as we have seen in the dance hall of La Parodie. The set of L'Invasion also had an important

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<sup>56</sup> Théâtre II, p.14.

expressive function, not only through the objects that were moved around, papers, furniture, etc., but in the dominant position of Pierre's den, upstage centre, symbolising the womb or tomb drawing him back and stifling him.

The rôle of the décor in creating a dream atmosphere was particularly clear in the first version of La Parodie in which, as if to emphasise the importance of production, the stage directions were considerably longer than in the version published later by Gallimard. Among the indications included in the earlier version were:

le fond doit être seulement deviné. Il n'a pas à exister par lui-même. Il n'est là que pour créer l'atmosphère.<sup>57</sup>

And at the end of the play, after N's dead body had been swept away, the stage direction specified, as well as a very harsh light, that there should be:

un décor qui devra être le plus près possible de la réalité, parfaitement vide, cru et froid. Terriblement vide surtout.<sup>58</sup>

A brief mention must also be made here of the place of the spoken word in these plays, though this will be dealt with at length in Chapter 4. As Artaud had recommended, the importance of the spoken word was diminished in favour of the concrete means of expression which we have been discussing. For example, in La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre, it is Le Mutilé's terrified agitation that shows us the

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<sup>57</sup> La Parodie. L'Invasion, p.29.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p.112.

terror of his summons, not what he says about it. In L'Invasion, Agnès' decision to leave Pierre for Le Premier Venu is not rendered through discussion and questioning, but by a series of gradually built up actions. Inevitably, much of this is lost in reading the play, and can only be suggested in the printed text by the stage directions. For example, at the end of Act 2, Pierre having just left the room:

Agnès reste un instant immobile, puis,  
brusquement, fait demi-tour comme pour aller  
vers la porte de gauche et se trouve face à  
face avec Le Premier Venu. Le Premier Venu  
se met à rire. La Mère rit à son tour. Agnès  
est cernée.<sup>59</sup>

They prevent her from following Pierre; she is literally unable to get through to him. It is through events such as this that Le Premier Venu gradually gets power over Agnès, rather than through the words he speaks to her which are mostly rather insignificant. When Agnès finally leaves with him, it is not as someone persuaded that it is the right thing to do, but as a defenceless creature caught in the power of something stronger than herself.

The meaning of the play is conveyed as much through actions as through words, and when dialogue does occur, it is frequently not dialogue in the normal sense of the word, but a succession of individuals speaking their subconscious minds as if on a psychiatrist's couch, though this is more true of La Parodie than of the later plays, with the exception of Les Retrouvailles and Comme nous avons été.

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<sup>59</sup> Théâtre I, p.80.

The new stage idiom which Adamov created was spare, violent, rigorous, relying on a stark progression to their logical conclusions of the most literal images embodying suffering, persecution, death. In his introduction to Strindberg, he said:

Je dis comme lui: "Dans toute pièce il y a une scène, et c'est cette scène que je veux".<sup>60</sup>

It was this concentration on the essential, most dramatic moments in all their intensity that gave to Adamov's early plays a vibrancy and a vitality that the most discerning men of the theatre, Vilar, Serreau, Blin, Planchon, not to mention Adré Gide, did not fail to recognise.

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<sup>60</sup> Strindberg, p.7.

## PART II

## Chapter 2 Themes

For the whole of his life, Adamov was an 'outsider'. His plays, from first to last, are all concerned in some measure with the theme of alienation; alienation from God, from family, from class and country, from the surrounding world of people and of objects. Even those aspects of life which commonly give relief from this modern 'mal de siècle' serve only to increase the alienating forces in his plays. The Mother, for example, a recurrent figure, is always a stifling, inhibiting power, who renders her offspring almost incapable of making relationships with other people.

Adamov did not at first use the word 'alienation'. The word which stands out on the first page of L'Aveu, and which was a key-word for him in the 1938-1950 period is 'la séparation':

... à l'origine de moi-même il y a mutilation,  
séparation.  
Je suis séparé. Ce dont je suis séparé, je  
ne sais pas le nommer. (Autrefois, cela  
s'appelait Dieu. Maintenant, il n'y a plus  
de nom.)<sup>1</sup>

The metaphysical alienation which he invokes here is enacted in concrete form in the various incidents of L'Aveu: acts of exhibitionism, or of masochism, ritual gestures, observations, dreams. In many cases, what he described as 'la séparation' was a sensation of terrifying isolation,

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<sup>1</sup> L'Aveu, p.19.

of being quite alone in a hostile universe. Frequently he also described a strong feeling that some difference separated him from his fellows; sometimes this was associated with his inability to enter a woman which made him feel he was doomed to remain always separate from her.<sup>2</sup>

It is these sensations of isolation, separation, even mutilation, which provided the basic subject-matter for the early plays. In L'Aveu 'la séparation' appeared in three principal forms: the 'separation', at the beginning of the book, from what was once called God, which became relatively unimportant in the plays. It persisted in the background, in their all-pervading fatalism, but it was never referred to as explicitly as in L'Aveu, nor did any of Adamov's characters attempt to pray, as he himself did in L'Aveu. The second principal form of 'la séparation' was that of human isolation. This is present in all the early plays; their characters are all isolated from one another and more or less incapable of communicating. Moreover, they are isolated from their surroundings, incapable of understanding the simplest things that happen to them and incapable of taking any action which would have an appreciable effect on their surroundings.

Finally, 'la séparation' was presented in L'Aveu in the form of what could be called separation from self. Adamov was neither physically nor mentally in control of himself. He looked at a hand which was grasping a rail in a metro carriage, and realised that it was his; he compared it with the hand next to it, belonging to someone else, and

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<sup>2</sup> See L'Aveu, p.74.

had the sensation that both were autonomous creatures. Mentally, he was a prey to obsessions and rituals, which, try as he would, he was incapable of controlling. This separation from self, both body and mind, finds its fullest expression in Le Mutilé of La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre.

Some of these aspects of 'la séparation' are present in the episode he witnessed in the Metro which made him want to write for the theatre.<sup>3</sup> This scene also shows how ideas of isolation and separation could find embodiment in concrete action, and demands careful analysis. At the heart of the episode is human isolation: an old blind beggar is jostled by two 'midinettes' who do not even notice him. Where one might have expected an encounter, there is none; the beggar and the girls are both isolated in their own small worlds. The immediate emotional impact of the scene is tragic, particularly if something leads one to sympathise with the beggar, so that he appears as a victim of the young girls' thoughtlessness. Persecution suffered by a man at the hands of a shallow female is a recurring theme in the plays, where the persecuting females are often, like the two 'midinettes', too superficial even to realise what they are doing. The image of blindness also recurs in the plays to suggest isolation and helplessness.

But the situation also contains the seeds of an ironic or grotesque

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<sup>3</sup> 'Note', p.8. Adamov described this episode on a number of different occasions e.g. Michèle Barat, 'Adamov: Je veux faire rire', Opéra, 9 janvier 1952. For an account of the episode see also above Part I, pp. 41-42.

treatment of the theme of human isolation. It is the girls' song "J'ai fermé les yeux, c'était merveilleux", which, juxtaposed with the beggar's blindness, produces an ironic effect. And it only requires us to stand back a little and take a deliberately cold, objective view of the situation, for it to appear not tragic, nor even ironic, but merely derisory: a blind old man, trying to beg, is not even noticed by two young girls who bump into him as they go past. There is always an element of the grotesque in the situations which Adamov presents in his early plays. They may be susceptible also of tragic interpretation, but an attitude of mockery at the grotesque aspects of the situation is never totally excluded.

This ambiguous approach can be seen very clearly in the episode of the blind beggar. Our interpretation of the situation, our appreciation of its tragic or its grotesque elements, depends on how much we identify with the beggar himself. Total identification leads to a totally tragic interpretation. Adamov, when he first encountered the scene, naturally identified with the beggar. His sense of impotence, his obsession with shallow, sadistic girls, his masochism, all these things made the situation live in his imagination.

But as he developed, he became more able to take the detached viewpoint which sees the grotesque aspects of the situation, until he could say, concerning Le Ping-Pong, that the important thing was for the play to cause laughter. Even in the early plays, when there was so much more emphasis on the anguish and terror of human solitude, and where Adamov so clearly identified with the victims, the seeds of the later detachment were already present. Their situations can always be interpreted either

way, according to one's measure of identification. This view was very well expressed by Bernard Dort, who, having discussed the two possible interpretations outlined above, wrote:

Or, c'est entre cette terreur-persécution et cette dérision que s'inscrit tout le théâtre d'Adamov, son évolution depuis La Parodie jusqu'au récent Ping-Pong.<sup>4</sup>

As he became less subject to the terror, less preoccupied with himself as an object of persecution, Adamov was able to stand back from the images of neurosis he had embodied in his plays, rather as a painter stands back from a canvas. Not feeling so totally involved in the dramatic situations he created, he was able to emphasise the grotesque elements, and, as we saw in Chapter 1, to let the images speak for themselves without forcing them into an artificially schematic pattern.<sup>5</sup> Finally, his desire for 'objectivation sur la scène', which had helped to make the dream techniques in his early plays so powerful, led him gradually to set his plays more in the broader context of the real world around him, and less exclusively in the restricted world of his private obsessions. Thus he was able to develop a far greater measure of reflection on such images, by placing them in a more real context, less thoroughly conditioned by the world of his neuroses, so as to suggest a variety of meanings without limiting their essential ambiguity; this was his success in Le Ping-Pong.

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<sup>4</sup> In a review of Le Ping-Pong for Théâtre Populaire, no.12, mars 1955, p.84.

<sup>5</sup> See above Chapter 1 (Part II), p. 118.

Adamov's itinerary through these plays, can thus be seen as the growing ability to transmute images born of his neuroses into themes of a general validity in a real context. In this chapter, I shall try to show how this was achieved, and why it was that before he could write Le Professeur Taranne or Le Ping-Pong, Adamov needed to write La Parodie and La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre.

As we have seen, the dominant note in all the manifestations of Adamov's neuroses was that of isolation and it is isolation of one kind or another that forms the most fundamental theme of all the early plays. As we saw in Chapter 1, when considering his use of objects, Adamov's central characters are, in the first place, isolated from their surroundings. L'Employé, for example, has no assurance of a meaningful place, either in the world at large, or in his particular town. This is expressed through his inability to situate himself, either in time or in space; he cannot discover where he is, nor what time it is. He spends most of the play trying to find either the café where he believes he has a rendez-vous, or the building which houses the employment office. In both he fails. In each case Adamov uses a nightmare image to convey the theme of isolation: the experience of missing someone whom one knows one should be meeting, and that of becoming lost in what one thought were quite familiar surroundings. It is worth noting that despite the extreme nature of these sensations, they are by no means inaccessible: both are feelings which most people have experienced at one time or another. L'Employé's inability to read the clock is perhaps a less commonly experienced sensation. Here his isolation is expressed as much

through the fact that he cannot see what others can, as through the invisible clock-hands themselves.

L'Employé is 'out of touch with reality' and the world around him eludes his grasp in the most concrete sense. This state of affairs was summed up for Adamov in the one word 'le décalage'. In conformity with his literal method, this 'décalage' received particularly concrete embodiment in his first play. For example, in the scenes of the dance hall, Adamov specified that there should be a "décalage entre la musique et la danse". In the first version of the play, this was taken to extremes by the inclusion of a character called L'Inconnue sitting at a table with some playing cards laid out face down. Each of the dancers claimed to see a different suit on the cards, and each interpreted this as a reflection of her particular bad luck. At the end of the tableau when the furniture was removed, L'Inconnue went on sitting in the same attitude, as if her table and cards were still before her.<sup>6</sup>

Such images of the lack of contact between objective reality and the apprehension of that reality by individuals, continued to be used by Adamov to convey the theme of human isolation. Taranne's notebook, for example, which he was sure he had filled with notes, turned out to be quite blank in the middle.<sup>7</sup> With Le Ping-Pong, the situation becomes worse, since not only are the humans unable to control the

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<sup>6</sup> La Parodie. L'Invasion, Paris, 1950, pp.58-59.

<sup>7</sup> Théâtre I, pp.229-230.

objects, but it is the objects, in the shape of the pin-tables, which take over and control the lives of the characters. In this play the 'décalage' appears in the gap between the aspirations of the characters and the reality of their situation; it is rendered chiefly through a special use of language and will be discussed in Chapter 4.<sup>8</sup>

The characters of the early plays are not only isolated from the objective world, they are isolated from one another. This is clear in the central relationship of La Parodie: the pursuit of Lili by both N. and L'Employé. Lili is beautiful, but hers is the surface beauty of a model ("sa démarche rappelle celle d'un mannequin présentant une collection").<sup>9</sup> She is completely shallow, unworthy of the love and self-sacrifice of her two admirers and quite incapable of responding to it. She represents the eternally disappointing woman who can never live up to the idealised image of her in her lover's mind. The 'décalage' in the behaviour of N. and L'Employé who treat her like a goddess, reveals the isolation of Man from Woman. Once again, it is clear that the figure of Lili grew from Adamov's own experience:

Je voulais aussi me venger, Lili me permit  
cette vengeance.<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps the woman he wished to be avenged on was Irène.<sup>11</sup> In any case, he used this personal obsession to convey a general theme.

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<sup>8</sup> See below Chapter 4 (Part II), pp. 224-233.

<sup>9</sup> Théâtre I, p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> 'Note', p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> See above Part I, pp. 10-11.

Adamov himself, summing up the themes of both La Parodie and L'Invasion, placed the emphasis on non-communication: "personne n'entend personne", but when coming to write L'Invasion, he was forced to abandon the extremely schematic style of La Parodie, in which all possibility of meaningful communication was totally excluded. As he commented, ironically:

Je trouvais vexant que moi, qui avais si bien  
démontré l'impossibilité de toute conversation,  
je fusse obligé d'écrire, tout comme un autre,  
de simples dialogues.<sup>12a</sup>

In L'Invasion, the theme of isolation was couched in an extended image of non-communication which formed the very subject-matter of the play: the piles of nearly illegible manuscripts left by a dead friend, which Pierre struggles to decipher and to transcribe. Not only does he fail to make sense of the manuscripts, but through his obsessive work on them, he gradually becomes isolated from every other character in the play.

His situation certainly has an autobiographical foundation harking back to Adamov's life in the nineteen-thirties: Pierre lives in circumstances of extreme disorder with a wife whose affections he cannot hold, relying on his mother for food and basic necessities of life. The mother-son relationship clearly has its foundation in Adamov's inability to break free from reliance on his own mother, while remaining obsessed with her stifling power. Pierre's other basic

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<sup>12</sup> 'Note', p.9: "je n'abandonnais pas... l'idée maîtresse de La Parodie: personne n'entend personne."

<sup>12a</sup> Ibid., p.9.

problem is connected with words, which he analyses with the same passionate intensity shown by Adamov in L'Aveu.

There is a further interesting detail showing how the central image of non-communication grew from Adamov's own experience. In his introduction to a selection of the work of Roger Gilbert-Lecomte, he explained that when Gilbert-Lecomte had finished a page, he would tuck it away in his brief case, without even re-reading it, joking about the doubtless far-distant day when he would finally have to open it and arrange his work in some sort of order. In the event, it was Adamov who opened the brief case after Gilbert-Lecomte's death, and was then faced with the impossible problem of trying to decide where the author would have included the various fragments had he been alive. Out of this real experience, Adamov created a situation which was as confusing and nightmarish as that of Taranne, whose situation resulted from the faithful transcription of a dream.

Human isolation is given a rational cause in L'Invasion, since each of the three characters involved in the work of deciphering has a different approach. Pierre's wife, Agnès, says that when she works on her dead brother's manuscripts, she may not always transcribe every word with perfect accuracy, but she finds the authentic spirit of his writing. Tradel, Pierre's friend and associate is above all keen to publish the manuscripts, patching up the uncertain passages if necessary. Pierre, on the other hand, insists on remaining completely faithful to the letter of what is written, no matter how long it may take, nor how little sense it may make.

The research is carried on in an atmosphere of ambivalence where nothing is quite what it seems to be. They have no clue as to what Jean's overall intentions had been, since the one thing that Agnès remembers him saying is that he hated the manuscripts and intended to destroy them all. But Pierre provides a perfectly plausible explanation for this, saying that Jean naturally questioned the value of his work at times; if he had not been subject to such feelings, he would probably never ~~had~~ written in the first place.  
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The central situation, then, concerns a blind search for an almost indecipherable message written by a man now dead; a very striking image of the difficulty of communication. This theme is further developed in the relationships between the living characters, each of whom is limited by his own approach to the work on the papers. Tradel, Pierre and Agnès can never truly work together; they cannot even live together since their attitudes towards the common centre of interest are in conflict.

Pierre's rigid devotion to his task forms a particularly striking embodiment of the theme of isolation from others, since the papers never give up their secret: <sup>13</sup> they have none to give up, and Pierre discovers too late that in his vain attempt to bridge the gap caused by death between himself and his friend, he has allowed himself to become separated from his wife and friends. Deprived of all human contact, he dies.

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<sup>13</sup> See below, Chapter 3 (Part II), p. 215.

The theme of isolation is particularly important to Le Professeur Taranne, where Taranne's failure consists quite simply in an inability to make any impact on the people in the police office with whom he claims acquaintance. There is a most effective build-up as first one character then another fails to recognise him; when finally La Femme du Monde thinks she does recognise him Taranne has a brief moment of jubilation before it becomes clear that she has mistaken him for Professor Ménard. In this short and economically constructed play, everything is designed to trap Taranne more thoroughly in a position where he has to admit to exhibitionism and plagiarism. The more he is forced into this position, the more isolated he becomes, and this isolation is stressed by his inability to convince the people around him of anything at all. They escape his control while he is actually talking to them. At first the inspector, then the employees, then the journalist and her friends, then the policemen and finally the hotel manageress and his sister, all leave the stage without his realising. The final image of the play, as he turns and begins slowly to undress beneath the blank map is one of extreme isolation.

The play marked a turning point for Adamov. As we have seen, the material was drawn straight from a dream, and was written in two days.<sup>14</sup> It included a minimum of allegorising. Yet thanks to the fact that Adamov's fears about his identity and his compulsion to expose himself were sufficiently universal, and because of his effective dramatisation,

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<sup>14</sup> See 'Note', pp.12-13.

this play provided a treatment of Adamov's major themes, isolation, non-communication, persecution, etc., that is more compelling than it is in other plays in which the allegory is made more obvious. The attempt to use the neurotic image to prove a point was, of course, still present, but it was disguised, not made explicit. Adamov felt that if Taranne's plight really was a forceful image of the senselessness, horror, isolation and ambiguity of life, then it would reveal this state of affairs more truly for being allowed to stand unexplained. The play's importance in pointing the way towards a new style for Adamov will be discussed in Chapter 5.<sup>15</sup>

The theme of isolation from others stands out most clearly in the central characters' relationships with women. And these relationships also provide the clearest example of how Adamov's own obsessions were transformed into the dramatic themes of the play. In a recent article on the evolution of Adamov, written chiefly about L'Homme et l'Enfant, René Gaudy suggested that the key to understanding Adamov's work was to be found in his erotic obsessions, which he traced back to the passage from L'Homme et l'Enfant about the two girls and the cat quoted in Part I, page 6 . He rightly pointed out that:

La vie d'Adamov, c'est d'abord la recherche de ces deux femmes: l'une, est la prostituée, au visage multiple mais finalement toujours la même, il la cherche à chaque grande période noire pour être anéanti, être au contact de la mort. Ses séances sont des tentatives de suicide. ...C'est à la fois pour éviter la

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<sup>15</sup> Especially pp.246,247c,261,262.

mort et la chercher qu'Adamov a si souvent  
 abordé cette femme. La deuxième femme est  
 la protectrice, la source de vie et de survie.  
 Il l'a trouvée en 1948, il l'appelle 'le bison':  
 "Sans elle je me serais, si lâche que je sois,  
 certainement tué."<sup>16</sup>

The first woman, the destructress, was not always presented in the guise of the prostitute in the plays, though in La Parodie he could not resist including a poor prostitute who has a very marginal dramatic function. She was more often, like Lili, placed in a position of inaccessibility, since the fact that she cannot be possessed is important. But the destructress, as well as being inaccessible, was despicable. Adamov clearly explained how his neurosis compelled him to grovel before a woman he despised:

Il n'est pas pour moi de volupté plus grande  
 que de subir en pleine face l'affront et le  
 mépris d'une femme que je méprise tout en  
 demeurant asservi au vertige du désir qu'elle  
 suscite en moi.<sup>17</sup>

In practice, for him this meant prostitutes. In the plays, these inaccessible women become despicable for other reasons. In the case of Lili, as we saw, it was because of her extreme superficiality; in this way Adamov brought out a 'décalage' in the discrepancy between the idealised picture which N. and L'Employé had of her, and her shallow reality.

But the power of this female as 'destructress' was made clearest

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<sup>16</sup> René Gaudy, 'L'Itinéraire d'Adamov', France Nouvelle, 21 août 1968.

<sup>17</sup> L'Aveu, p.71.

in Erna of La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre. She has all the self-centredness of Lili, but not her fluttering vanity; instead she is an incarnation of the female torturer. She practises a refined form of sadism, playing up to Le Mutilé's love, and drawing him on, in order to enjoy destroying him more completely, whereas Lili remained more or less unconscious of her effect on N. and L'Employé.

But there is a ray of hope offered in the form of the other woman, the protectress who is the source of life. She is a comparatively uncertain figure by comparison with her counterpart; sometimes she seems unable to do anything but complain about the power of her rival, as in the case of la Soeur of La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre. In this play the protectress figure is deliberately presented as the sister, thus precluding any sexual relationship, so that Le Mutilé is forced to seek this relationship with Erna. In La Parodie, the most fatalistic of all the plays, where the circle is most thoroughly closed, she does not even appear, except in the imagination of L'Employé. But in L'Invasion, she is one of the centres of attention in the form of Agnès, one of Adamov's most interesting female characters.<sup>18</sup>

However, it was to the destructress, who afforded contact with death, that Adamov was drawn in the black moments when he despaired of achieving anything, and the characters in the plays who are drawn to her are also vulnerable because of their complete impotence. Thus the relationship with the destructress was used to reveal not only isolation

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<sup>18</sup> For an analysis of Agnès, see below, Chapter 3 (Part II), pp.180-182 and Chapter 5, p.254.

from others, but also Man's inability to know or control himself. Because of his inability to establish a sexual relationship with Erna, Le Mutilé becomes, quite literally, separated from himself, limb by limb. Even before he meets Erna, very early on in the play, he sums up his agonised feeling of impotence:

Je ne pouvais rien faire. Je ne fais qu'essayer  
d'agir, toujours essayer...<sup>19</sup>

In L'Aveu, Adamov's own sense of impotence covered his general inability to take any effective action as well as his particular inability to accomplish the sexual act. There was no clear connection drawn between these two things, but both were aspects of 'la séparation' or 'la mutilation'. In the case of Le Mutilé, it is no easier to say which comes first, his general impotence or his inability to achieve a satisfactory sexual relationship; both are aspects of his isolation. But the consequence of this state for him is his progressive mutilation, an image which relies for part of its power on the castration fear.

For Adamov in L'Aveu, the sensation of mutilation was terrifying; in La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre, it is grotesque as well, since Le Mutilé inevitably becomes slightly ridiculous as he hobbles around losing one limb after another and always coming back for more<sup>2</sup>. This is what Adamov would have called the parodic side of his representation of the human condition: a deliberate exaggeration or travesty. But it is terrifying in so far as we identify with Le Mutilé and since the mutilation always follows a display of sexual inadequacy.

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<sup>19</sup> Théâtre I, p.106.

The grotesque and the terrifying are particularly well combined in Tableau 3, the 'cours de dactylographie pour manchots'. The picture of the four helpless 'manchots' practising their typing while a sadistic instructress corrects their position and criticises their work is exploited to the full. This is just one of the many examples we shall find of what Adamov called 'l'incroyable poésie' of real events, since it appears that such courses really do (or did) exist, and that the idea was suggested to him by an advertisement that he saw for one.

The erotic fears and fantasies which we have been discussing all show a basic fascination with death and destruction which frequently finds expression in the urge towards masochism and self-abasement combined with the fetishism of the foot or shoe. The comparatively accessible image of the destructress is frequently accompanied by rather less accessible scenes of a masochistic nature which are lifted directly from Adamov's own experience, with little or no adaptation. Half of N.'s rôle in La Parodie is contained in this passage from L'Aveu, in which the desire for self-abasement takes the form of literally flattening oneself against the ground in the position of death:

Je me revois par un crépuscule pluvieux sur  
le trottoir d'un faubourg désert où je m'étais  
couché après m'être totalement dévêtu, tremblant  
à la fois de terreur et du désir mauvais d'être  
découvert dans cette attitude dégradante.<sup>20</sup>

N. also has the desire to flatten himself on the ground, and he also undresses; and in him is developed what remains unstated in the above extract: the desire to be trampled into the mud by a poor prostitute

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<sup>20</sup> L'Aveu, pp.59-60.

("Marcher sur moi, m'étouffer, m'étrangler...").<sup>21</sup>

L'Aveu contains the descriptions of several encounters in which Adamov too begged for this treatment from a prostitute. In one example the power of the foot or shoe is also an important element, since Adamov wishes first to kiss the prostitute's feet and then to be struck with her shoe.<sup>22</sup> N. also begs the prostitute "Piétine-moi",<sup>23</sup> and the same obsession reappears at the climax of La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre, where Erna gives the defenceless Mutilé a great shove with her foot which sends him skidding into the street to be crushed by the crowd, while the voices command: "A même le sol."<sup>24</sup>

The masochism in these plays is also connected with a sense of guilt. The characters who are most isolated, who suffer most, who beg for kicks and blows from their women, experience a strong sense of guilt. In L'Aveu, Adamov postulated a link between this sense of guilt and 'La séparation', which he believed to be connected with an original fault in human nature.<sup>25</sup> At this time, he was still profoundly marked by Christian thought and he talked of "la grande prévarication originelle qui a nom séparation."<sup>26</sup> Added to the anguish caused by their isolation

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21 Théâtre I, p.43.

22 L'Aveu, p.66.

23 Théâtre I, p.44.

24 Ibid., p.141.

25 L'Aveu, p.57; see above, Part I, p.28.

26 L'Aveu, p.57.

and impotence, the characters in Adamov's early plays share this sense of guilt: "Il faut expier"<sup>27</sup>, says N. and accuses himself of imaginary sins.

N. represents Man possessed of a sense of guilt, but uncertain what he is guilty of; recognising his failure to love and so forced into a grotesque parody of the love relationship. *Le Mutilé*, too, accepts that he is at fault in his inability to establish a successful love relationship with Erna. So far from trying to place some of the responsibility for his misfortunes on Erna, he cherishes his very mutilation, telling himself that if he had not lost his hands, he would not have met Erna at the 'cours de dactylographie pour manchots'.

Though it may not always be expressed through masochism, a sense of guilt is felt by almost every one of the victims in the early plays. It may appear in the form of guilt for inability to take effective action. In this form it can best be seen in La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre. Here *Le Militant* appears to be activated by far more disinterested motives than *L'Employé*, his counterpart in La Parodie. He is engaged in what seems a heroic attempt to overthrow the police state whose brutality and insecurity dominate the whole play. But during his last appearance, when the forces of oppression have been overcome, he collapses while making a speech in which he admits that in order to overthrow a brutal régime, he has had to use equally brutal methods. In addition, he has been no more successful than *Le Mutilé* in maintaining

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<sup>27</sup> Théâtre I, p.42.

the affection of a woman, and his absence from home has provoked the death of his child. He expresses his consciousness of this: "Qui peut se dire exempt de fautes? (Bas) Qui? Qui?"<sup>28</sup> Thus, while *le Mutilé* feels guilty at his inability to act, *Le Militant* feels no less guilty for having taken action.

Both in '*la Grande Manoeuvre*', Man's attempt to justify himself and find some harmony in the universe, and '*la petite Manoeuvre*', his attempt to change his social conditions, he is doomed to failure. As Adamov said in L'Aveu:

Il n'est pas donné à l'homme de trouver le chemin  
qui le mène au but.<sup>29</sup>

In his 'Note' to Théâtre II, Adamov pointed out that for him the writing of the play constituted a process of justification which appeased his feelings of guilt: he was right not to commit himself to social action since:

Celui qui, au lieu de s'abandonner à l'autorité  
d'En Haut, lutte contre les autorités d'En Bas,  
celui-là (*Le Militant*) est détruit aussi.<sup>30</sup>

In Le Sens de la Marche, which Adamov has described as "un résidu de La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre"<sup>31</sup>, the same themes are explored, but this time the two types of guilt are combined in the one character, Henri. At first Henri, who is dominated by paternal authority, cannot

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28 Ibid., p.136.

29 L'Aveu, p.10.

30 'Note', p.11.

31 Ibid., p.12.

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make up his mind to act in favour of his friends who are attempting to fight injustice. But after he has failed to offer one of them a hiding place, he is so filled with remorse that he allows himself to be beaten by Albert and then abandons Lucile, despite the importance she has for him. However, like Le Militant, he finds that the decision to act does not solve all problems; his action comes too late and strikes the wrong person.

Edgar, in Les Retrouvailles, is another character who feels guilt at his own inadequacy: Louise is nothing other than an embodiment of his remorse as Adamov has told us,<sup>32</sup> and the progress of their relationship gradually reveals this remorse. At first she makes things easy for him, justifies his leaving his mother and fiancée for two years to study, but gradually she begins to make exactly the same claims on him that he was struggling to escape from in Lina. He gradually finds himself in a position where, without knowing how, he seems bound to oppose the simplest wishes of Louise and ends up getting her sacked from her job. The power of *La Plus heureuse des femmes* weaves a web around him making him incapable of leaving with Louise. But although he cannot act, he feels remorse at his inability to do so.

In Adamov's plays, the experiences of guilt, remorse and persecution are frequently confused. Some of his characters do not accept their guilt as clearly as others. In particular, Taranne refuses to admit until the very end that there is any reason for the various accusations which

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32 Ibid., p.14.

he faces. In this play the atmosphere of guilt is suggested chiefly through the framework of the police-office interrogation. The most disturbing thing about the accusations levelled against Taranne is that they seem so insignificant that he is constantly forced to search for some ulterior meaning behind them. He is never absolutely certain of what he is accused of. At first it is that he undressed in the open, and then that he left paper lying around in the undressing cabins. His plight recalls that of K. in Kafka's The Trial, who is never able to discover exactly what he is on trial for, but who realises obscurely that it is his very existence that is being called into question. In both works the suspects deny the charges which they fail to understand, but in both they somehow acquiesce in their sentence. As both works show, the atmosphere of the legal trial most effectively conveys the sense of undefined guilt.

The nightmare-like atmosphere of obscure menace is very characteristic of Adamov's early theatre; it owes a lot to Kafka as well as Strindberg. His general outlook had much in common with Kafka's and he was a great champion of the Czech writer, publishing some of his work in each volume of L'Heure Nouvelle when it was still relatively unknown in France. In view of the close friendship between Adamov and Marthe Robert at that time, it is interesting to see that in her Introduction à la lecture de Kafka, published in 1946, she analysed Kafka in terms which have a certain applicability to Adamov.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> This work was published by Sagittaire and listed as item 1 of a "Collection L'Heure Nouvelle". It was in fact the only one to appear in the collection.

In particular, talking of Kafka's revolt against paternal authority, she stated that although he revolted against it, he also longed for it. A parallel could be drawn with Adamov's hatred of his father which had an equally important, and equally ambivalent, rôle in his development. L'Homme et l'Enfant reveals how Adamov hated his father's gambling habits, was ashamed of him on numerous occasions, refused to become an engineer as his father wanted, and yet felt guilty for his death when he committed suicide in January 1933:

Je détestais mon père, c'est donc moi qui l'ai tué.  
Pendant au moins une année, j'en étais sûr. Je ne  
suis pas jusqu'au présent sur du contraire.<sup>34</sup>

The play in which Adamov's anxiety is most clearly dramatised is Le Sens de la Marche, in which Henri feels intolerably constricted by the paternal authority which he constantly meets, yet is unable to make a real gesture of revolt. Marthe Robert, analysing Kafka, sees an exactly similar dilemma. She said that in The Trial Kafka was caught

Entre la double nécessité de démasquer l'imposture  
et de la subir et la double impossibilité de la  
subir avec résignation et de s'y opposer.  
efficacement par la révolte.<sup>35</sup>

Beset by a crippling sense of guilt, powerless to resist the attraction of an obsession with auto-destruction, isolated from their fellows and from their surroundings, Adamov's characters are all presented in the shape of victims and the notion of Man as Victim is an abiding theme throughout Adamov's work. Initially in L'Aveu, Adamov's

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34 L'Homme et l'Enfant, p.45.

35 Op. cit., p.11.

apprehension of his own condition was as the victim of unnamable powers, of neurosis and death. This was his vision of reality. Motivated in writing for the stage by a desire to paint a true picture of reality, he therefore presented Man as the victim of these things.

In La Parodie, this is expressed through the combination of L'Employé and N.. The latter is completely fascinated by death, expressed in the most concrete way possible by his attitude of passive masochism, lying and begging for Lili to kill him. L'Employé is persistently optimistic, but is just as surely destroyed in the end. In L'Invasion, both Agnès and Pierre are the victims of La Mère, who represents the forces of order and death. The most complete embodiment of the victim is Le Mutilé, a victim both of his own impotence and of the Voices, powers exterior to him and beyond his understanding, but implacably hostile. In Le Sens de la Marche, Henri is a victim of the psychological power which the fear of his father exerts over him, and Taranne is a victim of his own doubts.

However, by dint of writing and thinking about men as victims, Adamov began to realise that as often as not Man is a victim of other men as much as of obscure powers. He expressed this realisation in his study of Strindberg, who also saw men as victims:

Strindberg, avant tout, est un persécuté.  
Et qui dit persécuté dit persécuteurs...<sup>36</sup>

Shortly before this, Adamov had begun to write plays in which Man

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<sup>36</sup> Strindberg, p.108.

became victimiser as well as victim. The first was Tous contre Tous, in which all are victims and persecuters turn by turn. In this interesting play, Adamov suggests that racist propaganda is always the same and that it can be arbitrarily turned against any group by any other group. It is also the play he disliked most in later life, precisely because he came to believe that such propaganda was not arbitrarily applied, but was always used by the propertied bourgeoisie to help protect its own interests. But it was the first sign of Adamov's growing interest in the causes of persecution as well as in its victims.

After writing Tous contre Tous, he took one more step away from the concentration on Man solely as victim. In the name of truth to reality, he had deliberately shaped his dramatic material in order to express the overall idea that Man was merely a helpless victim. But he began to feel that the very circularity of such plays as La Parodie and Tous contre Tous was a falsifying factor, that this vicious circle of despair did not present a true picture of reality. If persecution was not solely the work of metaphysical powers, but also of men, then the total nihilism of his early plays was unjustified:

La vie n'était pas absurde, difficile, très difficile seulement. Rien qui ne demandât des efforts immenses disproportionnés.<sup>37</sup>

With this realisation, he began to take a more committed stand in his plays. There was no change in his basic sympathies which continued to lie, as they had always lain, with the victims, the oppressed and

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<sup>37</sup> L'Homme et l'Enfant, p.111.

persecuted in any sense. But he began to place the emphasis more on the social context in which Man finds himself, and on the social mechanisms which allow one man to victimise his fellows.

A great many of his early plays had included scenes of political activism, but the emphasis had always been on the uselessness and inevitable failure of such activity. Now, under the influence of Marxism, he approached the subject of oppression with the basic assumption that it could be changed, though specific attempts to do so did not figure in his plays again until Le Printemps 71. At the time of this play's first full French production, in 1963, he wrote:

Le fait que l'homme soit mortel - et redoute  
la mort, et que cette crainte souvent  
l'obsède - ne l'empêche pas de vivre, donc  
de lutter.<sup>38</sup>

This was in some ways a very sharp change of direction, though it was by no means so fundamental a change as he suggested by his own total rejection of his early work. With hindsight, it appears as a comparatively logical development from what had gone before. This can only be fully demonstrated by and through a study of Adamov's later plays, and I have tried, in Part III, to emphasise the unifying themes and techniques in Adamov's work. For instance, two of the most important dramatic mechanisms employed by Adamov in his new committed theatre in order to criticise capitalist society had both been elaborated in the course of writing these early plays. One was the technique of juxtaposing the

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<sup>38</sup> 'Ma métamorphose', Ici et Maintenant, p.143.

tragic and the grotesque and the other was the exploding of a hollow rhetoric which depended on sham idealism. Both of these assumed an increased importance in Adamov's work under the influence of Brecht, but it is important to notice that both were present in Adamov's treatment of his themes in his earliest plays, written before he had seen or read anything of Brecht's.

In the case of the second of these two, the denunciation of sham idealism, its central importance for Adamov's whole approach was emphasised in our discussion of L'Aveu. The major themes of loneliness and absurdity, arose partly from a deep hostility to all forms of idealism in Adamov, which is visible both in the Absurdist themes themselves, and in his very concrete treatment of them. But it was chiefly through a denunciation of rhetorical devices that Adamov expressed this anti-idealism, and for this reason, discussion of it has been left for Chapter 4, 'Language'.

As for the juxtaposition of the tragic and the grotesque, we have seen examples of this in the typing scene of La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre or in the final image of Le Professeur Taranne, or of Les Retrouvailles. Many similar examples could be quoted to show that despite the despair and cruelty to be found in Adamov's early plays, a certain grotesque humour is never very far from the surface, just as in the early plays of Ionesco and Beckett.

In Le Ping-Pong, Adamov deliberately increased the grotesque treatment.<sup>39</sup> His themes in this play remained the same as before:

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<sup>39</sup> Discussion of Le Ping-Pong has been concentrated chiefly in Chapter 3, pp.191-200 and Chapter 4, pp.224-233; a discussion of the use of humour in this play will be found in Chapter 5, pp. 239-241.

personal isolation, guilt, death, persecution, but the treatment of these themes was more detached. Writing of Büchner's Woyzeck in 1953, he explained how, for him, Büchner had achieved the perfect balance both between the personal and the general and between the tragic and the humorous, and in this explanation he defined the theatre he was striving towards:

Tous les personnages de Woyzeck sont des malades. ... Mais ce fonds commun de maladie ne fait que les séparer plus irrémédiablement, chacun étant prisonnier de son mal particulier, et de ce seul fait, contraint à devenir victime et bourreau. Chez Georg Büchner, - et en cela il annonce toute une littérature - c'est cette prise de conscience de la nature profonde du 'mal' qui provoque le mélange du tragique et du comique, l'humour étant une certaine façon de voir le tragique et une revanche efficace sur lui.<sup>40</sup>

Through his use of humour, through emphasising the grotesque futility of the human condition, Adamov liberated himself from a purely tragic treatment of his themes. Having achieved this liberation from fatalism in his own mind, he could go on in his later plays (discussed in Part III) to propose to his audience a means of liberation from specific ills in their own lives. In Le Ping-Pong, he concentrated on trying to show up the persecutor and the persecuted by revealing the mechanisms which enable Big Business to oppress the small man. His theme remained the alienation and victimisation of Man, but this alienation gained a progressively Marxist meaning.

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<sup>40</sup> Georg Büchner, Théâtre Complet, Paris, 1953, p.10.

## PART II

Chapter 3 Characters

Adamov's desire to do away with "les pièces dites psychologiques" has been interpreted as a desire to do away with psychology altogether. In fact, his plays are all concerned with psychology, if by psychology is understood the study of the human mind. His theory of 'le sens littéral' is at the basis of his peculiar presentation of character and character was briefly discussed in the context of 'le sens littéral' in Chapter 1. Adamov's early plays are autobiographical, embodying a central character or pair of characters dominated by the obsessions which were Adamov's and which form the raw material for his plays; these obsessions which had started him writing and through which he felt he could attain a heightened vision of the world.

This autobiographical element can be seen in the division of the characters in these early plays into two main functions. There are firstly the central characters who always have some autobiographical foundation and whose function is to embody the human condition, and secondly the peripheral characters, who embody some aspect of the central character's psyche, or a view of life which is in conflict with that of the central character, thus challenging or threatening him.

The function of the central character, or sometimes pair of characters, is to embody the human predicament as it then appeared to Adamov, in all its absurd futility. This is achieved by concentrating, not on personal details, but on the general sensations of anguish,

helplessness and isolation. In order to achieve some diversity in the unity of his obsessional world, Adamov twice used a pair of complementary characters rather than a single character in order to express the unrelieved hopelessness of the human condition. Thus N. and L'Employé have been called a pseudocouple: their differences are all complementary, their similarities are fundamental. They have the same passion, Lili, the same self-deluding certainty that they have arranged a meeting with her, the same belief that she will accord them some special favour, whereas in fact she regards them as a couple of fools who share an annoying habit of constantly demanding her presence. They share the same obsession and come to very similar ends. In fact they constitute two sides of the same coin. N. is in a sense the most authentic, since he is convinced of the despair which the play's total structure conveys, and he embodies Adamov's most powerful obsession, his masochism. But L'Employé also embodies a genuine aspect of Adamov's attitude towards despair: the side that looks for the protectress and hopes against hope in the possibility of reaching a love which will make life meaningful.

Each of these characters is defined by his language and his movements. These are consistent and unchanged by the changing circumstances in which they find themselves. The traditional concept of theatrical character which always involves a change of heart, or at least a temptation to such a change, in the face of changing circumstances, is thus quite absent. There is no conflict possible, since both the active and the passive are inevitably bound towards destruction: their apparent opposition is lost in an identical fate.

La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre shows very little difference in its approach to characterisation. Communication of a more meaningful kind is possible in this play, but Le Mutilé's obsession with Erna and his progress towards destruction is as consistent as that of the two central characters of La Parodie. Le Militant's final admission that his struggle had been in vain is accompanied by his total collapse, and rather than showing a meaningful change of heart is simply the demonstration of his destruction.

As in La Parodie, both of these characters represent genuine aspects of Adamov's attitude towards life, but they have to be taken together to build up the complete picture he is trying to present. Le Mutilé is, like N., the pure victim. Mentally, he suffers from the same incapacity that Adamov experienced to maintain the affection of a woman. This is expressed by physical mutilation and there is never any question of this state of affairs being altered. He is from the beginning to the end Le Mutilé. The choice of a similar name for the other central character, Le Militant, expresses, more clearly than in La Parodie, their complementary functions.

Like N., Le Mutilé is in some ways the more authentic of the two characters, expressing Adamov's most powerful obsession, but Le Militant's function is also important, and reflects Adamov's inability to take any precise course of action. His 'Note' made it clear that the contrasted pair of characters, both going to their destruction, were to have the function of justifying his own inaction, and to alleviate the sense of guilt he felt over failure to act in the

resistance or in the Spanish war.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the temptation to positive action was strong. The revolution as presented in the play may be unconvincing and not particularly meaningful in the structure of the play, as Adamov suggests in his 'Note', but it showed the attraction which this kind of action had for him, even then, and perhaps points forward to his more positive involvement with Communism later and his admiration for the revolutionaries of the Commune.

In Le Sens de la Marche, Adamov combined the passive and the active principles in one character, making the same point about inevitable destruction and the inefficacy of action, but through a single character. For most of the play Henri is passive, allowing himself to be manipulated by what Adamov calls "L'autorité ancienne, celle des Pères"<sup>2</sup>, but suffering anguished remorse at his failure to join his friends in acting against the established order. In the end, he does act, making a blind gesture of revolt, but it comes too late and strikes the wrong person. Henri is characterised only by a few very general features which define this predicament: his fear of his father, his impotent desire to join the revolution, his inability to save his friend, his remorse at not doing so, his remorse at the pathetic position of his sister, his inability to convince Lucile of his love for her.

Adamov described the play as a residue of La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre<sup>3</sup>, and it can be seen that most of the emotions described above

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<sup>1</sup> L'Homme et l'Enfant, pp.78-79, 58.

<sup>2</sup> 'Note', p.12.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.12. (See also L'Homme et l'Enfant, p.102.)

were also part of Le Mutilé's make-up. Character is again defined clearly through action and a number of situations are used which can also be found in other plays. His insecurity, for instance, is expressed in a class-room scene where he is supposed to be teaching a lesson, but rapidly becomes embroiled in his own words and ends up trying to justify his own position, very much in the manner of Professor Taranne. His pupils turn against him and decide to send in a report complaining about him, thus becoming informers or accusers like the children of Le Professeur Taranne. Although he does not have a functional name, his character is as purely functional as the others we have so far mentioned: his unfolding drama is a bare demonstration of the anguish of living, stripped of everything other than the emotions mentioned above. He does not 'live' in the conventional sense through a proliferation of tellingly authentic details. Le Sens de la Marche is built around a 'psychological case' of father-fixation; the characterisation attempts to lay bare the psychological forces at work, not explaining away or humanising the extreme nature of the case.

The same is true of the two shorter plays, Les Retrouvailles and Comme nous avons été, dealing with mother-fixations. The details of characterisation revealed in the course of the plays are purely relevant to the central obsession, they do not attempt to inscribe this in a setting of every-day reality. This has to do partly with the dream-like construction of these plays and of the peripheral characters, as we shall see when we come to study them.

The one exception to this tendency to concentrate entirely on the mind of the central character in the early plays is in L'Invasion.

Although the play is principally a study of Pierre's dilemma, he is characterised in a fuller, more conventional manner and so, to some extent, are his friend Tradel and his wife Agnès. The relationship between Pierre and Tradel is a sympathetic and credible picture of two men who want to be friends but are divided by their disagreements on how to approach the work on the manuscripts.

Tradel is by no means an inaccessible character. He is defined principally in his relations with Pierre and his attitudes towards the work, but he approaches both with a warmth and enthusiasm which gives him a dimension going beyond that of his function. There is a very convincing scene in the second act when, their partnership having broken down two years before, Tradel returns once more to begin work again with Pierre. Their conversation at first reveals mutual sympathy, they exchange friendly words, compare feelings of frustration with the work, but as soon as they get down to examining a problematical word together, Tradel's enthusiasm carries him away. He tries to move too fast for Pierre and his desire to see the work published betrays him into arguments justifying the means by the end:

PIERRE : ...Il me faut le mot juste.  
 TRADEL : Mais qui le connaîtra? ...ce qui compte avant tout pour le lecteur, c'est la beauté de l'expression.<sup>4</sup>

They exchange violent words and Tradel leaves. The scene thus presents a convincing but relatively traditional conflict of wills in relation to the rights and wrongs of a central problem.

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<sup>4</sup> Théâtre I, p.78.

Richard Sherrell has emphasised the religious nature of the imagery used in Pierre's quest as he forsakes communal efforts and pursues a solitary ascetic path, withdrawing to his room which takes on the aspect of a hermit's cell.<sup>5</sup> As a result of this withdrawal, he comes to see the manuscripts as an embodiment of the meaning at the heart of life, but just as the manuscripts remained undecipherable, so this meaning remains beyond human understanding. Pierre finally discovers that although there may be a meaning, it can never be understood by the human mind or expressed through human language, which is a totally inadequate vehicle.<sup>6</sup> The idealism of Pierre is invalidated by this discovery, and yet he alone realises this, he alone is 'le dépositaire du Message'.<sup>7</sup>

Pierre's characterisation has much in common with that of the traditional romantic hero. The idea that Pierre resembled Chatterton was raised by one of the play's reviewers and confirmed by Adamov in his 'Note'.<sup>8</sup> It is Pierre's proud refusal to accept any compromise of his ideal, his impatience with the banalities of life and his gradual isolation culminating in suicide which gives him some similarities with Chatterton.

The similarity does not extend beyond this, but it is an important one, since if Adamov was to demonstrate the idea of universal futility,

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Sherrell, 'Arthur Adamov and invaded man', Modern Drama, vol.7, no.4, 1965, pp.399-404.

<sup>6</sup> See below, Chapter 4 (Part II), pp.211-215.

<sup>7</sup> 'Note', p.10.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.10.

the hero was ipso facto excluded: if all shared the same fate, there could be no exceptional cases. And yet, Pierre is exceptional and, moreover, is just as autobiographical as other characters in the early plays. He finds himself in exactly the position in which Adamov describes himself in L'Aveu and L'Heure Nouvelle. In both, he described Man as caught between the impossibility of finding the meaning of life and yet the impossibility of abandoning the hopeless quest, and in both he saw himself as one of a small élite who were the only ones to realise that this was the true state of affairs.

When Adamov agreed that Pierre had something in common with Chatterton, what he meant was that in creating Pierre, he had fallen back on received ideas. He had allowed Pierre to develop as a 'romantic hero', in a loose sense of the term: to develop a superior understanding of the world and of his own 'destiny'. As the hero, he maintained a purity that others could not achieve; he was able to see beyond the superficial appearances of life, and died because of a refusal to compromise. If he could not have perfect communication, he would have none at all. There are no other 'heroes' in Adamov's theatre.

L'Invasion is partly a dream play and the characters in it are part realistic, part dream-figures. Le Professeur Taranne is a pure dream play; it is not designed to prove a point, since in writing it, Adamov attempted simply to be faithful to the dream he had had. The play works according to nightmarish anti-logical processes, as in Strindberg's dream plays. Certain events seem completely unlinked by the processes of cause and effect, and in other cases, the links that appear to exist,

turn out to be self-contradictory. The second charge levelled at Taranne by the two policemen at first appears to be a trap to prove he was guilty of the first charge. But the two policemen claim they know nothing of the first charge and show no interest in it. The characters of the play come and go for reasons Taranne cannot grasp, and the play is full of the inconsistencies and absurdities characteristic of dreams, such as the suggestion that Taranne is to travel from France to Belgium by boat.

Although it deliberately disrupts the normal processes of cause and effect, the play does not go over into fantasy like Cocteau's plays of the surrealist period. It is compelling and meaningful because it deals with the problem of personality or identity, which is why it is of interest in a discussion of characterisation. It shows a man who is trying to define the limits of his personality. It presents an almost Sartrean conflict between what he would like to be and what his acts make him.

The whole play records Taranne's attempts to find a stable background in which he can establish his identity. But in the dream form of the play his circumstances are continually shifting. People vanish just when he is talking to them, the accusations brought against him change, so that he never knows quite where he is. He has a strong awareness of his own existence as an object for others and is acutely conscious of things conspiring against him:

Ils couraient, et ils criaient tous ensemble.  
(Bas.) Comme s'ils s'étaient donné le mot.<sup>9</sup>

He has a strong sense of being perpetually watched and judged:

Je sais trop bien qu'on m'observe, qu'on me  
fouille du regard, que tout le monde a les  
yeux fixés sur moi.<sup>10</sup>

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But although he is terrified of being watched by others, he is  
also in desperate need of recognition, like a Sartrean character needing  
yet fearing the judgement of 'the other'. His emotion, when he thinks  
he has been recognised, and his despair, when he finds he has only been  
taken for Professor Ménard, are a touching illustration of this.<sup>11</sup>

His character is built up almost entirely through what he says about  
himself. He is constantly appealing to the evidence of his life, but  
there is nothing concrete to show. Only the expression of the way he  
imagines himself. His insecurity is revealed through his manner of  
talking in the police station. He alternately pleads, tries to excuse  
himself and threatens, blusters. He is convincing, and the audience can  
sympathise with him because of the finely observed detail with which  
he describes certain things. The act of undressing, for example, which  
also has a wider symbolic function in the structure of the play as a  
whole, is made intensely real in his minute description:

Je déteste me déshabiller sur la plage où tout  
le monde peut me voir. Et toutes les  
précautions dont il faut s'entourer si l'on

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<sup>9</sup> Théâtre I, p.218.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.219.

<sup>11</sup> See above, Chapter 2 (Part II), p. 138.

ne veut pas être en butte aux regards indiscrets, toutes ces précautions me fatiguent, et surtout me font perdre un temps que j'aime mieux employer (riant) à autre chose... de plus utile. (Esquissant un geste.) C'est toute une histoire que de baisser son pantalon après avoir noué très vite sa chemise autour de la ceinture; elle peut tomber, il faut faire attention.<sup>12</sup>

He displays a number of characteristics, familiar and insignificant enough but which, taken together, build up an intensely convincing picture of a man who is a prey to uncertainty and self-doubt, as shown in his inability to read his own writing.

His intense desire to be what he is not is conveyed by the lyrical tone he employs to describe the noises that accompany his lectures, as more and more people crowd in to hear him. But the most convincing moment is perhaps when the letter from the Rector shows that like everything else he has said about himself, this is an uncertain claim, open to more than one interpretation and indeed it seems that the noises he described so lovingly were in point of fact caused by people walking out of his lectures in disgust. He drops his conciliatory, self-justifying tone, turning to open defiance as it becomes clear that all is lost, in a movement both true to life and touching.

Thus, within the form of the dream-play, Adamov gives a coherent picture of a character, trying to come to terms with a number of different elements in his own being which, in a realistic play, would need an

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<sup>12</sup> Théâtre I, p.227.

elaborate structure, but which in the dream form can follow one another with extreme economy. His character succeeds partly because the play confines itself to a representation of reality through his eyes. It is constantly hinted that if we could get outside the limitations of his own perceptions, there would be a rational explanation for all the things which seem so strange and threatening. This is illustrated, for example, by this statement<sup>e</sup> from Jeanne, one of the most controlled characters in the play:

Il arrive qu'on fasse des choses qu'on oublie  
par la suite. Souvent, je cherche mes peignes  
et je les ai dans les cheveux.<sup>13</sup>

A second explanation from an objective standpoint is in fact suggested at the end when the Rector's letter is read out and a different interpretation is posited for Taranne's behaviour than the one he had suggested. But even then, it is not clear how far the Rector's accusations of plagiarism and incompetence are justifiable. What they show is that Taranne's claims about himself are not accepted by the world he is trying to persuade, something which had been literally enacted in the first part of the play where he was mistaken for Professor Ménard.

The only reality of the play is reality as Taranne experiences it in his attempt to establish his identity before a hostile world/and the play closes on the note of exhibitionism with which it had started as he continues his struggle to exhibit himself in the most literal possible way. The play never opens out onto the real world, it remains within

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.232.

the closed circle of an obsession, but it opens the way for a treatment of the identity problem in a situation drawn from the material world, not just the world of the mind.

The second category of character which can be distinguished could be called the 'peripheral' characters because of their function in relation to the central characters. (The very schematic nature of the structure of these plays invites the geometrical vocabulary.) The peripheral characters have several functions. The first is to embody forces which are part of the central character's psyche and which go to make up his state of mind in his particular situation. The question of this use of characters relates, of course, to the whole question of structure and form in Adamov's early plays and was touched on in Chapter 1. And like other elements discussed in Chapter 1, it can be seen to develop from Strindberg and Kafka.

Just as the formal elements of Strindberg's dream plays influenced Adamov with their dissolves, sudden changes of surrounding, inexplicable transformations of character, so also did his application of these techniques to character. *Le Directeur de l'Avenir*, in La Parodie, for example, is transformed first into the manager of a dance hall, then into the reception clerk at a hotel. Adamov's note on the 'distribution' in the first version of La Parodie states clearly of these three characters:

Ils sont joués par un même acteur sans pour ainsi dire aucune transformation.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> La Parodie. *L'Invasion*, p27.

The important thing is that the audience should sense Le Directeur's sameness while understanding that for L'Employé his authority is manifest in all the differing situations in which he finds himself. Adamov's stage direction for the first change expresses this not as a costume change, but as a veritable transformation:

Le Directeur disparaît pour revenir presque aussitôt, une serviette au bras. Il est devenu le gérant de l'établissement.<sup>15</sup>

His transformation is occasioned solely by the entry of L'Employé. As soon as L'Employé leaves the stage again Le Gérant returns once more to his original state as Le Directeur. As Le Gérant, he represents simply the shape which, because of the surroundings, he takes on in L'Employé's mind. L'Employé's sense of being nothing more than a cumbersome object is rendered by Le Gérant's gesture of flapping the cloth in L'Employé's face as if trying to dust him away from the table.<sup>16</sup>

It is worth noting that this technique is also used for the central characters in the two plays where they form a couple. The complementary nature of N. and L'Employé, for example, is emphasised by Adamov's stage direction indicating a transformation of both the peripheral and the central characters. In Tableau 6:

Obscurité totale. Même décor. Les personnages seuls ont changé. Le Directeur de 'L'Avenir' est devenu le Directeur de l'Agence d'Isolation Thermique. En face de lui, à la place précise où se tenait N., L'Employé.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Théâtre I, p.24.

<sup>16</sup> This is one of the many authentic touches introduced from Adamov's own experience. He mentions the same thing happening to him in Je... Ils...

<sup>17</sup> Théâtre I, p.35.

The first published version added: "Donner l'impression d'une substitution magique."

Le Sens de la Marche provides another example of the same authority reappearing in different shapes. In its first production, given by Planchon, the parts of Le Père, le Commandant, le Prédicateur, and le Directeur d'école were all played by the same actor, and Adamov made it clear that this was his intention by the following remark in his 'Note':

Dans Le Sens de la Marche, j'ai voulu fonder le drame sur les réapparitions d'une figure posée d'emblée comme terrifiante, celle du Père.<sup>18</sup>

Thus again, he was using the nightmare-like transformation of a peripheral character to express the perpetually identical obsession of a central character. Combined with this function, the peripheral characters frequently represent the forces a man is faced with in different situations. Because of their functional purpose, these peripheral characters frequently have functional names: Le Directeur, La Soeur, L'Amie, etc. This was a device used by Strindberg in his dream plays and it is part of the Strindbergian structure of these plays that the characters are frequently mere functional, depersonalised forces rather than characters in the conventional sense.

This was also very common practice among the German Expressionist dramatists. Thus, for example, the characters in Kaiser's Gas were all given names which suggested their force or function, not their personality:

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<sup>18</sup> 'Note', p.12.

The Milliardaire's Son, The Chief Engineer, The White Man, The Daughter, The Officer, etc. This was part of a deliberate attempt by the Expressionists to depersonalise the stage characters so as to reach the essence of reality by concentrating on types, and avoiding the confusing idiosyncracies of reality. Kornfeld said in his introduction to Die Verführung that the actor should liberate himself entirely from reality and represent only the character's thoughts, and Wedekind, judging no actor capable of such a degree of depersonalisation, insisted on playing his leading rôles himself.<sup>19</sup>

Now this use of depersonalised characters in presenting a total view of life is very similar to that of Adamov in his early plays. It would be tempting to see German Expressionism as a source of Adamov's dramaturgical methods and use of characters. Geneviève Serreau does so, seeing Wedekind's Lulu as a prototype of Lili.<sup>20</sup> It is certainly true that there are many similarities between Adamov and the German Expressionist writers. But unfortunately Adamov did not in fact know Wedekind's Lulu when he wrote La Parodie, he had never been very interested in Expressionism and always regarded it as a danger to be

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<sup>19</sup> See Pierre Garnier, 'Qu'est-ce que le théâtre Expressioniste?', Théâtre Populaire, no.16, novembre-décembre 1955, pp.13-25.

<sup>20</sup> Serreau, p.68. She also likens Le Mutilé's loss of limbs to that of Herr Schmitt in Brecht's Das Badener Lehrstück vom Einverständnis. Six years before her book came out, Dort had, in his Lecture de Brecht, given the following footnote: "ce sketch n'est pas sans annoncer La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre d'Arthur Adamov, et il anticipe, par sa cruauté burlesque sur l'épisode de Lucky dans En Attendant Godot." Adamov did not know the Brecht play when he wrote La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre and it seems to me that Dort goes as far as is possible with his "n'est pas sans annoncer". Besides, the fear of amputation is to be expected from someone like Adamov who is obsessed with the fear of castration.

avoided, especially in its more extreme idealistic forms.

A truer picture is provided by stating that both Adamov and the Expressionist dramatists owed a lot to Strindberg. It is possible to establish many similarities of the type suggested by Geneviève Serreau between Adamov and the Expressionists, but they all have a common source in Strindberg. Adamov's peripheral characters, then, usually have a precise function in representing an aspect of the central character's world, as the secondary characters in Strindberg's Dream Play represent the different aspects of the world as seen by the Poet and the Daughter of Indra. Such characters usually have one main feature, not a set of 'characteristics'. But this simplicity does not make them banal, because of the particular meanings they take on for the central characters. In Adamov's dream world, the function of Mother or Father is not just to provide life and home, but also to present particular threats to the central character's existence, as we shall see.

The function of the peripheral characters in expressing the obsessions of the central characters in these early plays can be clearly seen if we group together similar characters from the different plays. The same basic characters can be seen to recur, with differences occasioned by the differing overall structures of the plays. We have seen that Adamov's early theatre deals with the themes of isolation, alienation, anguish, which all imply an investigation of the inner depths of Man's mind and experience. In their differing forms, the peripheral characters represent the forms these themes take on in the obsessions of the central characters which spring from Adamov's own emotional development.

These similarities can conveniently be seen in tabular form which also suggests how Le Ping-Pong, in which Adamov for the first time deliberately set out to re-introduce realistic character-drawing, still depended to a large extent on the character structure of the earlier plays.

CENTRAL CHARACTERS	N. & L'Employé (Simon & Laurent) D. Pierre Le Mutilé & Le Militant Taranne Henri Edgar (A.) C. Jean Rist		Arthur & Victor
FIGURE EMBODYING AUTHORITY	Le Directeur etc. L'Inspecteur Policiers Darbon		Le Vieux
FATHER FIGURE	Le Père etc.		
ASSISTANTS OF AUTHORITY	Le Journaliste Berne Neffer L'Amie (La Tante) C. La Surveillante		M. Roger Sutter
MOTHER FIGURE	La Mère ( <u>L'Invasion</u> ) La P. H. des Femmes (La Mère) C. La Mère ( <u>Tous contre Tous</u> )		Mme Duranty
DESTRUCTRESS	Erna Lucile Lili (for N.) (Nina) D.		
PROTECTRESS	Lili (for L'Employé) Agnès Louise, Marie, Noémie		Annette
SISTER FIGURE	La Soeur Jeanne Mathilde		
MILITANT FRIEND	Tradel (Le Militant) Georges & Albert Partisans		(Arthur & Victor)
SEXUAL RIVAL	Le Premier Venu Neffer Zenno		(Victor)

(Characters in brackets are from Le Désordre (D) and Comme nous avons été (C) which have only been published in reviews.)

We will examine these figures in the order of the groupings of this table, with the exception of those from Tous contre Tous which are most easily taken all together after going through the others.

The principal feature of the figure embodying authority is that he is incomprehensible. The only reaction which N. or L'Employé can have towards Le Directeur is one of confusion or an obscure feeling of guilt. His characteristics are extremely generalised. His only function is to embody the power which regularly places itself in the way of N. and L'Employé. The same characteristics can be observed in L'Inspecteur and the Policiers. The principal difference is that in Le Professeur Taranne these characters are more openly menacing. Le Directeur of La Parodie does not accuse, but simply listens in silence, allowing the central character to inculcate himself. But where L'Inspecteur and the Policiers are quite at ease, Le Directeur is himself subject to some of the limitations which weigh down N. and L'Employé. He experiences some of the same material difficulties (with lifts, taxis, etc.) and he also shares their fascination with Lili:

Dès qu'elle me quitte, mes forces m'abandonnent,  
elles s'en vont avec elle, et, comme elle, je  
ne sais où.<sup>21</sup>

But the difference is relatively small; in La Parodie everyone is seen to share the same hopeless condition; in Le Professeur Taranne, Adamov concentrates more closely on his central character and the peripheral characters are seen entirely through Taranne's eyes until the very end.

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<sup>21</sup> Théâtre I, p.22.

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In Le Père of Le Sens de la Marche, Adamov suggests that the fear and hatred of authority experienced by his characters proceeds from a type of Oedipus complex. In L'Homme et l'Enfant, he alluded to his own dependence on his mother and his hatred of his father.<sup>22</sup> These feelings were dramatised with great emotional verisimilitude in Comme nous avons été, in which A. gives a highly charged account of the emotions he feels at his father's suicide.

The combination of fear, hatred and guilt which is evoked by A., also goes to make up the attitude of Henri towards his father. He longs to break free from the restrictions his father imposes on him, but is restrained by a sense of guilt. In order to create this sense, the reappearing father figure is never frightening in a crude way; he always claims that he is trying hard to help Henri, and he complains continually of his own weakness, reproaching his son with not being stronger to make up for it.

In other plays, the figure of authority is a Mother figure. This is the case in L'Invasion, Les Retrouvailles, and Comme nous avons été. Like Le Père, these characters demand dependence, but they are complicated by also being associated with the idea of the destructress. This continues the 'Oedipus complex' pattern of the relations with the father. Henri longs to destroy the father, and effectively succeeds in destroying his associate. But none of the characters who are dominated by a Mother figure wish to destroy her; it is they who are destroyed by their inability to break free from her power.

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<sup>22</sup> See especially pp. 24-25 and p. 45:

In the central characters' relationships with Mother figures, the erotic implications of the submission to the destructress are sublimated. When Edgar humiliates himself before La Plus Heureuse des Femmes, it is as the child submitting to a protective mother, not as a sexual masochist. The most interesting of these three mothers is that of L'Invasion. She not only stifles Pierre by destroying his relationship with Agnès, but also has some hand in the advance of the powers of oppression outside the confines of the household. Her position is all the more important, since Adamov was deliberately trying to narrow the focus of this play:

Le cadre ne serait plus le monde, mais une chambre, les personnages ne seraient plus des types, mais des gens.<sup>24</sup>

The characters of La Parodie had no apparent background, no roots, but all the characters of L'Invasion, with the one exception of Le Premier Venu, are linked by ties of relationship or close friendship. The narrowing of focus and greater realism are brought together and emphasised in the unity of place which is preserved throughout the play. The one set shows the main room of the flat where Pierre and Agnès live with La Mère.

As her name suggests, La Mère embodies the traditional characteristics of the dominating possessive Mother. She shows great concern at the mess in the flat, is delighted when Pierre proposes to withdraw and immediately starts making arrangements for looking after him, promising to see his room is heated and his meals brought in. Pierre's den does not only have overtones of the hermit's cell, but also of the womb.

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<sup>24</sup> 'Note', p.9.

La Mère has given him life but threatens to want to keep Pierre in a state of foetus-like dependence.

e/ Real communication between Mother and Son is almost non-existent. Apart from passively accepting the arrangements she makes for him, including her ordering of the flat, he never takes any notice of her at all. He seems not to realise her deliberate plot to separate him from Agnès, even after he has realised that only Agnès can lead him back to a meaningful life. Her excessive zeal in working to separate Pierre from Agnès makes La Mère something of a caricature. Like a figure in a nightmare, she seems to fit into a recognisable category but is liable to act with an unexpected and sinister power.

She is positively malicious towards Agnès: when Agnès returns in the fourth act looking for Pierre, she withholds information about his presence in the house. She deliberately engineers the seduction of Agnès by Le Premier Venu, which is more clearly seen in the action than through the dialogue: every one of the first three Acts ends with Agnès literally cornered by La Mère who makes her intentions clear with a sinister laugh.

Her running battle with her daughter-in-law, her constant fight against disorder in the flat, her semi-fascist concern for order in the wider context of the nation, all these things are more a part of conventional realistic theatre than the concerns of the characters in La Parodie, and they are combined in such a way as to suggest the fictional Mother-in-law who is too funny, or too terrible, to be credited. None of the later Mother figures contain characteristics

not already present in La Mère of L'Invasion.

Her associate, L'Amie, is a complete caricature, a nightmare figure whose presence makes the smallest action seem sinister. She encourages La Mère in all her prejudices and political activities, interferes in the affairs of the family but still expects to be treated like a beloved aunt by the rest of the family. An important function of hers is to provide a link between the family inside the room and the life outside. The theme of order versus chaos, of 'invasion' in the national dimension, is entirely worked out in the dialogue between her and La Mère, with one comment thrown in by Agnès and one by Le Premier Venu. In these conversations, they mostly discuss the activities of their committee which is devoted to keeping the refugees out of their country. By the beginning of the last act this has been achieved and there is an obvious parallel with the state of the room, which has finally been reduced to order by La Mère.

In this case, the peripheral figures provide a parallel action to that of the main character, Pierre. Rather than embodying forces of his own neurosis, they demonstrate a different approach to the same problem. They too are faced with the problem of an invasion of forces which threaten order. Their solution is to impose an order which is seen to be cruel, and deadening.

Berne's rôle in relation to Le Père is similar to that of L'Amie in relation to La Mère. He emphasises Le Père's fascist tendencies and takes Le Père's tyranny over his children to an even greater extent. Le Journaliste is a much more elusive figure. He is more

approachable than Le Directeur, but equally unhelpful. He has some mysterious way of understanding what is happening, not vouchsafed to N. and L'Employé, but is equally subject to their fascination with Lili and is left equally unsatisfied at the end of the play. In the original version, instead of his rather ambiguous gesture of resignation, he uttered the following exclamation of despair:

Elle est partie. Je le savais. (Silence.)  
Pourquoi aurait-elle pris la chance que je  
lui donne?<sup>25</sup>

This ending simply serves to emphasise the point that all are subject to the same Absurd conditions: even those who are apparently 'in control' encounter the same frustrations.

The purest and most frightening example of the destructress is Erna. She still retains some of the maternal element which made the destructiveness of La Mère so terrible. For example, she visits Le Mutilé in hospital and pretends to be enormously concerned for his good. Describing her in L'Homme et l'Enfant, Adamov included this maternal quality among her more obvious attributes: "Erna, rousse, méchante, maternelle, infâme."<sup>26</sup> Through showing occasional concern, she appears as a false protectress. She has a tenderness in her cruelty which is a combination Adamov finds peculiarly compelling. It is the secret of her fascination that she deliberately pretends to be tenderly possessive in order to be able to destroy Le Mutilé all the

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<sup>25</sup> La Parodie, L'Invasion, p.110.

<sup>26</sup> L'Homme et l'Enfant, p.96.

more completely.

In the course of the play, Adamov deliberately puts Erna in the differing rôles of 'surveillante', nurse, masochist, sadist. She is not only "méchante", an extra scene is included to show her as "infâme", crawling around asking to be kicked by Neffer, fascinated to know about his tortures. She is as completely ambivalent as possible, both cruel and tender, an incarnation of the death force for Adamov. She is also able to represent more powerfully than La Mère the castration fear which is a part of Le Mutilé's relations with her.

The other destructress figures are less sinister, but insist in the same way on the central character's submission to authority. Lucile is even presented as the daughter of Le Prédicateur and demands Henri's submission to this Father figure before she will give him her love which he needs as Le Mutilé needs Erna's. In the more schematic framework of La Parodie, Lili does duty for both destructress and protectress. In neither rôle does she become as completely convincing as either Agnès or Erna, having even less autonomy as a character, since she has to be the neutral object onto which can be projected the contrasted erotic ideals of N. and L'Employé.

The protectress is less clear-cut as a figure than the destructress. There is no example of a protectress who plays so uncompromisingly life-giving a rôle as Jacqueline Autrusseau did for Adamov himself. In so far as the protectress occurs at all in La Parodie, it is only in L'Employé's poetic imagery of brightness, light, and height. She is the most extreme example of a character whose function is simply and

solely to reflect the obsession of a central character. The original stage direction made it clear that whereas all the other characters become more and more schematic till they reach the limits of caricature, Lili alone remains the same. She represents the eternal woman who will always be seen differently by different men. The characteristics attributed to her are entirely in the mind of the beholder. She thus has much the same degree of reality as the Voix des Moniteurs which are only heard by Le Mutilé. They have a general reality in that such powers govern everyone's life, but the precise form they take on is entirely governed by the central character's imagination.

Agnès is again not merely the protectress. As both Esslin and Sherrell have noted, she does in some sense represent the force of life; but as Esslin says, she also has a connection with the disorder La Mère is so keen to stamp out, and Pierre cannot come to terms with:

The disorder that Agnès brings also represents the bewildering nature of reality and of relationships with other human beings, which Pierre is unable to cope with.<sup>27</sup>

Sherrell notes that she represents the power to communicate since her job is to work at the typewriter, an instrument of communication.

Both ideas are useful pointers to her function as life-giver and protectress. There is also a third device through which she represents life. Just as L'Employé had seen his ideal woman as luminous, so Agnès has the property of shedding light. This is expressed in the mast

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<sup>27</sup> Martin Esslin, op. cit., p.73.

literal way at the very beginning of the play which opens on the voices of Pierre and Agnès in the dark. Agnès suggests that if he needs light for his work, he should open the curtains, but he cannot do it and so she has to get up and do it for him, whereupon the stage lights up. She alone is able to provide the light needed by Pierre.

Her special gift for making human contact is seen later, when she comments on the manuscript work:

Je me trompe bien parfois sur un mot. Mais  
je retrouve toujours Jean.<sup>28</sup>

But the equation of Agnès with light in a general sense which goes beyond the work on the manuscripts comes in the last act. La Mère and L'Amie are congratulating themselves that order has been restored in the country, the room also has been finally restored to order, but the lights go dim and the electric current seems to have been cut. All remains dim until the instant Agnès enters the room, whereupon the light inexplicably returns.

Agnès thus represents not only the protectress figure in relation to the central character, Pierre, but also, in the general context of the play, she forms the embodiment of the disorder of life which challenges all the characters of the play and which they all react to. It sheds light, but spreads confusion rather than order. Agnès is an interesting character because as well as her symbolic function of representing light and life, she has personal qualities denied to most of the other characters, and, in her rôle as protectress, reflects a

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<sup>28</sup> Théâtre I, p.61.

new emphasis on the idea of love. She is the unhappiest figure in the play, but is also the constant object of someone's desire or pity which makes the audience sympathise with her. Although Pierre does not realise his need of her before the end of the play, the constant attentions of Le Premier Venu, on stage for nearly all of the second and third acts, cleverly emphasises her pathetic condition.

She does what she can to preserve her marriage, accepting the most menial work when Pierre insists on her doing it. But she has a need for love and personal contact which is emphasised. She becomes more and more depressed as the play continues: "Je me demande pourquoi je suis faite"<sup>29</sup>, and longs for the unheeding Pierre to take notice of her: "ne rentre pas trop tard."<sup>30</sup> She herself insists on the need for love when she says of Weisenhauer: "Sa femme l'a laissé mourir sans soins. Et pourtant, il l'aimait."<sup>31</sup>

The Sister figures have much in common with the Protectress figures. Both are victims and both give evidence of great devotion. Agnès and Marie of Tous contre Tous both suffer from the machinations of their Mothers-in-law, are both unable to put up a fight against them, but both show great devotion to their new partners once they have been forced away from their original home, Marie going so far as to get herself shot helping Zenno in his attempted escape. In the shape of

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p.75.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.67.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p.73.

La Soeur of La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre, the Sister figure appears to simulate the rôle of the Protectress, since she presents the same devotion and passivity, and, furthermore, treats her relationship with Le Mutilé as if it were a sexual relationship, claiming that she could provide him with the security he is trying to find in his relationship with Erna, and addressing him, not as a brother, but more as a lover. From the first, she adopts a sensual, cajoling approach:

LA SOEUR, (câline). - Si tu avais voulu garder ta soeur, tu aurais réussi. (Etreignant le Mutilé). Tu as toujours compté pour moi plus que les autres, tu le sais bien.<sup>32</sup>

But the loyalties of La Soeur are torn. She has her husband, and more especially her child to look after, which hinders her would-be protective rôle. In Tableau 2, which shows Le Mutilé forced to follow the Monitors' voices for the first time, La Soeur wants to follow and help him, but as she is about to go after him, the child starts crying. She hesitates and then remains behind, unable to help Le Mutilé because she is already tied by the very links which he would need to establish if she were really to help him. It almost seems like a taunt when, immediately preceding his first "appel", she embraces Le Mutilé saying:

Je suis sûre que toi, si tu vivais avec une femme et si tu avais un enfant d'elle...<sup>33</sup>

To which Le Mutilé replies that he cannot imagine it. La Soeur cannot give him what he needs and yet she attempts to do so, which only emphasises his helplessness.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.106.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.107.

La Soeur provides the link between the complementary couple of Le Militant and Le Mutilé. The former has got from the latter's sister precisely what the latter cannot get from a woman. Perhaps it is an aspect of his militancy that he is able to gain the confidence of others, including a wife. But it does not help him, since he can concentrate only on his revolutionary project, and in the end, the relationship he has succeeded in establishing is compromised and, like Le Mutilé, he fails to achieve his aim.

Like both men, the sister is also a victim; Le Mutilé does not return her affection, but thinks only of Erna; Le Militant allows her child to die because he puts his political activity first. She is a sad figure, but not so sad as Mathilde, the sister of Henri in Le Sens de la Marche. Mathilde is completely downtrodden, slaving not only for an oppressive Father, but also for his cronies, who force her to submit to every imaginable indignity. Part of her function is to embody the remorse of the central character, which is achieved by her pathetically uncomplaining accounts of the horror of her life at home. Like Adamov himself and like others of his characters, she is victimised, yet she accuses herself of crimes for which she is not guilty. Adamov even projects onto her his own anxiety for responsibility in his father's suicide:

Je sais, je suis coupable. Quand Papa est mort, j'étais dans la chambre voisine ...  
j'aurais dû savoir.<sup>34</sup>

The description she gives of having to humiliate herself before all

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<sup>34</sup> Théâtre II, p.34. (cf. L'Homme et l'Enfant, p.45.)

Berne's friends can also be seen as a transposition of Adamov's own fascination with grovelling before despicable women.

But like Louise in Les Retrouvailles she embodies Henri's remorse at his inability to act. And like the other sister figures, she reinforces, in some obscure way, the powers of the authorities. When Henri finally decides to leave home, she appeals to him not to, says it will kill their father, and then complains that it will rebound on her. Here we find the stifling power of the family milieu which was something Adamov experienced so strongly. He spoke of "ces 'intérieurs' où j'étouffais"<sup>35</sup> and dramatised them in every play from L'Invasion to Le Ping-Pong. In both La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre and Le Sens de la Marche, this atmosphere is rendered chiefly through the sister figures who are tied to the hearth by devotion to child or to parent, as much as through the Parent figures themselves. The sister accepts the rôle of suffering victim, but because of this, she has some complicity in the established order.

Adamov's description of the dream which gave him the idea for La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre, describes him in the company of a sister "qui n'est pas Armik, mais je ne sais quelle image de soeur toujours présente dans mes rêves". And when he feels the call from the Moniteurs is imminent, and resolves to try to resist, she is against him:

Du reste, ma soeur me dit: "Il faut que tu y ailles." Et je lui obéis toujours.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Théâtre IV, p.87. (Introduction to Le Printemps 71.)

<sup>36</sup> L'Homme et l'Enfant, p.95.

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Again, in the very first pages of L'Homme et l'Enfant, Adamov recalls that his elder sister helped to codify his childhood obsessions. It was she who gave him the idea that certain parts of his room were safe, and others dangerous and he believed her.<sup>37</sup>

Jeanne reflects this sisterly rôle played by Adamov's own sister, perhaps more clearly than the others. She is gentle and understanding with Taranne, but firm as well. She does not, like the other peripheral characters in the play, ignore him or fail to recognise him. She even begins by reassuring him about his place at the high table in the mess of the ship. But she also reads the Rector's letter to him, does not question the truth of the accusations, and leaves him to his fate when the reading is over.

The friend figures do not require much analysis; above all, they represent the comradeship of shared action, which Adamov's isolated characters are never able to enjoy. Pierre cannot accept Tradel's offers of help any more than Henri can join his friends working for the revolution. They represent the world of combined action, which, if it could be shared or joined, would make a return to life possible, but which remains inaccessible. As for the sexual rivals, their rôle is clear; part of the central characters' feeling of sexual inadequacy is expressed by the constant presence of a rival, who poses a threat to their ability to hold the affection of a woman.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.15.

In all their different rôles, then, the peripheral characters help to define the obsessions of the central characters. They may embody a particular fear of the central character, so that they become almost extensions of his own psyche. Or they may represent forces quite external to him which intrude upon his consciousness. In his reactions to these intrusions, he defines himself.

But there is a growing ambivalence in the presentation of these peripheral characters; at first the audience sees them only in the light in which they appear to the central characters, and only those characteristics that obsess these latter are included. Thus, in La Parodie, we see Le Directeur taking on the different shapes which he assumes in the eyes of both N. and L'Employé. But gradually, in later plays, a contrast creeps into the presentation of such characters: the contrast between the subjective vision the central characters have of them, and a more objective view of them presented to the audience by the self-liberated playwright, who can step back a little, and point out both what links and what divides his obsessions from the world of everyday reality. Thus the policemen in Le Professeur Taranne are only menacing and terrifying, since we view them through Taranne's eyes. But Le Vieux of Le Ping-Pong is ridiculous as well as terrifying: he possesses the sinister power of Le Directeur in La Parodie, but can also be seen more objectively by the audience because of certain speech habits which enable them to place him in the real world of trade, so that he appears grotesque.

Most of the characters of Tous contre Tous fit into the pattern and correspond to one of the characters analysed above. But they are

more easily identifiable as characters from the real world of recent history, accessible to all. Thus, for example, Darbon embodies in a more conventional form the power of ubiquitous authority and perpetual menace which was embodied in Le Père of Le Sens de la Marche, Le Directeur of La Parodie and in La Mère of L'Invasion. He is portrayed as an opportunist, authoritarian politician.

Whereas Jean's persecution of the refugees is, rather crudely, motivated by his sexual jealousy over losing Marie to Zenno, Darbon is a calculating persecutor who does not allow himself to become lost in passionate hatred, who rather turns the current of anti-refugee feeling to his own advantage wherever he can, but is quite prepared to change his tune and proclaim a new policy of non-persecution when this suits his designs. His opportunism and his very subtle application of the methods of terrorism are exemplified in Tableau 9. Zenno has been captured while trying to leave the country, and Darbon, who needs to get rid of Jean Rist, pierces Zenno's disguise and forces him to betray Jean Rist in order to save his own skin.<sup>38</sup> His methods of interrogation are those of a clever but brutal policeman, a type which by 1950 had become part of folk-lore, following on the Nazi occupation and the proliferation of works like Sartre's Morts sans Sépulture.

Not only the character of Darbon, but the whole situation of the play, dealing with the persecution of a minority in an authoritarian state, had become familiar and was not confined to the private world of Adamov's own neuroses. It is perhaps because it is his least original

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<sup>38</sup> Théâtre I, pp.179-183.

work, the only one in which he falls back consistently on received ideas and unoriginal characters, that the play became very distasteful to Adamov. Although fatalistic, it did not follow the profoundly personal, obsessive pattern of inevitable destruction presented in the earlier plays. It attempted to deal with a more general social phenomenon: the widespread existence of persecution. But instead of approaching this from a constructive or even debunking standpoint, it simply presented the picture of a world in which everyone is pitted against everyone else.

As a result, though the characters may bear resemblances to similar types in the earlier plays, they are usually more conventionally motivated. Jean himself is persecuted like *Le Mutilé*, but not by any metaphysical power, simply by the high unemployment rate in the poor economic condition of the country. He is unable to make contact with his boss, but nothing more is implied through this than the traditional comment that the boss has plenty of time for his friends, but no time to see that justice is done to one of his workers. *La Mère*, again, presents many similarities with the mother figure in *L'Invasion*. Jean's feeling about his home is the same as Pierre's. He says:

Tu sais, si j'ai un congé, je serai à la maison toute la journée, entre toi et la vieille maman.<sup>39</sup>

And some of her words in the second Tableau could be interchanged with those of *La Mère* in *L'Invasion*:

Ils n'en mènent pas large, les réfugiés.  
En quelques jours, on en a bien flanqué

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.150.

une certaine (riant) hors d'usage. Ç'a  
impressionné les autres, qui se sont mis  
(jouant avec les doigts) à trotter, à  
galoper.<sup>40</sup>

There is nothing in her character which is not contained by  
implication in the mother of L'Invasion, but she is developed further  
and in a more conventional manner. The stifling power that was implied  
in a very few words, and above all in the menacing actions of La Mère in  
L'Invasion are made more explicit in Tous contre Tous. There is much  
less reliance on 'le sens littéral', and no such central symbolic object  
as the armchair. This mother's devotion to her son is taken to even  
greater extremes; she is prepared to accept any humiliation to help him.  
She goes begging to Zenno for work for Jean after Zenno has abducted his  
wife and in the process so upsets Jean that he joins the government's  
programme for persecuting the refugees. When the tide turns, the  
refugees are once more acceptable, and there are witch hunts for those  
who had persecuted them, she is prepared for the indignity of pretending  
to be one herself in order to protect him. There is a conventional irony  
in this, since she, one of the most vicious opponents of the refugees,  
already presents the outward characteristics associated with them: she  
has a limp. And in the end, despite her grotesque attempts to prove  
that her limp is not a refugee's limp, she is shot with the rest.

In the scene before she is led out to die, she becomes so  
grotesque that she is touching. With dreadful irony, all her schemes  
have turned against her: the limp which was to protect them has become a

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40 Ibid., p.155.

sign of guilt and her son, for whom she had done it all, denies her. As the tables are turned on her and she becomes more grotesque than ever, the audience can for a moment sympathise with her tragedy which is that of all small people who give in to racism to obtain their own ends but find that finally they are themselves crushed by it.<sup>41</sup>

This ending, though very successful in terms of the play, relies on a conventional sense of irony and of seeing the biter bit, which is not very common in Adamov's theatre. The statement made in his earlier plays that all are equally victims and doomed to failure has undergone a change of emphasis. In this play it has a moralising aspect: all are the same in that all are equally vicious and cowardly, and this is the sense carried by the disgusted "Tous les mêmes", which closes the play as it had opened it. This is very different from saying that all are victims, and Adamov has frequently deplored it, regretting that with such a sweeping generalisation he spoiled a play which could have had a useful purpose in revealing some of the social mechanisms which lead to racial persecution. Nevertheless, La Mère is a powerful character. She is given motives for her actions, is no longer a depersonalised force, and, at the end, even compels sympathy. This play, with its fuller characterisation/points forward to Le Ping-Pong.

In Le Ping-Pong itself, there are clear links with the figures we have analysed in the early plays, although it is a very different type of play from those which preceded it. The depth gained by Adamov's

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41 Ibid., pp.210-212.

dramatic writing in this play is visible in the way Le Vieux, for example, can be seen as an explanation of Le Directeur. He is in the same position as Le Directeur, possesses the same prestige as a result of his position as head of the business, is also surrounded by a group of henchmen. But where in La Parodie the sources of his power were somehow magical and represented a different world in which people were unfathomably in control, in Le Ping-Pong, the means by which the boss maintains his power are clearly suggested. And although a certain mystery still hovers at the beginning, over the appointment of M. Roger, for example, or the relationships of Sutter with Le Vieux, the function of the play is gradually to unveil and debunk the mystery behind these things, depriving them of the unfathomable quality which constituted their chief power in La Parodie.

The first step in this process occurs when Arthur and Victor have taken their new idea to Le Vieux only to be turned down on the grounds that it has already been thought of, and Le Vieux, patting M. Roger on the back, turns them away with the words:

Vous voyez, la maison n'est pas méchante,  
 l'entente y règne et la liberté. Alors, 42  
 maintenant que vous connaissez le chemin...

What was in La Parodie the mysterious ease with which others succeeded is shown up as merely a front which is cultivated by big business in order to make sure an idea is never lost and the individual is exploited to the maximum degree.

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42 Théâtre II, p.119.

The passage which follows this in which Arthur and Victor debate how Mr. Roger got the job, how Le Vieux had already heard of their idea, whether they should go back again, shows Arthur coming to terms with an obsession and resolving to break out of it. As he meditates on whether Sutter or M. Roger stole his idea, Victor says: "tu ferais bien de lutter contre une tendance que tu as à la manie de la persécution." And Arthur replies with a speech in which he shows he has realised that Le Vieux only asked them to come back so that he would not miss another good idea. Consequently, he resolves not to return.<sup>44</sup> But this awakening awareness does not go as far as a realisation of Marxist alienation on his part. He cannot escape his fascination with the machine, and soon returns to the Consortium which takes over his life completely. So again, without departing from the single-minded obsession dominating the central characters of the earlier plays, this character's development also provides the beginning of an explanation for a social mechanism.

From the first few words of the play it is clear that we are in a radically different convention from that which characterised the first plays. The title of the first scene, 'L'Espérance', alone signals a change from the all-pervading pessimism of the early plays, and the first few exchanges show that Arthur who, as his name suggests, is the autobiographical centre of the play<sup>4</sup> is capable of a new passion unknown in the early plays: excitement. His excitement is in a sense ludicrous, since it is over a completely insignificant pinball game, but it is a

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44 Théâtre II, p.120.

positive emotion, and is not presented as self-delusion like the excitement of L'Employé.

The ensuing scene shows Adamov's gift for realistic characterisation, as he depicts the relationship between the two young men, whose conversation is an appealing combination of friendship and rivalry accompanied by much light banter. Both are fascinated by the pin-table, and left to themselves, they are completely absorbed in their relationship with it: whose turn it is, who is better at it, etc. Here their mutual antagonism comes out as they circle round it rather as if it were a woman in whom they were both interested.

Adamov has in fact made it clear that the basis for these two characters was in his own boyhood relationship with the fellow-émigré whom he called Victor, and that these two were frequently rivals for the same girl. However, when Arthur and Victor are confronted by a third party, they are instantly drawn together, as when Sutter tries to take over their machine and they follow his game with a series of shared mimes and gestures.

Their youthfulness is very skilfully presented in their uncertainty as to what their reactions to this intrusion from outside should be. They can be seen testing out the different possible reactions. When, for example, Sutter leaves them with five free games, Arthur first of all takes the attitude that he is not going to stoop to pick up the crumbs left by Sutter. Then he thinks again and reaches the different conclusion that he should after all take advantage of them as this would be suitably disrespectful to Sutter. Finally he takes the attitude that

it makes no difference to him what Sutter thinks. In a few lines of most convincing detail, Adamov gives us a picture of a young man uncertain of himself, testing out the limits of his own freedom, unconsciously trying to establish for himself a coherent behaviour that will add up to a complete personality. At the same time Arthur's growing fascination with the machine has been established, since the real victor in his mental process has been neither himself, nor Sutter, but the machine, whose fascinating power can be seen to have determined, at least partly, what Arthur took for a personal and moral decision.

All the characters in the play undergo this fascination and domination by the machine. The central characters Arthur and Victor (particularly Arthur) have all their individuality gradually sucked out by it. But instead of existing only as a function of Arthur's central obsession with the machine, the surrounding characters have an autonomous existence in their own right on which the machine converges at different points. Thus Madame Duranty is delightfully portrayed as the traditional French hypochondriac. Like her health, her machine is always going wrong and giving her cause to grumble, but she remains a complete character in her own right, without her connection with the central obsessive object losing its particular function in the pattern of the play's construction. She is an excellent blend of kindness and homely wisdom with a large addition of self-pity and ignorance. The way her obsession with illness is brought in again and again shows another thing which is new in this play: Adamov's considerable comic talent.

Madame Duranty remains much the same throughout the play, but like Arthur and Victor, Sutter undergoes considerable development. He is

the 'mythomane' through whom the whole subject of mystification is initially explored. The stage direction at his first appearance describes him as "une quarantaine d'années, grand, fort, il 'déplace de l'air', beaucoup d'air, agite les bras, se démène, se gratte en parlant."<sup>45</sup> This physical appearance is accompanied by racy speech, always implying that he knows more than he says and characterised by bad puns and stock phrases like "Fidèle au Raphaël," all the stock-in-trade of the little man trying to impress. Arthur and Victor see through him, but are nevertheless impressed by him since he has power over the machine and mysterious connections with the Consortium which they cannot quite fathom.

The movement generated by the excellent characterisation of the first scene is picked up again in the second, in which Arthur and Victor take their idea to see if Le Vieux will buy it. Because we have seen them feeling for reactions, uncertain of themselves, their annexation by the Consortium is wholly convincing. Le Vieux's method is to praise their idea, and attribute to it a value far exceeding its immediate significance, so that Arthur and Victor are surprised and flattered. Having fascinated them, and made them believe that they can contribute something of real human value, he then tells them that of course their idea had already been thought up. He thus creates in them a feeling that there is a function they could fill in the Consortium (though in this instance their idea could not be used) so that they are bound to go away and come back later with another idea for his consideration.

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<sup>45</sup> Théâtre II, p.100.

The psychological verisimilitude of this process is made most effective in the lively dialogue.

Le Vieux is a very interesting character. He is described in the stage direction as a "sorte de monstre, caricature du 'gros patron'."<sup>46</sup> Obviously he has his roots in the Directeur of La Parodie, but he is quite a differently constructed caricature. Instead of being schematic, presenting only one feature and eliciting only one response, terror, Le Vieux is terrifying, funny, impressive, grotesque, turn by turn. And in each case, though his actions take place in a dream world, not a realistic one, his speech is not set in the neutral idiom of the earlier plays, but places him very precisely in the world of big business.

This aspect of his character is discussed in the following chapter, since it has to do with Adamov's use of language.<sup>47</sup> But some discussion of the new uses of language in Le Ping-Pong belongs in this chapter, since it was through particular uses of language that Adamov extended the range of his characterisation: the characters are defined by the language they use as well as by their actions and positions.

In some ways, this was not so new for Adamov's theatre. The expression of the ultimate futility of Arthur and Victor's lives in the last scene of the play could well have come from one of the earlier plays. It shows them totally preoccupied with a game of ping-pong which becomes more and more simplified, losing first the divisions on the table,

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p.114.

<sup>47</sup> See below Chapter 4 (Part II), p.231.

then the net, then the bats, until finally they are reduced to simply throwing the ball at one another, ending with Victor collapsing from a heart attack. The constant bickering between them as to who won the point and, more derisory still, whose turn it is to pick up the ball when it gets lost on the floor, recalls to perfection the arguments of two bad-tempered children engaged in such a game. But Adamov was not characterising two bad-tempered children; he was expressing the senility and final collapse of two useless lives. The method is similar to the dream technique of the early plays, since it portrays the whole human condition in one illogical little scene; but it is dissimilar in that the language and the ping-pong table are realistic, instantly recognised as part of everyday experience.

What are the implications of Adamov's realistic dialogue in a play which, in a non-realistic way, revolves around a single obsession? The construction of the play is extremely neat, but could not be described as realistic. The death of Annie, for example, and the scene that takes place around her corpse are both highly contrived. Why then does Adamov choose to give realistic dimensions to at least the dialogue between his characters?

The answer is to be seen by considering Le Ping-Pong as one further stage in the development from a despairing to a positive philosophy. This play, a considerable achievement in itself, was seen by Adamov as a transitional piece. In the 'Note' written at the time of its publication, he was already criticising his own vagueness in describing the social machine encompassing the action:

Je devais essayer d'examiner les rouages de la grande machine sociale aussi assidûment, aussi minutieusement que j'examinais bumpers et flippers.<sup>48</sup>

The question of a greater realism in the dialogue therefore has to be seen in the total context of a gradual striving towards a more situated drama which would deal with materialistic rather than idealistic dramatic subjects attempting to investigate the laws of cause and effect which govern life, rather than to be content with making large general statements about it. The revolt against idealism of the earlier plays was taking on a creative as well as a destructive aspect.

In this context, dialogue became more and more important, since the idea of cause and effect, of action and reaction, implies the possibility of dialogue. In the early plays, built on the presuppositions of separation and non-communication, he had adopted a very simple, neutral style of dialogue and had given pride of place to action. The characters had mostly spoken in a similar idiom, since they were often being seen only through the central character's eyes or were important only as embodiments of aspects of his psyche.

In Tous contre Tous the characters began to be differentiated, but only in a broad sense by what they did or described themselves doing. Apart from the language of the political speeches on the radio, they all spoke in the same neutral idiom. In Le Ping-Pong, for the first time, "Les sentiments qu'éprouvent les personnages ... ne sont pas posés d'emblée comme inévitables,"<sup>49</sup> and therefore the audience can be

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48 'Note', p.17.

49 Ibid., p.16.

interested in their development as characters. Adamov set out deliberately to portray characters capable of making a choice, though there is still a very large measure of determinism in the fascination of the machine ("c'est une société mystificatrice qui pose ce piège sur leur chemin").<sup>50</sup>

This play is not devoted to showing that all meet the same fate or that all are the same and is therefore the opposite of Tous contre Tous. The difference between them is described in these terms by Adamov:

La menace ne vient pas que du dehors; les personnages secrètent leur propre poison, préparent leur propre malheur; et ce malheur, n'ayant pas exactement les mêmes causes pour chacun, n'a pas du tout les mêmes résultats.<sup>51</sup>

The realistic dialogue thus becomes a means of freeing the characters, giving them a certain choice, differentiating them, and by so doing, Adamov also enriches the Absurd universe in which this play is still situated, since the nightmare situations are the more impressive for taking place in a realistic, recognisable idiom. Here again, Adamov could be said to be rejoining Kafka and Strindberg, both of whom employed for their dream situation, the realistic dialogue of everyday life.

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50 Ibid., p.16.

51 Ibid., pp.16-17.

## PART II

Chapter 4 Language

In 1950 when the new theatre of Adamov and Ionesco made its first impact on the Paris public, its clearest single characteristic was a radical attack on language. The famous alternative posited, rather unnecessarily no doubt, between Adamov and Claudel by Jean Vilar<sup>1</sup>, brought out clearly the fundamental difference between Adamov's approach to language, and that of the pre-war French dramatists such as Claudel, Cocteau, Giraudoux or Anouilh.

An intense preoccupation with language was, from first to last, one of the principal features of Adamov's thought. Much of L'Aveu was devoted to etymological analysis, which he believed could supply the key to understanding such fundamental concepts as 'la séparation'<sup>2</sup>, but with his decision to start writing plays, etymological problems began to take second place. In the preface to L'Aveu, written in 1943, he had already stated: "Le problème du langage est essentiel, encore qu'il ne soit pas, comme je le croyais, le premier de tous."<sup>3</sup> In the post-war years, the foundation of his developing dramatic theory, influenced by Artaud, was the need to bannish 'Sire le mot' in favour of a new

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<sup>1</sup> "Il est, certes, un autre théâtre: celui qui emprunte aux alcools de la foi et du verbe son efficacité. Posons donc la question: Adamov ou Claudel? Je réponds: Adamov." La Parodie. L'Invasion, Paris, 1950, p.16.

<sup>2</sup> See L'Aveu, p.57.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.15.

language drawing on all the resources of the stage.

Thus he approached the theatre with a basic interest in language, but with considerable hostility towards the traditionally pre-eminent place of language in French theatre. This hostility provides the most obvious link between the work of Adamov, Ionesco and Beckett and has become the most frequently discussed feature of these plays. Esslin talks of a tendency

toward a radical devaluation of language,  
toward a poetry that is to emerge from the  
concrete and objectified images of the stage  
itself.<sup>4</sup>

All three playwrights began by placing their characters in situations of extreme simplicity, conveying, with little reliance on discussion, a complete picture of the human condition. Language was devalued, used in an anti-meaningful way to emphasise the senselessness of life and the impossibility of communication.

Ionesco's use of cliché in La Cantatrice chauve, for example, is so continuous and so exclusive that in the end language proceeds under its own momentum like a runaway machine. It has become mechanical, 'thing-like': "Mort, par réification, du langage; et mort, par le langage/de toute communication."<sup>5</sup> This death of language is not so crudely proclaimed in Beckett's theatre, but his characters are all torn between their need to speak and the impossibility of doing so. In his first plays this produced a powerful poetry of half-uttered

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<sup>4</sup> Martin Esslin, op.cit., p.18.

<sup>5</sup> Geneviève Serreau, op. cit., p.41.

despair: the only thing that gives Vladimir and Estragon some relief from the anguish of existence is the ability to talk about it, and yet they fail to express what they mean, or run out of things to say. The importance of language in Beckett's plays has been gradually reduced, until in his most recent play, Breath, it has been dispensed with altogether.

But Adamov did not develop along these negative lines. His use of language evolved, from La Parodie, in which he attacked certain uses of language almost as fiercely as Ionesco, to Le Ping-Pong, in which language is examined, criticised, seen to be 'réifié' in certain respects, but in which it can also be the milieu of a genuinely human existence, and where true communication is a possibility, as in the first scene of the play.<sup>6</sup>

Jean Vannier, writing in Théâtre Populaire in 1955, shortly after the first performance of Le Ping-Pong, gave a very clear analysis of this development. He pointed out that the plays of Beckett, Ionesco and Adamov all shared a radically new attitude to language: it was no longer merely the means of describing and discussing the dramatic event, but was itself seen as the field of dramatic action. To convey what he meant by this, Vannier used language very similar to that employed by Adamov himself when describing 'le sens littéral': a character's language is, he said, "pour la première fois littéralement exposé sur scène." The avant-

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<sup>6</sup> See above, Chapter 3 (Part II), pp. 194-195.

garde is "un Théâtre de langage où la parole humaine nous est donné en spectacle."<sup>7</sup> And having shown how Ionesco's early theatre becomes a veritable attack on language which can open only onto silence, he said:

Chez Adamov, au contraire, on sent un effort  
fondamental pour faire du langage le lieu même  
de la vérité théâtrale.<sup>8</sup>

This chapter attempts to show how this became increasingly true as Adamov developed, starting with La Parodie, which is in some ways more nihilistic than subsequent plays, but just as interesting in its use of language.

The first thing Adamov was clearly trying to do through his use of language in this play was to pursue the denunciation of dead idealisms which had already formed an important part of L'Aveu. This was achieved by the use of parody (as the title suggests): not parody in the literary sense, but a parody of attitudes. Both N. and L'Employé are grotesque caricatures or travesties of two fundamental attitudes towards life. Thus L'Employé is not merely optimistic; he is an idealist and takes idealism to grotesque extremes. He not only assumes, against all the evidence, that Lili is destined to him from eternity, but also assimilates his imagined relationship with her to its ideal form:

Vous êtes la femme et je suis l'homme, nous  
sommes le couple.<sup>9</sup>

By the deliberate use of an inappropriate rhetoric, Adamov parodies

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<sup>7</sup> Jean Vannier, 'Langages de l'avant-garde', Théâtre Populaire, no.18, mai 1956, p.32.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.39.

<sup>9</sup> Théâtre I, p.15.

optimistic or idealistic attitudes, since they are so manifestly removed from reality as it is presented in the play, dominated by isolation, despair and death.

L'Employé's language is consistently idealistic and frequently 'poetic'. When he walks onto the stage at the start of the play, and surveys the town he is visiting for his holidays, his first remark is to say, as one might comment on the view: "Les arbres sont une promesse de résurrection."<sup>10</sup> When he meets Lili, he plunges straight into the traditional hyperbole of lovers' language:

Nous sommes faits l'un pour l'autre comme le  
ciel pour la terre et la terre pour le ciel.<sup>11</sup>

And at the end, although émprisoned and half blind, he still tries to make plans, talking optimistically of how lucky he has always been in business. In the process of his destruction, his language reveals a growing separation between the ideal and the real: although his words are in themselves meaningful, they are quite without applicability to his situation, as Edith Melcher has shown.<sup>12</sup>

The language used by N. does not reveal an idealistic optimism, but a completely despairing pessimism. For example, he says to Lili, "Vous m'aviez promis de me tuer, tuez-moi"<sup>13</sup>, as one might normally say

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.12.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.15.

<sup>12</sup> Edith Melcher, 'The use of words in contemporary French theatre', Modern Language Notes, no.77, 1962, pp.470-483.

<sup>13</sup> Théâtre I, p.17.

"kiss me". He provides an equally grotesque counterpart to L'Employé's idealism, although one can sense Adamov's own sufferings in the background when N. speaks. There is a passage, for example, in Tableau I where N. describes Lili in terms very similar to those which Adamov himself had employed seriously in L'Aveu: "C'est toi la nuit secrète et silencieuse. Toi aussi, la forêt profonde..."<sup>14</sup>. But here, as with all the lyrical passages of La Parodie, the lyricism is deflated by the ironical contrast between the superficiality of Lili and the exalted poetic image which N. has of her.

N.'s desire for death is as ineffective in making real contact with Lili as 'L'Employé's demands for instant marriage. In both cases, their language reveals the universal tendency of men, when faced with a woman of beauty, to go into ideal raptures, quite inapplicable to the reality of that woman. Because of its inapplicability, their language appears grotesque, and helps to bring out the theme of non-communication.

Adamov's attempt to stress the extreme banality of Lili, in order to contrast with the way N. and L'Employé describe her, led him to a limited use of the meaningless cliché in the manner of Ionesco.

Returning from her holiday, she says:

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.18. The passage in L'Aveu, pp.99-100 combines the ideal visions of both N. and L'Employé. NB the extreme similarity between N.'s speech at the top of page 18 and this passage from L'Aveu: "Toi aussi, la forêt profonde et secrète, -et chaque détour des sentiers perdus qui accèdent à son coeur réveille en moi la bouleversante et immémoriale certitude d'un déjà-vu, sombre, depuis combien de temps déjà, dans quels sommeils?" (p.100)

De ma vie je n'ai passé de vacances aussi agréables, Je m'étais habituée à prendre des bains de soleil en pleine nuit, tout le monde en faisait autant, c'était délicieux.<sup>15</sup>

But this is almost the only example of this use of language in any Adamov play.

Despite the hostility to idealism revealed in the sharp 'décalage' between the utter banality of Lili and the exalted terms used to describe her, the language of idealism is not made totally ridiculous in La Parodie. This is true of N.'s forest imagery quoted above and can also be seen in L'Employé's images of brightness, light and height. He describes Lili to the Journaliste by saying:

Elle est... comme un de ces grands oiseaux blancs qui survolent les cimes, si haut, si haut qu'on ne voit que leurs ailes.<sup>16</sup>

The flat in which he plans to set up house with her is envisaged as being very high up, and the Employment Exchange, which forms the object of his futile search/is imagined in similar terms:

Un grand immeuble tout blanc. Au soleil, il est transparent... comme le verre.<sup>17</sup>

His description of Lili and the building carry genuine emotion and recall the descriptions of the 'Cité radieuse' in Ionesco's Tueur sans gages which contains similar use of imagery associating light and height. The function of the building as a symbol of the ideal is clear from the way L'Employé, by the vocabulary he uses, assimilates his

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15 Théâtre I, p.23.

16 Ibid., p.27.

17 Ibid., p.41.

quest for it with his quest for love:

Je n'aurais peut-être pas reconnu l'immeuble,  
 mais ce soleil oblique sur la façade, je ne peux  
 pas m'y tromper. Eclairé de tous les feux du  
 soir, c'est un peu un visage que frappe l'amour.<sup>18</sup>

But it is when the 'décalage' between his words and his situation are most clear that his language achieves the greatest poetic resonance, in a poetry of a different type, which uses simple language, but gives it an unusual context. In the same scene, he sees the woman of the First Couple crossing the stage. She has grown old and is white-haired, but L'Employé suddenly feels he has seen her before. He tries to speak to her, but she takes no notice, contributing to the dream-like atmosphere of the scene. Having started on an ecstatic note, his tone becomes apologetic, as he tries to retain her, but it still displays a nostalgic certainty that something ideal has been missed:

"Excusez-moi, Mademoiselle. Je voudrais...  
 Je crois vous reconnaître. Nous nous sommes  
 rencontrés pour la dernière fois dans un  
 jardin public. Vous vous souvenez? Je  
 n'y suis pas retourné depuis, non. Devant le  
 jet d'eau... L'air était empli de poussière.  
 Je crois que ce jour-là, je vous ai fait  
 attendre un peu. Je me le suis reproché,  
 mais, croyez-moi, je...n'y étais pour rien."<sup>19</sup>

As with Lili, he fails to make contact. The woman is somehow beyond his reach, living in a different dimension, and his efforts to reach her convey all the anxiety of isolation. The suggestive power of the language goes far beyond its banal meaning, as a result of the context,

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18. Ibid., p.40.

19. Ibid., p.41.

the action which accompanies it and the 'décalage' which is clear to the audience between L'Employé's assumption that he can contact this woman and the reality of his separation.

It was because of the importance of 'le geste', of the concrete embodiment of meaning in action, that Adamov deliberately adopted this relatively banal tone for most of his dialogue, relying on the interplay of all the dramatic elements to get across his meaning. In La Parodie, as we have seen, there were still a few lyrical passages which make use of poetic imagery, but these were rigorously excluded from the plays that followed. He explained the reason for this very clearly in the 'Avertissement':

'Dans cette poussée du geste pour son propre compte, dans son irresponsabilité, je vois apparaître une dimension dont le langage seul ne peut rendre compte, mais en revanche, quand le langage est pris dans le rythme du corps devenu autonome, alors les discours les plus ordinaires, les plus quotidiens retrouvent un pouvoir que l'on est libre d'appeler encore poésie, et que je me contenterai de dire efficace.<sup>20</sup>

He even hesitated to use the word poetic, although he was always to see himself as a poet in this sense of someone who reveals the unexpected power to be found in the ordinary and the everyday.<sup>21</sup> What he meant by the "rythme du corps devenu autonome" is exemplified in the extracts quoted from L'Employé; the rhythm of his actions was what gave the additional level of meaning to his words.

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<sup>20</sup> 'Avertissement', p.23.

<sup>21</sup> See below, Chapter 5 (Part II), p.242-244.

This is also one of the most important features of La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre where the theory is better practised since the speeches are more thoroughly 'quotidien' than in La Parodie. Even Erna uses the most harmless language as in her last speech which out of context seems to convey nothing but kindness:

Décidément, tu nous quittes. Tu veux défiler  
avec les autres, célébrer la victoire! . (Pause)  
Mais, prends garde, on pourrait t'écraser. Tu  
tiens si peu de place!<sup>22</sup>

But the stage direction states that as she says this, she kicks him out of the door. It is not only her last words that are spoken ironically; the 'décalage' between her words and gestures has been present throughout the play. Through it is presented the picture of Erna as the terrifying yet fascinating female. Although the language she uses is, in itself ordinary enough, it takes on a new suggestiveness by means of the accompanying action, so the audience experiences the menace that is implicit in any relationship where one person is able to dominate another, however well-meaningly.

This use of simple-neutral language, described by Adamov as "les mots les plus simples, les plus délavés par l'usage"<sup>23</sup>, was important because it enabled him, in L'Invasion and subsequent plays to investigate the connection between Man and his own language, starting from the simplest possible level and unhampered by the metaphysical overtones attached to words in L'Aveu. Some of the forms of Adamov's

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<sup>22</sup> Théâtre I, p.141.

<sup>23</sup> 'Avertissement', p.23.

preoccupation with words do, of course, survive from L'Aveu: in his use of word-play, for example, we can see a vestigial survival of his fascination with etymology. In La Parodie, the name of the newspaper on which Le Directeur, Le Journaliste and Lili all work is 'L'Avenir'. Later in the play it has changed to the similar 'Demain'. Adamov uses this title to imply that Le Directeur de L'Avenir is literally in control of the future; he, Lili and Le Journaliste are mysteriously in control of life, while both N. and L'Employé are left completely baffled by it, and it is as the perpetuators of life's senseless order that the three of them survive at the end of the play, while N. and L'Employé are crushed. These implications are clarified by Le Directeur's statement that 'L'Avenir' depends on Lili, the embodiment of life's malevolent futility: "plus de Lili, plus de L'Avenir".<sup>24</sup>

Language only began to achieve a genuinely central position as 'lieu de la vérité théâtrale' with L'Invasion and its central character, Pierre. In Pierre, Adamov created a character for whom language is as important as it was for himself. Pierre needs to feel the living force of language. The crisis in his development occurs in Act III, where he withdraws to his den because, as he says:

Tout ce que j'ai tiré de l'ombre, ordonné,  
retrouvé, reste désespérément sans relief.  
Plat. (...) Savez-vous, au juste, ce que  
c'est qu'une chose plate? Aplatie? Rejetée  
soudain hors de l'espace?<sup>25</sup>

The meaning of this, which is perhaps not immediately obvious, becomes

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<sup>24</sup> Théâtre I, p.23.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.86.

considerably clearer if we compare it with some very similar words in

L'Aveu:

La pensée se meut dans l'espace. Le langage se base essentiellement sur le sens de l'espace. Le verbe qui se traduit en actes se projette dans l'espace. (Exemples particuliers: je recule devant cette décision, je me retranche derrière ~~cette~~ argument, je cours une chance, ...<sup>26</sup>

In an earlier version of L'Aveu he had phrased the same idea somewhat differently:

Tout développement de la pensée sous-entend une notion d'espace. Le langage ne peut se concevoir ni se construire que dans l'espace. Et il n'est pas de pensée sans langage.<sup>27</sup>

From the familiar idea that all conscious thought necessarily uses verbal forms, Adamov builds up his theory of the connection between 'le geste' and 'le langage'. Both are resumed in the idea of 'le sens littéral'; thought and language are inconceivable without the spatial element of gesture. Thus when Pierre says that for him language has lost this quality of spatial existence, he is saying that thought is no longer possible for him, therefore that his very existence is in jeopardy. Once again some lines from L'Aveu can help to illuminate the meaning. Adamov explains that in order to exist, he needs the presence of 'le verbe', he needs to be able to use it and to express himself:

Car si je cessais d'écrire, tout s'écroulerait.  
Que le verbe m'abandonne et aussitôt je ne tiens plus debout, je tombe, je dégringole, et tout s'en va à vau-l'eau, tout se décompose,

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<sup>26</sup> L'Aveu, pp.26-27.

<sup>27</sup> Arthur Adamov, 'Journal Terrible', La Nouvelle Revue Française, no.348, 1<sup>er</sup> février 1943, p.167.

tout se désagrège, et je m'affale à terre dégonflé comme une baudruche.<sup>28</sup>

The spatial element that Adamov ascribes to language seems vital to his own sense of existence, as it is only when he has some grip on the verbal process of thought and meaningful self-expression that he can 'keep upright'. So we realise that for Pierre, the statement that everything has become 'plat', lost its dimension in space, means not only that he has lost control over language, but also that his whole grip on existence seems to be slipping from him.

But although Pierre needs to recover the ability to experience language, he also sees language as a source of menace:

Pourquoi dit-on: 'il arrive?' Qui est ce 'il', que veut-il de moi?<sup>29</sup>

In L'Aveu Adamov had expressed a similar fear which helps to explain the fatalism of L'Invasion:

'Qu'est-ce qui te prend?' Cette question triviale me fait peur. Je ne sais jamais ce qui me prend. Ce que je sais, c'est qu'une puissance invisible me ravit à moi-même, me prend. Je suis pris, et bien pris, et cela à chaque instant.<sup>30</sup>

Thus the forms taken by the very language we use seem to affirm that there is a controlling power which cannot be known, since it is impersonal, always expressing itself through impersonal constructions. But whereas in L'Aveu (and to some extent La Parodie) the threat of the power seemed unexplained or somehow linked to the idea of God, a more precise definition is suggested in L'Invasion, by the very arbitrariness

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<sup>28</sup> L'Aveu, p.26.

<sup>29</sup> Théâtre I, p.86.

<sup>30</sup> L'Aveu, p.25.

of the choices imposed by language:

Pourquoi dit-on 'par' terre, plutôt que 'à'  
ou 'sur'?<sup>31</sup>

It is this that seems to disturb Pierre so profoundly/ the fact that there is no obvious reason why one should say 'par' rather than 'à' or 'sur' suddenly opens up vistas of meaninglessness. Where there is no distinctive feature between a number of available choices, language loses its living quality, its 'relief'; it loses the power we normally ascribe to it of being necessarily attached to some pre-defined object or meaning, and plunges us into the terrifying abyss of the Absurd.

The revelation which comes to Pierre of the meaninglessness of language, comes at the climax of a dramatic action built around his attempts to interpret or find meaning in it, and it is in this dramatic opposition that the place of language is defined. To hold onto life, Man needs to be able to interpret and to communicate through language; but what language reveals is precisely the impossibility of such an aim.

From the clash between the arbitrariness of language and Man's perpetual desire to make sense of it, results a conception of the Absurd that has similarities with Camus'. In Le Mythe de Sisyphe, Camus said that the Absurd sprang from the clash between the arbitrariness of the universe and Man's perpetual desire to make sense of it. One possible solution is offered by Camus in the shape of Meursault, the ordinary man who lives for the moment on a simple, day-to-day basis. Pierre too feels he has to achieve this quality of life:

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<sup>31</sup> Théâtre I, p.86.

Ce que j'ai compris ... c'est que rien ne me sera donné tant que je n'aurai pas trouvé le moyen de mener une vie tout à fait ordinaire.<sup>32</sup>

But Adamov's idea, though similar to Camus' is extended to the area of Man's relations with his own language. Pierre had said: "Ce qu'il me faut, ce n'est pas le sens des mots, c'est leur volume et leur corps mouvant."<sup>33</sup> He had discovered that life must somehow be lived, not interpreted, and since the power to make meaningful use of language confers life, he needs above all to experience this use of language, rather than to understand someone else's use of it. The only meaning conveyed by Jean's papers was the meaning of experience. As Maurice Regnaut said: "Jean est mort: les manuscrits n'ont pas d'autre sens."<sup>34</sup> As he tears them up after making this discovery, Pierre mutters: "Pardonne-moi de ne pas t'avoir compris plus tôt".<sup>35</sup> If both the things it can express and the composition of the language are purely arbitrary, it follows that Pierre's attempts to systematise and interpret were not only foolish but dangerous: they lead to the death of experience and the ability to experience. Pierre dies because he is unable to start again on an ordinary life in which simple communication through language is possible. Although Pierre is just as fatally doomed as N, and L'Employé, the implication that communication could be possible represents some advance.

The importance of language as a concrete element in the drama, as

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.92.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.86.

<sup>34</sup> Maurice Regnaut, 'Arthur Adamov et le sens du fétichisme', Cahiers Renaud-Barrault, no.22-23, mai 1958, p.183.

<sup>35</sup> Théâtre I, p.93.

the very means of experience, is something which flows from Artaud's insistence on 'objectivation' and scorn for theatre of the word alone. But this use of language only found its complete expression in Le Ping-Pong and it was not until after 1955 that the critics began to pay much attention to it. Bernard Dort was one of the first to point out the fundamental importance of language in Adamov. Writing in 1956, he referred back to L'Invasion, describing the play as:

Sorte de lutte entre deux langages: le langage indéchiffrable, qui n'est plus, littéralement, que de la matière, une matière proliférante, des manuscrits laissés par l'écrivain, et le langage menacé par le vide de moins en moins signifiant, de plus en plus blanc, rongé et disloqué, de la vie quotidienne.<sup>36</sup>

By his use of the word 'matière', he stressed the physical presence of the papers. These show the central 'invasion' of the play: the proliferation of a language which is indecipherable because devoid of all contact with living experience. The language itself becomes the area in which is played out a dramatic action opposing the possibility of life and the inevitability of death. Pierre provides the clearest expression of the central paradox of Adamov's early plays: it is only the urge to express oneself and to understand others that can give us life; but in practice communication seems impossible and so the only way out is death.

On the technical level, L'Invasion also provides an interesting example of Adamov's paradox. He stated in the 'Note' the dilemma he

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<sup>36</sup> Bernard Dort, 'L'Avant-garde en suspens', Théâtre Populaire, no.18, mai 1956, p.44 (footnote).

was in, having proved "l'impossibilité de toute conversation", and yet having to construct dialogue since he wished to continue writing plays.

J'eus alors recours à un stratagème: oui, ils parleront, chacun entendra ce que dira l'autre, mais l'autre ne dira pas ce qu'il aura à dire. ... Il me semblait évident qu'Agnès, réclamant une machine à écrire, réclamait "toute autre chose", qu'une machine à écrire. Je croyais à l'époque avoir non seulement exprimé par là une vérité humaine indiscutable, mais inventé une nouvelle forme de théâtre; or, il se trouve que l'oeuvre de Tchekhov, pour ne citer que celle-là, abonde en dialogues de ce genre...<sup>37</sup>

Whether or not this was an original invention, it is interesting in that it shows Adamov the dramatist caught in the same dilemma as Pierre, searching for a solution and (unlike Pierre) finding one, which helped him along the path of progress towards liberation.

The example he quoted of Agnès asking for the typewriter is most effectively used to convey a combination of understanding and deliberate misunderstanding. Agnès has returned in a final effort to see Pierre. She talks, very movingly, about the typewriter which she was used to seeing in its proper place in the room and, unwilling to reveal herself to La Mère, and having found this safe point of reference in an otherwise changed room, she builds up the theory that she came to see if she could borrow it. The device is used, not only to convey the difficulty of communication, but also the hostility of the surrounding atmosphere; in the way she talks of the typewriter and not of Pierre, we can see her frightened, defenceless state, separated from Pierre and attacked by

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37 'Note', pp.9-10.

La Mère, and we can see Agnès' confusion about her own condition.

The play contains many other examples of this technique used to convey the impossibility of expressing what one feels most deeply coupled with a recourse to the discussion of quite unimportant objects or meaningless clichés. Le Premier Venu says, "Vous avez une très belle vue d'ici", but the audience understands that he is stating his appreciation of Agnès. There is an interesting development in Adamov's use of clichés in this play, since these are specifically used to suggest a dead language linked with the deadening order installed by La Mère and L'Amie. The latter is particularly prone to the proverbial statement which brings what are, to Pierre, matters of life and death down to the level of cliché. For example, she answers a particularly agonised speech of Pierre's about the difficulties of his work by saying "Avec le travail, on a toujours des surprises!"<sup>38</sup>

For Pierre, language becomes, in a very real sense, 'le lieu même de la vérité théâtrale'. But it is a treacherous area, full of traps, demonstrating only Man's hopeless condition, caught in a universe where words are as uncontrollable as everything else. The uncontrollable, almost hostile quality of words which proliferate, like Pierre's papers, in a meaningless way, is a characteristic feature of the speech of many of Adamov's characters; it can be seen especially in some of Taranne's and L'Employé's speeches.

This is the closest that Adamov ever came to illustrating Artaud's

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38 Théâtre I, p.66.

theory that words should be used as incantation. He never used words for a uniquely hypnotic effect, as Ionesco did. This is doubtless because he never attempted to show language being used as a means of aggression or domination as, for example, in La Leçon. He was more interested in portraying the individual conscious of being victimised, than in Man as victimiser. Both L'Employé and Taranne are the victims of words, which constantly elude their grasp. This appears through passages of extended monologue which imply not only their puzzlement about their situation, but also the threat of a menace, the menace with which Man feels that the universe confronts him. However hard they talk, they cannot dispel the fear this menace inspires in them.

L'Employé, for example, finds himself in the dream situation of having to explain to the Directeur de l'Agence d'Isolation Thermique why he is late for work, although neither he nor the audience were aware that he had a job. He talks desperately about anything and everything that comes into his head, continually pausing, waiting for an interruption, but confronted only with stony silence, so that he goes on progressively revealing his inability to cope with life.<sup>39</sup> In a theatre devoted to showing the inadequacies of language, the power of a threat from someone who remains completely silent has frequently been realised. It forms the climax of Ionesco's Tueur sans gages and it is a prominent feature in Pinter's early plays: the tone of Edward's response to the silent Matchseller in A Slight Ache presents

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.35.

striking similarities with that of L'Employé. In both cases the erratic, hesitant, inconsequential structure of their speech reveals their terrifying isolation and inability to communicate.

The inability to manage words has an important part to play in the destruction of other characters. The same form of monologue is regularly used, often starting off quite confidently, but gradually faltering, becoming more and more apologetic until it destroys the very affirmation that the speaker had begun by making. This is precisely the movement of Le Militant's victory speech in La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre, which provides one of the few examples in this play of language that is not deliberately neutral and colourless. It is worth examining this speech, since it uses a technique which was to become a fundamental characteristic of Adamov's later plays: the denunciation of certain forms of idealism by a dismantling of the rhetorical devices which are usually employed to make that idealism seem attractive. Le Militant starts to speak in praise of the victorious revolution:

Nous avons fait tomber nos oppresseurs. Nous avons renversé l'ordre aveugle et inique qu'ils avaient instauré, pour établir un ordre conforme à la réalité d'aujourd'hui.<sup>40</sup>

But gradually, with almost no change in the rhetorical tone of the speech, its content becomes less confident:

Nous n'avons pas à remettre en question la légitimité de nos actes. Nous ne pouvons pas agir autrement que nous l'avons fait. Il est arrivé parfois que des hommes aient payé de leur vie une faute dont d'autres auraient dû

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p.136.

répondre. Mais quelle preuve avons-nous qu'ils n'en avaient pas commis une autre, pour laquelle ils méritaient le même châtement. (Pause) Qui peut se dire exempt de fautes? (Bas.) Qui? Qui? ...

Nous n'avons pas à regarder derrière nous. Peu importe que quelques-uns seulement aient survécu si ceux-là (de plus en plus bas et de plus en plus lentement) peuvent, jusqu'à la fin, garder la tête haute. (Il s'affaisse sur les épaules des Partisans.)<sup>41</sup>

The tone of the fiery, idealistic, political speech is cleverly preserved while Le Militant gradually realises that his rhetoric is quite hollow, that he means the opposite of what he is saying, and that what should have been a victory speech has turned into an admission of failure. There is a similar pattern in many of the speeches delivered by Taranne, who comes to deny, one after the other, all the affirmations he had made, as he is faced by the silent representatives of law and order.

Taranne, like Pierre, is annihilated because of an inability to make simple language meaningful in the context of his everyday life.

Regnaut expressed this in an elegant 'tournure':

Son langage est le moteur de son anéantissement,  
chaque parole le pose pour l'exposer et  
finalement le dépose.<sup>42</sup>

Finding himself accused of exhibitionism, he tries to deny responsibility for this and then for all the other different actions he is accused of having committed. Since some of them are mutually

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.136.

<sup>42</sup> Maurice Regnaut, op. cit., p.184.

contradictory, he is thus led to contradict himself repeatedly. Within the space of two pages, he states both that he cannot work while walking and that he frequently does so. His attempts at justifying his actions therefore lead, by their mutual contradictions, to the gradual elimination of the identity he claims for himself. He ends up a terrifying blank, like the map which he hangs on the wall. Everything that he has said has been shown to<sup>be</sup> open to more than one interpretation and with each new attempt to justify himself, he has made his claims less justifiable.

Thus the proliferation of words which become less and less controllable is a means of embodying a similar dramatic action to the one at the basis of L'Invasion, where Pierre's destruction proceeded from his inability to experience the meaningful use of language. Taranne destroys himself by talking about himself; he finds he cannot make sense of his own existence in verbal terms, and therefore he does not exist. As in the case of Pierre, it is his failure to make contact with other people that is fatal. Taranne is unable to formulate what he is in language that will convince others. Here Adamov has dramatised his own personal problem even more clearly than in L'Invasion, since what Taranne needs is not simply contact with one other human being, but with an audience; he needs recognition from society at large. In the dream from which Adamov transcribed the play, he records that the motivating force was his anxiety about being recognised as a dramatist. Instead of shouting "I am Professor Taranne," he shouted "I am the

author of La Parodie."<sup>43</sup>

Faced with the impossibility of establishing his existence through language, Taranne is thrown back on gesture. He gives up the attempt to talk about himself and adopts the simple exhibitionist action of undressing. Like many of Adamov's characters, he has experienced the failure of language, and so turns to pure gesture. There is a similar ending to Paolo Paoli, where Paolo, speechless, can only knock off l'Abbé's hat to register his revolt.

But Le Professeur Taranne marks a positive development in the matter of language, over the situation of L'Invasion, in which it appeared as an obscure, unnamable power which destroyed Pierre. This development has to do with Adamov's original appeal, in his dream, to an audience, as Dort has pointed out, showing that whereas Pierre was doomed to destruction, Taranne has a choice: he could at any moment accept the identity that is proposed for him:

Taranne doit se choisir: il hésite entre le professeur et le satyre, et l'un comme l'autre étant également vraisemblables, il opte pour l'anéantissement. La destruction, de passion, devient spectacle.<sup>44</sup>

He is not destroyed because no language could offer him a satisfactory account of himself, but because he proves himself incapable of choosing. As Dort suggests in his last sentence, this change in the function of language was capital, because instead of proposing in his plays a

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<sup>43</sup> 'Note', p.12.

<sup>44</sup> Bernard Dort, 'Le Ping-Pong', Théâtre Populaire, no.12, mars-avril 1955, p.86.

closed, fatalistic system which had to either be accepted or rejected as a whole, Adamov had begun to write plays in which a model of the world was proposed which obliged the audience to question basic assumptions, which retained a certain ambiguity, and did not insist on an unalterable view of reality.<sup>45</sup>

The implications of this development only became finally explicit in Le Ping-Pong where Adamov created characters who did not automatically destroy themselves, but who find a coherent language and therefore a coherent identity. The scope of the play is widened, there is much more accent on the time-sequence in the plot since through its vicissitudes we are able to follow the developments of characters who have gone one step beyond Taranne and have chosen to identify themselves in the only way possible, that is to say by adopting a language. This language is itself inadequate and bound towards destruction, but that is very different from Taranne's destruction proceeding from his inability to make a choice, or Pierre's, faced with the total inadequacy of language to provide the expression of any form of life.

The first thing that strikes one about the language of Le Ping-Pong is the realism of the opening dialogue between Arthur and Victor in Mme Duranty's café as they play at the pin-table.<sup>46</sup> Adamov reveals a remarkable ear for the patterns of everyday speech, taking us right into the setting and, moreover, capturing in a very few speeches, the

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<sup>45</sup> See below, Chapter 5 (Part II), especially pp.245-246.

<sup>46</sup> See above, Chapter 3 (Part II), pp.194-195.

friendly, bantering relationship that exists between Arthur and Victor. There is no question at this stage of non-communication. A very precise relationship is outlined in a very realistic setting. This realism of everyday speech is maintained in the exchanges between Madame Duranty and Sutter. She is characterised by her conventional complaints of ill-health and her realistic use of the café language: "Qu'est-ce qu'on vous sert, Monsieur Sutter?", and he, by his reply, "Un Raphaël. Fidèle au Raphaël!"<sup>47</sup>, is also characterised in his tendency to use trade jargon and his jocular approach. All the characteristics of the earlier plays seem absent: the unsituated, generalised setting, the lack of communication and impossibility of inter-personal relationships, in fact all the aspects of the dream play.

But Adamov did not abandon the procedure of motivating everything in the play by a single guiding obsession: instead of a woman, like Lili, it is an object, the pin-table. Since this object is open to commercial exploitation, with all that this implies, workers, salesmen, designers, etc., it acts as a model of the capitalist world and imposes its own language on the characters who become involved in it. In reality, this was not a radically new departure for Adamov. In his very first play, as we have seen, the language of the central obsession, an idealistic form of love, completely dominated N. and L'Employé. Whether it was the language of optimistic infatuation, or of fatalistic masochism, they

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<sup>47</sup> Théâtre II, p.101.

were trapped and destroyed by it. The difference lay rather in where the play had its roots, the source material which it drew on. For La Parodie, they were inwards, but in Le Ping-Pong, as Barthes put it, the roots of Adamov's language are turned outwards<sup>48</sup> with the consequence that the language of the obsession has its foundations in a realistic everyday idiom not in the obscure idealistic language of the internal passions.

And yet the characters were no less trapped by this language. Jean Vannier claimed that language was in fact the only dimension in which Adamov's characters have their existence. Thinking in particular of Le Ping-Pong, he said that whereas in traditional theatre language is subordinated to psychology, Adamov reverses this relationship:

Les personnages de ses pièces, si on les compare à ceux du théâtre traditionnel, sont curieusement dépourvus de toute épaisseur psychologique. Ils ne sont jamais assez réels pour que le dire, chez eux, nous renvoie jamais à un être.<sup>49</sup>

He sees the characters of Le Ping-Pong as totally engulfed in "un langage à la fois dérisoire et prestigieux; celui des billards électriques."<sup>50</sup> None of their speeches gives evidence of an independent psychological personality informing what they do. We certainly see them in all the normal situations in the evolution of a human life, relaxing, working, falling in love, ageing, dying, but in each case, just when it

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<sup>48</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Adamov et le langage', Les Lettres Nouvelles, no.27, mai 1955, pp.797-800. Reprinted in Mythologies, Paris, 1957, pp.99-102.

<sup>49</sup> Jean Vannier, op. cit., p.37.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p.37.

looks as if some personal or individual quality is about to show itself, there is a subtle intrusion of the language of the machine which gives the play the aspect of a study in mass mania. In fact one of the subjects next treated by Adamov was precisely an example of mass mania (En Fiacre) and his approach in Paolo Paoli was to present 'la belle époque' in the light of something approaching mass mania.

By describing relationships in a capitalist system as a mass mania, Adamov suggested that by pursuing the acquisition of material objects, men lose the ability to live for anything but objects. This was conveyed in as literal a manner possible by the way the language of the machine invades everything that might otherwise constitute the most personal elements of the characters' lives in Le Ping-Pong. In this way, Adamov's approach to language became critical: he wished to debunk or 'démystifier' the glamour of certain kinds of language, the false situations into which they lead one. In particular, he wished to show that big business creates its own linguistic habits, whose fundamental tendency is to entrap and to exploit.

This new function of language can be seen developing from the very first scene of the play in which Sutter manages to exert such fascination over Arthur and Victor by his way of talking about the machine and the Consortium, which has a mythologising effect. His <sup>cap.</sup> appeals to "Les mystères du commerce" lend a mystical inevitability to the functioning of the consortium and the business enterprise in general; he describes the machine's functioning in terms which suggest a divine order of things by clever resonances with biblical language:

"Eh oui, vous semez, je récolte," and he suggests that the machine has a life of its own by his anthropological imagery: "Mais il n'est pas si mal nourri!"<sup>51</sup> Sutter is a bluffer, a talker, even a 'mythomane'. In this first scene, he displays all his talents, playing with words, suggesting, hinting, never making a simple statement, always wrapping it up, allowing it a maximum of ambiguous suggestiveness. Although he has come to the café simply to collect the money from the machine, he claims to be a childhood friend of the Director of the Consortium and when Arthur expresses surprise, eludes the point:

Encaisseur! Je ne l'étais pas hier, je ne le serai pas demain! J'ai mis le doigt dans tous les rouages. Administrateur, prospecteur...<sup>52</sup>

Everything that he says is calculated to make the Consortium seem like a splendid and liberating organisation which holds the key to freedom, excitement, promotion, power.

By the opening of the second scene, the fascination exerted by Sutter has become too much for Arthur and Victor. Hesitantly, they approach the director of the pin-table Consortium with a proposal for improving the machine and the first consequence of this is that they are overwhelmed by Le Vieux's language. He discusses the machine in terms borrowed from the vocabulary of a general life-philosophy:

Une idée formidable, tout simplement!  
 Inspirer la crainte pour redoubler le plaisir.  
 (Levant les bras.) C'est cela, la connaissance  
 du coeur humain. Dix francs, un petit geste,

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51 Théâtre II, p.101.

52 Ibid., p.107.

et ce qu'on croyait fini, classé, mort,  
recommence, revit! (Riant.) Comme avant,  
mieux qu'avant!"<sup>53</sup>

Arthur quickly warms to this way of talking:

Oui, mais ce que nous ne savions pas, c'est  
que vous seriez frappé, comme nous l'avons  
été nous-mêmes, par la valeur générale, la  
valeur humaine de cette idée.<sup>54</sup>

The rest of the play records the gradual annexation by this language of every aspect of their lives. This gives Adamov a chance to create some extraordinary examples of the poetry he described in the 'Avertissement' which achieves its effect through the use of the most ordinary language. There is a striking example at the end of Tableau 4 when Arthur's proposals for improving the machine assume, in the course of the action, the dimensions of a love scene. The language of the machine takes on a profound ambiguity as the traditional love imagery of moons and eternal triangles is incorporated into a discussion of the way the lights on the machine could be rearranged:

ARTHUR: ... Il y aura deux fusées: une fusée immobile, la fusée témoin, et une autre qui, à chaque coup gagné, s'élèvera, se rapprochera. (Annette se rapproche encore d'Arthur et lui pose la main sur l'épaule.)  
...Jusqu'à atteindre, enfin, la lune...  
ANNETTE (prenant la main d'Arthur): ... qui aussitôt s'éclairera.  
ARTHUR (flatté et ravi, gardant la main d'Annette dans la sienne.): Donc, entre les deux fusées, la distance grandira, progressivement...  
ANNETTE (approchant son visage de celui d'Arthur avec un rire voluptueux.): ... tandis qu'entre la seconde fusée et la lune, au

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53 Ibid., p.114.

54 Ibid., p.115.

contraire... (Elle rit.) C'est ça?  
 ARTHUR (aux anges, riant.): Mais oui, c'est  
 ça! Absolument ça!<sup>55</sup>

The very expression of love can only be made through the language of the machine, and in this way every aspect of Arthur's life is annexed by the machine in the most grotesque manner. The invasion of everything that is most personal in the lives of Arthur and Victor, not by a terrifying power expressed in the arbitrariness of language, but by the self-sufficient language of the machine, expresses literally the absurdity of a system where everything is subordinated to the process of manufacture and trade. Man's alienation assumes Marxist rather than metaphysical dimensions.<sup>56</sup>

Through the other characters, as well as through Arthur and Victor, Adamov debunks the mythologising power of a language, which, however derisory in itself, can seem sufficiently glamorous to exert a totally compelling fascination. Sutter is the most obvious target. The arch-manipulator of words, he is nevertheless at their mercy. When he, at first so confident that he knew the Consortium inside out, has to leave his job to be the director of a 'colonie d'enfants', he is still at the mercy of his inflated language:

Quelle consolation pour moi, de savoir que dans  
 six semaines, je serai entouré de petites  
 têtes brunes et blondes qui se lèveront vers  
 moi au milieu des blés...<sup>57</sup>

In the same scene he himself indicates the limitations of the dimension

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55 Ibid., p.136.

56 The same theme was developed by Adamov, in a rather more Kafkaesque form, in an early, unpublished radio play entitled L'Agence Universelle. For a discussion of this, see Appendix I.

57 Théâtre II, p.146.

in which he exists: "Oh, les mots! Tous des pièges!"<sup>58</sup> Later in the play he reappears, still dominated by the Consortium, now spreading propaganda for its rival, since he is no longer allowed to perform this function in its favour.

As the head of the Consortium, Le Vieux provides the most grotesque example of a character completely annexed by the language of big business and the machine. There are numerous examples of the old man's power lust and lechery transformed through his glamorous use of this language, culminating in a frenzied scene which builds up to his death, and in which his reaction to Arthur's idea for a new 'return-ball' system becomes more and more frankly lecherous without ever departing from the discussion of the machine. In the end he makes a rush at Annette and expires panting the words "Profitons-en":

Tout le monde sait bien que plus c'est long,  
plus c'est bon, ou plutôt, meilleur c'est,  
pardon! Ça coûte dix francs, eh bien, ça en  
coûtera cinquante! Le tout c'est que la  
bonne grosse pièce passe dans la fente. Trop  
petite, la fente? Qu'à cela ne tienne, on  
l'agrandira! ... On en a, de ces pièces-là,  
dans la poche, alors profitons-en, profitons-  
en...<sup>59</sup>

Vannier alluded to this passage, pointing out that while the audience is tempted to laugh at this grotesque application of language, he also feels in Arthur's passionately serious explanations which counterpoint it, the whole question of the salvation or perdition of

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58 Ibid., p.143.

59 Ibid., p.169.

Man being suggested by exactly the same terms, spoken differently. He said that this language cannot be seen purely as an object, dead and petrified, as in Ionesco's plays, since through it the characters are able to live and communicate, but equally, it is too purely dominated by the machine to allow for interpretation of the action as psychological intrigue, and what results is:

un tragique très particulier, qui est celui  
des rapports de l'homme et de son langage...  
Dans Le Ping-Pong, surtout, le langage nous est  
réellement présenté comme situation humaine  
totale: les personnages s'y font par le langage  
tout en étant faits par lui.<sup>60</sup>

As we have seen, the basic situations in the development of a human life, relaxing, working, falling in love, ageing, etc., are all made possible through the machine and the language associated with it. The importance of the language is that only through it can life be lived although the characters find that their 'life' has been only that of cogs in the machine.

Les personnages du Ping-Pong sont un peu  
comme le Robespierre de Michelet: ils  
pensent tout ce qu'ils disent! Parole  
profonde, qui souligne cette plasticité  
tragique de l'homme à son langage, surtout  
lorsque, dernier et surprenant visage du  
malentendu, ce langage n'est même pas tout  
à fait le sien.<sup>61</sup>

Thus Barthes, in his article 'Adamov et le langage', expressed the plight of the characters of Le Ping-Pong. He described the play as "un

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<sup>60</sup> Jean Vannier, op. cit., p.39.

<sup>61</sup> Roland Barthes, Mythologies, pp.100-101.

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réseau, magistralement monté, de situations de langage."<sup>62</sup> He saw it as a frozen block of language in which the characters are sealed with no possibility of escape. But they are frozen alive rather than dead; that is to say the audience, though it sees the derisory quality of their language, sees them develop, go through life in its context. Through his emphasis on the connection between thought and spoken language, between the personality and the word, Adamov shows how and why men devote their lives to futile aims and objects. His use of language links Le Ping-Pong, mid-way in his career, with La Parodie, whose essential premise, that all activity is futile, it explains, and with Off Limits, which also shows how capitalism can annex the most personal aspects of an individual's life.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p.100.

## PART II

Chapter 5 Dreams, reality and poetry

On the personal level, Adamov's early plays were a success; through them he achieved some measure of liberation from his neuroses. The personal motivation behind his writing was mentioned in Chapter 1: his need to confess, to expiate, to exhibit himself, his fundamental urge to express himself, and the vital need to experience the use of language that was expressed in L'Aveu<sup>1</sup>, and finally the need to escape from his solitude by communicating some of his suffering, however little, to others.

As he wrote more plays, he began to achieve a clearer understanding of the workings of his own mind. This is not the place to attempt an investigation in psycho-analytical terms of Adamov's 'cure', since we are more concerned with the achievement of the playwright than with the mental health of the man. It seems in any case to be certain that although his mental state improved considerably during the forties and fifties, his cure was never in any sense complete. (Nor was his development as cut and dried as he suggested at the time.) But although the man was never totally free from fear and neurosis, the playwright achieved a remarkable liberation, and it is the consequences of this for his plays that I shall try to analyse in this chapter.

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<sup>1</sup> See above, Chapter 4 (Part II), p. 212-213.

The first important consequence of his gradual detachment from his neuroses was his growing ability to understand, in precise psycho-analytical terms, the processes of his own mind. And the danger was that he would use this knowledge to write an over-simplified 'case-book' drama, which merely illustrated one aspect or another of his own psychological case. This danger is particularly evident in the plays he wrote after Le Professeur Taranne and before Le Ping-Pong, in which it became possible to describe the themes in psycho-analytical terms. In his 'Note', he made it clear that Le Sens de la Marche, Tous contre Tous and Les Retrouvailles, all of which were completed after Le Professeur Taranne, were merely a residue of his earlier methods which had to be finally cleared away before he could embark on the new method he had glimpsed opening out before him. He went so far as to say:

Je crois avoir, grâce aux Retrouvailles,  
liquidé tout ce qui, après m'avoir permis  
d'écrire, finissait par m'en empêcher.<sup>2</sup>

Les Retrouvailles, like Le Sens de la Marche and Comme nous avons été, dramatises an aspect of the most easily identifiable of Adamov's mental disturbances, which could be loosely termed his Oedipus complex, and all three do so in the most unambiguous way, so it is perhaps interesting to examine them briefly and attempt to identify the liberating and constricting elements. Le Sens de la Marche, as we saw in Chapter 3<sup>3</sup> shows a young man stifled by paternal authority in everything he undertakes, suffering from guilt deliberately instilled

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<sup>2</sup> 'Note', p.15.

<sup>3</sup> See above, Chapter 3 (Part II), especially pp.158-159.

by the Father, and finally rebelling with an act of murder. The other two plays deal with the possessive Mother who stifles and castrates, rendering her adult son incapable of forming a relationship with a woman of his own age. The stifling Mother figure was examined in the shape of La Mère of L'Invasion, and L'Homme et l'Enfant has confirmed that part of what drove him to write was his own obsession with being trapped in his family, unable to escape from dependence on his mother and from a sense of guilt in his Father's death.<sup>4</sup>

In both Les Retrouvailles and Comme nous avons été, there are three characters, the Mother, the Son and a third female character in league with the Mother. Comme nous avons été concerns a mother and an aunt who are looking for their little boy named André. They appear inexplicably in the flat of a young man who is called simply A. who is lying on his bed in a 'tenue de soirée', waiting to go out and get married. Gradually the conversation between them becomes more and more intimate. Adamov engenders the familiar feeling of an absurd fatality closing inexorably in on the victim who cannot tear himself away from the women, as if he were in a nightmare. Eventually, he assumes the position of the little boy they were looking for.

Although the play is not his most powerful, it is technically most successful and contains a good example of dramatic revelation. The transition from amused detachment from the young man's plight at the beginning, to identification and sympathy at the end is well managed;

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<sup>4</sup> L'Homme et l'Enfant, especially p.45.

at first he is all confidence, since this is his wedding day, then gradually he becomes more and more submissive as the women gain control. This shift is reminiscent of the shift which takes place in La Leçon, and indeed, this is the play in which Adamov's style comes closest to that of Ionesco. In fact, it is interesting to see that Ionesco used the same idea in Victimes du Devoir, written at exactly the same time, and that the theme of the return to infancy is, as Dort has pointed out, one of the few that the so-called avant-garde of Beckett-Ionesco-Adamov genuinely have in common.<sup>5</sup>

Les Retrouvailles is longer, and rather more complex, but built around the same idea. There is less suspense than in Comme nous avons été because it is much clearer from the start that La Plus Heureuse des Femmes and Louise wish to dominate Edgar. But the play is particularly successful in the use of dream sequence. One scene fades into another and Edgar finds himself progressively more in the women's power with a disconcerting rapidity and lack of logic. The second female character in this play, Louise, is the same age as Edgar, so that she and La Plus Heureuse des Femmes form a complete equivalent to the mother and fiancée in Quevy whose influence Edgar is trying to escape. The dream atmosphere is increased by this neat substitution and it is carried to its logical conclusion in the final scene where La Plus Heureuse des Femmes literally becomes his mother.

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<sup>5</sup> Bernard Dort, 'Un scandaleuse unité', in programme for Off Limits, January 1969.

These two plays, and Le Sens de la Marche too, each present a naked picture of a single obsession in a brief dramatic form which serves only to reveal the obsession. Although there are some convincing passages of dialogue, they are not impressive as plays, and the reason would seem to be that they are too unambiguously confined to the representation of a single neurosis.

Adamov was aware of this danger, and his search for a more concrete setting for his plays was a sign of his desire to use his experience of neurosis in a way which would give it broader terms of reference, a wider range of application. And this, too, was a consequence of his growing personal liberation: as the last traces of idealism still present in L'Aveu gradually gave way to the materialism that was to lead him to Marxism, so he became less concerned in his plays with the world of his dreams and more concerned with 'objective' reality. This involved a certain detachment from his dramatic subject, just as he had to become detached, in his own mind, from his obsessions.

Thus behind La Parodie, we can sense that he is driven to express himself by a force which he only partially understands, but with Le Ping-Pong he is more lucid. He has succeeded in standing back from his circular obsessions, thereby putting into his play a different view-point on the world: it is still seen from the view-point of the characters (particularly the central characters), but they are themselves placed at the mercy of the audience's view-point. The audience no longer has to accept or reject 'en bloc' a vision of the world; instead, they are able to compare two different views: that of the character, and that of the author watching and judging his character.

In Le Ping-Pong, the relationship between dream and objective reality could truly be described as dialectical: the one contests the other and in the process moves the plot on to a new stage in its development. For example, Arthur and Victor have a dream-like vision of the consortium as an almost miraculous organisation, both prestigious and mysterious; against this vision is set the somewhat sordid reality of a commercial enterprise which they encounter and which, bit by bit, modifies their expectations. The important rôle of the real world in this play helps us to see why Adamov attributed such importance to the fact that in Le Professeur Taranne he had been able to mention the name of a real place, Belgium, and it is in establishing a clear definition of the relationship between objective reality and the distorted, isolated reality of the neurotic, that one can hope to understand the basis of Adamov's whole dramaturgy.

The plainest evidence of a new detachment of the author from his material to be found in Le Ping-Pong appears in his use of humour to achieve ironic distance. When asked to state briefly the subject of the play, Adamov himself replied, "L'épouvantable et comique agitation des hommes autour de n'importe quel leurre."<sup>6</sup> This deliberate use of humour did not alter the fundamentally serious nature of the play; it became almost a reinforcement of that seriousness, humour being, as Adamov said in his introduction to Büchner, "une certaine façon de voir le tragique et une revanche efficace sur lui."<sup>6a</sup> The advance which this emphasis on comedy represented in his dramatic style was not lost on

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<sup>6</sup> Le Monde, 2 mars 1955 (my emphasis).

<sup>6a</sup> See above, p.154.

contemporary reviewers. One, for example, said: "J'ai toujours pensé qu'il y avait chez Adamov un auteur comique qui s'ignorait. Dans Le Ping-Pong ... il ne s'ignore plus."<sup>7</sup>

The new humour to be found in Le Ping-Pong was burlesque in intention, since it attempted to cut down to their real size the things which are often taken to be most important in life, but the way it worked was precisely the opposite of burlesque, since it elevated things of no importance, notably the pin-table, to the level of an ideal. Adamov stated more than once his great admiration for Bouvard et Pécuchet at this time, and Dort emphasised the similarities between the ironic humour of Flaubert's description of Bouvard and Pécuchet and Adamov's description of Arthur and Victor. He suggested that the characters begin the play like crusaders off on a voyage of discovery but soon turn out to be anti-heroes, like Bouvard and Pécuchet or Don Quixote. Thus the spectator's identification with these characters, having been encouraged, is then given a sharp jolt; he is placed at a distance as he was in Le Professeur Taranne, and this arouses laughter.

Bouvard and Pécuchet see their meeting on a boulevard bench in terms of a great love affair. Arthur, in similar fashion, turns his discussion of a plan to improve the pin-table into a passionate declaration of love. Adamov is standing back and making fun of his own tendency to ascribe great significance to obsessions centering round matters of derisory importance. But because his characters really do

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<sup>7</sup> Guy Verdot, 'Le Ping-Pong', L'Aurore, 5 mars 1955.

ascribe values of life and death to derisory objects, the laughable becomes desperate, and the swing from one to the other makes for the play's powerful effect, just as the mixture of farce and despair contributes to the power of Bouvard and Pécuchet.

One of the characteristics to be found in almost all the 'theatre of the Absurd', is the humour of deflation. Perhaps the classic example is the ending of Waiting for Godot, where the despairing tramps' decision to end everything by hanging themselves is deflated by the sight of Estragon's trousers falling down as he unties the rope which was holding them up to use as a noose. The idea that when Man is at his most tragic, he is frequently most grotesquely comical, is central to Le Ping-Pong, as can be seen from such examples as the death of Le Vieux or the final ping-pong game between Arthur and Victor.

But this use of humour was not really new for Adamov; rather, it was a development of something which, as we have seen, was already present in the earlier plays. Even more important was the fact that Adamov achieved sufficient emotional detachment to allow an obsession, or an image drawn from an obsession, to stand on its own and speak for itself.<sup>8</sup> He further discovered that if the obsession was both allowed to retain its original ambiguity, and was placed in a real setting, then it could provide a powerful dramatic subject which, as we shall see, could be termed 'poetic'. In Adamov's developing theory and practice of poetry, one can trace the growing importance for him

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<sup>8</sup> See above, Chapter 1 (Part II), pp.117-119.

of a particular relationship between dream and reality, and the reasons why he added to his initial insistence on concrete stage images the demand that a play should be precisely situated in time and place.

Initially, Adamov's theory of poetry had been very closely linked to one thing, his ability to express his neuroses:

Les voies de la névrose sont celles mêmes de la poésie.<sup>9</sup>

In 1939, this link existed for Adamov because a neurosis could point to what Artaud called "les clefs profondes", metaphysical 'keys' to the meaning of the universe. The above quotation from L'Aveu continues:

Comme la poésie, la névrose incarne son tourment dans un objet, et cependant, cet objet de par sa nature particulière, se révèle symboliquement représentatif de l'une des quelques grandes images illuminatrices qui servent de pont entre l'esprit humain et le principe qui régit les mondes.<sup>10</sup>

This helps to illuminate the rôle which Adamov assigned to the objects of obsessions in his plays, whether papers or pin-tables, and the means by which he believed that particular objects could attain general meanings. He stated his particular view of the poet's function even more clearly in a later section of L'Aveu:

La mission essentielle de tout poète est de dévoiler l'esprit caché dans les apparences en nommant chaque chose par son nom.<sup>11</sup>

But although he had the highest admiration for poetry as a genre<sup>12</sup>,

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<sup>9</sup> L'Aveu, p.89.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.89.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp.105-106.

<sup>12</sup> E.g. the important place he gave it in L'Heure Nouvelle. See above, Part I, Chapter 2, pp. 31-32.

he did not, after early attempts before the war, write poetry himself.

Instead, he wrote plays and said of them:

Je crois que la représentation n'est rien d'autre  
que la projection dans le monde sensible des  
états et des images qui en constituent les  
ressorts cachés.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, when he began to write plays, he was expecting drama to fulfil, in concrete form, the same function which he had earlier wished poetry to fulfil, in verbal form. This might lead one to suppose that Adamov would write poetic drama, and in one sense his drama is poetic, but not in the sense normally ascribed to the term, of drama relying for its effect on the poetry of a spoken text. Adamov, in a very different way, succeeded in creating what Cocteau had defined in 1922 as "une poésie du théâtre" instead of "une poésie au théâtre."<sup>14</sup>

But where Cocteau gained his poetic effects largely from a liberal use of fantasy, Adamov gained his through his whole approach to the dramatic situation. The revelation of the hidden motivations behind events, defined in the two extracts above as the function of both poetry and drama, is achieved through his use of the central situation. As we saw in Chapter 2, this revelation is never the product of discursive reasoning, but is embodied literally in the action. Lynes has stressed the point that Adamov's plays bring into existence an "autonomous 'univers créé' which has the immediacy of plastic forms or of music."<sup>15</sup> He might more appropriately have added 'or of poetry'

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13 'Avertissement', p.22.

14 Jean Cocteau, Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel, Paris, 1922.

15 Carlos Lynes Jnr., op. cit., p.55.

since while it is important that the plays have the immediacy of plastic forms, they also combine with this the ability to convey propositional knowledge through language, which is something music and sculpture cannot do.

Adamov never entirely rejected language as Artaud did; when talking of the importance of 'le geste' in the 'Avertissement', he made it clear that it had to be combined with simple language, used in a particular way. When this combination was perfectly achieved, he said:

...les discours les plus ordinaires, les plus quotidiens retrouvent un pouvoir que l'on est libre d'appeler encore poésie, et que je me contenterai de dire efficace.<sup>16</sup>

Adamov's use of the notion of 'efficacité' rather than 'poésie' reveals his view of true poetry as that combination of elements which conveyed most effectively the total meaning of the drama. And hence his insistence on 'le sens littéral', the most direct means of expression possible, drawing on all possible resources.

The fact that he hoped, by combining simple language with the powerful situation, to achieve a certain expressive ambiguity, is made clear by a sentence following shortly after the above quotation:

J'entends une manière de prendre les mots les plus simples, les plus délavés par l'usage, en apparence les plus précis, pour leur restituer leur part d'imprécision innée.<sup>17</sup>

In L'Aveu he had felt that this innate imprecision of words stemmed

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<sup>16</sup> 'Avertissement', p.23. See above, Chapter 4 (Part II), p. 209 for a full quotation and discussion of the relevant passage.

<sup>17</sup> 'Avertissement', p.23.

largely from the fact that they were only the pointers to ideas of universal importance and that their sacred origins had been forgotten. As he became more interested in a materialistic rather than a metaphysical philosophy, he came to believe that the value of such 'imprecision' was that it made possible a complex expression of the different problems, mental and social, personal and political that are always bound up together in any reaction a man makes to the world around him.

Examples of ambiguous words have been quoted in the preceding chapter, but it is important to see that the poetic ambiguity of Adamov's plays extended beyond the words themselves to the whole situation. His constant concern was to find a means of expressing a neurosis with the maximum of 'efficacité'. This meant finding situations of great ambiguity; not at all vague situations, but ones which would have resonance on as many different levels of meaning as possible. Adamov made this very clear by his own comment in the 'Note' on the reasons for the failure of Le Sens de la Marche and Les Retrouvailles. He said that in each case he had constructed a dream, he had not used material that was alive for him:

L'ennui est que si l'on invente un rêve, on part d'une idée; et si l'image, au lieu de se situer à un carrefour de sens, prend un sens déterminé, elle perd son efficacité.<sup>18</sup>

In this insistence on the "carrefour de sens" Adamov was echoing Artaud's oft-repeated demand that the impact of the theatrical event

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<sup>18</sup> 'Note', p.14.

should have repercussions "sur tous les plans de l'esprit en même temps."<sup>19</sup> This demand for ambiguity, for different meanings at different levels, is something one normally expects to find in poetry and if, as Empson says, "the machinations of ambiguity are among the very roots of poetry"<sup>20</sup>, Adamov's theatre can be termed 'poetic'.

Le Professeur Taranne, the first of his plays in which he felt the demands of ambiguity were thoroughly met, was also the first step on the path towards the situation of his dramatic action in a time and place more real than the 'no man's land' of the first plays. He attributed this achievement to the fact that he was not trying to prove anything with the play. The various episodes and images were not constructed to fit into a framework of allegory, but allowed to stand in their own right, to carry whatever meaning the spectator chose to give them:

"je sortais du no man's land pseudo-poétique et osais appeler les choses par leur nom."<sup>21</sup>

As we shall see, this principle of deliberately not generalising from particulars, but allowing them to stand with a measure of ambiguity became for Adamov the very foundation of a new and genuine poetry.

Once he had achieved the courage to insert material drawn from his own subconscious into the real world without attempting to make the neurosis serve an overall allegorising aim, the foundation of his

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<sup>19</sup> Antonin Artaud, op. cit., p.87.

<sup>20</sup> William Empson, Seven Types of Ambiguity, London, 1930, p.3.

<sup>21</sup> 'Note', p.13.

new method was laid. With the new freedom he had found, his interest in obsessions did not lessen, but he came to feel that the important thing was to know how to transform obsessions into dramatic material. He stated this clearly in an interview he gave to the Observer in 1962:

Marxiste ou non-marxiste, le seul problème est de savoir comment utiliser ses névroses.<sup>22</sup>

From about 1956 onwards, he was to conduct a deliberate search for the obsession which could make a suitably ambiguous comment at a number of different levels of meaning. In the course of this search, he at first seized on objects which are fundamentally futile, but possess a certain glamour, such as pin-tables, feathers, butterflies. Later, he took examples of genuine neurosis borrowed from the clinical observations of psycho-analysts and, still later, returned to an exploitation of his own obsessions.

We have seen that wherever possible, his obsessions were represented in the most literal way possible, so that a number of related images, embodied in action, became the sole components of the dramatic situation: Le Mutilé's situation, for example, is constructed entirely from images associated with masochism: impotence, amputation, devotion to a cruel and inaccessible woman, etc. The combination of these images, all centering on Le Mutilé, makes a dramatic situation which is ambiguous in that he is torn in different directions, and in that his situation can be understood at a particular or at a general level. He is situated at "un carrefour de sens".

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<sup>22</sup> Ici et Maintenant, p.131. (Adamov's emphasis)

This explains why the 'invented' dreams, around which Le Sens de la Marche and Les Retrouvailles were constructed, did not succeed in making good plays. It was not just, as Adamov said, that he was not convinced by them, though this was important. It was that they did not have sufficient ambiguity, being too consciously chosen with a single generalising aim in mind. Becoming more detached from his work, he began to search consciously for the 'poetic' situation which would perform the same function as that of Le Professeur Taranne, since his most effective situations have never been 'invented'. The situation on which Le Professeur Taranne was based came to him in a dream; the first idea he had for Le Ping-Pong was the mental picture of two old men playing ping-pong, which became the final scene of the play and explains its title.

In this procedure for dramatic creation lies one of the most profoundly unifying forces in Adamov's theatre, despite its different styles. The situation of the blind beggar analysed in Chapter 2<sup>23</sup> is as multifariously suggestive as the dream which was the basis for Le Professeur Taranne, or the situation of the butterfly hunter which Adamov stumbled on and through which, in Paolo Paoli, he was able to summarise so successfully both the private and public hypocrisy of French society in the pre-first World War period.

L'Invasion could be taken as the earliest example of a play in which the situation, while embodying the extreme of a particular

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<sup>23</sup> Chapter 2 (Part II), pp.129-131.

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obsession, also managed to extend to more general applications by contrasting the private with the public, the particular with the general. The central situation of the play is one of separation.<sup>24</sup> This is visible at Pierre's own personal level, both in his failure to decipher the papers and in his failure to communicate with the other characters of the play. The themes of separation and of non-communication are worked out, both at the level of Pierre's own private obsessions with language, and also at the level of his association with his friends and family. All of this is set in a wider context by the political troubles of the refugees and the sinister activities of La Mère, L'Amie, and their committee.

In addition, the situation gives rise to other related ideas, such as the theme of the opposition between order and disorder. Pierre tries to create some order out of the disorderly piles of manuscripts but fails miserably. Agnès seems to carry disorder with her wherever she goes, but she also brings light and has the ability for direct personal communication which the others lack. La Mère, on the other hand, who is devoted to the replacement of disorder by order, only causes the death of her son and helps in the repression of an underprivileged group of people.

The dramatic situation of this play is 'poetic' in the sense that the various attempts at ordering and making sense that it embodies make different and sometimes conflicting comments on the problems of

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp. 135-137.

communication and identity which cannot be extracted and noted down satisfactorily in equation form but which, in the shifting relationships of the different characters, provide a central 'carrefour' at which different meanings intersect.

The play could be compared with La Parodie in order to see what progress Adamov had made in his use of the dramatic situation and in which direction he was moving. Despite the suggestiveness of the blind beggar scene, the play which Adamov wrote under its inspiration leaves little room for ambiguity. Its unchanging situation reveals simply, in Duvignaud's phrase: "une évidence - nous sommes persécutés."<sup>25</sup> There is no distinction between private and public, for the public is entirely taken over by the private and seen only from its particular view-point. What makes the strength of the play is the literal, direct quality of its statement, unhampered by "les oripeaux de la scène". Beigbeder, commenting on the early plays, expressed very clearly this quality in Adamov's situations:

Il réalise l'exploit d'imaginer les situations qui sont les plus simples du monde. Les plus criantes - elles auraient la brièveté, le frémissement d'un cri d'assassiné.<sup>26</sup>

In L'Invasion Adamov was forced, as he noted<sup>27</sup>, to move away from the completely generalised world of La Parodie, concentrating

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<sup>25</sup> Jean Duvignaud, 'Un Théâtre de la persécution', Critique, tome IX, no.68, janvier 1953, p.22.

<sup>26</sup> Marc Beigbeder, 'Le Théâtre à l'âge métaphysique', L'Age Nouveau, no.85, janvier 1954, p.39..

<sup>27</sup> 'Note', p.9.

instead on a particular subject. This meant that he was also able to contrast the general with the particular, the national events with the family events, and although the outlines of the former are still extremely hazy, this play can nevertheless be seen as the first step towards a new use of the dramatic situation, in such a way as to exploit all its levels of meaning.

This shape of contrast in the dramatic situation was taken one stage further in La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre. Here the public and the private sectors are more successfully contrasted since considerably more space is devoted to the public sector than in L'Invasion. But in none of these plays is there any way out of the vicious circle of fatalism within which everything is foredoomed to failure, both private and public.

With Le Ping-Pong and subsequent plays, Adamov established a convention in which these two things receive a more equal attention: the imaginary world of neurosis commenting on the real world and vice-versa. Instead of merely demonstrating the metaphysical alienation of Man in a world where he has lost contact with God and his fellow-men, Adamov tried also to depict the social alienation of Man, the reasons why he is separated from his fellows and the forces that are continually at work to keep him in that state. The whole of Ici et Maintenant reads as an attempt to reach towards this principle and is summed up in a final sentence that we shall need to return to later:

Il faut ... que celui-ci (le théâtre) se trouve contraint de se situer toujours aux confins de la vie dite individuelle, et de la vie dite collective.<sup>28</sup>

In achieving a suggestive ambiguity, Adamov's special use of symbols was naturally very important and this is something which has already been touched upon. In so far as by their movements, their transformations, their very positions, Adamov's characters and objects embody a general meaning which goes beyond their individual significance, his whole theatre could be described as symbolic. But it is a very rich type of symbolism in which the symbols are interesting both in themselves and also for what they represent. Moreover, it is frequently impossible to limit the object symbolised to one specific meaning, since it may vary according to circumstances. Once again the theory behind this procedure can be found very clearly expressed in Artaud:

Ayant pris conscience de ce langage dans l'espace, langage de sons, de cris, de lumières, d'onomatopées, le théâtre se doit de l'organiser en faisant avec les personnages et les objets de véritable hiéroglyphes, et en se servant de leur symbolisme et de leurs correspondances par rapport à tous les organes et sur tous les plans.<sup>29</sup>

One could perhaps call it a hieroglyphic rather than a symbolic theatre: like hieroglyphs, Adamov's symbols have a meaning in their own right and also a number of different meanings when placed in different contexts.

The symbols cannot be separated from the concept of 'le sens

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28 Ici et Maintenant, p.240.

29 Antonin Artaud, op. cit., p.107.

littéral', since they are part of a total structure in which everything combines to make a central point clear in as literal a form as possible. Thus, in many cases, the situation itself is symbolic. N.'s supine position, Pierre's situation as 'le dépositaire du Message'<sup>30</sup>, Edgar falling back into the pram with his legs in the air, all these are complete symbols of Man's hopelessness, his isolation, his difficulty in reaching maturity. But they do not just symbolise the play's meaning; they are the meaning. The different themes are embodied literally in the concrete, dramatic situations of the plays.

There are also other levels of symbolic suggestion at work in the plays in the form of images which do not resume the play's meaning so completely, but suggest related ideas, often in the form of contrasted opposites: light and darkness, sight and blindness, order and disorder, action and inaction. These images, too, are presented in the most literal form possible. Chapter 3 described how L'Invasion opened on the literal expression of Pierre's blind search, with the room plunged in darkness which only Agnès could dispel.<sup>31</sup>

La Parodie presents the image of blindness in an equally literal and even more disconnected form by means of a brief prologue between two voices offstage. One of the voices apparently belongs to a man who is testing the eyesight of the other. When he asks him what he can see, the other repeatedly answers 'nothing'. Immediately this is

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<sup>30</sup> 'Note', p.10.

<sup>31</sup> See above, Chapter 3 (Part II), pp. 180-181.

over, L'Employé enters; by the end of the play he has become blind. There is a similar prologue to La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre in which Le Mutilé is forced to watch a man being tortured offstage. The voices of the torturers are forcing the tortured person to go through a gymnastic ritual and this ritual becomes the hallmark of all sadistic persecution in the play; it is in the process of a similar ritual that Le Mutilé loses his limbs.

There are two major pairs of opposite, contrasted symbols which recur again and again in the earlier plays; order versus disorder and light versus darkness. As we saw in Chapter 3<sup>32</sup>, Agnès combines a mysterious connection with light and the propensity to spread disorder. Pierre's mother specifically accuses Agnès of being the cause of the disorder in their flat and as soon as she has forced Agnès out of the flat, she succeeds in restoring order; as soon as Agnès sets up house with Le Premier Venu, he falls ill and his affairs become chaotic. Her connection with light and Pierre's need of her, combining with her tendency to bring disorder, suggests a connection between disorder and life, order and death. This was the way Esslin interpreted it.<sup>33</sup>

But this interpretation is almost certainly wrong. Maurice Regnaut pointed out that in these early plays Adamov is still "prisonnier de la fascination fétichiste." His fascination is with death, and though this may be concealed, it is always to be found

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pp.180-182.

<sup>33</sup> Op. cit., p.73.

behind an action or a situation; whether life or death, action or passion, order or disorder, everything is dominated by the death-fetish:

Cette mort-fétiche, cette 'chose', est à la fois désordre de vie et ordre de mort.<sup>34</sup>

Regnaut refers to Adamov's superstitious rituals (which he was later to describe in L'Homme et l'Enfant) and points out that although they seem to conjure away the power of death, to liberate him from its terror, they do not offer any genuine deliverance: in accomplishing them, Adamov is merely recognising their power over him so that they are almost a means of reinforcing the power of terror:

le sens fatal est depuis toujours posé et cette activité, née de la fascination, n'a d'autre sens que lui. La mort suscite le vivant pour l'anéantir. L'homme alors se décourvre à la fois action et passion.<sup>35</sup>

Thus the disorder and light which Agnès brings into being through her activity are no less circumscribed by the circle of death and futility than Pierre's passive experience of his inability to use language. The contrast is basically the same one which opposed so much more bluntly the activity of L'Employé and the passivity of N. And this is of course equally true of the active and passive characters in La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre:

A quoi bon agir pour l'établissement d'un ordre nouveau: ordre égale passion. La grande manoeuvre n'est que la petite: l'établissement de la mort.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Maurice Regnaut, 'Arthur Adamov et le sens du fétichisme', Cahiers Renaud-Barrault, no.22-23, mai 1958, p.182..

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p.183.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.183.

The consequence of this precisely similar, fatal and futile destruction is that no genuine conflict is possible since the opposite sides in any conflict come to the same end. With Le Professeur Taranne, conflict became a possibility and with Le Ping-Pong, a reality, but this means that in the early plays a contrast between order and disorder can only be an unreal contrast: order and disorder both end in the equivalence of death. The reason why polarisation occurs between two seemingly opposed forces is precisely because of Adamov's need to show that even the most seemingly disparate elements in human life are levelled by death.

The fact that disorder is not permanently linked with life is shown by the way it is used in Le Désordre, a play in which every character displays what Adamov called in a note on the décor of the play "le désarroi de la solitude morale." Everything in this play is disorder. In a development leading the three central characters rapidly from uncertainty to despair and destruction, each new chance of a simple, harmonious arrangement is systematically destroyed. The characters, neurotic in their need to depend on someone, are incapable of true communication, incapable of not perpetually deceiving one another. This is the 'disorder' of the human condition, cut off from life and monotonously doomed to death and destruction. Much of the action here recalls that which passes between Agnès, Pierre and Le Premier Venu. But the disorder in their lives has no connection with life. It simply expresses their solitude and destruction. When

there are no absolutes other than death, all values are interchangeable and the image of disorder could carry quite different connotations in different contexts.

The early plays are, of course, filled with symbols of a less important kind, usually easy enough to understand, like the armchair in L'Invasion, symbol of the mother's influence. As Adamov's use of central symbolic objects developed, there was a clear evolution in his use of these minor symbols. In L'Invasion, the papers, the central objects, symbolic of isolation and non-communication, are certainly important, but they are a mere pretext for an action when compared with the pin-tables of Le Ping-Pong, which, in a far fuller sense, become the centre of the play. They are examined, described, played with, developed with enormous attention to detail. Every one of the twelve tableaux presents some new development in the design of bumpers, flippers and balls, or in the commercial state of the Consortium. They demonstrate the ever growing importance of concretisation in Adamov's plays:

J'essayais de montrer une forme d'aliénation,  
concrétisée sur scène par l'appareil à sous.<sup>38</sup>

When the central object is treated with such meticulous, detailed realism, there is no need for the subsidiary symbols: every prop in the play has an integral part to play in the complex symbolic rôle of the machine in all its ramifications.

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<sup>38</sup> 'Ma métamorphose', Ici et Maintenant, p.144.

Dort suggested that Adamov's theatre escaped from the dangers of symbolism because of its simplicity and directness:

Les symboles s'y incarnent, devenus des gestes, des mouvements réduits à leur sens littéral et ils s'offrent ainsi directement au spectateur en toute clarté et sans arrière-plan. S'il y a donc bien, au départ, une symbolique Adamovienne, celle-ci est convertie en réalisme par le jeu de l'action dramatique.<sup>39</sup>

Once again, we come face to face with the overall continuity in Adamov's theatre: the means that was to enable him to escape from a symbolic theatre into a theatre situated in history, was part of his fundamental method in the earliest, unsituated plays.

With Le Ping-Pong, Adamov achieved a dramatic situation symbolic of human futility, but centred on an object which is described with meticulous realism, and placed in a precisely defined, realistic setting which gradually becomes transformed, under the universal obsession with the machine, into something approaching the dream situations of the earlier plays. The use of material drawn from dreams has been a feature of much twentieth-century innovation in the arts and the use of such material does not necessarily dictate any one given structure. But Adamov drew on dreams for the structure of his plays as well as for their subject-matter. For example, his dream subjects are never of the 'psychedelic' type. They rely above all on the common experience of the dream shared by everyone. Like Strindberg's dream situations, they are presented in an entirely matter-of-fact manner relying on the paradox that a dream is most

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<sup>39</sup> Bernard Dort, 'Le Ping-Pong', Théâtre Populaire, no.12, mars-avril, 1955, p.84.

powerful when it is most 'real'. Circumstantial details are left unexplained and the strangest situations arouse no comment of surprise from the characters. In this way, a strong sense of anguish is conveyed by the audience's (and often the central character's) feeling that what is to him a nightmare situation, seems perfectly ordinary to others. The mysterious links between dream and reality in these plays, which were discussed in Chapter 1, could be resumed in the following exchange between the poet and the daughter of Indra in Strindberg's Dream Play:

Daughter: You know then what poetry is?  
Poet: I know what dreams are. What is poetry?  
Daughter: Not reality, but more than reality.  
Not dreams, but waking dreams.<sup>40</sup>

This suggests Adamov's phrase 'un réalisme légèrement décollé de la réalité'<sup>41</sup>. The dream structure is emphasised later in the play when the mysterious door is to be opened. Strindberg uses repetition of the above dialogue:

Daughter: You know then what poetry is?  
Poet: I know what dreaming is.  
Daughter: I feel that once before, somewhere else, we said these words.  
Poet: Then soon you will know what reality is.  
Daughter: Or dreaming.  
Poet: Or poetry.<sup>42</sup>

For Strindberg, the meaning of this dialogue was doubtless to be explained partly in terms of the Buddhist theory that all reality is a dream of God. But it also suggests that the key to reality is

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<sup>40</sup> August Strindberg, A Dream Play, trans. Elizabeth Sprigge, New York, 1955, p.245. (Anchor A54)

<sup>41</sup> Le Monde, 19 janvier 1958.

<sup>42</sup> A Dream Play, p.251.

only to be grasped through a combined understanding of dream and poetry. "Not dreams but waking dreams" suggests the importance of all the images drawn from the subconscious with which Adamov's plays are filled.

But this dialogue also has another symbolic function that can be seen in its use of repetition to achieve the atmosphere of the "waking dream". A similar use of repetition was fundamental to almost all of Adamov's plays and took on a new significance with Paolo Paoli. The use of repetition was originally a device to emphasise universality and inevitability. The same disastrous loss of limbs, repeated time after time, emphasised Le Mutilé's unalterable fate. Repetition also contributed to the dream atmosphere by creating a 'déjà-vu' sensation as in the extract from Strindberg.

The use of repetition to suggest or symbolise the inescapability of a commonly shared fate reaches its climax in Tous contre Tous, where Jean, persecuted at the beginning of the play, goes through a complete cycle, becoming persecutor himself, finally ending up in the same work, and commenting: "Ça finit comme ça a commencé, c'est normal."<sup>43</sup>

Even when there is no repetition the characters may feel, as in a dream, that they have been through the same actions many times without being sure where or when. L'Employé constantly suffers from this type of uncertainty. Some of the most disturbing moments of La Parodie come from his nightmare-like inability to remember or

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<sup>43</sup> Théâtre I, p.189.

identify people and places.<sup>44</sup>

In this way repetition and circularity have an important symbolic part to play. The image of the circle is particularly important, and two of Adamov's most perceptive friends and critics, Bernard Dort and Maurice Regnaut, have analysed his work by reference to the idea of the circle. Regnaut calls it "le cercle tragique", but it would perhaps be more appropriate to call it a vicious rather than a tragic circle. It is formed by the limits of an obsession that cannot be overcome: Le Mutilé, obsessed with Erna, must return to her again and again although she embodies his own destruction. Taranne, accused of exhibitionism, struggles fruitlessly to deny the charge by insisting on his character and profession only to end, after a circular movement, by the act of exhibitionism of which he was accused. Jean Rist, as we have seen, ends as he had started, and with both Edgar and A. we end up 'comme nous avons été.'

In Le Professeur Taranne, Regnaut said it was as if Adamov had jumped with both feet outside the circle. What he meant was that Adamov had succeeded in creating a character outside himself separate from himself, who did not serve the demonstration of a given metaphysical key. "Pour la première fois dans l'oeuvre d'Adamov il n'y a pas représentation, mais création."<sup>45</sup> Dort commented that:

Taranne est ramené, par la parole, à l'instant de  
"son" acte, puisque, soupçonné d'exhibitionisme, il

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<sup>44</sup> See above, p.208.

<sup>45</sup> Maurice Regnaut, op. cit., p.185.

est conduit à se dévêtir devant le public - c'est-à-dire à faire aux yeux de tous ce qu'il était accusé d'avoir fait en secret. Mais c'est précisément alors qu'Adamov échappe à la fascination du cercle et y fait échapper le public.<sup>46</sup>

In turning the 'passion' / the suffering and persecution of the early plays into 'action', Adamov's view-point is transformed. He sees, judges, organises, creates from the outside, instead of simply suffering inside.

Structurally, this is expressed in the abolition of the circle.

In Le Ping-Pong there is a linear development which takes us through the lives of the various characters, none of whom end up exactly as they had started. The play still lacks a positive character, it is still a demonstration of futility, but one which moves in spirals rather than in circles. There is a progression in the action which has importance in a time sequence and foreshadows the importance of the historical framework for Paolo Paoli and Le Printemps 71.

The structure of the plays brings us back once more to the idea of poetry; in Strindberg's dialogue, both the salient features of Adamov's early dramatic structure, repetition and dreams, are associated with poetry. The poetry of Adamov's plays has been defined by Lynes as relying on:

a kind of rigor in the dramatic progression  
... a certain pure and naked violence rendered  
in action and in the simple language of every-  
day life stripped only of its triviality and  
surface 'realism'. ... It is a poetry of pure  
action, a kind of functional poetry which it

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<sup>46</sup> Bernard Dort, 'Une Scandaleuse Unité' in programme for Off Limits, January 1969.

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would be difficult to find elsewhere in the contemporary theatre.<sup>47</sup>

His use of action, of the simple vocabulary, of violence and the rigorous dramatic progression, have been analysed in the preceding chapters. The justification for calling this combination poetic lies in the rich suggestiveness and the uncompromising rigour of the dream situations combining 'geste' and 'langage' in such a way as to achieve "un pouvoir que l'on est libre d'appeler encore poésie et que je me contenterai de dire efficace."<sup>48</sup>

Ronald Peacock wrote that "the dramatic quality of any moment or situation in a play is directly commensurate with all the meanings involved."<sup>49</sup> In all of Adamov's work, from his earliest playlet in 1927 to his last play in 1970, he was searching for the dramatic image and situation which effectively placed themselves at a cross-roads of meaning. He wanted his plays to be like poems: compelling in themselves because they strike the imagination as authentic, but also sufficiently ambiguous to suggest other meanings which lead off in different directions from the cross-roads. This is true of every one of his plays (though his skill in achieving it varied) and it provides one of the broad unifying forces in the diversity of Adamov's work.

The image of the blind beggar was, as we have seen, one of the

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<sup>47</sup> Lynes, op. cit., p.53.

<sup>48</sup> See above, p.244, note 16.

<sup>49</sup> Ronald Peacock, The Art of Drama. London, 1957, p.164.

best examples of Adamov's ambiguous dramatic situations, containing as it did all his major themes by implication, bound together in an all-embracing irony. As this example shows, the image or situation did not necessarily have to spring from his dreams. But it had to be vividly meaningful for him, and it also had to contain sufficient ambiguity to go beyond that initial appeal to the imagination. As he achieved some liberation from neurosis, he began to take his subjects less from his dreams and more from reality around him, thus reverting to his experience with La Parodie. Describing the historical circumstances which lay behind the subject of his next play, Paolo Paoli, he again evoked the idea of poetry, talking of:

l'incroyable poésie que contiennent les faits eux-mêmes, et à laquelle aucune imagination, si puissante fût-elle, ne saurait suppléer.<sup>50</sup>

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50 Ici et Maintenant, p.44.

PART III A critical study of Adamov's plays from Paolo Paoli  
to Off Limits, including the radio plays and propaganda  
sketches

## PART III

Chapter 1 Planchon, Brecht and 'le théâtre populaire'

The important period in Adamov's life which saw his development from nihilism to Marxism, was dominated by his relationship with Roger Planchon. Between 1953 and 1960, Planchon put on three plays by Adamov and three of his adaptations from foreign classics, including Les Ames Mortes. Adamov's art gained enormously from regular contact with this very creative theatrical group and he always acknowledged his debt towards Planchon. He would spend up to six months at a time in Lyon, working with the company on a play or an adaptation, sharing in the common development of ideas about a theatre that was committed to making culture meaningful to a wide, modern audience with no traditions of theatre-going.

Thanks to Emile Copfermann's superb book on Planchon<sup>1</sup>, it is possible to trace in detail the progress of his company as it developed from a minute group of enthusiastic amateurs, via the small professional 'Théâtre de la Comédie', to the company that was able to take over the Villeurbanne theatre and became the 'Théâtre de la Cité'. To some extent, the development of Adamov in this period was along similar lines to that of Planchon. Copfermann's book helps to bring out this similarity by the prominence which he gives to Adamov in his second chapter, 'Parcours', dealing with the period 1953 to 1957. One of Planchon's first shows, produced only three months after the opening

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<sup>1</sup> Emile Copfermann, Roger Planchon, Lausanne, 1969.

of the Théâtre de la Comédie, was Le Sens de la Marche and Le Professeur Taranne. There followed, in May and June of the following year, La Cruche Cassée adapted from Kleist, and Edouard II adapted from Marlowe. Working on these adaptations, the preoccupations of Adamov and Planchon coincided. Both were concerned with the death of the classic 'hero' in modern drama and the challenge made by this demise to the whole of our inherited scale of values.

In Kleist and Marlowe, they found echoes of these ideas.

Copfermann quotes Adamov at some length to show that he saw Adam in La Cruche Cassée as a contemporary Oedipus, an anti-heroic, comic 'Oedipus through the looking-glass', lacking Oedipus' nobility, and bearing a derisory resemblance to Oedipus' fate in his uncontrolled lust and his club foot:

Adam, contrairement à Oedipe, se sait coupable, et le drame ne réside pas pour lui dans la découverte de cette faute par les autres. Le spectateur accordera, tout au plus, à ce vieillard libidineux ... une pitié méprisante.<sup>2</sup>

Adamov's interpretation of the play saw it as centred on Kleist's preoccupation with the idea of the judge who is condemned by the very Justice which he is compelled to uphold. For Copfermann, this interpretation follows naturally from Adamov's preoccupation with the Oedipus problem as exemplified in Le Sens de la Marche:

pour Henri, une fois encore un héros en proie à une vie qui, quoi qu'il fasse, le broiera ... la seule (mais fausse) issue consiste après avoir tout accepté à abattre

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.67. Copfermann is quoting Adamov here.

l'obstacle essentiel: Henri tue le masseur  
Berne, image du père tyrannique disparu dont  
il prend la place. Sur cette lancée, La Cruche  
Cassée devient surtout un Oedipe comique.<sup>3</sup>

Adamov also found a connection between his Adam, a hero who was:

coupable et sordide, et pourtant appelé, par  
la situation centrale qu'il occupe, à la  
destruction absolue, celle qui n'a pas la gloire  
pour contrepartie...<sup>4</sup>

and Edward II, who, deliberately renouncing this 'gloire' becomes a  
modern anti-hero:

La pièce de Marlowe est le drame de la déposition:  
on peut écrire de la dépossession.<sup>5</sup>

But the important thing about these plays, on which Adamov and  
Planchon collaborated, was not so much their close relationship with  
Adamov's own work, as the fact that they enabled him to work on ideas  
already familiar to him, in a new context. In both his adaptations  
the drama of Man's inner dispossession was firmly set in precise social  
circumstances, and it was these circumstances which made the characters'  
downfalls inevitable.

The significance of this lay in the fact that both Planchon and  
Adamov were becoming more and more interested in a socially committed  
theatre. In his 1955 and 1956 seasons, Planchon, while continuing to  
present plays representative of the recent French absurdist school,  
was also experimenting with a more socially orientated theatre. As

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.66.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.68. Copfermann quoting Adamov.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.68.

well as Comment s'en débarrasser, Victor, ou les enfants au pouvoir, La Leçon and Victimes du devoir, he performed L'Alcade de Zalamea in an adaptation placing great emphasis on the political content, Brecht's Grand-peur et Misères du 3ème Reich and Vinaver's Les Coréens, which created a certain amount of disturbance and gave him his first taste of official disapproval.

It was during this same period that Adamov, convinced of the importance of social involvement, had written Le Ping-Pong and Paolo Paoli. And it was after seeing Planchon's production of Les Coréens that he decided to ask him to put on Paolo Paoli.<sup>6</sup> He gave the play to Planchon as soon as it was finished at the end of 1956 and it was the last production to be mounted at the Théâtre de la Comédie before the move to Villeurbanne. It had a considerable success in Lyon and was chosen by Planchon for his first visit to Paris in January 1958.

Adamov remained in close contact with Planchon for the next two years and they worked closely together on the adaptation of Gogol's Dead Souls which was first performed on the 22nd January 1960. They continued to develop on similar lines, as Planchon worked out the implications of his move from a small 'art' theatre to a large industrial suburb and Adamov sought to widen the range of his committed theatre. In Planchon's ebullient, yet rigorously disciplined nature, and in his passionate belief in Socialism, Adamov had clearly found someone who could sustain and excite him, from whom he had much to

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<sup>6</sup> See L'Homme et l'Enfant, p.121. (Note the mistake in dates: 1955 for 1956.)

learn about the practice of theatre, and with whom he could share his social and political preoccupations.

Unfortunately, he and Planchon fell out after the Villeurbanne production of Les Ames Mortes, criticised with a touching mixture of bitterness and regret in L'Homme et l'Enfant.<sup>7</sup> Had this not happened, and had some of his later works been produced by Planchon, he would have stood a better chance of achieving the recognition in France which he so desired.

It was ironic that the break-up should have come at a time when they were still developing in the same direction, a direction that was governed by the discovery of Brecht which was the most important influence on both men in the period 1953 to 1960. Along with many others in France, Adamov did not begin to read Brecht until the early fifties. To all except the experts, his work had remained almost entirely unknown until Jean Vilar's production of Mother Courage in 1953 at the T.N.P. The only other production that had been seen since the war was Jean-Marie Serreau's The Exception and the Rule which passed almost unnoticed in 1950. The first book to appear on Brecht in France was in 1954, by René Wintzen, Geneviève Serreau's book appeared in 1955/and Dort's Lecture de Brecht did not appear till 1960.

But the most influential event was the visit to Paris in June

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp.135-6.

1954 of the Berliner Ensemble with Brecht's Mother Courage and Kleist's The Broken Jug. In the same month, Planchon put on, rather unsuccessfully/a production of The Good Woman of Sechzuan; being interested in Brecht, but having no first-hand knowledge of his work, he went to Paris, saw the productions of the Ensemble, and had long discussions with Brecht about his methods.

The extraordinary catalysing effect of the Berliner Ensemble's visit on a whole area of French theatre is described by Copfermann:

La rencontre avec Bertolt Brecht a pour effet de radicaliser les rapports qui s'étaient noués dans ce qu'on nommera, à défaut d'autre qualificatif plus approprié, théâtre de recherche. Une scission s'opère, matérialisée par la crise qu'Adamov traverse: le "brechtisme" a curieusement pour effet d'inciter Ionesco, absurde jusqu'au bout, à entreprendre un/croisade pour la liberté au théâtre, pour le classicisme au nom de Molière. ... Planchon confiera en 1960 que les représentations parisiennes de Brecht le plongèrent dans le désespoir ... Cette soudaine découverte d'un théâtre lucide, conscient, l'incite presque à tout abandonner. Désespoir et admiration, d'autres les partageront sans les dominer. ... Brecht nous indique le chemin à prendre, dit Roger Planchon, il faut le copier hardiment.<sup>8</sup>

One can understand the reaction of Planchon: Brecht's achievement was precisely to have welded into an effective and subtle unity all the forces, dramatic, social and political, which were then preoccupying many young Frenchmen of the theatre. To follow him without copying him must have seemed an almost impossible task, and one which perhaps Adamov only achieved thanks to the force of his own personal obsessions.

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<sup>8</sup> Emile Copfermann, op. cit., pp.72-73.

But before analysing more closely the impact that the discovery of Brecht made on Adamov, it is important to situate this discovery, and Adamov's relationship with Planchon, in the broad history of the development of a similar approach to the theatre in France. 1953, the year of Vilar's Mother Courage was also the year of the founding of the review Théâtre Populaire and of the movement entitled 'Amis du Théâtre Populaire', a group whose original raison d'être was to support Vilar and the T.N.P. but which soon extended its activities to a more general promotion of the idea of 'le théâtre populaire'. The idea is one which has evolved considerably during its history in France. Its origins can be traced back to 1794, when the 'Théâtre Français' was changed to the 'Théâtre Populaire'. But the French revolution failed to produce any genuine theatre of the people. It was not until the end of the last century that directors like Firmin Gémier or Romain Rolland began to formulate an approach which was truly aimed at the masses, and to put it into practice. Gradually the idea began to take shape that such a theatre had not only to make itself available to the working classes in respect of price and situation, but also had to develop a new repertory: one which was centred on plays presenting social themes in terms a popular audience could enjoy and understand.

Copeau's theatrical revolution which started with the founding of the Vieux-Colombier in 1913, and which had such an influence, was been more concerned with theatrical than with social reform. In fact, he specifically stated in 1913:

Nous ne sentons pas le besoin d'une révolution.  
 Nous avons, pour cela, les yeux fixés sur de trop  
 grands modèles.<sup>9</sup>

and he said that he was aiming initially at a minority public of students, writers, artists and intellectuals.

And yet Copeau has had a strong influence on popular theatre in France since the war. To some extent this influence was indirect, residing simply in the fact that he trained some of the leading exponents of this type of theatre. He always believed that the idea of a theatre with a permanent troupe was inseparable from the idea of a theatre school. Because of this emphasis on training, his rigorous professionalism, and his own personal charisma, a large number of very gifted actors joined his troupe or his school and received their training from him. Among these were Jean Dasté who married Copeau's daughter, Marie-Hélène, and became director of the Comédie de St. Etienne, and Copeau's nephew, Michel St. Denis who was until recently director of the Comédie de L'Est at Strasbourg. At a second remove, his influence can be seen, as Dorothy Knowles points out, in directors trained by actors trained by Copeau, such as Jean Vilar and Claude Martin, both trained by Dullin and both producers of Adamov.<sup>10</sup> Planchon himself, though his own personal development owes little to Copeau and his school, follows many of the same practices: he places emphasis on the formation of a troupe, the training of actors, and the revival of

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<sup>9</sup> Nouvelle Revue Française, 5ème an., no.57, 1er septembre 1913, p.347.

<sup>10</sup> Dorothy Knowles, The French Theatre of the Inter-War Years, London, 1968, p.313.

the classics.

But Copeau also exercised considerable influence by his own conversion to the idea of popular theatre. In 1941, he published Le Théâtre Populaire as the first volume in a series entitled 'La Bibliothèque du Peuple' (later changed to 'Que Sais-je') in which he postulated the necessity for a new and wider theatre. He said that the Vieux-Colombier had taken refuge in a minority theatre which was necessary at the time for the formation of technique, but that now, it had to approach the large question of what gives meaning to life. It would thus need an ideology, either Marxist or Christian, but above all it would have to be of universal application, therefore 'populaire'. He linked this new understanding in his own mind of the need for a people's theatre with the French defeat which he felt had shown up their ideological poverty, and with his own experiences in Burgundy between 1925 and 1930 when he had had no fixed home for his troupe. In the spontaneous performances he had seen and given at the village wine festivals, he saw a possibility for the rebirth of a theatre whose roots would be firmly embedded in a culture shared by the masses. From this experience he concluded that open air performances were ideal for people's theatre.<sup>11</sup> He longed for:

Une dizaine de comédiens tout au plus, une  
dizaine de costumes, quelques masques et quelques  
accessoires, et peu ou point de décors.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> His argument refers for support to the powerful emotive effects of Hitler's open-air rallies, and to an open-air pageant of the history of Vaud produced in 1903 with a cast of 2,400!

<sup>12</sup> Jacques Copeau, Le Théâtre Populaire, Paris, 1941, p.59.

Furthermore, he proposed that it would help to bring this type of theatre into existence if a cheap, temporary, simple building were erected in one of the Paris suburbs to enable the necessary experimentation to be carried out.

From this work, there emerges an astonishingly prophetic vision of the new, vital, socially orientated theatre that was to grow up after the war, beginning with Vilar's open-air performances at Avignon, following with the decentralisation movement and the establishing of subsidised theatres in the Paris suburbs. Not only the location of these theatres, but also their style of production, the 'esthétique du dépouillement' that became characteristic of Vilar's T.N.P. productions, and the emphasis on small troupes with no 'stars' were foreseen by Copeau. It cannot be doubted that his expression of these ideas and the way they were put into practice by his disciples form one of the most important influences on the rise of what has been known as 'le théâtre populaire' in France since the war.

But although these ideas had been in the air for such a long time, it was only with the appearance of directors who were motivated socially as well as theatrically that they began to be put into practice. This is brought out rather well by the report of a congress held in 1950 under the title Théâtre et Collectivité.<sup>13</sup> The texts of the speeches given at this congress reveal much vague discussion of 'la communion au théâtre' and much citing of Copeau, but the most striking speech is

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<sup>13</sup> André Villiers, Théâtre et Collectivité, Paris, 1953.

one given by Vilar entitled 'Du Spectateur et du Public'. In this, he says that a 'Théâtre du peuple' or 'Théâtre des masses':

ne veut rien dire dans le monde ... où nous vivons  
à l'heure actuelle.<sup>14</sup>

He suggests that before the theatrical experience can be all that it should, society must have a greater ideological unity. Planchon, Martin, Garran and others have shared this view, and while working for society to achieve this unity, have chosen to perform their plays in the working class suburbs which are largely communist in France and where the required ideological unity thus exists.

The idea of 'théâtre populaire' continued to develop during the fifties and its evolution is most clearly visible in the review Théâtre Populaire. An initial indication of what the review understood by the term was given in the first issue by the president of the 'Amis du Théâtre Populaire':

Pour nous, le théâtre populaire est moins lié, dans sa définition, à un répertoire particulier ou même à une catégorie de spectateurs qu'à certaines formes de relation entre le public et le théâtre. Il est fondé sur un accord profond du public qui, dépassant l'émotion fugitive de la représentation, s'exprime par un véritable engagement de responsabilité. Cet acte suppose un public organisé, averti des problèmes techniques, politiques et sociaux du théâtre.<sup>15</sup>

It was this insistence on the two-way relationship between the theatre

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.114.

<sup>15</sup> Théâtre Populaire, no.1, mai-juin 1953, p.93. (Quoted by Copfermann in his Théâtre Populaire pourquoi?, Paris 1969 (2nd edition), p.62.

and the public, very strongly influenced by Vilar, that gave an evangelistic fervour to the movement, led to Planchon's move from the centre of Lyon to an industrial suburb, and gave an enormous boost to the 'centres dramatiques' and cultural centres that were established or consolidated over the next decade.

The review thus took up a very militant position. It saw itself as a means, both of educating this new public, and of helping to define the direction in which this 'people's theatre' evolved. It always took the broadest possible view of its subject, publishing articles on the history, sociology, public, scenery, architecture, repertoire. It had articles on every type of theatre from Japanese Nô to the Elizabethans and from Stanislavski to Artaud. Very soon its polemical tone was stressing not only the integration of theatre and society, but also the primary necessity for a classless society. The editorial of the fifth number states,

Nous ne pouvons prétendre définir le Théâtre Populaire que comme un théâtre purifié des structures bourgeoises ... Comment pourrions-nous prétendre définir d'emblée un théâtre collectif, alors que notre société française n'est encore que trop visiblement déchirée, soumise dans sa structure économique à la dure sécession des classes sociales.<sup>16</sup>

The arrival of the Berliner Ensemble seemed to reveal in a flash to the editorial team what it was that they had been groping for. They instantly championed Brecht and had much to do with the

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<sup>16</sup> Théâtre Populaire, no.5, janvier-février 1954, p.4.

rapid spread of his influence in France.<sup>17</sup>

For a review of its kind, the contributions were mostly of an unusually high standard and this was due to the impressive range of talent on the editorial committee, which included Roland Barthes, Guy Dumur, Henri Laborde, Jean Paris, Jean Duvignaud and Bernard Dort. Morvan Lebesque, who had been a founder editor, left in 1954 as the review took a progressively more open political stand.

From the very beginning, the review insisted on the importance of building up a repertory for a people's theatre and one of its most important functions was the publication of plays and adaptations, often by young or unknown authors. In all, it published five of Adamov's plays and three of his translations. The review was owned by 'L'Arche' and thus many of the texts which had their first publication in the review were later issued in book form.

Finally, in 1964, just over ten years after its birth, Théâtre Populaire ceased to exist. It is disappointing that such an interesting review could not continue, but in a sense it had completed its evangelistic mission. The idea of people's theatre was widely accepted, an extremely comprehensive network of regional and suburban dramatic centres had been established, where even under a Gaullist régime, a genuine 'culture populaire' had begun to appear. Its editors were perhaps too brilliant and too volatile; they all had

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<sup>17</sup> In 1961 Adamov expressed his own involvement with this effort to make Brecht known. It is a good example of his peculiar wry humour: Ici et Maintenant, p.208.

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strong views which inevitably diverged. Adamov's commitment to the ideal continued; his later plays were mostly put on in the suburban dramatic centres and, though hampered by his inability to find 'his' producer, he continued to attempt to create the dialogue with a 'people's' audience.

In this approach, he had, apart from Brecht one other clear predecessor in Erwin Piscator. The precise influence of Piscator on French people's theatre is difficult to gauge, but it seems certain that when Adamov and Planchon were turning in this direction, they quickly became familiar with Piscator's work. Adamov was certainly influenced to some extent by his work/of which he had first-hand knowledge through a translation he did of Das Politische Theater, published in 1962.<sup>18</sup> It is thus not surprising that a number of characteristic Piscatorian features are to be found in Adamov's later theatre.

The most important of these can be seen in Piscator's peculiar 'epic' style of theatre concentrating on a historical and social theme, depending on massive documentation and making considerable use of projected material. There were two basic principles behind Piscator's work. One he called the function of man:

Pour nous, l'homme a sur la scène l'importance d'une fonction sociale. ... Lorsqu'il entre en conflit (moral, psychique, ou affectif), c'est avec la société.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Erwin Piscator, Le Théâtre Politique (texte français d'Arthur Adamov), Paris, 1962. Adamov also mentions that he knew of Piscator before doing this translation: see Ici et Maintenant, p.221.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.137.

It was with this in mind that he conducted his vigorous and far-ranging experiments with new theatrical techniques which he called his second principle; he wished to portray this conflict and show as clearly as possible its relevance to our everyday lives:

Si donc je considère que l'idée fondamentale de toute action théâtrale réside dans l'élévation des scènes privées au niveau de l'histoire, il ne peut s'agir que d'une élévation au plan social, politique et économique. C'est grâce à elle, que nous lions le théâtre à notre vie.<sup>20</sup>

Here he is expressing a preoccupation very similar to Adamov's with the relationships between the private life of the individual and the movement of history, especially in its social, political and economic dimensions. In particular, it suggests exactly that balance which Adamov succeeded in achieving in Le Printemps 71.

The technique for which Piscator has been chiefly remembered, and the importance of which has perhaps been exaggerated, is the use of projected film in theatrical productions. He used film to fill in background details rapidly and strikingly, to show another field of action simultaneous with the stage action, or to comment on the stage action in the manner of a chorus. Adamov's use of projected material in Paolo Paoli and subsequent plays, and his use of 'Guignols' in Le Printemps 71 have much in common with this use of film. For his adaptation of Les Ames Mortes, a complete cartoon film was made by René Allio, which he used to convey Tchitchikov's travels through Russia, thus copying precisely Piscator's use of a cartoon film made

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.139.

by Georg Grosz for his adaptation of The Good Soldier Schweyk in 1928.

It is perhaps even more interesting to see that one example given by Piscator of the film's function as commentary, demonstrates an approach to his subject-matter, and particularly to the use of language, which we shall see is almost identical to Adamov's, especially in Paolo Paoli. Describing the use of film as commentary in his production of Rasputin, he said:

Il contredisait les mots prononcés sur la scène.  
 Le représentant de Krupp proclamait: 'Il s'agit  
 de sauver la civilisation allemande', le  
 représentant de Creusot trompétait: 'La  
 démocratie et la civilisation doivent être  
 défendues', le représentant d'Armstrong  
 déclarait: 'We fight for the liberation of  
 the world', et l'on voyait, en arrière-plan,  
 la forêt fumante des fourneaux et des  
 cheminées de l'industrie lourde. Ainsi,  
 grâce au contraste (satirique), le caractère  
 de la guerre impérialiste était mise à nu  
 jusque dans ses plus profondes racines.<sup>21</sup>

Piscator was, however, more of a theatrical practitioner and less of a thinker than Adamov. His importance lay in his insistence on a political and 'popular' approach and in his demonstration of the flexibility of dramatic means that could be harnessed to achieve this aim. Brecht himself had borrowed ideas and techniques from Piscator, and it was partly through Brecht's own work that Adamov was exposed to this influence. Adamov's admiration for Brecht as the greatest twentieth century dramatist remained with him to his death. Some discussion of the relationship between Brecht's work and Adamov's

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.182.

will be left to the detailed analysis of the plays in the following chapters, in particular the chapter on Le Printemps 71 which will include a comparison with Brecht's Days of the Commune.

But before going on to the plays, some preliminary remarks must be made about Adamov's relationship to Brecht, which has suffered from the usual critical pigeon-holding that is inevitable, so that he has been labelled as a 'brechtian' writer. In fact only one of his plays, Le Printemps 71, presents any clear similarities with any of Brecht's. If a label were required for Adamov's late work, then Büchnerian would perhaps be more appropriate. Adamov's treatment of the class problem in his plays usually comes close to the anguished, nightmare-ridden world of Woyzeck. It was a text by Büchner that provided Adamov with his first personal involvement with the professional theatre, when he translated Danton's Death for Jean Vilar's second Avignon festival in 1948. In 1953, Vilar did a revival at the T.N.P., which occasioned further reflection about Büchner on Adamov's part, since he wrote an introduction to the play for Arts, and also collaborated with Marthe Robert on the short but very dense 'préface' to an edition of Büchner's three plays, which 'L'Arche' brought out in the same year. This preface bore the unmistakable mark of Adamov's composition, highlighting, like his book on Strindberg, many of his own early preoccupations<sup>22</sup>; but it also insisted on the rôle of time in Büchner's plays, thus pointing forwards to its importance in his own later plays.

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<sup>22</sup> See the quotation from this preface given in Chapter 2, Part II, p.154.

La métamorphose de l'homme en mécanique aveugle,  
c'est la plus grave conséquence de sa manière  
de vivre le temps.<sup>23</sup>

The blind mechanisms of human life caught in the inevitable progression of time never really ceased to form an important part of the subject matter of his plays. He simply modified the fundamental fatalism, which to begin with he shared with Büchner, in an attempt to achieve what was also Buchner's unfinished plan in Woyzeck:

donner la parole au tribun populaire qui, tout  
en agissant, énonce les vérités qui l'empêchent  
d'agir.<sup>24</sup>

It is tempting to speculate on how far Büchner, had he lived, might have followed a similar path to Adamov's, and it is particularly noteworthy that Adamov's only recorded contact with Brecht was spent discussing Büchner:

Brecht, le plus grand écrivain de théâtre du  
siècle, mais que j'ai connu à peine, avec qui  
j'ai passé seulement un après-midi quand il  
était déjà alité, malade. Beaucoup parlé  
de Büchner.<sup>25</sup>

Again, if forced to choose a label for himself, Adamov might well have preferred to be 'Tchekovian'. His admiration for Tchekov never ceased to grow; his French versions of all of Tchekov's plays were some of the few translations that he felt really pleased with, expressing particular satisfaction with his version of The Three Sisters which he regarded as Tchekov's greatest play. His plays

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<sup>23</sup> Georg Büchner, Théâtre, Paris, 1953, p.10.

<sup>24</sup> Adamov, 'Büchner', Arts, 17-23 avril, 1953.

<sup>25</sup> L'Homme et l'Enfant, p.130.

share with Tchekov's the presentation of a historical movement through banal or derisory details of everyday life and also a certain cruelly ironic humour, of the type found in Paolo Paoli.

Even the influence of Brecht on Adamov's style and dramaturgy was less important than it might seem to be. Although his later plays exhibit, as we shall see, a skilful handling of the brechtian epic form, it is not in fact so very different from the rapid, economical movement of Adamov's early plays. Indeed the form of La Parodie, with its short scenes, each showing a new stage in the overall disintegration, and with its placards containing ironic, deflating titles, such as 'L'Amour vainqueur' might seem just as influenced by Brecht as any of his later works.

It is of course important to remember that Adamov had experienced some of the same formative influences as Brecht, notably those of poverty and self-disgust, and that both had grown up in Germany of the Expressionist period. Everything that Adamov did was so deeply imprinted with his own intensely personal genius, that it should not surprise us to find that for him Brecht was not so much a model as a precursor: he had made the same attempt to attack the 'curable' rather than the 'incurable' with his theatre, had established a precedent of success, despite nihilistic beginnings not unlike Adamov's. It is very striking that the plays of Brecht's which Adamov preferred were those written around 1930, The Mother, Saint Joan of the Stockyards, in which he said Brecht was most clearly under the combined influence of Expressionism and the Russian Revolution, but which were

nevertheless profoundly original plays.<sup>26</sup> Brecht had managed to use elements of Expressionism without becoming lost in its vague abstractions, something which Adamov never ceased to fear after the mid fifties.<sup>27</sup>

In these respects, Adamov found in Brecht someone who had been through some of the same experiences as himself, both personal and artistic. He also felt near to Brecht later in his life, especially in Brecht's disappointments with Communism, the fact that he had been tempted to reject it, but had nevertheless kept faith. He felt that the way this inner struggle appeared in Brecht's late poems made these the most moving things in all of his work.<sup>28</sup>

But the feature of Brecht's theatre which most powerfully influenced Adamov was its fundamentally critical attitude. It has been called a 'critical' theatre<sup>29</sup> because it goes beyond normal criticism of social institutions and tries to unmask the myths on which capitalist society is built. The myth of the inevitability and glory of war, for example, is given this treatment in The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui by showing that precise business interests and human decisions

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<sup>26</sup> See Ici et Maintenant, p.220.

<sup>27</sup> See Ibid., p.141, in which he speaks of "ma peur de l'expressionisme".

<sup>28</sup> Private conversation, July 1968.

<sup>29</sup> Bernard Dort, Lecture de Brecht, Paris, 1960, 1960, p.107: "Un théâtre à égale distance entre la tragédie et la satire - un théâtre que nous dirons critique."

opened the way to Hitler and that he would not have come to power without them.

But this fundamentally critical approach meant more than just a new choice of subject-matter for Adamov. Its central importance for his change of direction cannot be overstressed: it implied a change in his whole world view. In 1961, he was able to look back and describe exactly what the discovery of Brecht had brought to him. Initially he had had the same reaction as Planchon: one of despair.<sup>30</sup> But gradually he had learnt to live with his admiration for Brecht and still write his own plays, very much changed though they were. The change this made in him once again serves to stress the similarities between his development and Planchon's. A longish quotation from the discussion about Brecht between Adamov, Planchon and Allio in 1961 will help to clarify the magnitude of Brecht's impact on them and to show exactly what kind of change it brought about.

PLANCHON : ...Je sais, maintenant, que pour faire une bonne mise en scène, il est important - ça paraît tellement élémentaire que je n'ose plus le dire, mais je pense que ça ne l'était pas, il y a quelques années, et ça, c'est Brecht qui l'a amené... - il est important d'avoir une connaissance profonde des choses; un regard sur le monde, enfin... Je dirais que quand je fais une mise en scène, je m'engage totalement. ... Personnellement, il me semble qu'on ne peut faire une mise en scène, qu'on ne peut pas donner une indication à un acteur, qu'on ne peut pas régler un mouvement sur le plateau sans savoir que ça engage des problèmes aussi grands et aussi simples que, par exemple, la

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<sup>30</sup> See Ici et Maintenant, p.209.

liberté, etc. Une vision du monde, pour parler comme Goldmann. ...

ADAMOV : ... Planchon disait: "le regard sur le monde", et c'est ça qui est important... Or, ce regard sur le monde, il peut presque se résumer, si on regarde bien l'oeuvre de Brecht, en une seule formule: la dénonciation de l'idéalisme; ... Pourquoi aimons-nous Sainte Jeanne des abattoirs? Je pense à ce vers du premier tableau, à ces vers parodiques:

Te souviens-tu, Criddle, de cette promenade  
Que nous fîmes un jour de par les abattoirs?  
Ce "de par les abattoirs", c'est l'ancienne rhétorique dénoncée par le mot même d'abattoir... Autrement dit, c'est l'intelligence qui démasque le faux idéalisme de cette société dans laquelle, hélas! nous sommes... Et cela me paraît très important.<sup>31</sup>

This denunciation of idealism, already a natural property of Adamov's before he felt the impact of Brecht, became the corner-stone of his new method, and the brechtian procedure employed in his example from Saint Joan of the Stockyards was one which he was to use constantly.

Planchon's view of the total responsibility of the producer also drew inspiration from Brecht's idea of 'l'écriture scénique':

Or, que Brecht ait été le premier, au théâtre, à avoir dégagé la responsabilité totale de l'écriture scénique, c'est cela, pour moi, son apport essentiel, sur le plan de la mise en scène - en dehors de toutes ses trouvailles esthétiques. Il nous a donné conscience qu'il existait une responsabilité de l'écriture scénique.<sup>32</sup>

After the success of his own adaptation of Henri IV, he went on to do several more adaptations in which the importance of 'l'écriture

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31 Ibid., pp.215-216.

32 Ibid., p.214. (Also quoted by Copfermann, op. cit., p.123.)

scénique" was equal to that of the text. These included Les Ames Mortes and a second version of Edouard II, this time dispensing with Adamov's text, simply calling it 'Edouard II d'après Christopher Marlowe'. His method of adaptation became more and more one of re-creation, going much further than mere 'mise en scène', developing gradually into a 'mise en pièce' of material bearing little relation to any previous dramatic text and culminating in the collective creation in 1969, of La contestation et la mise en pièces de la plus illustre des tragédies françaises "Le Cid" de Pierre Corneille suivies d'une "cruelle" mise à mort de l'auteur dramatique et d'une distribution gracieuse de diverses conserves culturelles.

For Adamov, the denunciation of the false uses of idealism and the approach to life which criticised all the social mechanisms by which Man oppresses Man continued to be of cardinal importance. He developed their implications in two particular areas: character and language. As well as criticising aspects of society, the brechtian approach is critical of the individual characters which make up that society. If history is not something inevitable, but something for which the decisions of individuals are responsible, then it is not sufficient to show a character caught in a situation, he must also be shown to be responsible for that situation. To show how men both form and are formed by history, Bernard Dort wrote that Brecht had to:

faire de son théâtre le lieu même d'une critique du personnage, critique active qui

aboutit à la division sinon à l'éclatement  
de ce personnage.<sup>33</sup>

Brecht's theatre is rich in examples that could be drawn on to  
illustrate this contention; the most obvious is perhaps Shen Te in  
The Caucasian Chalk Circle, who literally becomes divided in two.

But Adamov, who had left behind the unrealistic characters of his  
early plays, felt that Brecht's method carried with it the danger of  
excessive schematisation. By 1961, Adamov's own ideas about dramatic  
character had evolved; he said that Brecht's figures were often too  
stereotyped and that he would have lost nothing by allowing them more  
depth:

Je rêve ... d'un théâtre qui serait à la fois  
Brecht et O'Casey, c'est-à-dire un théâtre  
où les mécanismes seraient démontés, comme chez  
Brecht, et où, néanmoins, les personnes, les  
individus continueraient de vivre une vie  
individuelle, au milieu même de ce démontage  
des mécanismes.<sup>34</sup>

Il me semble qu'il y aurait un moyen, je ne sais  
pas lequel, l'avenir dira si j'y arriverai -  
ou si d'autres y arriveront - de garder des  
figures individuelles plus précises, tout en  
conservant absolument la leçon.<sup>35</sup>

This study of the rest of his plays will try to show how far he did  
achieve this. Moreover, his ability to place Man's relations with his  
own language at the centre of his early plays was extended into a  
method of denouncing certain types of rhetoric, as we shall see in

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<sup>33</sup> Bernard Dort, op. cit., p.126.

<sup>34</sup> Ici et Maintenant, p.209.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p.213.

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Paolo Paoli, his example from Saint Joan of the Stockyards being a good example of one such denunciation.

But first, as an introduction to Paolo Paoli, we should go back to 1956, the year in which the play was written, when Adamov published an important article in Théâtre Populaire which he entitled 'Théâtre, Argent et Politique' and which demonstrated the central importance of the impact of Brecht on his new 'style'. The article is an extended meditation on theatre in a social context combined with an analysis of how successfully different playwrights have been in integrating material of social or historical interest with genuine dramatic writing.

He began with a description of what is normally understood by the term 'historical drama': one in which more or less historical characters discuss "les dangers que court la 'personne humaine'". He said that the worst thing about these plays was that they encouraged the audience to see themselves in the rôles of the characters:

Or, dans une vraie pièce historique, le spectateur n'a nullement à s'identifier avec tel ou tel personnage, mais à reconnaître ce qui, à une époque donnée, à travers plusieurs personnages, annonce, contient en germe, la sienne propre.<sup>36</sup>

In this way the audience could turn a critical look on its own past:

Grâce à ce regard, la reconnaissance équivaut à un dépistage.<sup>37</sup>

The influence of Brecht on Adamov is very clear here; it was in

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.31.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.31. (Adamov's emphasis)

very similar terms that Brecht had described the function of historical distance in the theatre:

Bei der Historisierung wird ein bestimmtes Gesellschaftssystem vom Standpunkt eines anderen Gesellschaftssystem aus betrachtet.<sup>38</sup>

But it is interesting to observe Adamov's use of the words 'reconnaissance' and 'dépistage'. The idea of recognition is fundamental to all of Adamov's plays. We have seen that in putting a play like La Parodie on the stage, Adamov wished to provoke in the audience a recognition of its own situation. In Paolo Paoli, this element retained all its importance, but was reinforced by the idea of 'dépistage', of tracking down a truth not immediately apparent from the facts. This is what he described in the 1961 passage quoted above as "ce démontage des mécanismes". The truth to be tracked down, the mechanism to be dismantled, was:

La coexistence et l'antagonisme des classes, dont l'une est toujours opprimée par l'autre.<sup>39</sup>

As a model of the way this could be done in drama, he took Brecht's The Exception and the Rule . While admitting that this was not properly speaking a historical play, he maintained that the same procedure could work, and even more effectively, if situated in a historical period. What this play showed was how the dominant class could use any argument in order to maintain its dominance; it might be true or it might be the complete opposite, the use to which it was put

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38 Schriften zum Theater V, p.294.

39 Ici et Maintenant, p.31.

always remained the same. He made it clear that in Paolo Paoli he was trying to show much the same thing in a given historical context:

J'essaie de montrer, à travers différents personnages, la continuité des intérêts, sans cesse masquée par la discontinuité des opinions. 40

The rest of the article is devoted to an elaboration of the way a society based only on competition, leads inevitably to the creation of impostures on a large scale. He illustrated this with many examples from recent history, like the Panama Affair, or the machinations of the Marquis de Montpesat. In both cases he sketched out the plot of a play which he imagined he would like to write around these subjects. Both are interesting in that they contain similarities with Paolo Paoli and the important characteristics of that play can be highlighted by seeing how they appear in these sketches.

In all three cases, the form of the action was 'epic'. Like so many of Brecht's plays, Mother Courage, The life of Galileo (whose name, Galileo Galilei, was the model for Paolo Paoli), The resistible rise of Arturo Ui, to name but three, they followed a character through a developing dramatic action which depended on showing how he reacted to changing social circumstances, how they acted on him, and how he acted on them. In order to achieve this, the 'epic' theatre technique of short scenes joined by linking projections was used. This dramatic progression through short scenes, without the projections, had been used, as we have seen, in Adamov's early plays. But where these had

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40 Ibid., p.34.

used this to present a circular, unchanging situation of 'incurable' despair, the situation was now able to develop towards something other than despair.

In the sketches and in Paolo Paoli, Adamov deliberately chose historical material because of

l'incroyable poésie que contiennent les faits eux-mêmes, et à laquelle aucune imagination, si puissante fût-elle, ne saurait suppléer.<sup>41</sup>

This shows an interesting development of the poetic situation as it was used in the early plays; one is reminded of Brecht's comment, after reading Auden's plays, that perhaps the poetry should lie more in the dramatic situations themselves, since, as he said, "Die Wahrheit ist Konkret"<sup>42</sup>. Adamov found it not only concrete, but remarkably poetic, as we shall see.

He also chose historical material because of the authentic 'dépistage' that could be accomplished with such a subject if it represented a genuine incident in recent history. As he said of Paolo Paoli, the deliberate imposture of the governing class must not be considered independently, but

Comme faisant partie intégrante de ce jeu de la concurrence d'où devait sortir la guerre mondiale.<sup>43</sup>

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41 Ibid., p.44.

42 John Willett, The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht, London, 1967, p.122.

43 Ici et Maintenant, p.36.

Finally, and perhaps most important, all three plays aimed to debunk or to 'démystifier' as Adamov, along with the editors of Théâtre Populaire, tended to say.<sup>44</sup> If he wished to 'track down' the real state of affairs, Adamov had to show up the false arguments that were used to disguise this reality. Talking of this, he provided the key for understanding Paolo Paoli, both in its humour, and in its serious intentions:

La disproportion entre les intérêts des plumassiers - intérêts apparemment légers, puisqu'il s'agit de plumes! - et le langage que les plumassiers emploient pour les défendre - celui de tous les chefs d'entreprise - révèle les impostures générales de ce langage.<sup>45</sup>

In the course of this revelation, he developed in a most effective manner the technique of debunking hollow or falsifying rhetoric which he had used in Le Ping-Pong, but in Paolo Paoli the impostures are not present only in the language of the characters, but in their whole lives.

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44 See eg. Ibid., p.32.

45 Ibid., p.36.

## PART III

Chapter 2 Paolo Paoli

Paolo Paoli is a play about feathers, butterflies and buttons.

But paradoxically, this seemingly frivolous subject was made to serve the serious purpose of tracking down the social and political origins of the First World War. Adamov stumbled on the idea of using butterflies when 'ghosting' a book for a distinguished entomologist, Eugène Le Moulton. His attitude to Le Moulton was graphically rendered in a few terse sentences of L'Homme et l'Enfant:

Le Moulton, second collectionneur de papillons  
du monde, le British Museum est le premier.  
Le Moulton chargé d'ouvrir à l'île du Diable la  
correspondance de Dreyfus.  
Le Moulton voulant faire jeter un homme dans la  
prison du bagne parce qu'il avait tué son tamanoir<sup>1</sup>.  
Le Moulton est une canaille, mais qu'importe  
puisque en l'écouter évoquer son passé, l'idée  
me vient de ma pièce Paolo Paoli.<sup>2</sup>

Adamov borrowed much from the life of Le Moulton when creating Paolo's circumstances. Paolo's father, a Corsican and a civil servant in French Guyana like Le Moulton, had, like him, built up a vast butterfly collection by using escaped convicts as his butterfly hunters. Paolo himself had grown up in Guyana, inherited the collection, and returned to France, where, like Le Moulton in later life, he made a good living off the butterfly trade, and continued to receive supplies of

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<sup>1</sup> L'Homme et l'Enfant, p.118.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.117.

specimens from the ex-convicts hiding from French justice in Guyana. In an interview, Adamov stated how the subject had first appealed to him:

Naturellement, je fus séduit par l'image à la fois burlesque et tragique du forçat armé d'un filet à papillons.<sup>3</sup>

The play is built on a series of similar comic contrasts; events of great importance are repeatedly seen through a comic and diminishing perspective. For example, one of the events in the play which heralds the onset of the First World War is Hulot-Vasseur's reorganisation of his factory, which abandons the manufacture of fashionable feather products in favour of buttons for army uniforms.

Adamov's very decision to build his play about the origins of the First World War around a butterfly trader and a feather industrialist, showed his desire to create a comic tension between the important events of the period and its ridiculous representatives: "le seul rapprochement des mots "industrie" et "plumassière" est comique". This enabled him to develop the comic techniques of Le Ping-Pong to even greater effect, since they were set in a definite historical period. He continued to believe, as will be seen later, that the best way to approach a historical period was not to describe its great events in the grand manner, but to approach it through marginal events, and characters set in a comic perspective:

Que l'on ne vienne pas me dire, en pays socialistes que j'ai eu tort de parler de plumes et de papillons au lieu de montrer simplement la

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<sup>3</sup> Ici et Maintenant, p.47.

rivalité de Krupp et de Schneider. "Transposer"  
 toujours et donc rire toujours.<sup>4</sup>

But of course there were also, in butterflies, feathers and buttons, more serious economic and sociological implications than the above contrasts suggest, and these gave to the play a wider dimension: instead of contenting himself with exploiting the delightfully whimsical suggestiveness of the "industrie plumassière", Adamov wished to show its real place in the capitalist system. In butterflies, he discovered not merely an object of aesthetic delight prompting the collector's instinct, but also, beneath this and masked by it, a very profitable merchandise. Behind the apparent frivolity and insignificance of the feather business, he discovered the startling economic fact that until 1912, feather products formed the fourth largest of France's exports. And this bald economic fact points to a long French tradition of cultivating the luxury product, which in turn means creating a home market for it by encouraging frivolity and ostentatious extravagance to be seen as virtues in public life. This love of ostentation can be seen to have reached a climax in the early years of this century and hence the importance of Adamov choosing to situate his play during 'la belle époque'.

His choice of material was governed not only by his search for a link between the serious and the comic, but also for a link between "la vie dite individuelle" and "la vie dite collective", which he also

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<sup>4</sup> Théâtre III, pp.7-8.

described as 'the private' and 'the public'. He wished to give an account of the complex relationships existing between the lives of private individuals and the large movements of history at the national and international level. With extraordinary skill, he succeeded in combining, in the private lives of his cast of seven characters, all the important aspects of French society of 'La belle époque': the church and free masons, the army, the traders, the worlds of business and of fashion, the servant class, the working class, even the convicts, colonial administrators and missionaries. There are echoes of all the great historical conflicts or issues: the Dreyfus affair, the Boer War, the conflicts between imperialist powers in South Africa, Egypt, Morocco, the Balkan war, the Franco-Russian alliance, the 'entente cordiale', in short all the important international events that paved the way for the First World War.

Running through the representation of all the events of Paolo Paoli, both at the private and the public level, there is one motivating force, 'le troc'. As Adamov said:

la vérité de la pièce ... c'est le troc, c'est l'échange. Et si j'ai choisi la période d'avant 1914, c'est parce qu'il s'agit d'une période qui est passée de la frivolité la plus apparente aux événements les plus dramatiques. Si bien que le mouvement de la vie privée pouvait particulièrement bien, en l'occurrence, coller avec celui de la vie publique.<sup>5</sup>

The link between the private, (particularly his own private obsessions) and the public, was one which had preoccupied Adamov since

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<sup>5</sup> Ici et Maintenant, p.70.

L'Aveu, and was alluded to in Part II.<sup>6</sup> It was not a very great problem so long as his basic philosophy was fatalistic. Thus, in La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre, he was able to present the 'public' sector as merely a reflection of Le Mutilé's internal state of neurotic impotence. But with the rejection of fatalism he felt he had to reject the use of his private neuroses (although he later came back to them once again). Le Ping-Pong marked a half-way stage, in which private neurosis was far less important than in the early plays. In Paolo Paoli and Le Printemps 71 there are no haunted, neurotic characters at all. No longer is the public sector seen principally as a reflection of the private. It is rather the reverse that is true: the private world of Paolo, Hulot-Vasseur and L'Abbé is a reflection of the large capitalist world, although they do not realise this.

Their behaviour, however, is not very different from that of the characters in the early plays. Although they are not dominated in the same way by sexual obsession, they are just as thoroughly dominated by their obsession with the circular world of trade and exchange. The private intrigue shown in the play is one in which all relationships have become dominated by commercial considerations. At first only objects change hands, but soon wife and mistress, servant and worker are bargained and exchanged. As we shall see, the plot becomes a frenzied spiral of self-interest, through which Adamov examines the

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<sup>6</sup> Chapter 5, pp. 251-252.

types of conflicts which a capitalist society inevitably gives rise to as the characters lose all sense of any values other than trade values and lose the ability to live for anything except objects. Their antics, as they are overwhelmed by the tide of war, seem no less grotesque, and no less futile than those of the characters in the early plays.

Much of this is of course achieved by Adamov's choice of central objects; one of the most important things for an understanding of the play is to see the precise function of these objects. Adamov was fond of using a striking object around which the obsessions of the central characters could be constructed. In La Parodie, the object was Lili, in L'Invasion, the papers, in Le Ping-Pong the pin table, in Paolo Paoli, feathers, butterflies and buttons. One of the works Adamov most admired was Gogol's Dead Souls, for precisely this reason: in the dead peasants which Tchitchikov was trying to buy, he saw a wonderful example of a suggestive central object around which to build up a drama of universal implications.

But the objects of Paolo Paoli, like the dead souls of Gogol's work are different from the objects of Adamov's early plays in one important respect: they are not important solely for what they symbolise. They are important for what they are, and indeed, they do not symbolise anything in the strict sense of the term; the feathers, for instance, are used in such a way as to suggest all the frivolity of 'la belle époque', but they do not symbolise that frivolity,

Bernard Dort insisted on this in his review of Paolo Paoli for Les Temps Modernes. He wrote that whereas in Le Ping-Pong the pin table consortium was a symbol of the capitalist world as a whole, in Paolo Paoli the butterfly and feather trades were not. Rather, they provided examples of human behaviour that could be approached primarily in their own right, simply as examples, but could also extend to give insights into all human relationships. Dort resumed this rather neatly:

Dans Le Ping-Pong, le monde se résolvait en un seul objet: ce billard électrique: avec Paolo Paoli, ce sont les objets qui ouvrent sur le monde.<sup>8</sup>

The use of objects reflects the new orientation of the whole play, since their real historical existence is important. It is important to the play that during the years 1900-1914, feather products, buttons, and even butterflies were of commercial value. At the same time, of course, they suggested the more superficial aspects of 'la belle époque' and were thus exploited for their ambiguity, for the different levels of meaning and association that they contained.

In this choice of objects, we can further detect exactly the same concern for poetry in drama that Adamov showed in his early plays. His use of poetry as defined in Chapter 5, Part II, was confirmed and

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<sup>8</sup> Bernard Dort, 'Paolo Paoli ou la découverte du réel', Les Temps Modernes, décembre 1957, no.142, p.1107. NB this article is reproduced in his Théâtre Public, Paris, 1967, pp.255-262, where the sentence is slightly altered to read: "dans Le Ping-Pong, le monde se résumait à un seul objet: le billard électrique; avec Paolo Paoli, les objets ouvrent sur le monde." (p.256)

reiterated; he was still attracted by a dramatic situation in which different levels of meaning could meet, but he found these conditions more effectively fulfilled by the semi-ridiculous feather and butterfly trades during 'la belle époque' than by the products of his obsessions and dreams. He mentioned the word 'poésie' in connection with historical realities a number of times. In 'Théâtre, Argent et Politique', when discussing the type of historical play that he wished to write, he mentioned 'l'incroyable poésie que contiennent les faits eux-mêmes',<sup>9</sup> and in one of the discussions held on the subject of Paolo Paoli, he said:

Je crois qu'il y a dans la réalité historique  
même ... une poésie si effarante que toute  
invention strictement personnelle paraît  
malingre en comparaison.<sup>10</sup>

In Paolo Paoli, his aim was to provide both laughter and outrage; he wished to show the disastrous results of a society whose mainspring was the profit motive, "montrer comment la concurrence peut saper un régime qui n'est fondé que sur elle"<sup>11</sup>, to show how the 'sacred' laws of free trade in the Third Republic were to lead inevitably to a 'trade war'. And in order to do this, he held up to ridicule, not the grand manoeuvres of the imperialist powers, but the sordid circuit of barter in the feather and butterfly trades:

Les ressorts d'un commerce inutile étant les  
mêmes que ceux d'un commerce utile, l'opération

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<sup>9</sup> Ici et Maintenant, p.44.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.66.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.43.

commerciale (inutile, même si l'objet auquel elle s'applique est utile) apparaît sous son vrai jour, démasquée<sup>12</sup>

Since both objects, particularly feathers, were genuinely objects of capital investment, manufacture and trade, Adamov could employ them in a particular appropriate way, by exploiting their essential uselessness, to reveal the workings of a capitalist economy.

Adamov thus had a dramatic subject which was not only historical, but which also carried the seeds of both a comic and a tragic development in the same way as the image of the beggar in the metre that was the starting point for La Parodie. However, it required very skilful dramatic handling indeed if the link between the private and the public were not to seem artificial. Most critics who have written on the play seem to agree that Adamov did exhibit the necessary degree of skill.

Esslin, for example, wrote:

The characters are most ingeniously chosen to represent a whole microcosm of the political, religious, national, and social forces involved in the origins of the First World War. Adamov's brilliance as a dramatist is shown by the astonishing ingenuity with which he has condensed all this - and extremely convincingly - into a cast of only seven characters.<sup>13</sup>

The answer to how Adamov was able to achieve his link between the 'public' history of the pre-war years and the private worlds of Paolo and Hulot-Vasseur, is chiefly to be seen in three things: the

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.58.

<sup>13</sup> Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, London, 1962, p.86.

dramatic construction, the treatment of character and the treatment of language.

To take the first of these three things first, the play's construction was marked by a technical innovation: the use of 'projections'. Since the historical truth of the play's circumstances was so important to its overall effect, it was necessary that the audience should appreciate fully the historical veracity of what it was seeing. It was also important for them to be reminded of the salient events of the given year in which the following scene was set. In order to achieve this, Adamov preceded each scene in the play with a series of 'phrases projetées' drawn from all manner of books, newspapers, and other publications of the period. While these were being projected onto a screen, the audience was to hear songs dating from the years in which the ensuing scenes took place.

The quantity of contemporary critical comment on these projections shows that they were seen at the time as quite an innovation, despite Brecht's earlier use of a similar technique. Brecht's projections were, of course, intended to operate as part of the 'V-effekt', and were generally no more than a title or a single sentence chosen to highlight the point of a scene. Adamov's projections were more substantial, having the important function of supplying historical detail, but they also fulfilled the distancing function, and achieved the effect gained by Piscator, of preventing the audience from being taken in by the characters' rhetoric.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> See above (Part III) Chapter 1, p.281.

This last function is particularly important, for the projections made a considerable contribution towards the unmasking of false rhetoric (or what Adamov called "les impostures ... de ce langage"<sup>15</sup>), which is central to the whole meaning of the play. An example can be seen in the very first 'phrase projetée', which immediately sets the tone of a society which liked to dress up crude realities with fine phrases:

L'Exposition, dont les travaux s'achèvent avec une remarquable activité, nous apportera sans doute un réconfortant appoint de cette manne aurifère après laquelle brament les gouvernements et les gouvernés, nerf de la guerre, moelle de la paix. Le Petit Journal.<sup>16</sup>

The first group of 'phrases projetées' also shows how links can be made between the private and the public by situating the feathers and butterflies firmly in the world of trade:

Les produits de l'industrie de la plume occupent le quatrième rang sur la liste des exportations françaises. Chambre syndicale des fabricants de plumes fantaisie pour modes.  
Pour contenter tant d'acheteurs, il me fallait beaucoup de chasseurs. EUGENE LE MOULT  
Mes Chasses aux papillons<sup>17</sup>

As well as placing the events of the play in this perspective, Adamov was able to show that the attitudes of his characters were representative of views genuinely held by a large number of people at this period. For example, he included in the projections phrases

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<sup>15</sup> See ibid. p.294.

<sup>16</sup> Théâtre III, p.15.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.16.

from both Chamberlain and Barrès describing territorial affairs in Africa in terms of naked barter. Barrès, for example:

Il y a du bon dans l'accord franco-allemand.  
Le Maroc, c'est superbe; l'échange contre le  
Congo, c'est acceptable. MAURICE BARRÈS  
Mes Cahiers<sup>18</sup>

L'Abbé's interminable commentaries on the international situation are very much in this vein. Furthermore, Adamov could show by means of the projections that during this period war was never seen as the catastrophe that it always is, but rather as a normal and integral part of the process of trade: discussing the Boer war and the war in the Balkans, Le Petit Journal and Die Deutsche Tage Zeitung both showed themselves principally interested in how their standing in the arms trade was affected. The overriding importance of trade considerations in many peoples' minds is shown by a phrase from M. Guillemin in 1912:

Faites que le présent emprunt ne soit pas  
conclu avant que des avantages positifs aient  
été accordés à l'industrie française en  
compensation de l'aide que le gouvernement  
bulgare trouve de nouveau auprès de l'épargne  
française. M. GUILLEMIN président de l'Union  
des industries métallurgiques et minières ...  
à R. Poincaré, président du Conseil.<sup>19</sup>

And the two 'phrases' which follow show, with wry humour, how the society world covered up these unpleasant realities by busying itself with charity appeals and with the latest fashions:

Mme Bompard a lancé un appel à la charité de la  
France pour les blessés de la guerre des.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.83.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp.83-84.

Balkans. Elle a recueilli cent soixante-huit francs. Les Journaux.

Rien n'est plus probable qu'une mode persane pour le prochain hiver. L'Illustration.<sup>20</sup>

The alternation between allusions to historical events in the projections, and scenes of private life given in the Tableaux provides the very movement which the play wishes to establish as that of French society of the period: a society defined by the pressure of external historical events. The members of this society are under the delusion that they control these events whereas in fact they are controlled by them, rather as Balzac's Rastignac thinks that he is in control of his life, but is in fact forced to follow the inevitable course laid down for him by the very organisation of the society in which he desires to 'percer'.

The pressure of historical events defining the attitudes and activities of the private world of Paolo Paoli can be seen by looking at any one of the characters. Paolo himself is a particularly good example; as the play opens, he is complaining that the attempt on the life of the Shah of Persia has prevented him from making a good sale of butterflies to the Shah. L'Abbé, with whom he is talking, does not point out the discrepancy between Paolo's concern for his butterfly trade and the World events in question, because he does not see it; he simply quarrels with Paolo's conclusion. This provides the play with its remarkable opening sentence by l'Abbé, which immediately makes

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.84.

the link between the public and the private and carries us straight into the atmosphere of the characters' small world in which the large events are seen in terms of small private rivalries:

Vous êtes extraordinaire, Paolo! Vous vous en prenez au chah et pas aux anarchistes; or, sans les anarchistes, le souverain de la Perse n'aurait pas été victime de cet attentat - manqué, grâce au Ciel! - et il vous aurait certainement acheté, comme il vous l'avait fait espérer, un joli lot de papillons.<sup>21</sup>

At the beginning of the first Tableau, it does not in fact seem that the attempt on the Shah's life will have any greater effect on Paolo than that of depriving him of a good sale. As the play progresses, the pattern of this episode is repeated, as other historical events intervene more and more seriously in the little world of Paolo and Hulot-Vasseur, but they continue to trade and barter as if they were completely free of the influence of these events. In fact, we are shown

loi du trafic entraînant  
des trafiquants.<sup>22</sup>  
La mesure du déterminisme par lequel la grande  
loi du trafic entraîne la fausse liberté  
des trafiquants.<sup>22</sup>

As each of the characters' tricks, by which they hope to gain advantage in the little circle, is foiled by another character, and as historical events bear down on them, they talk as if they are free to make the choices which the audience can see to be determined largely by outside events. At the opening of the last Tableau, Paolo is still seeing events only in the light of his butterfly business:

PAOLO, (triste et goguenard à la fois): En somme,

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.17.

<sup>22</sup> François Wahl, 'Lecture de Paolo Paoli', Esprit, no.11, novembre 1957, p.562.

la Belgique violée, le frérot menacé,  
 l'Entente Cordiale, l'Alliance Russe, les  
 liens conjugaux, tout ça, c'était pour  
 noyer le poisson, c'était pour que je  
 lâche mon Charaxes!<sup>23</sup>

But the interpretation is no longer valid and the conclusion of the scene shows Paolo finally realising that he has to face up to larger issues.

Dort particularly stressed the process whereby the small private world of the characters was gradually defined under the pressure of the capitalist world. We have seen that for him one of the most important things about Paolo Paoli was that Adamov had abandoned the symbolism of his early plays; he developed this idea further, suggesting that as a result of this, and partly by means of the projections, the development of the play itself became an explanation of the way in which history develops:

Dans la précédente pièce d'Adamov, Le Ping-Pong, on pouvait dire que le monde réel était symbolisé par cette petite société qui tournait autour d'un appareil à sous, appareil à sous qui était l'expression du Capital. Mais je crois qu'Adamov abandonne cette technique d'avant-garde, et il institue un rapport entre un milieu étroit, fermé, qui auparavant était symbolique et qui ne l'est plus, et l'évolution même de l'Histoire. Je pense que c'est ce qu'il a essayé de faire, et même réussi, avec les projections qui précèdent chaque tableau, et d'autre part avec la progression même de sa pièce.<sup>24</sup>

We have seen how Adamov attempts to make this link by means of the projections; we must also examine the play's structure to see how

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<sup>23</sup> Théâtre III, p.135.

<sup>24</sup> Ici et Maintenant, p.77.

'la progression même de la pièce' contributes towards it.

The play progresses through a series of circular developments.

A repetitive, circular movement is inherent in the very subject-matter of Paolo Paoli, as Sartre pointed out:

L'essentiel c'est qu'il a réussi à donner à la pièce une structure qui corresponde au sujet qu'il traite. Ce sujet, ce ne sont pas les individus que nous avons devant nous, mais le mécanisme économique de l'échange qui devient le mouvement même de la pièce.<sup>25</sup>

The spiralling action of the play's twelve tableaux is almost entirely built around the activity of buying and selling. Whenever the characters meet they have some barter in mind, and the majority of the dialogue is directed towards accomplishing some kind of exchange. The circular dramatic structure to which this gives rise is particularly evident in the second part of the play where, in the course of six tableaux, the female Charaxes moves round and round between the different characters: first Paolo refuses to sell it to Hulot-Vasseur; then Rose steals it and takes it to Hulot-Vasseur, who pays her a derisory sum for it. Paolo, discovering his loss, rushes off to Rose's flat to search for the butterfly, accompanied by L'Abbé; they fail, but Hulot-Vasseur returns the butterfly to Paolo, and Rose, frightened, returns the money. Finally, using l'Abbé as an intermediary, Hulot-Vasseur buys back the Charaxes from Paolo, who gives the money straight to Rose.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.70.

As both Sartre and Dort pointed out<sup>26</sup>, the movement of the play is not just circular; it spirals up to the point where it is brought to a halt and is turned back on itself. From the psychological point of view, Paolo's change of heart is not particularly well motivated, as many critics pointed out. In addition, Adamov himself criticised the ending, making the point that Paolo, by giving the money for the sale of the Charaxes to Rose, is hardly attacking the root of the problem which the play has exposed.

But what Adamov does achieve by this device is an explanation in retrospect of what the play was about. Up to this point, when an object changed hands, money was seldom mentioned. The important part of the transaction was always the advantage gained or lost in the primitive process of barter; the money itself seemed somewhat incidental. It was more important that objects were being kept moving round the 'circuit', but the 'circuit' itself was, of course, never mentioned. In the last scene Paolo suddenly understands the monstrous futility of the 'circuit' and instead of playing his Charaxes like a trump in the game of barter, he opts out of the game:

cet argent-là ne reviendra plus tourner dans le  
sale petit circuit! ... Cet argent-là, il ira  
tout droit à ceux qui en ont besoin pour manger. <sup>27</sup>

Instead of representing counters in a self-sufficient game of barter, the money will be able to be of practical use to someone who needs it. The most ironic line of the play is l'Abbé's horrified reply:

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p.70 and Dort, op. cit.

<sup>27</sup> Théâtre III, p.141.

C'est ... c'est la loi de la jungle!<sup>28</sup>

Adamov's demonstration of the way in which capitalism completely inverts the reasonable values of human charity is complete.

In creating this circular succession of tableaux, Adamov drew largely on his earlier methods of construction. In fact the structure seems at first to be very similar to that of La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre, which shows the small circle of individual action set within the larger context of an equally circular political action concerning the whole society. The effectiveness of a circular structure for this play, or for Le Sens de la Marche, was in the way that it created a dream-like feeling of being caught in a perpetually recurring situation. The same use is made of repetition in Paolo Paoli, where the effect is all the more powerful since what seems to be like a nightmare is in fact historical reality.

But in Paolo Paoli the characters are not doomed to remain forever inside their vicious circle. The pressure of external events does have an important part to play in forcing them into their futile activities, but in the last analysis, they are seen to carry the responsibility for external events as well as for their own lives, since they will sacrifice anything sooner than abandon their circular world of trade and exploitation. François Wahl pointed out that it was not new for Adamov to set in motion an absurd mechanism, but it was new for him to assign to society the responsibility for this mechanism, which

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28 Ibid., p.141.

had formerly been attributed to our metaphysical condition. Because of its circularity, Adamov achieved in the structure of the play itself a strong impression of the frenzied struggle to gain the upper hand which he wished to suggest was the inevitable relationship between men in a capitalist system:

A bien entendre Paolo Paoli, le capitalisme est une frénésie et nous fait retrouver à l'échelle d'une société l'un de ces délires qui secouaient les familles de Strindberg.<sup>29</sup>

The frenzied spiralling of the plot becomes a picture of the economic circuit which is the subject-matter of the play. As in all of Adamov's plays, the image of the circle is dominant; here its meaning is concrete rather than metaphysical: it is an image of the circular economic world of capitalist trade and of any system which relies on the exploitation of man by man. The repetition of actions such as the return of Marpeaux or the sale of butterflies between Paolo and Hulot-Vasseur emphasises the transparent circularity of the world of 'le troc', and the extreme complexity of the plot highlights the complexity of a world in which every person is allied with another to gain advantage over a third.

This complexity within the circularity is demonstrated at its most comical in tableau 3, where there is a hilariously farcical build-up of 'troc' and counter- 'troc': first Stella, then l'Abbé come to enlist Hulot-Vasseur's aid in foiling Paolo's plans for Marpeaux

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<sup>29</sup> Wahl, op. cit., p.563.

without realising that Marpeaux and Rose have already asked him for help on their own behalf. In addition, l'Abbé is going behind Paolo's back in order to sell directly to Hulot-Vasseur some butterflies, which have been sent to him from brother Basile in China on Paolo's suggestion, but for which Paolo was then not willing to give the price demanded. Just as the sale is being transacted between the freemason and l'Abbé, Paolo appears, and sums up in the last line of the scene, his indignation at the double trick which has been played on him:

(A Hulot-Vasseur) Et il faudrait encore que  
je vous paye, vous, pour que vous lui achetiez  
ça, à lui!<sup>30</sup>

This blow-by-blow build-up, containing a strong element of farce technique, owes as much to traditional methods of plot construction as the repetitive structure owes to Adamov's early plays. Particularly striking is the economy of Adamov's comic technique. Although writing his first 'situated' play, he never included superfluous details for the sake of gratuitous realism. This is particularly noticeable in the way the entrances and exits of the characters are engineered: as in farce, these are done with the minimum of realistic explanation for their movements. Only when it can reveal something of their game does Adamov make them explain their movements; otherwise, they simply appear when their presence is necessary to advance the situation and they seldom mention doors, stairs, hat-stands, or other stand-bys of realistic theatre. Adamov emphasised this in an interview he gave to Le Monde, when he said:

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<sup>30</sup> Théâtre III, p.50.

Réalisme, oui, mais réalisme légèrement décollé  
de la réalité.<sup>31</sup>

The realism of the play is a very carefully constructed, heightened realism and it is also of considerable importance to the new treatment of character in this play, which marked his acceptance of the principle of characterisation in the theatre:

Il fut un temps - lorsque Antonin Artaud était  
pour moi la vérité du théâtre - où je croyais  
qu'on pouvait chasser la psychologie du théâtre.  
Je ne le crois plus.<sup>32</sup>

Just as Adamov took great delight in situating his first historical play in its precise context, so he also enjoyed creating characters, though they are never allowed to run away with the play, but remain strictly subordinated to the demands of the plot. They could be defined as 'realistic caricature'. Each of the characters is given sufficient depth for us to believe in him or her, but their characteristics are limited to those which provide the necessary interaction to make the plot progress. With the exception of Rose and Marpeaux, all are guided by self-interest usually expressed in the form of an overriding obsession (e.g. butterflies in the case of Paolo). They stick to these obsessions with great intensity and we never for a moment see them in a relaxed mood of generous self-forgetfulness. Indeed, it is part of

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<sup>31</sup> Le Monde, 19.1.58. (See chapter 3, p.361 for another analysis of the relationship between truth to life and realism on the stage.)

<sup>32</sup> Ici et Maintenant, p.84.

Adamov's design to show that they are entirely consumed by their greed so that they become dehumanised, living only for their function in the commercial circuit. Thus, although realistically portrayed, they are only half the human beings they should be.

It was necessary for them to have this constant basic motivation, since the purpose of the play was to show up the disguises beneath which they attempt to hide. Like Molière's Tartufe, the play examines human motivation and shows how people tend, more or less consciously, to cover their self-interested actions with the false appearances of fine sentiments. Apart from Rose and Marpeaux every character in the play indulges in a 'tartuferie' of some kind, and, as in Molière's play, the humour results from the realisation of the discrepancy between the real and the apparent motive.

L'Abbé is the character most guilty of such posing behaviour. In the very first scene, he takes up a disinterested, unworldly pose:

Il existe dans le monde d'autres valeurs que  
celles de la bourse, monsieur Vasseur,  
réfléchissez-y!<sup>33</sup>

And yet, as the play develops, he shows himself to be the readiest of all the characters to sacrifice everything to commercial values. In the interests of commerce, first on behalf of his brother Basile, and then on behalf of his 'yellow' union, always to some extent on his own behalf, every one of his ostensible 'values' is sacrificed. Even while he is professing his convictions, his words are contradicted by his

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<sup>33</sup> Théâtre III, p.23. NB The hypocritical insistence on the importance of virtue by those who encourage and profit by the frivolous 'industries de luxe' can be traced back to the debate on luxury in early eighteenth century France.

actions. As he drives a hard bargain with Paolo for the price of  
 r) brot brother Basile's butterflies, he pretends to be acting out of the deepest  
 friendship:

Paolo, comprenez-moi: à l'idée que vous, mon  
 ami, pourriez essayer un refus de mon propre  
 frère, à cette idée ... Non, je ne peux pas!<sup>34</sup>

But the supreme example of l'Abbé's tartuferie is in his decision  
 to betray Marpeaux to Hulot-Vasseur in tableau 11. In reality, he has  
 no choice: Hulot-Vasseur has threatened to stop employing l'Abbé's  
 catholic workers if he does not supply him with the information needed  
 to get rid of Marpeaux. The situation is complicated by the fact that  
 l'Abbé has a personal grievance against Marpeaux, so it is doubly in his  
 interests to see him confounded. But before he can behave with such  
 infamy towards his former protégé, he needs to find a noble pretext for  
 his action. Hulot-Vasseur understands this perfectly and hands him  
 the pretext of patriotism:

De plus, vos scrupules ne me semblent guère de  
 mise, à l'heure où le pays a besoin de tous  
 les dévouements.<sup>35</sup>

L'Abbé grasps at this straw and there follows a brilliant speech in  
 which the audience sees him going through the process of covering his  
 real motive of self-interest with the false motive of patriotism as  
 le Tartufe covers his real concupiscence with the handkerchief of false  
 modesty:

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34 Ibid., p.35.

35 Ibid., p.129.

Cui... Ai-je le droit, pour résister à la tentation d'une vengeance personnelle, de ne pas venger. non, venger n'est pas le mot... de ne pas défendre mon pays contre les attaques, d'où qu'elles viennent?... Certes, Rose sera très malheureuse, et moi, moi... (Sincère) je ne saurai plus où me mettre. Mais ai-je le droit, oui, le droit, d'oublier l'importance (Il retrouve sa vivacité d'élocution et sa fierté) que peut avoir un stock de boutons livré trop tôt, livré trop tard, à l'heure où, en Alsace, les troupes allemandes revêtent la tenue de campagne? (Pause) Monsieur Hulot-Vasseur, j'ai hésité mais... (Très grave.) Mon seul tort fut de vous faire le témoin de ce combat qui aurait dû se livrer dans la solitude.<sup>36</sup>

The particular deception which Adamov shows up by means of l'Abbé's sham idealism is that of the man who claims to be motivated only by high ideals, but who will always compromise for personal advantage in individual cases, and who thus objectively protects a system of exploitation by covering its worst excesses with fine phrases.

Paolo is as guilty of impostures as l'Abbé, though they are of a different kind. He does not spin fine phrases, but plays the part of the simple man who looks facts in the face. This rôle fits ideally with his determination to exploit anyone and anything that comes his way, since it allows him to be friendly, jovial, even to seem concerned, but also provides an alibi when his fundamental self-interest shows through: as he sends Marpeaux off to Morocco, he can pretend that he is only facing up to the realities of the situation and that this is the best he can do for him at that moment.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.129.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp.39-40.

From the first tableau we see the self-interest behind his affirmations of friendship, as he fawns over Hulot-Vasseur, even passing on his own wife when he thinks there is commercial advantage to be gained. When his protestations of disinterested generosity are loudest, the audience can see him most thoroughly working for his own advantage. Three points in the play stand out in this respect: the first is Marpeaux' unexpected return from Venezuela, when Paolo, by promising to get his conviction quashed, persuades him to hunt butterflies in Morocco. The second is in tableau 4 where, by paying off Cécile's debt to Rose with apparent generosity, he effectively buys back Rose as his own mistress. The third is when, with protestations at his own stupidity ("Ah, vous pouvez vous vanter de me faire marcher")<sup>38</sup>, he agrees to buy back a number of butterflies from Hulot-Vasseur, since this is once again his only means of keeping Rose, and since it also offers a good chance of getting his revenge on Hulot-Vasseur in the long run.

Paolo's favourite imposture is that of the artist, the connoisseur of beauty. But this apparently disinterested aesthetic delight is unmasked when Paolo uses it as an excuse for rejecting Hulot-Vasseur's proposition that they go into business together making butterfly buttons: it does not seem to him a sound commercial speculation, but his answer is couched in these terms:

Vous comprenez, mes clairs de lune, mes cendriers,  
mes presse-papiers, ce sont de vrais objets,

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p.80.

individuels, qu'on regarde; tandis que le bouton, c'est la série, c'est la Belle Jardinière! Sans vouloir me donner des gants, je suis tout de même un artiste!<sup>39</sup>

Of course Adamov is also making fun here of an idealised vision of art for art's sake.

The monetary appreciation that lies behind the aesthetic idealising of the collector is further brought out in the person of Hulot-Vasseur. The exclamations of both men at the beauty and delicacy of their specimens are reserved particularly for those which are rarest, and their appreciation is always partially founded on excitement that such fragile creatures can be worth so much.

By comparison with Paolo, Hulot-Vasseur is a straight-forward man. His chief imposture is that of the 'good boss':

Il faut les comprendre: c'est assez dur, pour une femme, de rester debout dix heures consécutives, et si l'on s'en tient aux vendeuses, comme le prescrivait la loi, Millerand a raison, mille fois raison!<sup>40</sup>

He is vain, likes to think of himself as a reasonable, understanding man, even a seducer, though he is a little shy when Stella throws herself at him. By and large, he takes life as it comes, makes no bones about his aim to enrich himself, and has no embarrassing 'convictions' to live with. He is ready to accept help from l'Abbé if it suits him, despite the fact that he is a freemason. When he is forced to strike a pose, he does so rather recalcitrantly, as for example, when he agrees

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.86.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p.21.

to sign an anti-Protestant tract as the price of getting l'Abbé's catholic workers for his factory.

The two women, Stella and Cécile, are prize imposters. They are both nervous, highly strung, and perpetually striking a pose. Cécile, a fairly marginal character, is included in order to convey the posturings of the army during this period. She claims that the worst thing to have happened to her husband was when he was forced to salute Jaurès. She pretends concern for France's honour when in fact she is only concerned with her husband's advancement. She is the kind of woman who excels at playing the suffering saint but at the same time is out to squeeze as much money as she can from anyone who will listen to her. There is a good example of this at the beginning of tableau 2, where she does her level best to get a hat from Stella at a reduced price by promising to be of help to her by publicising her shop in high society. But when she fails to get a reduction, she is unable to contain her anger and begins to make sly allusions about the 'convict' labour employed by Stella and Paolo, to which Stella replies that she would at any rate have looked ridiculous in a feather hat at her age. Adapting the same shape as Molière's Célimène-Ar/inoé scene, this part of Tableau 2 gives a most amusing picture of the posturing society prude.

Stella is one of Adamov's most passionate female creations, constantly 'exaltée', unable to decide whether she is more disgusted by the petty posing of the men around her, or by the failure of her own poses intended to fascinate and subjugate them. At the beginning of the play, she is in a high state of excitement, because she has

succeeded in fascinating Hulot-Vasseur and in setting up her own shop, but she soon tires of commerce, becomes disgusted with the sordid world in which she lives, and, despite her own flightiness and instability, has a clear intuition of the disaster that is threatening. She sees that if anything is to change, the impostures of the characters must cease, and says to Paolo:

Tu peux te moquer, mais il arrive aussi que de  
mettre ses actes en accord avec ses idées<sup>41</sup>  
réussisse, même sur le plan le plus matériel!

But she soon realises that they are all incapable of this, even Hulot-Vasseur, in whom she at first believed. So she storms off to live in Germany, saying:

Adieu, Florent, prends garde de ne pas perdre  
ton parapluie dans les combats de rue! Oh, je  
vous laisse tous les deux à vos petites affaires,  
petites gens! ... j'aime encore mieux le bruit  
des bottes sur... sur le pavé, que celui des  
pièces d'un sou sur... sur...sur...<sup>42</sup>

But this too is an imposture: she does nothing to fight against the commercial world, and before the end of the play she is back in France, begging vainly to be taken back by Hulot-Vasseur. She is a figure drawn straight from the world of fashion which Hulot-Vasseur's feathers help to create. So long as she can flash and dazzle, fascinating men by her fragile frivolity, she is in her element. But as time runs out for the artificial world of fashion, she is the first to be crushed.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.62.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p.77.

The remaining two characters, Rose and Robert Marpeaux, provide a complete contrast to those discussed so far. They are, in a sense, the real centre of the play; they constitute the potential that the others are concerned to exploit. Both are flung from pillar to post and provide the only examples of real suffering in the play. All Adamov's sympathy for the victim of persecution, which in his earlier plays was focussed on the central characters is here concentrated in Rose and Robert. One function of their sufferings is simply to arouse indignation. Another is to make the lamentations of the other characters at their various small misfortunes seem all the more hollow.

The ease with which these two can be exploited is stressed throughout the play, culminating in Rose's pathetic attempt to play the game of 'le troc' herself: she steals Paolo's Charaxes, but is then incapable of doing anything with it, accepts a ludicrously small sum for it from Hulot-Vasseur, and realises too late that she is bound to be caught.

In Robert Marpeaux, Adamov not only portrayed a member of the exploited classes, but also gave a pointer to the sort of action that would be necessary if the situation were ever to be changed: the organisation of workers' unions, strikes, anti-war propaganda, etc. However, the criticism of the bourgeoisie in this play is very much stronger than the urge to action and showed that, as Adamov said:

La difficulté de porter à la scène un personnage  
'positif' demeure effrayante.<sup>43</sup>

The problem is that the most vivid type of character in the theatre

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<sup>43</sup> Ici et Maintenant, p.59.

is the one who impedes the plot with doubts and questions, or whose foolishness or bad faith can be unmasked, not the one who gets on and does whatever needs doing.

In any case, Marpeaux has no political awareness at the beginning: it develops with the action of the play. His growing realisation of the need for social action is a portrait of the young man at first trying naively to be accepted by the establishment, then slowly discovering that the establishment, whether in the form of Paolo or of l'Abbé, is interested only in maintaining whatever hold it has over him.

We have seen that while 'le troc' is the motivating force behind everything that happens in the play, it is always more or less disguised by the characters concerned, and the language they use to cover their tracks thus takes on great importance. In order to unmask them Adamov needed to unmask their particular use of rhetoric whose special effect was to cover the unsavoury realities of trade with an idealistic vocabulary. He discussed this in 'Théâtre, Argent et Politique'<sup>44</sup>, and it is another example of the way he applied 'avant-garde' techniques in his new style. In Le Ping-Pong, he had shown a situation in which the exploitation practised by big business could be masked by its glamorous language. In Paolo Paoli, he turned his debunking technique

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<sup>44</sup> See Ici et Maintenant, pp.34-37 and above(Part III),Chapter 1, pp. 293-294.

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on all forms of idealism. In so far as he took only examples of idealistic rhetoric which were characteristic of the 1900-1914 period, the scope of his meaning was limited. But in so far as the language of idealism is still used to mask the realities of capitalism, the play has perhaps a more genuine applicability to to-day's world than Le Ping-Pong, in which the implied absurdity of all life mitigated the treachery of the Consortium.<sup>45</sup>

The language which the characters of Paolo Paoli use to 'mystify' what is basically a bargain includes the language of aesthetic, religious and patriotic idealism. Examples like the speech of l'Abbé quoted above were described by Wahl as "Des chefs d'oeuvre d'une rhétorique truquée".<sup>46</sup> This falsified or falsifying rhetoric shows two things: it shows up the hypocrisy of the characters' own motives, and it also shows that, while they think they are free, the spectator can see that their language never quite coincides with their fundamental self-interest, or with their real situation in the ~~tr~~ of historical events, and it is these two things alone that truly govern their actions.

The first of these functions of rhetoric forms the principal comic technique of the play, relying on the irony implicit in the distance between the characters' words and their acts. In Adamov's own

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<sup>45</sup> Adamov's constant attempt to find a practical solution to the contradictions of life without slipping into a despairing attitude, is reflected in a note from his journal dated 1st February 1969, in which he objected to a journalist's comment on Mexico: "la beauté du mouvement de contestation réside dans sa révolte contre tout". He commented: "'Contre tout". Et les bourreaux de Mexico et d'Athènes de s'épanouir, de rire: ce n'est pas seulement nous qui sommes visés, c'est tout."

<sup>46</sup> Wahl, op. cit., p.563.

words, the humour of the play stemmed from:

la disproportion, et même de la contradiction  
entre les paroles qu'"ils" adressent à la majorité  
- paroles qui évoquent toujours des valeurs  
éternelles - et leurs actes, qui ont trait tou-  
jours à des intérêts extrêmement provisoires, les  
leurs.<sup>47</sup>

There are examples of this whenever Paolo and Hulot-Vasseur discuss butterflies. Although they are both interested chiefly in the butterflies' commercial value, they both like to pose as high-minded collectors interested only in the insects' beauty, and they adopt a suitably pompous mock-heroic tone:

PAOLO: ... A défaut de Chinois, que dites-vous de  
ce Zalmoxis femelle? Alléchante, la dame, non?  
HULOT-VASSEUR: ... Je ne me sens pas tellement  
misogyne.  
PAOLO: J'étais à peu près sûr qu'elle aurait  
l'heur de vous plaire.<sup>48</sup>

It is significant that as the rhetoric reaches this high point Hulot-Vasseur succumbs, and the sale takes place. Just as l'Abbé had to be able to persuade himself that it was his duty as a patriot to betray Marpeaux, so Hulot-Vasseur must have his 'folie' wrapped up in the right rhetoric before he will pay out.

A more extreme example of rhetoric used as pure fascination can be seen in Stella's first speech given to Hulot-Vasseur, in which she develops all the implications that can be drawn from an idealisation of feather decorations for hats:

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<sup>47</sup> Ici et Maintenant, p.62.

<sup>48</sup> Théâtre III, p.23.

STELLA: La plume m'attire tellement plus!  
 Une plume, c'est si léger, si doux! Même  
 morte, la plume bouge encore. (Elle rit.)  
 Enfin, à quoi bon imiter les fleurs? Ne vaut-  
 il pas mieux se promener parmi elles? Une  
 plume, au moins, c'est réel! (Paolo regarde  
 Hulot-Vasseur et rit.). Notez que j'ai  
 horreur de tous les réalismes, mais la plume,  
 j'entends la plume sur un chapeau, est à la  
 fois vraie et pas vraie du tout. Elle ruse,  
 elle suggère, elle simule, et j'aime, j'aime  
 - peut-être parce que je suis une femme, mais  
 pas seulement pour cela, pour d'autres raisons  
 aussi, j'en suis sûre - ce qui à la fois vous  
 rappelle et vous détourne. Et puis le seul  
 contact d'une plume sur la peau, quand on a  
 chaud, quand on a froid... (A Hulot-Vasseur.)  
 Vous ne trouvez pas? Vous n'avez pas ressenti  
 cette... cette attirance, monsieur Hulot-  
 Vasseur?<sup>49</sup>

In this passage, Stella is devoting at least as much attention to fascinating Hulot-Vasseur as she is to the feathers which ostensibly concern her. She is proposing a bargain; her attractions are offered in return for Hulot-Vasseur's feathers, which she needs for her hat shop, and thus the passage becomes a comment on the whole world of trade: the amount of reduction Stella can hope for on the price of the feathers she wants depends on how far she can succeed in fascinating Hulot-Vasseur. Therefore she indulges in a sham idealistic attitude through which Adamov implies satirical comment on Stella's character and on the fashion-conscious society that makes her what she is. She talks as if feathers were her whole world and includes the maximum of sexual suggestiveness in her appeal to touch, skin, warmth and cold. Adamov gains an additional effect by contrasting her idealism with

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49 Ibid., p.26.

Paolo's gesture of appreciation of the 'real' values involved as he reacts to the double meaning of the word 'réel'.

Of course, as well as all this, Stella, like all the other characters, deludes herself by her own rhetoric, which has the effect of elevating both herself and Hulot-Vasseur in her mind to levels of sophistication which they cannot in reality attain, and which leads to disappointment on both sides as the action progresses.

The second function of the characters' self-deluding rhetoric was that of giving them the illusion they could escape the pressure of historical events, and this was an important innovation in his dramatic development, depending on his new ability to situate a character in a precise historical period. Thanks to this situation, the characters of Paolo Paoli were shown to bear some responsibility for their period and their escapist rhetoric was used to demonstrate the state of mind responsible for the starting of the First World War. Bernard Dort expressed very clearly the way the characters' rhetoric showed their irresponsibility:

Revenons à la forme théâtrale: je veux dire, au fait que ce théâtre est fondé sur le langage comme milieu humain fondamental; un langage que le spectateur doit comprendre comme un langage de protection contre l'Histoire. Les personnages d'Adamov parlent de l'Histoire pour y échapper et, finalement, ils sont livrés pieds et poings liés à l'Histoire; parce qu'ils n'ont pas voulu l'assumer. C'est bien là ce qui fait rire: eux qui parlent tant des choses qui arrivent au monde, ils sont broyés par le monde.<sup>50</sup>

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50 Ici et Maintenant, pp.83-84.

He is pointing out that language has an even more serious mystifying influence in that it is not simply used by individuals to deceive others, but to give themselves the impression that they have freedom to choose and therefore that they are in control of the situation; in point of fact, as we have seen, they are by no means in control.<sup>51</sup> By means of their deceiving rhetoric, they not only fool others, but also themselves. Just as they come to believe, by dint of talking about ideal values that they are truly motivated by them, so by talking about World events in unrealistic terms, they blind themselves to their realities. The speech of l'Abbé quoted above showed not only the patriotic mask with which he covered his personal vindictiveness, but also that even his sham patriotism was merely an expression of world events and the necessities of trade: the buttons have to be manufactured so that war can begin, thus Marpeaux must be sacrificed. Or, if we prefer, we can see it the other way round: the war must begin because a sufficient number of industries have, like Hulot-Vasseur's, been turned from the manufacture of peace-time articles to war-time articles. War has become a financially attractive speculation. A sufficient number of Marpeaux have been sacrificed in the process and an unstoppable momentum has been built up.

In his review for Les Temps Modernes, Dort pointed out that the play's ending demonstrates brutally the inapplicability of the characters' language to their historical circumstances:

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<sup>51</sup> See above, pp. 208-309.

ils ont trop parlé, les événements ont travaillé à leur place et maintenant qu'il s'agit pour eux de se ranger du côté de ces événements, les mots sont en trop. Paolo Paoli se termine donc sur un silence.<sup>52</sup>

At the end all escape is impossible and they are all dragged into the war for having hidden their heads too long in the sand like Hulot-Vasseur's castrated ostriches. Paolo is unable to express his sudden disgust; language literally fails him because it has been misused so long. The only way he can find to express his feelings is by his final gesture of knocking off l'Abbé's new military hat.

From looking at the play in this way, it is possible to see two main lines of development, one in the events of the plot, the other in the evolution of the language. These two lines of development can be seen to react upon each other: the events of the play become less and less subject to the control of the characters so that their language ends up being obviously inapplicable to the situation, bankrupt, coagulated, as Dort puts it. The approaching war dictates a need for mobilisation which means a need for uniforms, which means a need for buttons, which dictates the attitude of Hulot-Vasseur and hence of l'Abbé to Marpeaux. But this chain of influence is not recognised and so, as we have seen, l'Abbé makes his patriotic speech which is an analysis of the situation in terms which fail completely to account for it, and are themselves devoid of any meaning they might once have had.

However, up to a certain point the idealistic words protect the

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<sup>52</sup> Dort, op. cit., pp.1110-1111. (Théâtre Publique, p.259)

characters from an unpleasant impact with real events. A subtle displacement of words and intentions shows how it was possible for noble words and grasping intentions to exist side by side and how the notion of a 'trade war' was only natural in a social system founded solely on the values of trade and the profit motive. It puts the blame all the more squarely on the characters by showing that in a sense they understood what was happening. L'Abbé, for example, frequently makes remarks like this in reply to Paolo's question:

PAOLO: Je suppose que vous n'êtes pas venu pour me faire des homélies sur la situation européenne?

L'ABBE: Je suis venu, en effet, vous entretenir d'un sujet particulier. Mais ce sujet particulier se trouve, aujourd'hui, englobé dans la situation générale.<sup>53</sup>

And Hulot-Vasseur gives a similar reply to Stella's ironic comment:

STELLA: Alors, c'est parce que les cosaques chargent les foules à Tsarskoié-je-ne-sais-quoi, que tu ne peux faire...

HULOT-VASSEUR: Figure-toi, Stella, que tout se tient.<sup>54</sup>

But they consider only the likely repercussions on their own little affairs, to which they return without considering in any real sense either the 'situation européenne', or indeed the fate of 'les foules de Tsarskoié-je-ne-sais-quoi'.

Thus Adamov demonstrated, by the very terms his characters used to describe their own preoccupations and obsessions, the self-deception which, on a national scale, could lead to war. Instead of

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53 Théâtre III, p.63.

54 Ibid., p.68.

just revealing the mechanisms involved in Man's relation with the powers of the universe, Adamov tried to reveal the mechanisms of his relation with history.

It is of course of great importance that the play was situated in a precise historical period, since the authentication for his view of these mechanisms is supposedly provided by their correspondence with the real events described. Where Le Ping-Pong was a theoretical discussion of the same mechanisms, this play is a practical demonstration in terms of a given situation. Wahl's definition of the play as an authentic reading of it is an accurate one.

Therefore it is not entirely correct to see Paolo Paoli as a brechtian play which is what it has frequently been called. When Adamov suddenly turns the play round at the end and challenges the spectator, who up to this point had merely observed, he is not pointing the way towards a certain type of conduct, since Paolo's action is merely a gesture and could not be taken as a programme for reform: rather he is compelling us to decide whether we accept or reject his 'lecture'.

This was brought out by Roland Barthes:

R. Barthes: Oui, c'est que Brecht est un moraliste.  
Ce qu'il y a chez lui, essentiellement, c'est une  
problématique de la conduite de la conscience.  
Alors que Paolo Paoli est plutôt une pièce  
descriptive.<sup>55</sup>

What is exactly meant by this opposition? Is it possible, for example, to draw a distinction between the way Brecht exposes the

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55 Ici et Maintenant, p.86.

*Thirty Year's War*

world of the thirty year's war in Mother Courage and the way Adamov exposes the 'belle époque' in Paolo Paoli? One of the main differences between the two is that in Mother Courage it is the dregs of society that are in the forefront of the action. The old woman is a representative of the 'Lumpenproletariat', whereas the leading characters of Paolo Paoli are members of the bourgeoisie, the governing class. But above all, Brecht shows Anna Fierling's progress in such a way as to suggest that she could at any moment choose differently from the way she does, that she always has open to her the possibility of turning her back on the armies, of refusing to hitch her waggon to the fortunes of the war. The openness of her choice is particularly stressed in the very first scene where her eagerness to sell leaves Eilif open to the advances of the recruiting officer, and having lost him she is told "Will vom Krieg Leben. Wird ihm wohl müssen auch was geben".<sup>56</sup>

Of course she never acts on this information, but it is the function of the play to show how she might have done so and to encourage the audience not to fall into the same error.

But in Paolo Paoli there is very little suggestion, except at the very end, that the characters have any real freedom to act differently from the way they do. Adamov even at his most socially committed, retains much of the fatalism which characterised his early plays. Not only is there very little prospect of Rose and Marpeaux ever really succeeding in extricating themselves from their situation, but Le Printemps 71 is almost equally pessimistic in that the "Communards"

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<sup>56</sup> Bertolt Brecht, Stücke III, Suhrkamp, 1962, p.80.

are ruthlessly crushed and the only note of hope is provided by something well outside the play's dramatic structure: the unfurling at the end of a world map showing in red the present communist-dominated countries.

This latter is in any case a hope which has not been perfectly realised if the implication is meant to be that in these countries the ideals of the Commune have really flourished. Adamov is first and foremost a playwright who describes and reveals rather than one who moralises. Of course, a certain type of description can amount to moralising, as Barthes suggested:

Impossible de faire la morale à ces gens-là  
- sinon par l'excès même de la description.<sup>57</sup>

As this phrase suggests, it is by means of the very narrowness of Paolo's world, and the very detail in which it is described, that Adamov made his general point about a whole society. The point is made by implication and springs directly from the play's humour of juxtaposition. This method, as Barthes again pointed out, is drawn straight from the avant-garde:

Personnellement, je verrais volontiers un procédé mis au point par l'avant-garde et qui se révèle précisément très efficace dans Paolo Paoli: un maniement de la dérision; la disproportion entre le sujet et l'utilisation qu'on en fait dans la pièce, entre les objets généraux des conflits capitalistes et le monde des papillons et des plumes.<sup>58</sup>

This, as we have seen, is the derisory connection which shows up the necessary futility of the world of capitalism: the fate of the world

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<sup>57</sup> Ici et Maintenant, p.86.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p.76.

lies in the hands of the feather-tinkers.

This is why humour is so important in Paolo Paoli. At the time,

Adamov stated his belief in the value of comedy as follows:

Je ne sais pas si, d'une manière générale, le théâtre d'aujourd'hui doit être comique. Tout ce que je peux dire, c'est qu'ici, dans ce monde où nous vivons, une tragédie, même 'optimiste', une pièce qui ne serait pas tragi-comédie, me paraîtrait déplacée, même dangereuse. Pourquoi? Parce que le sérieux que l'on pourrait ici opposer au rire ne serait pas, si l'on veut ne montrer que lui, le sérieux véritable, et glisserait inévitablement vers l'idéalisme.<sup>59</sup>

There is ample demonstration in Paolo Paoli of this sliding into idealism. By 'le sérieux véritable' one must assume that Adamov meant an integrated, practical philosophical system, such as an ideal form of Marxism, but it is interesting to see that even at his most committed period, he did not feel this could be successfully advanced on the stage. He got over this rather uncommunistic attitude by restricting himself to the West:

Je crois très sincèrement qu'une pièce pensée, écrite ici dans 'notre' Western World, et qui ne serait pas comique, serait une pièce pour le moins médiocre. Les contradictions criardes appellent le rire, et même le rire jusqu'au hoquet.<sup>60</sup>

This feeling, that the only appropriate reaction to modern life is desperate, hysterical laughter, is, of course, one of the characteristic features of the theatre of the Absurd; Adamov's outlook had perhaps not changed as much as he would consciously have liked. Ten

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p.61.

<sup>60</sup> Théâtre III, p.8.

years later he was to prove, with Off Limits, that it was possible to make a play out of 'les contradictions criardes' of Western life that was not comic. But in Off Limits he took characters with whom he could sympathise personally. In Paolo Paoli he remained detached from his characters and could laugh at the inappropriateness of their interminable self-justifications. The price that eventually had to be paid for them was so horrifying, and the mentality that gave rise to them so petty, that laughter provided the only sane reaction.

In Paolo Paoli, Adamov succeeded triumphantly in showing up the petty deceitfulness of a certain French bourgeois mentality during the so-called 'belle époque'. He provided a historical setting, and showed convincingly how the mentality of the national leaders paralleled that of the small tradesmen. He avoided the trap of didacticism and, by concentrating the action of the play on a small circle of people, remained in complete control of his material. But although the characterisation and dramatic construction were most successful, he was worried by the play's very negative message. Ideologically speaking, it debunked and criticised, but did not construct anything new. Moreover it lacked a convincing 'positive' figure; beside the well-defined bourgeois characters, Rose and Robert Marpeaux are relatively colourless. It was to meet the challenge of a play about a positive communist achievement, which would contain well-defined proletarian figures, that he turned to the Paris Commune as the subject of his next major work, Le Printemps 71.

## PART III

Chapter 3 'Le réel et l'irréel': Les Ames Mortes and three radio plays

The political reorientation of Adamov's theatre was to find its complete fulfilment in Le Printemps 71, completed at the end of 1960, which will be studied in the next chapter. The present one will be concerned with four works written at about the same time, less important in themselves, but which show Adamov following a rather different, but equally important line of development. These plays present many similarities with his earlier work, particularly with Paolo Paoli and its dramatic and satiric mingling of the real and the imaginary. The first of them is a free adaptation of Gogol's Dead Souls, which Adamov had already translated into French in its narrative form, and which was first performed early in 1960; the others are short plays written for radio: En Fiacre, 1959, Le Temps Vivant, 1962, and Finita la Commedia, 1964.

These plays show Adamov working over and developing some of the implications of his political reorientation in relation to his earlier themes; in particular he considered the problem of how to reconcile the world of the individual's imagination with the objective world and the social realities surrounding him. In their treatment of some of his earlier themes, these plays help to point the way towards the new synthesis that he achieved between his private and his political preoccupations in Off Limits.

In the earlier plays, the inner life had been the only reality, and any possibility of acting on the real world had been presented as futile. Now this extreme view was seen as self-deception. This was made clear in Le Ping-Pong, and in the plays that followed it, by the regular appearance of 'mythomanes' - mythomaniacs - people whose self-deception is so great that they are unable to tell the difference between their own distorted view of external reality and the 'normal' view of it. This led to an important discussion, in the plays, of how our perception of reality governs our ability to act upon that reality in a meaningful way.

Dead Souls has particular similarities with Paolo Paoli, both in style and in subject matter, which must have struck Adamov when he decided to work on an adaptation for the French stage. Gogol's whole tone is extraordinarily modern: his ironic, mocking criticism, his deflating style, his despair that where there should be generosity of spirit, he found only mean self-interest, futile vanity, and malicious gossip, all of this is the very image of Adamov's tone as we have seen it exemplified in Paolo Paoli.

The similarities in the content of the two plays are again considerable. Both take as their subject 'le troc'; in both the merchandise which is bartered lends itself to a contrast between 'le réel' and 'l'irréel' with the double meaning of financial or philosophical values which these words contain.

Les Ames Mortes also resembles Paolo Paoli in its social criticism. It too portrays an exploiting class which is self-involved, frivolous or stupid, but always self-centred and self-

interested, lacking all gifts except the ability to drive a hard bargain. Although he has rightly been compared with Kafka, Strindberg and Brecht, in his approach to the bourgeoisie, Adamov is closer to Gogol than to any of these. One of Gogol's most striking characteristics is the merciless description he gives of irredeemably banal creatures, whom he nevertheless treats with a humour that is almost indulgent. In this he has affinities with Flaubert, another nineteenth century writer admired by Adamov. Analysing Les Ames Mortes in a preface to his 1956 translation of it, Adamov called it "ce grand poème de la banalité extraordinaire". He said he found it difficult to know how to describe it, since the comedy was so personal, arising mostly from the highlighting of a single banal detail, and the tone of the narrative moved so suddenly from the grotesque to the lyrical. He concluded that it was not surprising that the public of 1842 was baffled by such an extraordinary combination of extreme banality and intense feeling.

What is most extraordinary is that the terms of Adamov's description apply so well to his own theatre. The extraordinary banality, the passage from the grotesque to the lyrical, the tender humour with which despicable objects are treated, all these things are true of Adamov. They all apply, for example, to the one speech from Paolo Paoli quoted on page 327. For Adamov, it was because of Gogol's mercilessly realistic approach, that he was unable to bring Tchitchikov to a position where his dead soul would come to life again; in his discussion of this problem can be seen an important key to his own development.

Gogol, he said, could not understand that:

le mot 'âme' n'a aucune signification réelle dans une société qui précisément prend le spiritualisme comme alibi pour camoufler l'inhumanité avec laquelle elle traite les corps. ... Prêter une âme à un propriétaire foncier, qui possède, achète et vend des âmes, telle est l'absurdité à laquelle devait aboutir Gogol avec la seconde partie des Ames Mortes. Et l'échec devenait inévitable. ... Parti d'une vision profondément réaliste de ce monde, Gogol ne pouvait lui donner aucune valeur 'spirituelle'.<sup>1</sup>

Although Adamov certainly never possessed the evangelistic fervour of Gogol, his early plays did attempt to show metaphysical realities behind the material world and his renunciation of these plays was intimately connected with a more materialistic approach to reality, especially as expressed in Communism. Les Ames Mortes might be seen as a first indication of the return swing of the pendulum; not that he returned to a belief in the Gods, but he found in Gogol's writing an element which he sometimes described as 'l'irréel' and sometimes as 'l'onirique', and which he was to attempt to maintain in a creative tension with his descriptions of the real world.

In Gogol, he said, existed "le monde réel, auquel lui seul, par l'astuce de ses déductions, parvenait à donner des dimensions, irréelles."<sup>2</sup> This appeal to 'dimensions irréelles' shows Adamov, even in his most materialistic period, conscious of the absurd elements behind the apparently solid realities of the external world. The magnitude of

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<sup>1</sup> Ici et Maintenant, p.111.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.111.

Gogol's achievement for Adamov was that "il venait tout simplement d'inventer la littérature critique moderne, celle qui ... met en lumière l'absurdité de ce qu'on s'est accoutumé à considérer comme logique."<sup>3</sup> As we have seen, Adamov had turned his back on a view of the Absurd which remained totally pessimistic. Instead, he believed in a rather Sartrean manner that, with human life beginning on the far side of despair, it was important to go beyond despair, to distinguish the curable from the incurable and to discover the circumstances in which a meaningful struggle was possible. This went a lot farther than the simple belief that undesirable social institutions could be seen to be absurd and illogical on their own terms; that the church of Gogol's Russia could be condemned for its exploitation of the souls it claimed to love. It was a belief that the irrational elements in man's make-up, his obsessions, dreams, subconscious motivations could not be cut out of one's total world view in the name of realism, any more than the internal contradictions in Gogol's Russia could be resolved in a 'happy end':

Il s'agit en effet de trouver un théâtre .  
absolument orienté et absolument ouvert,  
qui montrerait la connexion réelle entre le  
monde dit onirique et le monde objectif.  
Ces deux mondes sont réunis dans le livre  
de Gogol.<sup>4</sup>

The investigation of the later plays will be partly an attempt to track down the precise meaning that this 'connexion réelle' had

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.111.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.117.

for Adamov, but a useful approach to understanding it is provided by seeing the 'réel' and the 'irréel' in a dialectical relationship, in Les Ames Mortes and the radio plays. The history of the 'objective' world is the product of the imagination of the men who have made it. Vice versa, the objective world conditions the nature of the dreams, absurdities and other things entertained by Man which fall outside the category of the 'réel'. For example, Tchitchikov discovers the 'objective' fact that dead serfs are not struck off the inland revenue lists immediately they die, but only after the next census. Starting from this fact, he 'dreams up' his scheme for buying dead souls and raising a bank loan on the evidence of the real estate which his false serfs will apparently prove he owns. In his attempt to create real estate out of imaginary assets, Adamov felt that Tchitchikov's scheme combined in suggestively ambiguous form the worlds of 'réel' and 'onirique', and led to a whole series of events in which the two worlds interpenetrated.<sup>5</sup> In point of fact, the 'onirique' element is not very strongly represented in Les Ames Mortes; it is much more clearly present in the radio plays in which Adamov was less tied by the realistic demands of the stage<sup>6</sup> and all three of which are built around cases of madness, or semi-madness. The sense in which it is present in Les Ames Mortes is closer to that of the fantasies displayed by the characters in Paolo Paoli, in which, as Copfermann said,

le fétichisme de la marchandise produit sa propre fantasmagorie.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See above, note 4.

<sup>6</sup> In some of his later, less successful stage plays (e.g. Sainte Europe) he introduced special dream sequences, and his last play, Si l'été revenait, consists simply of four different dreams.

<sup>7</sup> Emile Copfermann, Roger Planchon, Lausanne, 1969, p.78.

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Of all Adamov's translations and adaptations, Les Ames Mortes is the only one which owes as much to Adamov as it does to its original author, it is the only one to have been published under Adamov's name, and the only example of his adapting for the stage a work not originally written in dramatic form. One may ask why Adamov chose to adapt this work. In discussing the question, Adamov made it clear that what had particularly drawn him to this text was his belief quoted above that in writing it, Gogol had invented "la littérature critique moderne."

Adamov's play seizes delightedly on this critical quality, especially since the form of the original is epic, and it thus seems to present the perfect model for the "théâtre épique et critique" which Adamov was striving for at this time. The meaning conveyed by the phrase 'épique et critique' as by 'littérature critique moderne' was that of a literature which denounces by debunking; which pushes to their ultimate conclusion the absurdities of what is thought of as a logical system. As in Paolo Paoli he had shown how the laws of barter and self-interest lead to only one possible conclusion, wars, in Les Ames Mortes the fact that Tchitchikov can operate his swindle accuses a system in which men can be bought and sold.

In Les Ames Mortes, Adamov found a work which, like Paolo Paoli saw human relations as governed by a series of bargains; both works make a play on the double meaning of 'le réel' by stressing the unusual nature of the merchandise which is bartered. In addition,

the dead souls, since they were once men and women, bring the exploitation of man by man into even clearer relief than did the commercial spirals of Paolo Paoli.

The purpose of Tchitchikov's visits to the landlords surrounding the town of N. is to conduct a series of bargains. In return for the deeds of ownership of dead serfs, he offers to Manilov the flattering illusion that he possesses a great and cultivated spirit, to Korobotchka money and the false promise to obtain Government orders for her farm produce, to Nozdriov he offers a guarded willingness to join in his games, to Sobakiévitch money and the chance for a good haggle, finally to Pliouchkine the miser a chance to save something. All but Nozdriov allow him some dead souls in return for his ministrations and it is this epic of bargaining which forms the first part of Gogol's story.

Moreover there is a certain progression in the importance of the bargain, a progression which Adamov emphasised in his stage version. Manilov, the first to be visited by Tchitchikov, is prepared to let his serfs go for nothing; Korobotchka is much more wily and takes a lot of persuading; Nozdriov is not prepared to sell them at all and is only interested in persuading Tchitchikov to gamble for something really valuable; Sobakiévitch is prepared to sell, but treats the transaction as a perfectly normal bargain, talking of his dead serfs as if they were still alive. He speaks the normal language of barter: "Cinquante roubles. Et je vous jure, bon Dieu, que j'y perds",<sup>8</sup> irrespective of the fact that his dead souls are in normal commercial terms worth nothing. This enables Adamov to bring to a climax his

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<sup>8</sup> Les Ames Mortes, Paris, 1960, p.94.

implied protest at a system in which men could be bought and sold like merchandise. Though this condemnation is not implicit in Gogol's original, Adamov is able to use the farcical climax which Gogol gives to the scene, as Sobakiévitch refuses to part with the deeds until he has his hands literally on the money, and Tchitchikov will not part with the money till he has his hands on the deeds.

The series of bargains ends with Pliouchkine, who for Gogol, completed the picture of selfish greed among the landowners. But as far as the theme of the bargain is concerned it is the scene with Sobakiévitch which provides the climax, and it is possible for this reason that Adamov said: "Peut-être aurais-je dû ... supprimer sans hésitation le personnage de Pliouchkine, avare à la Harpagon, sans autre intérêt que psychologique."<sup>9</sup>

As well as giving us a dramatisation of one of Adamov's most important themes, Les Ames Mortes displays the integration in one play of all the dramaturgical features which he regarded as most important. The fact that 'le sens littéral' was still important to him is shown by his analysis of the problem of making an adaptation from prose to dramatic form:

Les dimensions de la prose ne sont pas celles  
du théâtre, et vouloir rendre littéralement,  
dans l'espace physique, des actes qui se  
déroulent dans un autre espace me semble  
presque toujours aberrant.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ici et Maintenant, p.112.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.107.

This discussion of why he chose to adapt Gogol's narrative shows a lively awareness on Adamov's part of the special features distinguishing prose narrative and drama. Whereas in the former every action is presented to the reader as an image, and the action recreated only in the readers' imagination, in the theatre the actions are literally 'enacted'. As before, Adamov is insisting on the literal embodiment of action as the most fundamental element of the theatrical event.

He goes on to insist that the one reason why he felt justified in adapting this work, was that for Gogol it was not a novel but a 'poem', a term assimilated by Adamov to the twentieth century sense of the word 'epic'. Gogol's Dead Souls, with its linear development through time and space clearly formed an ideal subject for an epic play after the manner of Brecht, particularly since it already contained a didactic element. But the fact that it was a 'poem' was also important for another reason: it matched Adamov's own idea of the poetic subject, analysed above in Part II Chapter 5. That this was part of its attraction for Adamov is shown by the following comment he made:

De plus, Les Ames Mortes se situant constamment au point d'intersection d'une critique sociale aigüe et de la poésie qui, dans la multiplicité des faits, choisit le fait révélateur, il m'est apparu qu'elles ne sont pas étrangères au théâtre dont nous avons le plus besoin: un théâtre épique et critique.<sup>11</sup>

In the term 'point d'intersection', we can see the same idea that Adamov expressed earlier through a different image as "un carrefour de

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.107.

de sens".

Adamov himself invited us to make the link with his other works

by saying:

Le choix d'un thème central auquel tout  
ramène et d'où tout repart m'a toujours  
semblé caractériser les plus grandes oeuvres.<sup>12</sup>

This love of the central theme, image or activity giving unity to the whole work has already been pointed to in the pinball machine of Le Ping-Pong and the feathers and butterflies of Paolo Paoli. In his 1956 preface to the prose translation, he had already pointed out how successfully this was achieved in Dead Souls:

Peu d'écrivains ont su donner à une oeuvre  
une telle ampleur tout en la circonscrivant  
dans une obsession unique.<sup>13</sup>

He quoted Bouvard et Pécuchet, Moby Dick, Zola's Au Bonheur des Dames as the only other examples he knew in which this 'ampleur' had been achieved in a work centred on a single obsession. The means whereby Gogol had made his 'poem' into something more than just the story of an obsession was, Adamov considered, through his use of poetic ambiguity, a clear example of which can be seen in the title. This can be taken to refer either to the dead peasants which Tchichikov buys, or to the mediocre landowners whose minds and consciences are to all intents and purposes dead. Adamov took care to include in his

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.109.

<sup>13</sup> Les Ames Mortes, Lausanne, 1956, p.20.

stage version any hints of this kind which occur in Gogol's text.<sup>14</sup>

The reviewers were even more divided over this play than they usually were over Adamov's plays, because instead of simply coming down for or against the author, they had three authors to deal with: Gogol, Adamov and Flanchon. As regards the first, it is amusing to see that exactly the same reproaches were made to Adamov, as were made to Gogol 120 years earlier: the play's lack of spiritual power, depth, etc., and its excessive concentration on the satire of provincial banality. The only difference was that in 1842 Gogol's critics were comparing his book with the one they thought he ought to have written, but clearly had not, whereas in 1960 they were comparing Adamov's version with what they thought Gogol ought to have written, believing that he really had.

The virtues of Adamov's play, its linear clarity and vigorous movement, were appreciated by many. Paul Morelle found it "clair, rapide, nerveux, fougueux, corrosif, vigoureux".<sup>15</sup> But those who appreciated this aspect almost invariably criticised Flanchon's

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<sup>14</sup> E.g. Gogol's Manilov declares that,

he really wished to give some proof of his heart-felt sympathy, of the magnetism of souls, while the souls of the dead peasants were, in a way, absolutely worthless.

And Adamov's Manilov says:

J'aurais aimé, voyez-vous, vous donner des preuves plus convaincantes de la sympathie du..... du magnétisme que mon âme, aussitôt... Et puis, vraiment, ces âmes... défuntes, ne valent... pas grand-chose.

<sup>15</sup> Libération, 23. 4. 60.

production for being too overloaded with unnecessary detail. Those, on the other hand, who admired the inventive brilliance of the production tended to complain that the text was too slight. This dichotomy can never be resolved, since there is no objective record of the production, but the point is an important one, since the adaptation was made in collaboration with Planchon, deliberately leaving space which was to be filled by Planchon's 'écriture scénique'.

We have seen the close collaboration there was at this period between Planchon, Adamov and Allio. The script of Les Ames Mortes was deliberately 'dépouillé', since it was written specifically for production by Planchon, who approached it with the view that the 'écriture scénique' was as important as the text.<sup>16</sup> Like Adamov, he too went back to the source in Gogol, became fascinated by Gogol's obsession with noses and decided to portray each character's individuality by giving him a different type of false nose.

He worked out a particular style of acting, caricatural but not excessively so, to stress the shallowness of the characters, but also to hint at what there should have been underneath:

l'art de Gogol repose sur un comique apparent des personnages, décrit superficiellement qui, grattée cette surface, laisse voir "la parcelle de vie morte". Le jeu des comédiens peut s'inspirer d'une description en surface "rendu par un grand nombre de gestes quotidiens, typiques et caricaturaux", chacun recouvrant "la vie morte". Le jeu doit être parodique: "mais c'est un jeu parodique qui ne parodie rien."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> See Chapter 1 (Part III), pp.286-288.

<sup>17</sup> Roger Planchon quoted by Emile Copfermann in op. cit., p.128.

The mime, stage business, and dazzling inventiveness of Planchon's production replaced the descriptive dimensions of the original which were naturally lost by its transfer into dialogue form. The closeness of the cooperation between Adamov and Planchon is suggested by Adamov's comment:

J'ai eu le tort ... de ne pas faire intervenir...  
 le peuple, ce peuple qui est pourtant le sujet  
 ou l'objet de cette farce - ou de ce drame.  
 Mais Planchon était à mes côtés, et les serviteurs  
 de chaque propriétaire ont très vite surgi  
 (ceux de Manilov endormis, hébétés; ceux de  
 Sobakiévitch diligents, terrorisés, etc...)

This comes in the 'supplément' to no. 9 of Planchon's newsheet of the arts, Cité Panorama. Both nos. 8 and 9 (janvier and février 1960) are largely concerned with the work on Les Ames Mortes, and they present a most interesting picture of the collaboration of the whole company on this work, writer, director, actors, composer, 'décorateur', all pooling their own special insights and their own creative efforts to produce a rich and meaningful performance.

The question of whether Adamov had genuinely 'betrayed' the text, as some critics maintained, is an interesting one. Some claimed that he had completely omitted to include any of Gogol's belief in 'Holy Russia' and in the 'pilgrim's progress' of Tchitchikov. But this argument can be effectively countered in two ways. The first is to point out that Gogol himself never really succeeded in integrating this theme in his 'poem'. It occurs only in interpolated passages of lyrical apostrophe, intended to point the way forward to the happy resolution he hoped to achieve in the second part, when the converted Tchitchikov would turn into a model land-owner ushering in a glorious Russian future: "Russian emotions will rise up... and everyone will

see how deeply what merely skims over the surface of the nature of other nations has sunk into the Slav nature."<sup>18</sup> Commenting on Gogol's failure to achieve this reconciliation, David Magarshak wrote: "Nothing perhaps shows the utter unreality of Gogol's attempt to effect a lasting reconciliation of the hostile social and economic forces in Russia so much as the fact that the régime of serfdom, of which he himself was in favour, was finally abolished only eight years after his death."<sup>19</sup>

The second means of countering this argument is to point out that, through the film which was used to link each scene to its predecessor, Adamov did indeed capture the spirit of Gogol's apostrophes. The film was the work of René Allio, Planchon's gifted stage designer, who had been introduced to Planchon by Adamov. However, although he was not personally responsible for making the film, Adamov had foreseen its use when working on the adaptation, and had wished it to convey two things: the immensity of the Russian soil, that is to say the sheer size of the space through which the tiny figure of Tchitchikov was travelling, and also the idea of the progress made by Russia herself, as she forged ahead like a troika - like Tchitchikov's troika - not knowing exactly where she was going. In the 'poem' there are passages describing Tchitchikov's progress along the road interspersed between each interview, and Adamov achieved the same effect by his use of this film between the scenes.

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<sup>18</sup> Quoted by David Magarshak, Dead Souls, Penguin Classics, 1961, p.11.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.15.

A brief extract from Gogol's final description of Tchitchikov's progress will help to show how the film could achieve a similar effect; in fact the passage might seem influenced by the cinema if one did not know it was written before the cinema's invention:

milestones fly past, merchants on the coachman's seat of their covered waggons fly to meet you, on each side of you the forest flies past with its dark rows of firs and pines, with the thudding of axes and the cawing of crows; the whole road flies goodness only knows where into the receding distance... Is it not like that that you, too, Russia, are speeding along like a spirited 'troika' that nothing can overtake? ... Russia, where are you flying to? Answer! She gives no answer...<sup>20</sup>

Gogol never supplied the answer to his question; that was to have come in the second half. But by the use of film, Adamov and Allio gave to the stage version this epic dimension, with a sense of awe at the greatness of Russia and the speed of the troika's headlong flight which is the essence of Gogol's set pieces.

The other main criticism made by contemporary critics contains more substance. Jean Selz, writing in France Observateur, formulated it most clearly when he said that what gave depth and breadth to Gogol's poem was the descriptive passages; the passages of dialogue "ne sont que de petites touches réalistes."<sup>21</sup> It is true that it is in the descriptive and reflective passages that Gogol emphasises what seems to him to be the important message of the book. The passages of dialogue merely add another dimension of life-likeness to characters

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp.258-259.

<sup>21</sup> France Observateur, 28. 4. 60.

and situations which he has already established through description. But they are nevertheless enormously alive, and, if taken in isolation, can be seen to convey, if only by implication, the vast majority of the information which, in the original, was contained in descriptive passages.

What is most interesting, in view of the accusations Adamov faced of betraying the original, is to see that he used Gogol's own dialogue almost exclusively. Because of this, we can see, by analysing his additions and rearrangements, exactly where his dramaturgical gifts lie. It is in the first half that he remained particularly close to the original. He followed Gogol's rhythm and respected his sequence of events almost perfectly. The only difference he made was to add another ball at the Governor's so that there are two, one at the beginning of the first part, the other half way through the second part. In this way he got over the difficulty of how to show all Tchitchikov's initial visits, in which he ingratiated himself with the gentry. For the first ball scene, Adamov borrowed dialogue used as introductory material in the other scenes by Gogol.

Such small changes were not only used by Adamov to condense the action; he also used them to increase the immediacy and impact of the comedy. For example, in Gogol's version, Tchitchikov finds that all he has to do to ingratiate himself with Manilov is to praise the excellent qualities of the local dignitaries, one after the other. Later, trying to make up to Sobakiévitch, he tries the same approach, only to find that Sobakiévitch, who despises the lot of them, meets his exclamations very coldly. The comedy of this contrast is brought

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out all the more clearly in the play by closer juxtaposition, since the two conversations take place one after the other at the Governor's ball.

Above all, what Adamov's play added to Gogol's version was a truly dramatic rhythm. An example of this can be seen in the first Tableau in which Tchitchikov dresses up to go to the Governor's ball. There are several similar dressing-up scenes in the original. Adamov took the details from these scenes, but placed his one at the beginning of the play, thus providing an excellent 'entrée en matière', in which we see Tchitchikov the trickster gradually putting on his disguise and planning the part he is to play.<sup>22</sup> The first scene also provides a chance to become acquainted with Tchitchikov's character, and, more important, with his relationship with Sélifane: the master-serf relationship which is to dominate the whole play.

But perhaps the most successful thing in the play is its comedy of social observation. This comes to the fore in the second half, where Tchitchikov's adventures take second place to the description of minor Russian officials. Gogol was particularly cutting in his satire on women, and the various plots thought up by the women in the second half of Dead Souls rival anything in The Government Inspector. In fact the basic situation of The Government Inspector is used in Tableau 12, when the officials suddenly begin to wonder if the mysterious Tchitchikov is not perhaps an inspector in disguise. But here, instead of making it the mainspring of the plot, Gogol pushes it to an absurd

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<sup>22</sup> This type of scene has always been effective; see e.g. its use in plays which draw on the Commedia dell'Arte tradition as well as its use by Brecht.

conclusion, as each man thinks up a new and wilder identity for Tchitchikov, ending with the suggestion that he might be Napoleon loosed on Russia by the English in a vile attempt to ruin her.

Adamov's scene gives an excellent dramatic shape to this progression; it starts with Sofia Ivanovna insisting vehemently to the astonished and worried officials that she know<sup>l</sup> Tchitchikov is planning to elope with the Governor's daughter, although the previous scene has shown how this idea was dreamed up by her and Anna Grigorievna without a scrap of evidence. This extraordinary revelation opens the way to speculation of all kinds in the minds of the officials; the celebrated story of the captain Kopeikin is the centre-piece of the scene (although only two pages long as against Gogol's six) and it builds up to an absurd climax in the suggestion that Tchitchikov might be Napoleon. The dialogue is clean, fast-moving and more conventionally witty than Adamov usually allowed himself to be in his own plays.

The result of Adamov's adaptation is a play with a remarkably clear, unencumbered dramatic line. Looking back on it, he had some regrets that so much had had to be cut out, particularly those 'real' dimensions provided in the original by the exterior scenes which showed the life of the peasants. He felt that the constant presence of this human merchandise should have been borne in more forcefully on the audience. At the opposite end of the scale, he also regretted cutting out Tchitchikov's dreams and reveries. But his justification, a good one, was: "je redoutais une dispersion de l'intérêt dramatique"<sup>23</sup>,

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<sup>23</sup> Ici et Maintenant, p.113.

and he also pointed out that it was necessary to maintain the linear construction which displayed the heart of the matter:

Ces propriétaires apparemment différents les uns des autres, mais semblables du seul fait de leur souci commun: s'enrichir au maximum,<sup>24</sup> exploiter tout ce qui peut être exploitable.

With the minimum of intrusion, Adamov succeeded in making this into a most successful modern epic drama, a tribute both to his theatrical skill and to the modernity of the original, a drama which lost none of the ambiguity of the original, even adding to it a particular kind of poetry, whose power depended on the use of a single obsession to expose, by pushing it to its logical conclusion, a system of exploitation. As he had done in his earlier plays, he used a 'poetic' situation, from whose enactment comments on the world could be drawn at a number of different levels; but as in Paolo Paoli, the time and the place were important for its total effect. Discussing the poetry of Les Ames Mortes, he insisted that it was dependent on time and space. He said that what had attracted him in the work was

l'extraordinaire poésie; celle d'un espace indéfiniment parcouru, et le temps lui aussi passe sur cet~~te~~ espace, et c'est toute la Russie qui défile avec ses villages, ses steppes, ses fleuves très larges, et le peuple misérable portant des charges trop lourdes, au milieu de ces villages et autour de ces fleuves.<sup>25</sup>

The preoccupations with time and space became central to the

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p.113. (Adamov's emphasis)

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp.115-116.

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three radio plays which were written in the late fifties and early sixties. At the start of Le Temps Vivant the 'author' states "le problème du temps est primordial". Man is a creature who lives in time, and is defined, in part, by his relations with it. The dislocation that occurs when a man loses his sense of being anchored in time was one of the strongest images of alienation used in La Parodie, through the image of the clock-face with no hands, and the décalage of dancers and music, who were out of step with one another. This image of 'décalage' will become linked with a more specific failure in Le Printemps 71, the failure of the Communards to seize fully the opportunities presented by the short space of time they were given.

In 1958, Adamov had said:

Le théâtre, à mon avis, c'est l'art du temps  
et de la progression dans le temps. Je m'excuse  
de paraphraser Rimbaud, mais il s'agit de  
réinventer un nouveau temps théâtral...<sup>26</sup>

Adamov's experiments with time in Le Temps Vivant can therefore be seen to be very central to his developing dramatic method. The play concentrates purely on this one problem choosing two boundary situations to show what it means to live in time. At the same time, he returned to a use of mental abnormality in order to ensure a more central place for the 'onirique' than it had had in Paolo Paoli or Les Ames Mortes.

Both are war-time situations; one concerns a German in a psychiatric hospital who is genuinely deranged, and who betrays a

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<sup>26</sup> Le Monde, 19 janvier 1958.

friend, hiding from the Gestapo, because he cannot make the link with real time and understand his friend's danger at a given moment. The other concerns a girl who is also suffering from mental disorders which make her unable to feel the reality of the passage of time, but who manages to conquer this sufficiently to save her lover, also wanted by the Gestapo, by pretending she is madder than she really is.

The freedom of the medium allows Adamov to put these two case histories side by side with no very elaborate dramatic framework. They are conveyed entirely through dialogue, apart from introductory explanations by an 'author's voice', and they display a masterly use of suspense. In each case the central character is surrounded by others whose experiences provide variations on the central theme of Man's involvement with time. These are described so vividly that we are made to feel all the different varieties of anguish engendered by our relations with time. There is the anguish of the German's wife, who can do nothing, but simply has to wait and hope that the Gestapo will not investigate the Sanatorium where her husband is in hiding. The anguish of waiting without information is compounded by the realisation that it is her fault that he is in danger. And this too is connected with time; she has insisted on him staying in the hospital, failing to realise that what was the right thing to do for the safety of her husband three months before is no longer the right thing to do in the changed circumstances of the present.

At the opposite end of the scale, we experience the anguish of heightened awareness of a very short space of time as three French partisans wait to accomplish a dangerous mission. They have to shoot

a collaborator that day, or many lives will be lost; they wait for him by a news stall where he habitually comes to buy a paper, but he is a few minutes later than usual. They are tempted to leave, but wait in an agony of apprehension for his appearance. When finally he does come, the killing and the getaway seem to take an age.

In Finita la Commedia, Adamov explores similar problems, this time with relation to mythomania. The play is still basically interested in Man's inability to coincide with the demands and realities of his situation in a Sartrian sense; that is to say his time and place. Again the play has a violent setting. Like Sartre in his political dramas, Adamov was naturally drawn towards war-time situations. Most of the important characters of the play (and some minor ones as well) in order to escape from their own sense of inadequacy when faced with the horrors of Nazi occupation, more or less invent for themselves the things that would satisfy their deepest needs - a husband for Andrée, power and prestige for the 'Marquis', backers longing to spend money on her productions for Lucette, a German soldier who will help them escape because they share his admiration for Heine, for the three prisoners in the German concentration camp.

The subject of mythomania, is one of the most important in Adamov's theatre. It began to come to the fore with Le Professeur Taranne, as he was able to step outside his characters, and its introduction also brought with it the liberating, detaching force of humour, as we saw in Part II. As his own feelings of despair

became less overwhelming, Adamov was drawn to describe the means which people invent in order to go on living in a situation to which the only logical response would be despair.

In the first instance, with Taranne, Adamov used his own obsession with being unknown: in his dream he tried to persuade himself that he had escaped the common futility of the human condition by achieving notoriety for his play La Parodie. Taranne was the first of Adamov's many mythomaniacs. Because he could not face up to his isolation and inner dispossession, he persuaded himself that he was a great professor, modelling his imagined characteristics on those of another professor. This mental procedure was more cruelly displayed in the figure of Sutter, the pathetic bluffer of Le Ping-Pong, and of course Arthur and Victor themselves exhibit some of these characteristics as they allow their lives to be taken over and modelled by the Consortium. All the characters of Paolo Paoli except Marpeaux exhibited some tendencies towards mythomania, but it was in the radio plays that Adamov allowed freest rein to this preoccupation.

En Fiacre was the first of these and is in some ways the best. It dramatises the point where the 'onirique' world of the mythomaniac clashes with the inexorable realities of the 'real' world. As in Les Ames Mortes, Adamov borrowed almost all his dialogue from his source, which was the clinical description of a case of mass-mania recorded by Clérambault, and he again added only what was necessary to give it dramatic shape. Through the voice of a 'présentateur' he explained, at the beginning, that it had been taken from a clinical observation, gave a brief description of the case, and stated his dramaturgical

principles:

Le langage prêté aux vieilles filles est en substance celui qu'indique l'observation médicale. Mais bien entendu, elles ne parlent pas ici tout à fait comme elles ont parlé en réalité: elles parlent comme on parle au théâtre, avec ce léger décalage dans les termes qui, d'une part, certes, rend les choses moins quotidiennes et moins vraies, mais d'autre part donne un mouvement à ce qui n'était que statique.<sup>27</sup>

Clérambault's account describes three middle-aged sisters who were accused of being in debt to a coachman who had driven them around the streets of Paris all night. They turned out to have been living entirely in hired coaches for several months. Their father had been an unsuccessful business man who had died leaving almost nothing. Their devoted mother had slaved to provide for them, always keeping them in a state of complete dependence, so that when her turn came to die, they were quite helpless. They were exploited, insulted and turned out of their flat by a legal swindle. In these circumstances, they managed to keep their grip on life only by inventing a special category for themselves, all tacitly agreeing to join in the make-believe that they were a sort of caste apart. They lived on their small income, walking the streets by day and sleeping in coaches by night, for some months, until they were taken to an asylum. Three weeks later the second sister, Annette, died.<sup>28</sup>

Clérambault's notes give a detailed verbatim account of the

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<sup>27</sup> L'Avant-Scène, no.294, p.39.

<sup>28</sup> G. de Clérambault, Oeuvre Psychiatrique, réuni et publié par Jean Fretet, Paris, 1942. The account of the three sisters is given on pages 7-20.

interrogation in which the sisters spoke of the different stages in their life with no logical connections, and little sense of time, frequently superimposing two events which must in fact have taken place several years apart. They also returned again and again to certain names or phrases, which seemed to have a magical significance, since they themselves frequently failed to understand their meanings. For example, they said that they were 'des castors' with a mixture of pride and despair, lamenting the fact that no-one had told them sooner, yet they were quite unaware that this was a slang word for a prostitute (as a footnote informs us). The names of the houses in which they had lived, 'la rue Coulaincourt', 'la rue Letort', were also pregnant with symbolical significance which never became entirely clear, but which they did not see the need to explain.

Starting from this genuine, well-documented case, and using a realistic setting and realistic dialogue, Adamov constructed a short, very 'onirique' radio play which demonstrates the terrifying distance between the world of the individual's imagination, or of a collective imagination, and the world of objective reality. The play is beautifully constructed and is compelling if only as a true story about three extraordinary characters. But it is also interesting as a play about mythomania as a mass phenomenon.

The play was written in 1959, when Adamov's technical powers were at their height, when he had mastered a new style, when the relationship with Planchon had not yet reached crisis point, and he was not yet suffering from alcoholism. It is one of his most successful attempts at combining realistic characterisation with a subject that is

based on neurosis. The oldest sister, Jeanne, appears to be the accepted leader; it is she who takes the initiative when they are called upon to speak, pay, explain themselves, etc. But it soon becomes apparent that the real instigator of the mass mania is Annette, who either urges her elder sister on, or steps in and prevents her if she seems to be going too far in her admissions to the médecin légiste. She is less nervous than her elder sister, backs her up when Clotilde seems to be challenging her authority, but also reminds her of her duties if she seems to be flagging:

Ne dis pas de bêtises, Jeanne! Quand on a  
cinquante-six ans, on ne dit pas de bêtise. (sic) <sup>29</sup>

This little remark also characterises the play's ever-present irony, since it is precisely the sisters' attempts to live as their age and station demand that leads them into their particular form of 'bêtise'.

Clotilde is the odd one out. In the play, it is she who has always ultimately paid with her body to keep the other sisters from disgrace, and this, if not an addition, is an interpretation by Adamov of something which is not made explicit by Clérambault. This seems to have been her rôle ever since she stole away Jeanne's fiancé in the long-distant past, though whether by design or accident is never very clear. Their father who was a 'castor' and a bad lot as far as the other two are concerned, is also implicated, since he was especially fond of a photo. in which Clotilde and the fiancé were doing something together which the other two regard as unmentionable.

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<sup>29</sup> L'Avant-Scène, no.294, p.40.

A sort of pairing emerges: the two sisters, their dead mother and the world of saintly respectability ranged against Clotilde, their father, and the world of sordid compromise. In the course of Adamov's play Annette's and Jeanne's idea of their own respectability reaches a crisis of rejection of reality, expressed in their murder of Clotilde. This was added by Adamov, bringing to a dramatic climax the tensions implicit in the group as recorded by Clérambault. They are prepared to compromise anything, except their image of themselves. They even allow their sister to compromise herself, but then hate her for it since she herself has become the image of that compromise. When she shows signs of making use of the claim which she thus has over them, they literally get rid of her.

For Jeanne and Annette, undergoing interrogation, their action was still just part of the private, fantasy world; it is no concern of others, and they persist in pretending that Clotilde is still with them and that they are only guilty of failing to pay the cabby. But their action has had a real consequence in the real world; their sister is really dead, and so of course reality clamps down on them.

En Fiacre can thus be seen as one link in Adamov's development from his first to his second manner, uniting some of the themes and methods of both. For example, the mythomania of the three sisters is partly the product of a persecution complex; they believe that everyone knows who they are, stares at them, whispers behind their backs. They claim to have discovered that there was a plot against their father, and even claim to have detected a taste of poison in the drinking water at one of their lodgings. The case is as strange as some of Adamov's own obsessions, but it is viewed from the outside, its

objectivity reinforced by clinical observation.

The legal interrogation at the centre of the play can be seen as a further link. Adamov had already been influenced by Kafka's use of this as an image of Man's alienation and sense of unidentifiable sin. Taranne, for example, could not be sure what he was accused of, since the accusations changed half-way through the play and were mutually contradictory. Like K., he felt he was on trial for his life, and blindly accepted this by attempting to prove his identity.

The two sisters of En Fiacre refuse to see the médecin légiste's enquiry as a murder investigation. They too, feel that their whole life is on trial and accordingly they do not give straightforward answers but talk indiscriminately about their past. Adamov made full use here of the self-justifying phrases which, according to Clérambault, continually recurred in their replies, for example the phrase "nous avons cru bien faire".

The 'trial' or 'interrogation' form was used again by Adamov in a later play La Politique des Restes. It is in itself a powerful image of Man's uncertain place in the world. But its advantage for Adamov's later manner is that it presents the ideal forum for contrasting the world of objective certainty with the world of dreams and hallucinations.

The most recent of the radio plays, Finita la Commedia, presents a tremendously ingenious play on the whole problem of identity in a style which for the first time in Adamov's theatre makes it possible to speak accurately of a resemblance with Pirandello. All of Adamov's plays reveal their author's acquaintance with the theatre of Pirandello,

but in no other play did Adamov attempt, as he did in this one, to push to its logical conclusion the problem of the mythomaniac's schizophrenia. Which half of Henry IV's character is the real one; we do not know. Some of the characters in Finita la Commedia are equally mysterious, though in most cases the audience is enlightened before the end. The play is a very controlled piece of writing; it avoids all pseudo-philosophical pretensions, and 'avant-gardism'. It presents a large number of very realistic examples of mythomania all of which are skillfully made to interfact in a neat dramatic structure encased by a performance of Uncle Vanya, with which it opens and concludes.

The connection with Uncle Vanya shows Adamov's preoccupation with Tchekov towards the end of his life. Bits of the plays we have been discussing actually read like Tchekov, certain passages at the beginning of Les Ames Mortes, for example, which show Tchitchikov and Manilov discussing in the most banal tone what they assume to be profound ideas of friendship, ending with their deep mutual admiration which reduces them to complete silence as they promenade up and down arm in arm. In Finita la Commedia, there are moments when Andrée's infatuation with Serge, modelled on Sonia's for Astrov in Uncle Vanya, recalls even more strongly Nina's with Trigorin in The Seagull. Like Nina's, Andrée's infatuation is not so much with the man, more with the part he is playing. Serge is playing the part of Astrov, and Andrée, blurring rôle with reality in her P.O.W. camp, pretends she is married to a doctor. At the end of the play, when the inmates of the camp are about to be freed by the allies, Andrée cannot face the return to reality and allows her imagined life to triumph over her real one by deliberately seeking death in a typhus epidemic which is ravaging part of the camp.

By really dying from the disease which Serge, acting Astrov, was fighting, she reinforces the personal reality of her mythomania, although showing in a final scene that she is still in control of her sense and understands what she is doing. Her character is well drawn, with just the right combination of passion and self-mockery, so that the parallel between her case and that of Sonia is immediately clear at the end of the play, which closes on the departure of Astrov and the mental agony of Sonia, longing for peace.

The merging of past and present, illusion and reality, theatre and life is most subtly achieved. But the play is not mystifying. It does not leave us in a generalised fog about illusion and reality. It is quite clear what is real and what imaginary in Andrée's story. And yet it is dramatised with such compassion and gentle humour that it is intensely moving.

As in Le Temps Vivant, the main theme is commented on in the lesser dramas of the subsidiary characters. Here Adamov used many standard tricks of the theatrical trade which he sometimes scorned in his stage plays. There is considerable suspense for example; this arises chiefly from the fact that one is never quite sure whether a given character is what he says he is, or not. The mythomania of both Lucette and the 'Marquis' only gradually appears as the play unfolds. At first we take them for what they seem to be, but gradually the disguise is stripped off until finally the pathetic reality of their lives is revealed. Particularly pathetic is the 'Marquis' who is arrested after the liberation as the collaborator he had pretended to be, but who, it turns out, never had any real influence with the Nazis, and, furthermore, is

discovered in the shrubbery off the Champs Elysées wearing women's clothes.

The play is principally a study in mythomania from the personal point of view, but does not restrict itself to this entirely: it is full of hints at other dimensions and aspects of the problem. In Paolo Paoli the characters' mythomania contributed towards the illusion of the 'belle époque' and helped to make them the dupes of their own illusion. In other words, Adamov saw this particular type of escapism as partly responsible for bringing about the start of the First World War. In Finita la Commedia, Adamov again insisted on the political and social implications of the central subject. For example, the 'Marquis' replies to a request for his help, by saying:

Mais Serge, lui, est un grand acteur, et je ne voudrais pas que pour des raisons aussi futiles - passez-moi l'expression - il souffre dans son art. Et pourquoi, mon Dieu, pourquoi?... L'Allemagne, la France, ce sont des mythes, rien que des mythes. Alors pourquoi ces cadavres de part et d'autre?... Jadis, au temps du Roi à la Barbe Fleurie... Vous me direz que j'ai bu, c'est vrai, je bois pour oublier précisément tous ces mythes, tous ces mensonges qui nous font tant de mal ... Pour ma part, j'ai toujours préconisé la réconciliation franco-allemande; (solemnel) et aussi la réconciliation de l'homme avec lui-même, la seconde entreprise étant, bien sûr, beaucoup plus difficile encore que la première. (Il soupire.)

In the 'Marquis', Adamov criticised the apolitical approach, which conveniently skates round precise problems of political morality by generalised appeals to the problems of Man. There is more than a hint of the subject-matter of Sainte Europe in this speech in the 'Marquis's' somewhat Gaullist appeals to Charlemagne and the myths of history. There is also strong dramatic irony in his speech since his own problem

is precisely that of his reconciliation with himself.

Further political and social implications are also brought out in scenes which aim to give the whole atmosphere of life in Paris under the occupation. The link with the theme of mythomania is summed up in the comments of a Gestapo officer:

Enormément de gens - je dis bien énormément - pour se prouver qu'ils sont de vrais gens, qu'ils existent, en quelque sorte, se racontent des histoires, des aventures, auxquelles ils n'ont jamais été mêlés, se fabriquent des intentions qu'ils n'ont jamais eues, s'accusent ou se glorifient, selon les cas, d'actes qu'ils n'ont jamais commis.

Here then is another consequence of mythomania on the political level: it so engrosses people in an incurable fantasy world, that they fail to join the fight against the curable ills of the real world.

## PART III

Chapter 4 Le Printemps 71

In the last chapter we examined some of the new directions explored by Adamov in the years following Paolo Paoli, but the project which he regarded as most important during the years 1957 to 1960 was his work on the Paris Commune. This led not only to the writing of his play, but also to the publication of a book of documents from the Commune period, newspaper articles, posters, speeches, etc.. Adamov felt that too little was known of the Communard ideas and writings because of the anti-Communard bias of most French historical accounts of the period.

With his growing awareness of the value of a precise historical setting for his plays, Adamov was clearly bound, sooner or later, to face the challenge of the historical play. Paolo Paoli had been situated in a precise historical time, but its subject-matter, though constantly seen as part of the historical process, was only of marginal historical importance. In Le Printemps 71, on the other hand, Adamov attempted to 'aborder l'histoire de front' by using important events in a great historical crisis. Whereas the characters of Paolo Paoli had been almost exclusively members of the bourgeoisie, he wished now to write a play in which the important rôles were played by proletarians. With these aims in mind, the choice of the Paris Commune seemed an ideal one. This intensely dramatic event in the history of mankind allowed him to construct a play in which the class struggle was of central importance, and supplied a solution to the problem that

had troubled him with Paolo Paoli: how to create a character who was both 'positive' and proletarian.

But he did not wish to write a purely polemical play. He had already had some experience of the use of polemics in drama: in 1958 he had written three short political plays for a collection entitled Théâtre de Société which was published by the communist firm 'Les Editeurs Français Réunis'. The volume includes a useful introduction by Adamov, which helps to explain the use he wished to make of polemical theatre. His approach was to stress the literal and grotesque elements in a situation:

La situation française actuelle, par exemple, avec ses paradoxes apparents, ses retournements grotesques dissimulant l'impeccable logique des intérêts de classe, demande à être représentée, et cela le plus littéralement, donc le plus grossièrement possible.<sup>1</sup>

This shows his belief in displaying to his public the laughable contradictions in the motives claimed by the governing class, who, thus exposed to ridicule, would be robbed of their power. But he realised that this belief was far from invulnerable. The fact that exposure to ridicule does not necessarily achieve the required result, was dramatised in one of the same series of plays, entitled La Complainte du Ridicule. In it, 'le Ridicule' complained that his proverbial ability to kill had deserted him; as Adamov said in his preface, "Je me suis demandé si souvent pourquoi le ridicule ne tuait plus, que

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<sup>1</sup> Théâtre de Société, Paris, 1958, p.9.

j'ai fini par faire du Ridicule un personnage fatigué."<sup>2</sup>

This type of allegorising was something which never ceased to tempt Adamov. Applied here to a precise political objective, it had a precise effect, unlike the allegorising of his early theatre. The objective in all three plays was basically the same: to protest against the oppression of man by man, and to expose some of the mechanisms which enable man to oppress his fellows. The first play, Intimité, which also used an allegorical technique, was placed in a mock medieval setting and reads rather like a preliminary sketch for Sainte Europe. The play is a send-up of General de Gaulle, thinly disguised as 'La Cause Incarnée'. The various social groups are personified, the police, for example, are 'Les Effets de la Cause, personnages muets, mais robustes', and the workers are personified as 'L'Homme qui voit les causes et ressent les effets'. Everything is drawn into the political allegory, even the food, a ragout called 'capital-travail' and a 'salade' called 'contre-toute-dictature-d'où-qu'elle-vienne'. The tone of the allegory is admirably maintained, and although it is very short, the play makes its point very persuasively through its use of the grotesque and the ridiculous.

The second play, Je ne suis pas français, presents another example of Adamov's inspiration from real events. It was based on the account he had heard from a journalist friend of his experiences in Algeria. The journalist had been making enquiries in Algeria, shortly after

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.9.

de Gaulle's rise to power in 1958, when the General was insisting on Franco-Algerian fraternisation. With typical clarity, and economy, Adamov concentrated on the one reply which the journalist claimed to have received from every Arab he interrogated: "Je ne suis pas français", and this was used to explode the whole idea of fraternisation for the myth it was.

The third, La Complainte du Ridicule, though based on the attractive idea that 'le Ridicule ne tue plus', was very quickly outdated, since it accused the General of intending to falsify the Algerian vote so that a massive 'Yes' to integration would be the outcome, whereas soon after 1959, the General was in fact looking for ways of according independence to Algeria. This short monologue is also marred by its ending which becomes a sort of call to action; Le Ridicule begs his friends to help him in his fight to say "non à la fausse république, non à la guerre, non à la misère," whereupon they stop pelting him with bad eggs and all rally round.

This was perhaps the most openly propagandist piece he ever wrote, and it illustrates two of the built-in dangers of crudely propagandist literature: the speed with which it becomes outdated, and the unconvincing nature of any direct appeal to action coming from the stage of a theatre. In perfect accordance with the Communist Party line, it contained as much criticism of the socialists as it did of the right-wing groups and gives a clear indication of the final leftward push administered to Adamov by the events of 1958.

Adamov never officially joined the party. But his feeling of the

need for an open commitment appears clearly in these three plays and in a fourth published in La Nouvelle Critique, entitled Les Apolitiques, which endeavoured to show how, at a time of crisis like 1958, it was impossible to opt out of politics.<sup>3</sup> To claim to be 'apolitical' was to surrender to the party that was prepared to be most ruthless in its use of force.

Although he promised in the preface of Théâtre de Société that he would produce more plays of this type, he did not in fact do so, but the techniques he had tried out in them came to be of great use later in his more complex political plays, especially Le Printemps 71, which presents several clear examples of them. The allegorical style of Intimité was borrowed for the 'Guignols'; the procedure of debunking government rhetoric by juxtaposing it with straightforward statements from simple people was used to great effect as we shall see<sup>4</sup>; the rather crude call to action at the end of Intimité was also repeated in the final epilogue of Le Printemps 71, though in a slightly more effective form by the singing of the Internationale. And finally, the lesson that only a whole-hearted commitment to the struggle can serve, and that it is doubly dangerous to be a liberal moderate, so plainly stated in Les Apolitiques, was given further and much more complex treatment in Le Printemps 71, especially in the portrayal of one of the central figures, Robert Oudet.

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<sup>3</sup> 'Les Apolitiques', La Nouvelle Critique, no.101, décembre 1958, pp.124-131.

<sup>4</sup> See below, pp.392-393.

Each of these short plays was able to devote itself exclusively to making a single point. When, on the other hand, he approached the subject of the Commune, Adamov was fascinated by its very complexity, by the fact that it showed "tant de grands pressentiments, d'erreurs, de combats sur tous les fronts, et en si peu de temps."<sup>5</sup> Here it was necessary to show not the ridiculousness of a single statement, or policy, but the way in which so many different things arose to make a multitude of contradictory claims on the leaders of the Commune.

He was thus faced with a problem basically different from that facing a writer of straightforward polemical theatre. Instead of simply clarifying the essential facts of one issue and bringing out any inherent contradictions, Adamov had to place himself in the position of the Commune leaders and consider the problem of establishing priorities between a multitude of issues, with the additional problem of ends and means, once the priorities themselves had been assigned. Adamov never launched himself in the public debate of left-wingers about such matters in the manner of Camus or Sartre. For him, such things were only usefully to be discussed in a real historical situation.<sup>6</sup> The Commune provided just such a situation.

In his approach to it, Adamov was very true to Communard ideals, in that he tried to place the emphasis not so much on any one individual, but on the 'collectivity'. This is something that is very difficult to

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<sup>5</sup> Ici et Maintenant, p.118 (Adamov's emphasis).

<sup>6</sup> In this respect, his practice could be described as Sartrian.

do in a play. Sartre had tried to do something like it in Le Diable et le Bon Dieu: only when Goetz began to serve the aims of the peasant army as a whole, instead of searching for personal salvation, did he achieve authentic behaviour. But this discovery came at the end of a long and intensely individual pilgrimage in which Goetz wrestled by himself and with himself. Brecht managed to point the need for collective activity in his play about the Commune, through the insertion of lyrical material such as the song 'Keine oder Alle'.<sup>7</sup>

But Adamov's play tried to show the private dramas and the collective drama reacting the one upon the other at every juncture of the plot. He did not sacrifice his early rejection of the hero, analysed in Chapter 1. Every action by every character had significance in the history of all. Adamov might almost have been inspired by the same phrase of Dostoievski's that stands at the head of Simone de Beauvoir's Le Sang des Autres: "Chacun est responsable de tout devant tous."<sup>8</sup>

Adamov's method was to show the problem of ends and means facing the Communards not in the form of one person's scruples about how far he was permitted to use violence, but rather as a collective struggle for existence. When one member was unwilling to take the ruthless measures required, then one, maybe many, of his friends died. Every action taken individually or collectively by members of the Commune, had repercussions on their chances of survival; it was the collective rather than the individual which benefited from their successes and

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<sup>7</sup> Bertolt Brecht, Stücke X, Suhrkamp, 1962, pp.419-420.

<sup>8</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, Le Sang des Autres, Paris, 1945.

suffered from their failures.

Thus the emphasis was not placed on the individual crisis of conscience about ends and means, but on the importance of collective survival. The approach is Leninist in the sense that what Lenin understood from the failure of the Commune, was that a proletarian collectivity, if it was to survive, had to realise that the bourgeoisie must inevitably oppose it, and therefore it could not think about changing conditions of life until it had first ensured the means of its own survival.

Equally important in this play was the influence of O'Casey, whose plays Adamov had begun to read shortly before he started on Le Printemps 71. He wished to match O'Casey's realistic psychological portrayal of the Dublin proletariat and to achieve the same warmth and verisimilitude that he achieved. As we shall see, Adamov did achieve this by not over-idealising his Communards and by making every one of them exhibit some kind of failing. Many of them follow a complex evolution of character, both influencing and influenced by the evolution of the group as a whole. And it was because of this careful psychological portrayal of the changing Communard attitudes that Adamov felt he had been justified in attempting a play on exactly the same subject as Brecht's Days of the Commune.

Adamov had thought long and carefully about the historical play, and he was trying to avoid all the standard dangers of the medium. He made this clear in an explanation of why he felt Brecht's play fell short of perfection. He placed his judgement in the perspective of what he claimed were the two chief dangers facing the historical play-

wright:

Ces deux écueils, les voici: prendre les événements historiques comme toile de fond et faire apparaître surtout les aventures individuelles; ou réduire celles-ci au minimum pour ne laisser apparaître que l'Histoire.<sup>9</sup>

Brecht, he felt, had fallen victim to the second of these dangers. He had been so keen to clarify the lessons which emerged from the historical events, that he did not produce credible characters. We can best understand what Adamov was trying to do in Le Printemps 71 by remembering that the play's composition was governed by a desire to find a middle way between the Scylla and Charybdis defined in the words just quoted. While he had no wish to write a purely political drama, he nevertheless believed, as we have seen, in the poetry of the concrete situation. He shared Brecht's belief that the poetry of a play should lie in the actual situations.<sup>10</sup> He thus wished to do two things: to draw the political lessons that could be drawn from the period, but also to give a living picture of the people who composed it.

But although the didactic aim of the play was partly served by observing the errors and human failings of the Communards, his approach was still sufficiently Brechtian for him to be unwilling to abandon an opportunity for satirising the bourgeoisie.

The means he decided on was to introduce a separate convention for the representation of the bourgeoisie. Whereas the realistic scenes

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<sup>9</sup> Ici et Maintenant, p.119.

<sup>10</sup> See above, Chapter 1 (Part III), p.293.

concentrated chiefly on the Communards, the bourgeoisie were presented almost entirely through 'Guignols'. There were nine of these interspersed at regular intervals through the play. He explained in his 'préface' to the play, that

Par 'guignols' je n'entends pas du tout des scènes de marionnettes, mais des intermèdes allégoriques, joués par des acteurs, et même sans stylisation excessive. Les guignols présentent, je trouve, plusieurs avantages. D'abord celui de couper, de contrarier la pièce tout en la complétant, de la 'distancer', en somme; ensuite, d'éclairer, du point de vue de l'histoire, les tableaux qui les suivent, évitant ainsi aux personnages de longues et fastidieuses explications sur les faits.<sup>11</sup>

These scenes thus had a dual purpose, that of providing historical information, and of creating a 'Verfremdungseffekt'. But why did he want to alienate, and from what? As well as the word 'distancer', he used the words 'couper', 'contrarier la pièce'. This suggests that the function of the alienation was supposed to extend over into the Communard scenes and not merely to apply to the Guignols themselves. Obviously one of his chief aims in dramas of this period was to demystify or demythologise history. He had already achieved this in Paolo Paoli by the juxtaposed quotations projected between the scenes, and these also had the second function of conveying historical information. With the Guignols, Adamov was doing the same thing; getting across the facts of history, but in a ludicrous manner. Clearly, however, he also wished to "couper", cut up the play, causing deliberate breaks in the story of the Communards. In this way, the play was broken

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<sup>11</sup> Théâtre IV, p.89.

up into scenes constructed around one clear choice, the results of which were clearly exposed.

The other chief aim of the Guignols as expressed by Adamov himself was to "familiariser le public avec l'histoire de la Commune"<sup>12</sup> and to "éclairer d'un point de vue historique les tableaux qui les suivent".<sup>13</sup> But if we examine them carefully, we find that they are not in fact very effective in this respect, particularly in the second and third acts. This was perhaps because Adamov attempted to convey as much as possible in the Guignols by means of literal enactment, thus returning to his earlier principal of 'le sens littéral'. This can be clearly seen in his portrayal of the Bank of France. She is represented by a severely dressed old lady with a monocle who has very little to say, and who, for most of the play, shuts herself firmly inside a strong-box. She occasionally lifts the lid sufficiently to peer out, but brings it down again with great speed at the sight of the Commune. But there is a limit to the amount of historical information that can be conveyed when the means of expression is so very generalised as this.

Some of the other characters, however, have more to say than the Bank, and wherever possible they speak words which were actually spoken by their historical counterparts. The ineffectiveness of the Conciliateur, for example, is shown up by giving him a phrase borrowed from Louis Blanc:

Mères, c'est à vous qu'il appartient de sauver  
la France! Les soldats ne savent pas résister

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<sup>12</sup> Ici et Maintenant, p.129.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.120.

aux prières d'une femme.<sup>14</sup>

The Conciliateur is a hypocritical figure whose contortions and dishonesties recall those of L'Abbé in Paolo Paoli. All that his idealistic appeals can achieve, is temporarily to obscure the Versaillais' clear determination to wipe out every Communard.

The figure of Thiers is most successful. He is practical, realistic, ready to lick Bismarck's boots whenever necessary, and possesses just the quality of ruthless opportunism which the Communards lack, and without which, tragically, they cannot survive. He is most effective when quietly confident, giving, for example, his historic assurance that the reoccupation of Paris would involve no more than "quelques maisons de trouées, quelques personnes de tuées."<sup>15</sup>

When not using the words of the genuine people of the period, the figures in the guignols adopt the speech habits of the characters in Adamov's earliest plays, saying not what the historical characters would have said, but what would have remained at the backs of their minds as thoughts; they speak what an actor calls his 'sub-text'. The procedure is the exact opposite of that used in Paolo Paoli, although the effect is very similar. In Paolo Paoli there was frequently a clear intention behind, and different from the spoken words; here the two are perfectly fused. Thus, for example, the following exchange shows up, in its real light, the peace treaty signed between Bismarck and the French:

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<sup>14</sup> Théâtre IV, p.230.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p.217.

L'ASSEMBLEE ; Mais dites... mon bon Monsieur...  
 vous restez quand même chez nous, n'est-ce pas?  
 BISMARCK ; (fier, sur son cheval) Je vous  
 promets, Madame, d'occuper le territoire français  
 jusqu'au paiement intégral de votre indemnité  
 de guerre.  
 L'ASSEMBLEE ; Oh, merci! ...<sup>16</sup>

This tone is the verbal counterpart of the Daumieresque caricature which Adamov demanded in the costumes, make-up etc. of the Guignol characters.

The caricatural quality of the Guignols was apparently most successful in performance, since several critics praised the Guignols very highly, Lemarchand talking of Adamov's "verve critique", and preferring the Guignols to the realistic scenes.<sup>17</sup> They do indeed show Adamov's gift for contriving action to give literal expression to an idea or activity, particularly when it offers an opportunity for humour of the grotesque kind. The two-face/nature of the Conciliateur, for example, is emphasised by his false beard which falls off at just the moment when he is about to win over the Commune.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, the inclusion of actual texts of Communard proclamations helps to convey the tone of the period as well as the required information. But towards the end, where the information principally concerns the renewed attacks on Paris, the repetition of Thiers' physical attacks becomes less meaningful.

The 'Guignols' were designed to provide a picture of a crude but

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp.98-99.

<sup>17</sup> Le Figaro Littéraire, 18 mai 1963.

<sup>18</sup> Théâtre IV, p.128.

cruel bourgeoisie who were determined, in marked contrast to the Communards, to regain power by any means. The Communards' failure to realise this was pointed out by use of a Brechtian epic structure. The characters move in a succession of short scenes through the different stages of their story, and gradually, as the play proceeds, their mistakes are pointed out by a contrast between the intentions of their actions and the results that ensue from them. The epic style of construction allowed Adamov to build up, in the development of the play, a dialogue between the characters and the events they lived through. We see first the historical situation, then a choice being made, then the change brought about in the situation by this choice, and finally the character's reaction to this change, which forces him to make another choice.

This process can best be examined in the development of one of the main characters, Robert Oudet, who, starting from a very moderate position, was gradually forced to see its inadequacy in a revolutionary situation. Adamov went so far as to say that the play might have been called Les Erreurs Politiques de Robert Oudet. By the end of the play he has realised some of these errors, but for most of the play he sticks to them tenaciously. Like Brecht in Mother Courage, Adamov put his lesson across to the audience most powerfully when it was not understood by the character himself.

For example, Robert Oudet insists on total freedom of speech. In the early parts of the play he maintains that this is all-important, and that they cannot simply arrest everyone who disagrees with Commune policies, or close down papers that criticise it. When the very person to whom he puts this argument, L'Hercule, is killed two days later by

i/ a group of people demonstrating support for Versailles, Robert Oudet still fails to see that they are engaged ~~on~~ a struggle for survival. Thus in Tableau 10, when he and Pierre Fournier have their hands on L'Abbé, Robert Oudet refuses, against pressure from Fournier, to arrest him.<sup>19</sup> As a result, L'Abbé (who is not so scrupulous) is able to collect evidence identifying Pierre Fournier, which he uses to have him shot during 'la semaine sanglante'.<sup>20</sup>

This is an example of the method by which Adamov used personal characteristics, set in the progression of events, to point up the faults of the Communards. Robert Oudet's character is chiefly used in this way to show up the disastrous moderation of many Communards, who followed beautiful ideas of "liberté sans rivages" instead of adopting the necessary ruthless discipline. The predicament in which he finds himself is rather similar to that of Brecht's Shen Te; like her, he finds the temptation to goodness is terrible. But he is a Shen Te who is incapable, until it is too late, of finding his other persona. He is constantly caught up in the mood of happiness and gaiety to the extent of forgetting or ignoring the real objectives of the Commune. In the first scene, for example, he breaks up a discussion between Pierre Fournier and Sofia about the vital matter of whether the bank should be occupied, in order to drink "A Paris, et à la liberté du monde!"<sup>21</sup> He has his eyes so fixed on the ideal objective, that he

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.179.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.262.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.108.

is incapable of facing up to the immediate problems. In a similar manner, he stops Pierre Fournier and Jeanne-Marie protesting at the failure of the Garde Nationale to pursue the regulars fleeing to Versailles. He is a moderate, delighted with what has been achieved, but unwilling to consolidate it with ruthless and immediate action.

Robert Oudet is not, like Mother Courage, totally involved in self-interest and incapable of learning the lessons of his predicament. He learns his lesson, but he is too slow. Time and gain the criteria which he applies to a situation are seen to be quite inappropriate to that situation. There is a 'décalage' which both heightens the drama and gives emphasis to the lesson.

There is a good illustration in Tableau 14 of how a 'moderate' like Robert Oudet, who refuses to take an aggressive, revolutionary initiative, inevitably finds himself driven into a defensive action which has no overall coherence, since the more ruthless party opposing him has taken the initiative. He is approached by Lagarde, who asks him for help in getting a bed for a child in an overcrowded hospital. At first, though he would like to help, he feels there are more important demands on his time. But a news-vendor is heard shouting:

sl "Massacre des Fédérés à la Belle-Epine: Deux enfants lâchement assassinés!"<sup>22</sup>,  
and as if feeling that this action must be countered, he agrees to help Lagarde.

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22 Ibid., p.200.

Thus his whole conduct becomes a sort of 'défense quartier par quartier'. Instead of having a coherent plan, he simply rushes to defend whichever point is attacked, and so is easily manipulated by the enemy. The literal enactment of this mistake through the development of the play is pointed up at the end in a brief scene with Jeanne-Marie just before they both meet their deaths when Robert Oudet says:

Si seulement j'avais crié que la fameuse  
 défense quartier par quartier ne valait rien,  
 et qu'elle nous perdrait.  
 JEANNE-MARIE : Tu ne l'as pas crié, mais tu  
 as été de toutes les barricades.<sup>23</sup>

Pruchonien

The lesson of the dangers of Robert Oudet's moderation is rubbed home by the figure of his father, a strict Pruchonien, who is even less willing to act unscrupulously than his son. He is one of the elected representatives who steps down when he discovers that according to previous legislation the total number of votes cast was not sufficient to elect him. His constant presence in the background is very effective, since it suggests the past of 1848 literally hanging over and influencing the present of Robert Oudet and the Commune.<sup>24</sup> In this way Adamov suggests one of the causes of the Commune's failure in its tendency to look back, its predominance of 'souvenirs quarante-huitards'.

But if Robert Oudet's attitude was responsible for the failure to take required action in Act I, if his political education came too slowly and too late in Act II, he finds a satisfaction in the simple

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p.260.

<sup>24</sup> Léon Oudet is excessively impressed when he discovers that an uncle of Martin Bernard was 'proscrit sous l'Empire'.

fact of commitment, despite the Commune's failure in Act III. There is a point in Tableau 18 where the Communards are building the Panthéon barricade and where Robert Oudet has these words<sup>25</sup> which are almost reminiscent of Malraux's heroes:

Croyez-moi, la vraie chose, la chose unique,  
c'est qu'on soit ici, tous ensemble!<sup>25</sup>

From this point onwards, as they are gradually killed off by the advancing Versailles troops, there is a growing feeling among the Communards of this spirit of togetherness which is very similar to the feeling of fraternity experienced by the men condemned to die together after the failure of their insurrection in La Condition Humaine.

This note of togetherness reaches its height in Tableau 24, the scene of Robert Oudet's death in which he and Jeanne-Marie are reconciled in a spirit of assurance that they have not died in vain, that others will come and carry on where they were forced to give up. This is not overdone; there is no feeling of a mystic communion in common death, as in Malraux. But one aspect of the commitment to the proletarian cause has been suggested: the solidarity of people of all times and all places fighting for a common cause.

However, two other members of the Commune, Mémère and Henriette, enable Adamov to make a didactic use of character by presenting the opposite spectacle of a gradual drift away from commitment to the Commune. Mémère is not characterised in any great depth. For most of

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<sup>25</sup> Théâtre IV, p.232.

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the first part of the play she is present in the background, since many of the early scenes take place in front of her café, 'le cochon fidèle'. She provides an example of the harshness of Adamov's judgements on his characters after the event, which sometimes seemed to be an attempt to make up for his indulgence to that character in the play. In his 'Lettre à Otto Haas', he describes her as:

un personnage typique, son attitude a été  
 et demeure celle de nombre de petits  
 commerçants, pleins de bonne volonté, mais,  
 en aucun cas, prêts à la lutte.<sup>26</sup>

From the solid communist point of view, she is condemned because, when the Commune is defeated, she attempts to save her skin. But in the play, she has some justification for her attitude. If we follow D.H. Lawrence's advice: "Don't trust the artist, trust the tale", we find that Adamov the playwright has produced a more subtle character than Adamov the political commentator will allow.

For example, she approves Henriette's decision to break with Le Garibaldien, saying:

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Ce sont des toqués, ces hommes-là... Ils ne  
 se rendent pas compte que c'est nous, les  
 petits, qui pour finir, comme toujours... Si  
 je savais seulement ce qu'est devenu Riri!  
 Et gifler une femme! Un Français, quand même,  
 il ne ferait pas ça.<sup>27</sup>

The author's condemnation is reinforced by Mémère's silly remark about the different way a 'true Frenchman' would have behaved. But the speech is in fact quite delicately balanced. We cannot ignore the fact

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26 Ici et Maintenant, p.138.

27 Théâtre IV, p.242.

that her analysis of the situation is correct: it is the little people who will suffer, and her anxiety about Riri reminds us that she has given her son for the Communard cause. Other episodes involving Mémère present similar ambiguities, and even in the final scene, Adamov took care to mitigate her treason with accents of genuine suffering:

Remettre le terme à trois mois plus tard,  
c'est bien gentil, seulement quand, deux mois  
plus tard, il faut lui donner ses gosses, à la  
Commune! Moi j'appelle ça prêter avec intérêts,  
Tonton.<sup>28</sup>

Of course Adamov took care to show her limitations in this speech: even her grief is expressed in semi-commercial terms, but the fact remains that she has given everything and is in a worse position than before. Just as Anna Fierling, though in Brecht's view despicable at the end of Mother Courage, was seen by audiences to embody something splendid of the brute resistance of human nature, so Mémère seems to present a certain ferocious stoicism, despite her despicable betrayal of Polia.

A final example of how Adamov used characters to draw political lessons, and one in which his own feelings intervened to a lesser degree, is that of La Pauvre Fille. This type of character was present in his earlier plays but his treatment of her here is very much more controlled. She is not, like La Pauvre Prostituée of La Parodie, included to satisfy an obsession of Adamov's. Instead, she is carefully used to make four important points about the class war. First, she is in a shocking state of deprivation, and faced with this appalling poverty, the

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p.273.

attitudes of Communards who wish to help her are contrasted with those of Versailles supporters, who merely wish to use her. Second, she is used to show how difficult it is to provide an effective means of preventing exploitation of the poor by the rich, even when the necessary legislation exists. Third, she is used as an example of how the real enemy of progress is ignorance: her ignorance is such that she is quite incapable of seeing where her real interests lie, following first one side, then the other. Finally, she serves to show that the class struggle is serious: all the thanks she receives for making tricolour armbands for the Versaillais is to be shot as a 'pétroleuse'. She too exhibits some development of character, however slight. It is in Adamov's words,

Le chemin ... de son incompréhension totale  
à l'ombre d'une compréhension, puis de nouveau  
à l'incompréhension totale.<sup>29</sup>

Any attempt to view in a critical spirit the reasons for the failure of the Commune is bound to take into account two important factors: the considerable delay before the Commune forces marched on Versailles, and their failure to occupy the Bank of France. Brecht places the latter in a very central position, in an admirable scene between Beslay and the Marquis de Ploeuc which was praised by Adamov.<sup>30</sup> But the subject is only mentioned twice in the whole of Adamov's play, and then only in short passages of one or two lines. The question of an early march on Versailles is only mentioned three times in an equally

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<sup>29</sup> Ici et Maintenant, p.134.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.119.

sketchy fashion.

Of course, this could be defended by an appeal to historical verisimilitude: the only way of explaining the delay in the march until April 3rd. is by assuming that the euphoria was so great that no-one was prepared to think about action, and that, quite apart from the Communards' scruples about starting a civil war, it did not seem necessary, since Paris had been taken so easily and the rest of the country was expected to follow the Parisians' lead. However, it is difficult to see why Adamov devoted so little attention to the matter of the Bank. Again, it was perhaps an obvious means, though rather a negative one, of showing that no-one took the matter seriously enough to bother discussing it, and that their immediate financial requirements having been met by advances from the Bank, they were so busy with their other preoccupations that they failed to realise the bargaining power that seizure would have given them.

These explanations have at least the merit of being in keeping with Adamov's general aim in the play which was to show what happened in concrete form through the action of his play rather than to describe or discuss it. Brecht's play contains quite a large number of scenes showing the debates of the Commune in session. Adamov's has none. Brecht gives prominence to these scenes, partly because the inconclusive nature of much of the debate shows the lack of effective leadership. Adamov prefers to show this in action, as the Communards are defeated at barricade after barricade for want of a unified defence plan. Whereas in Brecht's play the Commune discusses what to do about the Bank in session before deciding to do nothing, in Adamov's we simply see the

lack of interest manifested by the ordinary Parisians.

The most important means of criticism used by Adamov in earlier plays was 'démystification', which usually involved showing up an inauthentic use of language. Similar examples of 'démystification' can be found in this play, but they are accomplished in different ways. First, they are found in the Guignols, as we have seen. But Versailles propaganda is more often shown up in a rather delightful way by putting it into the mouths of the Communards. There are many examples of this. The play opens on one, as Tonton, 'lisant d'une voix parodique', reads out Thiers' proclamation asking for all the cannons to be deposited in the arsenals.<sup>31</sup> There is another good example in Tableau 5, stressing the importance of the commitment to action, and showing how untrue propaganda can be debunked by showing its inapplicability to the situation. During the euphoric inauguration of the newly elected Commune, Tonton spots Pierre Fournier in the 'service d'ordre':

TONTON : Mais c'est Pierrot! Dans le service d'ordre!

JEANNE-MARIE : (riant) Du gouvernement du désordre!

PIERRE FOURNIER : (riant) Ce qui est une nouvelle preuve de l'odieuse et sanglante dictature qui pèse sur les pauvres prolétaires parisiens...<sup>32</sup>

In the joyful way they all take up the game, there is a reminder of Brecht's scene in which Papa and Jean act out a little charade pretending to be Thiers and Bismarck.<sup>33</sup> Exactly the same technique is

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<sup>31</sup> Théâtre IV, pp.101-102.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pp.141-142.

<sup>33</sup> Bertolt Brecht, op. cit., pp.370-373.

used by Robert Oudet and Jeanne-Marie at the beginning of Tableau 8. Tonton is leaving his old lodgings under the protection of the Commune's decree that accumulated rent debts can be written off, but his profiteering landlord, Pichambart, tries to stop him with these words:

Alors, parce que ces messieurs de la Commune...

(Entrent Oudet père et fils et Jeanne-Marie)

ROBERT OUDET : (devinant la suite du discours de Pichambart...) ...usant d'une force usurpée, veulent nous appliquer un décret inhumain.

JEANNE-MARIE : (poursuivant) ...toi, tu te défiles sans me payer mon dû. (Riant et désignant Tonton:) Profiteur!<sup>34</sup>

The game-like approach gives the impression that they are not fooled by this propaganda, that they are healthy enough to be able to laugh at its obvious inappropriateness to the facts. As a means of discrediting Versailles double-talk, the disabused laughter of simple people is most effective. It also has the additional force of showing that they are not taking the threats of the Versailles propaganda seriously enough, with the result that in the end they themselves become the victims of the double-talk that they can see through. The double-talk that made it possible for relatively humane, civilised Europeans to slaughter more than 20,000 Parisians in a week.

Finally, on the subject of 'démystification', the Versailles sympathisers who remain in Paris also display the insincere language found in Paolo Paoli. It will not be necessary to repeat an analysis of the procedure; two examples may be taken. The first shows how Adamov combined clever characterisation with this use of language. It is in

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<sup>34</sup> Théâtre IV, p.167.

Tableau 10, where l'Abbé and Anatole de Courmont, surprised by some Gardes Nationales, <sup>aux</sup> have hidden hurriedly behind the door of a shed. Despite Anatole's terrified pleadings, l'Abbé refuses to remove his cassock pretending that this refusal is governed by his loyalty to the church. But when caught and interrogated, we see him using the fact that he is wearing it as an argument for his innocence:

Croyez-vous vraiment, citoyens, que si nous  
nourrissions les intentions que vous nous  
prêtez, je n'eusse pas revêtu une autre tenue?  
(Ricanant:) Une soutane, ça s'enlève et ça se  
remet.<sup>35</sup>

In much the same way as in Paolo Paoli, Adamov here achieves a criticism of the innate hypocrisy of l'Abbé's motives, as well as an indication of his character, an amusing play on the idea of the disguise, and an ingenious moment of suspense.

We may take some words spoken by Beaubourg as a second example of double-talk, an example which is so exaggerated as to be laughable. He is trying to persuade l'Abbé that it is important for Le Figaro to appear in Paris, while nevertheless affirming his perfect loyalty to Versailles:

Si Le Figaro, M.l'abbé, n'écoutait que son coeur,  
bien sur qu'il ne paraîtrait pas. Mais il  
se doit à ses abonnés, il se doit surtout aux  
deux cents travailleurs qu'il fait vivre.<sup>36</sup>

But these are isolated examples. The characters in this play are by and large not so devious as those of Paolo Paoli. The camps are

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35 Ibid., p.179.

36 Ibid., p.156.

clearly drawn up, there is little doubt as to which side most people are on.

Considering the amount of critical material Adamov packed into the play, it is surprising that he was at all able to achieve his second chief aim, which was to spread his admiration for the Commune. But although the play does take a fundamentally critical attitude, it is what one might call a loving criticism. Adamov was in love with the Commune, in his own terms 'littéralement fasciné'<sup>37</sup>, and he treated it as he treated all his loves or obsessions: with tenderness. His attitude towards it was almost paternal. He said, in his preface, that he did not wish any one character to stand out above the others:

Il fallait que cette première place revienne  
à tous ceux de la Commune, même aux personnages  
secondaires.<sup>38</sup>

In this play, to borrow a phrase used by Lucien Goldmann about Malraux's novels, we have "le remplacement du héros individuel par un personnage collectif."<sup>39</sup> It is because Adamov had this attitude of tenderness and this determination to "rendre le "ton" de cette époque, touchant, navrant, innocent, admirable,"<sup>40</sup> that the play escaped from a narrow communist orthodoxy and became a drama of multiple conflicts, both at the political and human levels, not only a spectacle of working class solidarity.

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<sup>37</sup> Ici et Maintenant, p.124.

<sup>38</sup> Théâtre IV, p.88. (Adamov's emphasis.)

<sup>39</sup> Lucien Goldmann, Pour une sociologie du roman, Paris, 1964, p.87.

<sup>40</sup> Théâtre IV, p.88.

The emphasis on the collectivity was achieved in a number of different ways. One of these was to concentrate on scenes of celebration, such as the first scene, or of mutual exhortation in Tableau 18, mentioned above. Such an emphasis became possible in this play because the history of the Commune of Paris was in reality the history of the common people who tried to create something and were ruthlessly crushed. It was not the history of any one outstanding character, his vision and achievement; therein, no doubt, lay part of the reason for its failure. In order to convey the fact that the history of the Commune really was the history of a collectivity, Adamov attempted to include personal dramas, jealousies, ambitions, only when these concerned or affected the life of the whole group:

Je n'ai montré des histoires d'amour que lorsqu'elles se prêtaient à des modifications dues aux événements.<sup>41</sup>

Jeanne-Marie, for example, buries her jealousy of Polia when it is a matter of persuading Henriette to stand firm. Robert Oudet abandons his insistence that he must stay near Polia to protect her when he realises that the last struggle demands every able-bodied man.

The care with which all the different relationships within the group have been worked out, so that both the political and the emotional lives of each member of the group are conditioned by those of other members, is most impressive. An example of Adamov's success here can be seen in the evolution of Henri Lagarde. The movement leading up to his final adoption of a political position is as much a

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<sup>41</sup> Ici et Maintenant, p.119.

response to certain emotional factors concerning other members of the group as a result of political reasoning. He is strongly drawn to Jeanne-Marie, partly through his admiration for her unswerving loyalty to a political position he does not share. Jeanne-Marie, who is not indifferent to him, finds her inclinations thwarted by other claims on her personal and political loyalties, a situation which is literally enacted in Tableau 17.<sup>42</sup> In the following Tableau, his insistence that he could not live without her at first seems to be just a declaration of love, but helps to prepare for his final adoption of the Communard cause in the scene where he meets his death, and indeed takes on a political significance in the light of that scene, since his declaration comes to mean not only that he cannot live without hope of her love, but also that he does not wish to live in a world where her political ideals are unrealised.

Adamov also intended the brief 'transitions' to contribute to his propagandist aim. It is perhaps curious that having already established two conventions, very different the one from the other, in the Guignols and the 'realistic' scenes, Adamov should then add a third in the form of the Voice of the Commune. In the letter to Otto Haas, he made it clear that the purpose of these was to show that he took the Commune seriously, being worried that she might be seen by the audience as a figure of fun on the same footing as the other figures of the Guignols:

Je les crois nécessaires parce que, conjointement

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<sup>42</sup> Théâtre IV, p.224. Jeanne-Marie is about to follow Lagarde when Henriette bursts into tears and drops her collecting box again; Jeanne-Marie has to stay and support Henriette's weakening devotion to the Commune.

au rire des guignols, mérite d'être perçu  
aussi le sérieux dans la nuit de la Commune. 43

If, as this quotation states, the aim of the 'Transitions' was to get across the important achievements of the Commune, they cannot be said to have succeeded. The majority of them are in any case quite superfluous from this point of view, since they convey information which is enacted in the play itself. This is true of nos. 2, 4, 6, 7 and 8. Nos. 1 and 3 are simple statements of belief in the working people of Paris, "seule classe capable de sauver le pays." Transition 5 announces the setting up of the Comité de l'Union des Femmes, which is not superfluous information, since it is not announced elsewhere, but equally is not the greatest achievement of the Commune. Finally, Transition 9 announces the order promulgated by the Commission de la guerre, to shoot immediately all inmates of any house from which anyone had been seen firing on the Garde Nationale. This is interesting in showing how ruthless the Commune were finally forced to become in their desperate fight for survival, but again could hardly be seen as an important achievement. In short, although they serve Adamov's purpose in giving an opportunity for some of the Commune's edicts to be pronounced on stage, their only advantage is in their soberer language; from the point of view of content, they are somewhat superfluous.

The emphasis on solidarity and common action is also present in the scenes of rejoicing. No historian of the Commune fails to mention

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43 Ici et Maintenant, p.138.

the gaiety of its first brief weeks, as Paris was suddenly drenched in sunshine, the <sup>seige</sup> over, and all the hardships of the past few years seemed gone for good.

Alistair Horne mentions this, carefully quoting his sources:

Although the dispensation of law had all but come to a standstill with the 'disappearance' of most of the Parisian Judges as well as the police ... order was astonishingly well maintained. "Robberies, assaults, and other crimes became," as Dr. Powell claimed with corroboration from many others, "a very rare occurrence as far as I can remember." The streets seemed unusually empty and people went about calling each other 'citoyen' ... To the under-privileged, the oppressed, the frustrated of Paris, these last few days must have possessed an unimaginable magic, must have been golden with promise.<sup>44</sup>

One of the most difficult challenges faced by anyone writing a play on this subject must be how to convey this joyous atmosphere of innocence regained without becoming false or forced. Brecht's solution to the problem was to introduce songs, dancing and a simple but lyrical speech on the new state of Paris:

Das ist die erste Nacht der Geschichte, Freunde,  
in der dieses Paris keinen Mord, keinen Raub,  
keinen frechen Betrug und keine Schändung  
haben wird. Zum erstenmal sind seine Strassen  
sicher, es braucht keine Polizei. Denn die  
Bankiers und die kleinen Diebe, die  
Steurreintreiber und die Fabrikanten, die  
Minister, die Kokotten und die Geistlichkeit  
sind nach Versailles ausgewandert: die  
Stadt ist bewohnbar.<sup>45</sup>

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44 Alistair Horne, The Fall of Paris, London, 1965, pp.305-306.

45 Bertolt Brecht, op. cit., p.369.

Rather than stressing this feeling of innocence regained, which is so strong in Brecht, Adamov put the emphasis on the common work undertaken by the Communards. One of the most spontaneous moments of gaiety is in Tableau 11 when Sofia has returned from the provinces with the disappointing news that all the other Communes have been eliminated; but the others finding themselves reunited, discover a common joy in the work that is waiting for them in Paris, despite the fact that the early halcyon days are over and the rain has set in. The moment of common joy is a short one, and its cause is the prospect of common work which never ceases to multiply: "On travaillera, on dressera, on recensera"<sup>46</sup>, and this very haste is an important element in the way Adamov built up the sense of a shared destiny.

Furthermore, he tried to stress that during its short life, the Commune did achieve much that was of real value. The "tant de grands pressentiments ... sur tous les fronts"<sup>47</sup> were exemplified in various different ways, for instance in Tableau 8 (quoted from above, see note 34), in which we see the social legislation brought in by the Commune having a real effect on the lives of the people of Paris. Here the beneficiary is Tonton, and, in a short scene of authentic gaiety, we see the effect on him of the Commune's law which wrote off all outstanding rent debts.

As well as this, Adamov tried to show how the changed circumstances

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<sup>46</sup> Théâtre IV, p.184.

<sup>47</sup> See above, note 5.

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of life under the Commune opened up new opportunities for friendship: one direct result of the triumph of the Commune, he suggested, was that communication became easier. The first Tableau shows many of the Commune supporters meeting together, some for the first time, discussing the events of the day, the failure of the regular soldiers' mission to recapture the cannon and the defection of some to the Commune. Thirteen of the nineteen Communards are introduced in this scene.

This sense of excitement and common purpose is also one of the means Adamov uses to stress the failure of the Commune to coincide with its time. The scene in Tableau 11 described above ends on an ironic note, since their gaiety was partly occasioned by the news of Dombrowski's victory at Asnières, but the last episode of the scene shows Anatole de Courmont delightedly reading that Asnières has been captured by the Versailles forces. This ironic edge, an ever-present reminder of the fact that the Commune was doomed to failure, which prevents the scenes of joy from cloying, is clearest in the scenes which confront soldiers returning from the front and groups of Communards in the centre of Paris. Adamov spoke of "ce style rapide, cette syntaxe impatiente que j'aime tant." The central portion of Tableau 8 illustrates how this is put into dialogue: half finished sentences picked up by a second speaker before the first one can complete it, questions which do not need to be fully formulated before receiving an answer, elliptic syntax which frequently leaves out the main verb, a rapid varying of the tone, from anguished to sardonic to bitter; all these are present in the following passage:

HENRIETTE : Mais... Comment ont-ils pu?...  
 PIERRE FOURNIER : Comment? Tout simplement.  
 (Désignant les gardes:) Ils n'avaient pas de  
 cartouches.  
 PREMIER GARDE : Ni mangé depuis seize heures.  
 Alors, il a bien fallu décamper.  
 PREMIERE OUVRIERE : Mais pourquoi n'aviez-  
 vous pas de cartouches, citoyens?  
 PREMIER GARDE : Parce qu'on a été trahis. (...)  
 PIERRE FOURNIER : (enchaînant). Non, même pas.  
 C'est plutôt parce que la Commune, quand il s'agit  
 d'organisation...  
 MEMERE : Tu crois, Pierrot, que la Commune est?...  
 PIERRE FOURNIER : Perdue? Non, Mémère.<sup>48</sup>

No sooner is one problem mentioned than another is raised; the time literally escapes them and no single one of the problems can be faced, analysed, solved. With this rapid style, Adamov achieved a great sense of urgency and vividness and made up for the fact that his proletarian dialogue was at times strangely colourless and showed that he had not entirely escaped from the neutral style of his early plays, nor found a speech idiom which would really situate his characters in the Paris of 1871.

Finally, despite Adamov's critical intentions, the moderates like Léon and Robert Oudet, whose attitudes Adamov believed to be fatal, generate a kind of warmth which shows his fundamental sympathy for them which comes across almost despite himself, as Brecht's sympathy for the incorrigible Mother Courage comes across despite himself. As Esslin wrote:

Behind the rigid sociological framework, the human side constantly reasserted itself: while the politician in Brecht piled on the social

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<sup>48</sup> Théâtre IV, pp.169-170.

villany, the poet in him drew on the subconscious feeling he had for the archetypal mother-figure.<sup>49</sup>

There are uncertainties in Esslin's case, but I believe he is right in that any author has a fund of sympathy for his own characters, even, perhaps especially, those of whom he disapproves, and one can see this in the characters of, say, the Threepenny Opera no less than in those of Mother Courage. It was with a similar double standard that Adamov approached his characters in Le Printemps 71, and a comparison of this play with Days of the Commune will show how similar was the mixture of love and criticism displayed by Brecht and Adamov.

The question of characterisation in this play presented some new problems for Adamov. He had made it clear that he no longer thought psychology could be ignored in the theatre. Furthermore, one of his reasons for attempting the play, even after Brecht had written one on the same subject, was precisely that he felt Brecht's play had been too schematic and that he wished to clothe the bare bones of the story by showing the common people of Paris as they really were. As we saw in Chapter 1, his feeling about Brecht was always that, great though he was, it should be possible to produce a militant theatre which remained faithful to the psychological complexities exhibited by human beings.

His second problem was the sheer quantity of characters he had to establish. For a play with 36 characters (excluding the Guignols) named in its 'dramatis personae' it is a great achievement that they

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<sup>49</sup> Martin Esslin, Brecht, a choice of evils, London, 1965, p.209.

are all so clearly differentiated. The majority of the characters in the play are supporters of the Commune, nineteen out of the thirty-six, with a further six historical members of the Commune, like Vallès and Fraenkel, though these only put in occasional appearances. There are only nine Versailles supporters. The predominance of Communards shows Adamov's desire to centre the play on their group, but their very numbers made it difficult for him to accomplish the complex characterisation which was his reason for wanting to write the play. He realised this difficulty and tried to get over it by emphasising the varying evolutions of the different characters when placed in the same political crisis.

But being unable, for lack of space, to devote an equal amount of time to each one, he feared that for certain characters, this evolution was somewhat abrupt. This he felt could be remedied in the manner of production. He insisted, in his letter to Otto Haas, that the different developments of the minor characters should be just as clear, and were just as important, as those of the major characters. For example:

Henri Lagarde... peu à peu (et c'est à vous, Haas, de montrer ce "peu à peu") comprend que la Commune et la vraie république ne sont pas si différentes l'une de l'autre qu'il le croyait.<sup>50</sup>

Or again, he says of Polia:

Qu'elle change aussi "peu à peu", et que sa dernière "déclaration:" Polia Krikovskaja, Polonaise, membre de l'Union des Femmes pour la Défense de Paris..." ne soit pas une rupture, mais un aboutissement.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ici et Maintenant, p.134.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., pp.134-135.

Some of Adamov's fears that the development of these characters would seem abrupt are probably unjustified. All the characters are placed in a crisis situation; they all find themselves faced with something that is quite new to them which demands a personal response. The movement of the play is clearly established in the first few scenes, and the audience is looking for signs of how each one will react to the gradually worsening situation. It is fair to assume that the claims of the situation do not need to be restated for each character, that some economy of presentation need not be taken as abruptness.

However, it remains obvious that Adamov could not go really deeply into the psychology of more than a few of his thirty-six or more characters. In fact, of these thirty-six, ten appear in only one, two or three scenes each, seven appear in four, five or six scenes each, and only five appear in more than ten of the play's twenty-six Tableaux, and this number does not include a single Versailles supporter. We have analysed briefly Robert Oudet's development through the play. Let us take, as a second example, Mémère's daughter, Henriette.

She is young, vital, rather wilful, but with plenty of charm and enthusiasm. In the first scene she rushes to hang up the red flag, but is prevented by Robert Oudet who insists that Polia should do it. This provides an ironic contrast with the final scene of the play, when she is trying to hide all traces of her involvement with the Commune, and the red flag, which she had forgotten, falls from her wardrobe and unfurls itself all over her.

She is impetuous and easily forms attachments which she breaks

with equal ease. Her first sweetheart is Charlot, a regular who has deserted to the Commune. In her early enthusiasm for him and for the Commune she abruptly shakes off Louis Lavigne, the bank clerk who wants to protect her. Her impetuosity, linked with her naïve enthusiasm, lead her to the fort at Vanves at the height of the battle, where she becomes infatuated with a new sweetheart, Le Garibaldien.

But she has a reaction to the worsening of the military situation which becomes manifest in her love-life: she sends Le Garibaldien packing in favour of Louis Lavigne, hoping that after the Commune has been destroyed, he will be able to protect her. There is a good build-up to this point, showing how she suddenly takes fright when the situation becomes dangerous and the rôle of Commune is no longer a glorious one. In her uncertain state, she is the first to doubt the stout denials by the Communards of the news that the Versailles forces have entered Paris. Tableau 20 contains some of the best characterisation of the play. Having broken with Le Garibaldien, Henriette cannot bear to hear talk of the capture of Montmartre, and when a couple of young National Guards, as frightened as herself, begin to tear off their uniforms, she pours out onto them all the guilt that she herself is feeling in a cry of: "Vous... vous n'avez pas honte?"<sup>52</sup>

This self-contradictory movement has the ring of truth; one feels that Adamov has really succeeded in being true to the human complexity of the situation, that he has not put all the good on one side and all the bad on the other as he was accused of doing.

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<sup>52</sup> Théâtre IV, p.243.

Even more important to Adamov than such individual examples of good characterisation was to achieve through them a genuine feeling of the interdependence of political and emotional choices and ideas across the whole spectrum of the group. We have seen an example of his success here in the evolution of Henri Lagarde. But it is only fair to add that in his characterisation of the Communards, Adamov did not always avoid the trap of the 'touching young heroism'. The last part of Tableau 14, for example, is designed to provide a counterpart to the development of Henriette. Whereas she went bravely to the front in the beginning, but deserted when things became tough, her brother Riri follows the opposite path: he is so frightened at his first exposure to fire that he runs away, but he achieves a new firmness of resolve and returns to fight to the death. But the scene seems artificial and sentimental; the initial build-up, as Tonton and Mémère explain his sudden return to each other by assuming he has been given special leave for gallantry is too obvious; and his final decision to return to the front seems too easy. The danger of sentimentalising is very great when dealing with 'positive' characters. Brecht realised this, and knowing his own sentimental streak, included as few positive characters as possible. Adamov escaped the danger with Robert Oudet, Pierre Fournier and others since, as we have seen, he took a critical approach. But with some of the others, Tonton, l'Hercule, Riri in particular, he did not entirely avoid the trap.

This explains why there could be no 'good' characters among the Versaillais. The play attempts to put the Commune into perspective in the history of the class war. Seen in this light, one can understand

how there could be bad as well as good Communards, but only bad  
Versaillais. It might be objected that this over-simplifies history,  
but it is Adamov's case that the Commune was one of those polarising  
events when history simplifies itself. A study of the repression of the  
Commune certainly helps to substantiate this view by showing that it  
was one of the most barbarous occurrences in recent history, but Adamov  
could, perhaps, be criticised for his poor characterisation of the  
Versailles supporters who are almost all types. L'Abbé is the one who  
appears most often, but apart from increasing the examples of his sly  
vindictiveness, Adamov never really does anything to give him psycho-  
logical depth. The others are all types: Pécheteau the industrialist,  
Courmont the aesthete, Deaubourg the Figaro journalist, etc. In one  
sense the more they conform to type, the more convincing they are: the  
brutish peasant soldiers are doubtless frighteningly true to their  
historical originals.

By representing the Versailles party only in caricatural or  
villainous form, Adamov was accused of prejudging the issue. This  
criticism misses the point because it fails to see the play for what it  
is: a partisan piece about the Commune, and betrays a desire for it to  
be something which it is not: an unprejudiced drama using the historical  
period as a setting in which to write about the unchanging factors in  
human nature. It was not the general characteristics that Adamov  
tried to get hold of in this play; quite the contrary, he made it  
perfectly clear that he wanted to write about the precise problems that  
faced the Communards in their specific moment of history. In so doing  
he was inevitably faced with a limitation of time: the fact that the

Commune only lasted from March 18th to May 26th 1871. "Le problème du temps est primordial"<sup>53</sup> said Adamov later and it is this dimension of time in the play as well as the sensitive characterisation that gives it a depth and interest which go beyond the level of propaganda.

Of course the illusion of the unbiassed historical play is really quite unfounded. Ever since Aeschylus' The Persians the great historical plays have been those which took their stand and made their interpretation. Büchner, whom Adamov admired so much, was no exception, and his Dantons Tod is as partisan as Adamov's Le Printemps 71. The difference is not so much in method as in content. Büchner wished to show the dangers of an excessive application of terror and the essential value of the moderate's position. His Robespierre, and his followers, are as straightforwardly black as Adamov's Versaillais. Now it is interesting to recall that one of the things which had appealed to Adamov most strongly in Dantons Tod was the intervention in the drama of the time dimension. In 1961, discussing Man's relations with time in Le Printemps 71, Adamov used almost exactly the same ideas that he had used with reference to Dantons Tod nearly ten years before, when his whole outlook had been very much concerned with the 'incurable'. In 1953 he wrote:

la cruauté réside dans la succession des faits,  
succession aveugle qui déplace sans cesse la  
culpabilité des héros.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Opening passage in Le Temps Vivant (1962).

<sup>54</sup> Georg Büchner, Théâtre, Paris, 1953, pp.9-10.

In 1961 he said:

C'est peut-être cette question du temps, du manque de temps, ce resserrement terrible des choses, en soixante-treize jours, qui m'a le plus intéressé, le plus frappé. ... ce qui m'a, je crois, le plus intéressé, c'est de faire que les personnages n'en soient jamais au point où en sont les événements: ils sont en deçà ou au delà.<sup>55</sup>

Le Printemps 71 was partly the product of a meditation on the dual action of time on Man and of Man on time which had been set in motion by his work on Dantons Tod. In both plays the implacable march of time "déplace sans cesse la culpabilité", that is to say, the characters find themselves defending ideas that were right the day before, or will be right for the day after, but are inappropriate to the demands of the present moment. They are incapable of matching exactly the speed with which events develop. This is not only because their communications are bad, because they rejoice at the 'victory' of Asnières when it has already been retaken by the enemy. It is a matter of their whole approach; the only salvation for the Commune would have been to realise that priorities had to be governed by an awareness of this "resserrement du temps". But this they could only have done with hindsight, as Lenin did, counting every day which the October revolution outlived the Paris Commune's seventy-three days as 'Commune plus one', etc. Thus they were condemned to fail because they were conditioned by their time, and in a sense their fate is as tragically inevitable as that of Büchner's revolutionaries.

We have seen some of the sources of Adamov's preoccupation with

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<sup>55</sup> Ici et Maintenant, pp.118, 120. (Interview with André Gisselbrecht)

time and some of its later results, but we have not discussed the debt he owes in this to Brecht. In Brecht's later work there is an awareness of the present as a precarious moment balanced between past and future. Any action in the present has to be performed in awareness of both the past, with its mistakes and the lessons to be learned from them, and of the future, with its image of a new world that is to be brought into existence. Bernard Dort saw this as the most fundamental characteristic of Brecht's later work:

L'art de Brecht ne se définit plus par la rupture ni même par la distance. Il est une reprise en charge du monde passé dans la mesure où celui-ci est "transformable". Il est naissance d'un nouveau savoir, d'une nouvelle sagesse supérieure à l'ancienne parce qu'elle l'englobe, parce qu'elle lui redonne, littéralement, vie.<sup>56</sup>

Adamov, too, was working for a synthesis of old and new, but even more important, Dort helps us to see why both Adamov and Brecht were attracted to the Commune, and why they were both wrestling with what is basically the same problem:

La problématique de la Commune de Paris recoupe la problématique de la création brechtienne. Entre la critique du passé et l'Utopie du futur, une réconciliation est-elle possible? Le théâtre de Brecht pose cette question sans la résoudre.<sup>57</sup>

We have seen that the combination of a critical look at the past and a utopian expectation of the future made up the two important aspects of Adamov's play, the one constantly cutting in on the other in a relationship which could be described as dialectical. In such a theatre, the

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<sup>56</sup> Bernard Dort, Lecture de Brecht, Paris, 1960, p.172.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p.176.

vision of man living in time, able to act upon it, yet conditioned by it, contributes to both sides of the dialectic and also provides the occasional moments of synthesis when for a moment past mistakes and future hopes are brought together in a vivid awareness of the present moment. Such a moment is the last stand of Jeanne-Marie and Robert Oudet. As an instance of the same thing in Brecht's play, Dort gives an extract taken at a precisely similar point in the action:

GENEVIEVE : Ich spreche nicht von dir und mir,  
ich sagte "wir". Wir, das sind mehr als ich  
und du.<sup>58</sup>

Dort makes the point that what Brecht is stressing here is the way this moment can be transformed into knowledge: Geneviève says "Nun, Jean, wir lernen."<sup>59</sup> Adamov makes the same point, but he does it by stressing the time factor. The Communards' only mistake was that they came too early; but the others, the "wir" of the "on", will be able to benefit from the knowledge that has been learnt:

JEANNE-MARIE : ... Tu verras. Non, tu ne verras pas... et moi non plus... Mais d'autres verront, et comprendront, et nous vengeront. (Pause.)  
On gagnera, Robert, on gagnera, et il n'y aura plus de crimes sur la terre... je te le jure!  
On est venus trop tôt... C'est tout!<sup>60</sup>

Theirs was, in Adamov's description, "une vérité née avant terme."<sup>61</sup>

Adamov's great achievement in Le Printemps 71 is to have combined

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<sup>58</sup> Bertolt Brecht, op. cit., p.432.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p.432.

<sup>60</sup> Théâtre IV, pp.260-261.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p.88.

all the elements, personal, political, historico-temporal, by means of a dramatic construction which skilfully combines and separates the different elements, so that they constantly illuminate one another. There is a striking example of this at the end of the second Act. Here the personal, historical and political elements are blended together as Jeanne-Marie, Robert and Polia put aside their personal frictions to come to the aid of Henriette, depressed by the news of the Versaillais' entry into Paris. The dogged Communard optimism is stressed as the band-leader off stage announces that since Thiers has not kept his promise to enter Paris that day, he will doubtless not be there the Sunday after, and the audience is therefore invited to another concert at the same time, although we know that Thiers' troops are already inside Paris. However, supported by her friends, Henriette takes up again her task of collecting for the Communard widows and orphans. Thus the personal and collective tragedies of the play are combined: Henriette's which is that when she later has to choose on her own, without the support of her friends, she gives way, and the Commune's which is that it was so penetrated with the spirit of optimism that it could not see its own position. The end of the final Act of the play again brings the personal and the political together, as Henriette, urged on by Louis Lavigne to hide any traces of her involvement with the Commune, finds herself smothered in the red flag that she had originally helped to erect.

But the principles of dramatic construction of this play were not simply those of dramatic effectiveness; the play also had something of the Lehrstück, and a good way to sum up its unique blend of the

personal and the historical is to draw together the comparison with Brecht's Days of the Commune. We have seen that Adamov was keen to portray the life of the Parisian people, and on this basis a first contrast can be drawn, since Brecht produced a dialectical piece which matched bourgeois against Communard in order to demonstrate a lesson of history, whereas Adamov, with the same ultimate aim in mind, remained faithful to the principle of 'le sens littéral'. He wished, not merely to provide a dialectical discussion, but to show in concrete dramatic action, the enactment of these lessons in people's lives.

Both plays try to show how internal discussion, and preoccupation with social legislation led the Communards to neglect the basic necessities for survival. Brecht did this by means of a deliberately documentary approach. He maintained a balance showing both bourgeoisie and Communards in a realistic manner, by including lengthy scenes of the Commune deliberating in session and deliberately highlighting the different arguments advanced by different factions. Adamov, on the other hand, chose an approach which depended more on psychology. He wished to teach the same lesson but not by a simple dialectical approach, rather by the more 'human' method of showing individual cases of Communards who gradually came to realise their own mistakes. Brecht did include a scene in which Langevin and Geneviève reach the conclusion:

Wir hätten nur einen einzigen Punkt statuieren  
sollen: unser Recht zu leben!<sup>62</sup>

but the scene is a very short one and the experience leading to this

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<sup>62</sup> Bertolt Brecht, op. cit., p.408.

conclusion is not lived through by the characters in the course of the play's action. As Dort wrote:

Pourtant il ne réussit pas à nous exposer concrètement les fautes des Communards. Il ne nous montre guère que "le peuple n'a jamais qu'une heure à lui. Malheur, si, alors, il n'est pas debout, prêt à frapper, armé de toutes ses armes!" Sa critique reste extérieure aux personnages.<sup>63</sup>

Adamov is less concerned with extracting material for a polemic and more concerned with concrete, lived experience in a given time and place. What is lost at the end of Brecht's play is the lyrical beauty of Papa's speech, the haunting nostalgia for a state of lost innocence which frequently comes to the surface in Brecht's writing. What is lost at the end of Adamov's is the lives of people who have discovered themselves, reached a political consciousness, but too late or too early. The notion of 'le décalage' used in the early plays to demonstrate hopeless separation, here is used to fundamentally the same purpose: Man is still in a position where he cannot coincide with himself. But he is separated not from a metaphysical reality, but from that social order which would enable him to live as he should. The context of the separation has changed: it is no longer metaphysical but political and therefore theoretically alterable.

Two further points follow from Adamov's careful attention to realistic historical detail in this play, which are of particular interest for the evolution of his work seen as a whole: the fact that the 'irréel', which in Les Ames Mortes was "mêlé au réel", is here

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<sup>63</sup> Bernard Dort, op. cit., p.175. (His quote is taken from Days of the Commune.)

almost completely banished, and secondly, this play is almost entirely lacking in the obsessive, neurotic material which was an integral part of the subject-matter of his other plays, both earlier and later.

The only shape in which 'l'irréel' appears is in the utopianism so detrimental to the Commune's chance of survival; the only form in which the nightmare apparitions appear, is that of the Guignols; the only hint of Adamov's familiar obsessions is the brief episode in Tableau 5 when Henriette throws her shoes in the air and Le Garibaldien catches them in order to be able to replace them and kiss her feet. There is almost a touching note of optimism here: in the right circumstances even such obsessions find their healthy fulfilment. At such a moment, as Henriette says, everything is permissible: "je permets tout"<sup>64</sup> - nothing can seem sullied.

The political dimension did not give Adamov an infallible programme for action. What it did was to provide a context within which he no longer needed to despair, since he had found a faith, the belief that conditions could be changed. In practice, his work presented no more of a 'happy end' than before. Adamov gave only guarded assent to the Communist ideal, choosing, significantly, to write a play about the most wildly idealistic of all Communists, the ones who were most inevitably doomed to failure, and who were the most cruelly punished.

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<sup>64</sup> Théâtre IV, p.140. There is some small support for this view to be drawn from Adamov's indignation at the fact that the girl who played *La Pauvre Fille* in the Unity Theatre production was bare-foot. (See Ici et Maintenant, p.136.)

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Here is the relevance, which she did not fully bring out, of Geneviève Serreau's remark that Adamov would have had no use for a triumphant Commune.<sup>65</sup> Communism was not for Adamov, any more than it was for Brecht, a sov<sup>e</sup>reign remedy for all ills. Rather, it provided a possibility for hope.

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<sup>65</sup> Geneviève Serreau, Histoire du "nouveau théâtre", Paris, 1966, p.80.

## PART III

Chapter 5 Obsessions and Politics: from La Politique des Restes to Off Limits

Adamov had finished writing Le Printemps 71 at the end of 1960. Having arrived at the logical conclusion of the development begun with Le Ping-Pong, he did not attempt another historical play. For the last ten years of his life he was to follow a new line of development which attempted to reach a synthesis of his first and second 'styles'.

In many ways, the work he produced in this period was disappointing. As well as the two radio plays discussed in Chapter 3, he wrote five new plays, but only Off Limits is really among his best, and the promise of his early plays was never truly fulfilled. During this period, even his faithful friend and critic Jacques Lemarchand devoted considerably less space in his regular column to his reviews of Adamov's plays. Esslin also felt that the early promise was unfulfilled and that Adamov's series of illnesses was perhaps to blame.

La Politique des Restes, written a year after Le Printemps 71 was completed, gave a clear picture of the development that was to come. Later, in 1968, he formulated some criticisms of Le Printemps 71 which must have been going through his mind as he worked on La Politique des Restes. He talked of:

cette tentation du réalisme socialiste que je reproche aujourd'hui au Printemps 71 où les faits sont rapportés un peu trop fidèlement, un peu trop minutieusement, et sans la ration de folie qui me paraît nécessaire pour exprimer

quoi que ce soit, où que ce soit.<sup>1</sup>

Reading Adamov's comments on his own work, one wonders if, despite their intelligence, his reflections on dramaturgical and aesthetic problems did not occasionally lead him into the trap of trying to write a play according to a formula. His last five plays certainly contain their 'ration de folie', but in some, especially La Politique des Restes, it is not successfully integrated with the rest of the material so that the play, taken as a whole, fails.

However, La Politique des Restes provides a clear illustration of what Adamov meant when he talked of an art which linked Man to his own 'fantômes' and to those of other men in a precise setting.<sup>2</sup> He undoubtedly felt that he had succeeded in this; he said so in L'Homme et l'Enfant<sup>3</sup>, and he stated in the introduction to Théâtre III:

J'ai uni, réuni un peu mieux que dans le passé,  
la psychologie de chacun et la ligne générale,  
politique, de tous.<sup>4</sup>

He set about this by borrowing an extraordinary clinical description of a case of schizophrenia from Le Temps Vécu by Dr. Eugène Minkowski, one of the pioneers of phenomenological psychology.<sup>5</sup> Adamov took this case-history out of its original context and placed

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<sup>1</sup> 'Entretien avec Arthur Adamov', Les Lettres Françaises, 3 juillet 1968. Interview by Jacques Henric.

<sup>2</sup> In his postface to Ici et Maintenant, see above Part I, Chapter 3, pp.69-70.

<sup>3</sup> p.141.

<sup>4</sup> p.9.

<sup>5</sup> The case which Adamov used is described on pp.169-170 of Le Temps Vécu, Paris, 1933.

it in a situation in which there were symptoms of a generalised paranoia felt at a national level: the situation of white South Africans or white American Southerners, aware of sitting on a volcano of black power.

Although Minkowski's book, like Adamov's radio play of the same title, was principally concerned with the problem of time, this was not true of the case on which La Politique des Restes was built. It was the case of a man who believed that all the rubbish in the world, everything thrown away by anyone, was being set aside for him to eat. He was convinced that this was a national policy, going by the name of 'la politique des restes'. The particular hold which this obsession exerted over him appeared to lie in the idea of proliferation. When, for example, he had his hair cut, this made him think that everyone had their hair cut from time to time, which made him think of the regularly increasing supply of sweepings from barbers' floors all over the country that was building up for him; and not only the hair clippings, but also the razor-blades, old razors and countless other items of rubbish which were proliferating day after day. Picking on this fear of proliferation, Adamov decided to transpose the original fear of proliferating rubbish, changing it to a white man's fear of proliferating blacks.

The original neurosis with proliferating objects was linked to a powerful persecution complex; the conviction of Minkowski's patient that all the things he enumerated were to be forced into his stomach, was merely an expression of his feeling that they were all hostile to him. It only required a small extension of this persecution complex

to reach the point where Adamov's Johnnie Brown felt the proliferation of human beings, first black then white as well, to be a real threat to him. The atmosphere of a repressive, totalitarian regime is sufficiently built up by the fears and uncertainties of other characters in the play for this transposition to be acceptable.

However, there was, strictly speaking, nothing in the original case to suggest such a change, and Adamov was accused of having linked quite arbitrarily two things which had no real connection.<sup>6</sup> It is fair to say that since the fear of the ever-increasing numbers of black people in South Africa is not the principal motivating force behind Apartheid, but only one aspect of it, the link between the private obsession and the national paranoia does not make a completely convincing play. However, there are some excellent things in it, and it includes some of Adamov's most important themes.

From the dramatic point of view, La Politique des Restes is very skilfully constructed around the fairly standard framework of a murder trial, in the course of which the conflicting issues of the play emerge. Instead of a dramatic movement which takes the characters through a significant development in time, the action of the play is all centered on the court room. Considerable use is made of flash-backs, in which important past events are acted out, thus enabling the audience to compare what really happened with the versions that are recounted by the witnesses in court.

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<sup>6</sup> By Jacques Lemarchand in particular. See Le Figaro Littéraire, 6 novembre 1967.

This use of flash-back, in which we see one or two episodes concerning each of the principal witnesses, allows Adamov to unfold the story with the maximum of suspense and the minimum of unnecessary explanation. The first witness is a man who saw the crime from only four metres distance; during his testimony, there is a flash-back which instantly gives the audience a clear picture of the crime, though the motive still remains obscure. Then Dr. Perkins is called, who reveals in the course of two flash-backs the nature of Johnnie's neurosis and also the fact that Johnnie's wife and brother have tried to bribe him to keep Johnnie locked up in his clinic.

The next witness is the Portuguese barber, Mr. Galao. The flash-back in which we see him and Johnnie together gives an opportunity for a demonstration of Johnnie's raving and also shows Mr. Galao being bribed by James and Joan to give compromising evidence. The detail of Johnnie having a barber come to his home is an authentic detail drawn from Dr. Minkowski's account.

The testimonies of James and Joan Brown (Johnnie's wife and brother) follow. They do their best to underline Johnnie's neurotic state, but in a long flash-back we see that they themselves, especially Joan, are quite neurotic in their fear of the blacks. Joan believes she has been attacked, since an occasion when her car broke down and she found herself surrounded by a crowd of curious bystanders who were all black. We begin to see what pressures are exerted on Johnnie in his family situation: the other two are constantly harping on his fear of proliferation, partly as a deliberate policy in order to drive him mad, but also partly because they themselves are terrified of their

precarious situation.

Finally comes the summing up, and it is only when the defence counsel, bribed by James and Joan, deliberately begins to cite all the names of whites who have got away with killing blacks, that Johnnie has his final outburst, on the basis of which he is condemned. The defence counsel's clever speech deliberately provokes Johnnie by presenting his list of precedents as if they were in themselves a proliferating species, and therefore, in Johnnie's eyes, a threat to him.

With his belief in the need for a precise setting, Adamov was keen that the play should be clearly situated in a country where racism was a reality, South Africa, or the Southern American states, for example. He tried to achieve this by two principal methods. First, he constructed the play on the lines of a typical American thriller film centred on a court-room case. He insisted, for example, that the lawyers should walk around and smoke during the cross-examination. Secondly, he built up the feeling of a repressive regime, in which no-one is totally secure, by means of hints and undercurrents of feeling which constantly break surface during the trial. A good example of this is the terror of Mr. Galao, the Portuguese barber:

L'AVOCAT GENERAL (Imperturbable, à Mr. Galao):  
 Selon vous, Mr. Brown aurait donc, en abbatant un  
 noir, obéi à des impulsions criminelles inconscientes? ...

Mr. GALAO (effrayé): Non... je ne crois pas du tout, monsieur l'Avocat, que Mr. Brown... ait, en tuant ce nègre, prouvé... ce que M. l'Avocat croit que j'ai voulu prouver... Je suis tout à fait, au contraire... de coeur avec Mr. Brown;

car bien entendu... tout cela c'est de la faute  
des nègres...<sup>7</sup>

The play is not based on a genuine historical event, like Le Printemps 71, but the attitudes of the witnesses to the central problem of racism give it great authenticity.

However, the creation of Johnnie Brown, by far the most authentic character of the play, owes almost nothing to the racist situation and everything to Minkowski's observation. Minkowski gave a wealth of detail on which Adamov drew heavily: the material contained in Johnnie's ravings on pages 156, 157, 162 and 163 of Théâtre III is drawn almost word for word from his account. In these passages, the play really comes to life. The incredible world of Johnnie's obsession has a richness of imagination and a logic of its own that would authenticate it even if one did not know it to be genuine:

JOHNNIE: ... Ainsi, quand on fume comme vous fumez - car ça vous est bien égal, ce que je sens, ce que je sens et ressens, vous, vous fumez -, quand on fume, il y a la fumée, la cendre, les allumettes consumées, et déjà, tenez, regardez, le mégot qui reste, le mégot qui traîne. (Pause.) Et à table, ce sont les noyaux de fruits, les os de poulet, le vin et l'eau qui stagnent au fond des verres (Très grave) et l'oeuf, c'est mon pire ennemi.

LE DOCTEUR PERKINS: Pourquoi l'oeuf?

JOHNNIE: Pourquoi? Pourquoi? Vous êtes bon!

A cause de la coque!<sup>8</sup>

What frequently fails to come off is the marriage between the Minkowski material and the racist material. Where the link is

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<sup>7</sup> Théâtre III, pp.166-167.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.156.

successful, it is through the character of Doctor Perkins. There is a most effective conversation between Perkins and Johnnie, in which Johnnie is talking of the 'rubbish policy', as he sees it, and Perkins, while seeming to talk about the same thing, is in fact referring to what he believes to be the cause of Johnnie's neurosis: the segregation policy.<sup>9</sup>

However, Dr. Perkins is the only character with any anti-segregationist feelings; the rest are uncompromisingly anti-black and committed to maintaining the status quo. This means that there is very little ambiguity or subtlety in the dialogue. The efforts of the other characters are, in fact, all centred on Johnnie in one sense or another, as is clear from the cast list: Johnnie Brown; Joan Brown, sa femme; James Brown, son frère; Le Docteur Perkins, son médecin; Mr. Galao, Portugais, son coiffeur; Tom Guinness, noir, sa victime; etc.

All their efforts consist of attempts to manoeuvre Johnnie in two different directions: the 'Président' and the 'Avocat Général' simply wish to tidy out of the way a rather embarrassing murder, which neither wishes to punish, but which they are forced by the law to consider as a crime. On the other hand, his brother and his wife, as well as the defence counsel whom they have bribed, wish to provoke Johnnie into an outburst that will warrant locking him up. The various witnesses are all frightened at being called before a court, and whatever their original intentions, find themselves compelled to say only what the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.163.

court wishes them to say. Doctor Perkins is the only one to command respect or compell<sup>d</sup> sympathy. In some ways these characters resemble more the 'peripheral' characters of the early plays than the three-dimensional creations of Paolo Paoli, Les Ames Mortes, or Le Printemps 71. But the mystery surrounding the early peripheral characters is no longer present: the 'ration de folie' is all compressed into Johnnie's ravings. And thus the other characters seldom come to life.

Linked with the anti-racist theme of the play is one of Adamov's favourite targets: the hypocritical search for self-justification on the part of the profiteers. This was a theme with which he had dealt in Paolo Paoli; it played an important part in Sainte Europe and was a theme to which he wanted to return for his last play about Ferdinand de Lesseps on which he had hardly started when he died. The last entry in his journal contained some notes about this play in which he summed up the process by which Ferdinand de Lesseps deceived people/ "La justification à tout prix. Plaidier l'innocence quand on se sent coupable."<sup>10</sup> For Adamov, a fundamental characteristic of the capitalist mentality was this perpetual exercise in rhetoric, so as to cover up self-interested moves with fine, disinterested phrases. To show this up, was one of his most constant aims.

This theme of justification is clearly linked with the awareness of persecution which haunted Adamov. Anyone having this strong sense of persecution combined with powerful guilt feelings is bound to wish

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<sup>10</sup> 20 novembre 1969.

to disculpate himself at every opportunity, and we have seen that Adamov's early plays were, to some extent, an 'entreprise de disculpation'. The figure of Taranne, with his hopeless protestations of innocence, was what Adamov feared he might become. Having recognised this tendency in himself, Adamov was able to detect it in others.

In La Politique des Restes, this theme appears in two forms. First there are the protests and excuses of the half-mad Johnnie Brown with his paranoiac sense of persecution by proliferating objects. The construction of the play itself constitutes a complete image of Johnnie's mentality by literally putting him on trial. Throughout the play he is literally in the dock; like Taranne, he has become in reality what he always was in his dreams: 'the accused'.

But also, behind the appearances of a murder trial, there are the machinations of Johnnie's brother and his wife, who are determined to lay their hands on Johnnie's share of the family business. The justification they use is that Johnnie must be shut up as a danger to society, but in reality, they are totally indifferent to the fate of the man he has murdered; indeed, they themselves incited him to the crime by repeated insinuations to the effect that the blacks were proliferating in an uncontrollable fashion. Even if the link between Johnnie's neurosis and the colour problem is seen as somewhat arbitrary, the play functions well at this level of psychological interest, and presents similarities with the Strindbergian infernal family circle where each is out for his own interests in a ruthless struggle to the death.

La Politique des Restes is only a half-length play; it was not seen by Adamov as one of his masterpieces, but rather as something which proved to him that he could still construct a play despite his difficulties. Jacques Guicharnaud, the only critic who has written at all thoughtfully on La Politique des Restes, finds it successful. He points out that Adamov's procedure is the same as in most of his plays: the dissection of a mechanism. But in this case he dissects two: that of the threat exerted by an object psychosis over an individual man, and that of man in society treated as an object, a victim of dehumanisation. For Guicharnaud, it is not important that there is little to link the two; he feels that the device of simply juxtaposing them is effective:

The double game of participation (we who belong to a world that is essentially racist are hypocritically urged to commit racist murder) and distance (the racist murderer in the play is mad by any standards - that is to say, a creature separate from us, who bears the weight of our intellectual and objective judgement) is convincing. Adamov simultaneously dissects two mechanisms, remaining faithful both to his own temperament and to his ideology.<sup>11</sup>

It is in this attempt at combining a mental and a political abnormality in such a way that they comment upon one another that the interest of the play lies. It is a bold attempt, but one that only proved totally successful in Off Limits.

The next two plays, Sainte Europe and M. le Modéré, may be taken together; not only did they follow one another chronologically, but

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<sup>11</sup> Jacques Guicharnaud, Modern French Theatre (revised edition), New Haven, 1967, p.205.

they share many of the same defects. Neither can really be said to be worthy of Adamov's talent. Where M. le Modéré was concerned, he fully realised this, always calling it a 'clownerie'. Both plays were written at times of great mental and physical stress: Sainte Europe at the height of his alcoholic crisis, and M. le Modéré when he was just recovering from a period of serious illness.<sup>12</sup> In both, he attempted to find in 'le rire vainqueur' a 'revanche'<sup>13</sup> on his unhappy circumstances.

Sainte Europe is the least successful of all Adamov's plays and the one in which he makes things easiest for himself. The rigour and disciplined searching after reality which characterised almost all his work, his ruthless self-criticism and insistence on total honesty, these temporarily abandoned him in the writing of Sainte Europe with the result that the play is full of facile jokes and specious juxtapositions designed to give an air of proof to dubious assertions.

The play suffers enormously from not being situated in a precise time and place, and shows how right Adamov had been to subject himself to the discipline of the precise situation in his preceding plays. It attempts to encompass the whole time-span of European history from Charlemagne to the present day, and covers the geographical limits of the world as it was known to the crusaders with, in addition, the two major modern power-blocks hovering in the background. It is centred on a 'Karl' figure who represents every leader who has seen himself as

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<sup>12</sup> See above Part I, Chapter 4.

<sup>13</sup> "l'humour étant une certaine façon de voir le tragique et une revanche efficace sur lui", 'Préface' in Büchner, Théâtre Complet, Paris 1953, p.10.

leader of a United Europe from Charlemagne to Charles de Gaulle.

The other figures in the play are equally representative and imprecise (bankers, soldiers, diplomats, religious fanatics, etc.) so that everything that happens in the play is supposed to be representative of the kind of thing that has always happened in Western Europe and that has turned it into the expansionist, commercially minded place that it is. Thus, for example, the prologue juxtaposes a speech by a Nazi officer with an extract from the fourteenth century Dict des marchands:

Les vertus guerrières françaises vont pouvoir  
se manifester à nouveau. Vive notre Guide, dans  
le combat contre le Bolchévisme asiatique: Adolf  
Hitler. Vive une France heureuse dans une  
Europe unie. ...  
On doit les marchands  
Desservir toutes gens honorer ...  
Dieu garde les marchands du mal  
Que nous en amendons souvent.  
Sainte Eglise premièrement  
Fut par marchands établie  
Et sachez que Chevalerie  
Doit aussi marchands tenir chers. <sup>14</sup>

This sets the tone for the rest of the play, which all takes place in a medieval décor with gregorian music and a liberal use of verbose medieval expressions. In this way, Adamov wished to suggest the continuity of business interests beneath the phoney nobility of the pompous archaic phrases used by statesmen and diplomats. Gaullism being Adamov's chief target, this was clearly an attractive and potentially effective procedure, but one suitable for a short satirical

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<sup>14</sup> Théâtre III, p.192.

sketch rather than for a full-length play. In fact the play is closer in spirit and method to Intimité than to any of his other works.

Jacques Guicharnaud rightly dubbed it "a political cartoon expanded into a three-hour spectacle."<sup>15</sup> It contains an excellent idea for a small parodic piece, but has been given a vastly over-inflated treatment.

A very strong anti-commerce theme runs through the whole play. Honoré de Rubens, the banker figure, dreams for example that he is weighed in the scales by Innocent XXV and has to pay out a huge sum of money before the scales tip in his favour. He also has to apologise for cheating, which enables Adamov to include a didactic couplet almost in the Brechtian manner:

Il est évidemment difficile de ne point tricher  
Quand on a pour profession de vendre et d'acheter.<sup>16</sup>

In this scene, Adamov hints at the commercial origins of such traditional Christian metaphors as the scales on which the sinner is weighed; he also evokes the whole concept of Crime and Punishment and of payment for evil to be found in Dostoievsky and Strindberg. Rubens awakes, uttering what Adamov in his stage direction calls "ces mots 'strindbergiens'": "O Doit! O Avoir!"<sup>17</sup> But the play remains at this superficial level of an evocation of ideas. The grand themes that are suggested are not worked out in any detail.

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<sup>15</sup> Op. cit., p.204.

<sup>16</sup> Théâtre III, p.284.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.285.

The best scenes in the play are those where two heads of state meet in a diplomatic encounter directed towards the establishment of some treaty. As always, Adamov is keen to debunk inflated rhetorical devices. The language of all the characters, and of Karl in particular, is a very careful combination of medieval archaisms and cliché phrases drawn from the vocabulary of politics. It is unrealistic, but not unfamiliar. Its disguising function is made all the clearer by the fact that the phraseology becomes more 'medieval' the more insincere the speaker. When he is particularly furious, Karl's pretended calm makes him lapse into total archaism: "Peu me chaut".<sup>18</sup>

Occasionally the convenience of the cliché as a pleasant-sounding disguise for ruthless intentions is shown up by another character:

KARL: Terres christiques et terres islamiques  
n'oeuvrent-elles pas, chacune de leur côté,  
pour la liberté, la fraternité et même...  
même l'égalité?

GRETHE-FRANCE-LAURE: Père, tout de même,  
vous exagérez! L'égalité! Vous n'auriez  
jamais usé de ce mot-là, ne fût-ce qu'il y a  
quelques mois!

KARL: ... Je le sais.<sup>19</sup>

Within this pattern of debunking, Adamov is able to insert his objection, noted in his journal, to de Gaulle's use of the word 'vulgaire' during the Ben Barka affair:

Les êtres vulgaires: Montherlant, de Gaulle.  
L'affaire Ben Barka: "Rien que du vulgaire et  
du subalterne."

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.197.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.197.

Vulgarité de ceux qui usent du mot 'vulgaire'.<sup>20</sup>

It was only to be expected that Adamov, with his hatred of rhetorical devices, should fasten upon this:

N'entrons pas, messieurs, je vous prie, dans des considérations, somme toute, secondaires, vulgaires et même sectaires de détail.<sup>21</sup>

As well as criticising such uses of language, he criticised the facile, would-be generous gestures of which public figures are so often guilty. After news of a disastrous earthquake has come in from her country, Ousannah Nannah decides to adopt one of the many children who have been orphaned. A child is found and brought forward; the fact that he had nothing to do with the earthquake is irrelevant: Ousannah has been seen to make a fine gesture.

Adamov also deflates other brands of rhetoric common in public life. For example, there is an amusing take-off of Le Monde's 'moderate' style in a declaration by Honoré de Rubens of why the crusade is necessary:

Un certain malaise social subsistant chez nous en Pays Franc, comme du reste en Alémanie, malaise dû à l'esprit d'irréflexion et de subversion de la paysannerie, et aussi, pour être tout à fait sincère, à certains excès regrettables de certains de nos chevaliers, et aussi, ne pas l'oublier, de certains de nos droit commun récemment sortis d'un de nos pénitenciers ... il serait bon, ceci étant, de trouver une solution raisonnable à ce fâcheux état de choses.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> L'Homme et l'Enfant, p.176.

<sup>21</sup> Théâtre III, p.199.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp.215-216.

But although the play contains some good passages of this kind, it is on the whole drawn-out, verbose, and extraordinarily non-dramatic. There is very little action, and there can be no real development in the situation since none of the events have a precise significance. In an interview with Jacques Henric given in 1968, Adamov explained that when revising his journals he had to cut out large sections, since he found that he had an unfortunate tendency, under the effect of alcohol, to repeat himself in phrases of the 'A bas de Gaulle' variety. Sainte Europe suffers from just this kind of repetition; it is a pity he did not prune it as severely as his journals.

One last feature of the play deserves mention because of its significance for his last play, and that is the inclusion of dream-scenes. There are dreams revealing Karl's power-complex and his neurotic fear of deposition; there is a dream showing St. Teresa of Avila as the lover of Christ, the dream of Honoré de Rubens which has already been mentioned, and several others. These dream scenes are more interesting than those in which the characters are awake; in them Adamov's writing is more concentrated, more imaginative. He was very uncertain about whether he had achieved sufficient differentiation between dream- and waking scenes; when he came to write Si l'été revenait, he decided to use dream-scenes only.

M. le Modéré suffers from the same lack of precision in the setting and the characters. Like Karl, M. represents a generalised 'Gaullist-European' attitude. His career, from hotel-keeper to head of state, is unrealistic, and the state in question, 'Le Jura' is mythical. The main targets of the play's satire are again de Gaulle

and 'Europeanism' including the American involvement in and encouragement of it. M. loses the American support which is vital if he is to retain his position as head of state, because he does not mention the word 'Europe' sufficiently frequently, a fact of which he is reminded by 'La voix du Seigneur'. With God and the Americans against you, Adamov implies, you cannot hope to win in the capitalist world.

The play opens well, but fails to fulfil the promise of its early scenes. Again, it is as if Adamov had tried to blow up a rather small subject to unnatural proportions. Like La Politique des Restes, it harks back to Adamov's early plays in presenting one central figure, M., surrounded by peripheral characters, his wife, his daughter, his acquaintances, etc.

The play is in three parts. The first takes place in Paris, and its content is not overtly political. In fact, it marks a clear return to Adamov's earlier style, in which the absurd pretensions of a narrow-minded bourgeois mediocrity are exposed. The prologue is extremely successful; it recaptures the meandering, would-be confident tone of Taranne's utterances: M. is writing his diary in which he records the fact that ever since childhood, he has frequently been afflicted with angina which led him to question first his mother, and then, later, his wife, with irritating frequency, as to the number of white spots on the back of his throat. Clo has become annoyed by this:

Clo, prise, je ne dirai pas de colère - je n'irai pas jusque-là -, mais surexcitée, agacée en un mot, prétendit que je lui posais cette question sept ou huit fois par jour. Ce qui eût été, bien sûr, excessif et même... abusif, mais n'était pas vrai, en tout cas pas entièrement vrai. A vrai dire, je lui posais, je crois, ladite question

cing ou six fois par jour, au grand maximum, et encore, il me semble qu'il se passa plusieurs jours d'affilée - deux ou trois jours -, sans que je soulève, même indirectement, même allusivement, le problème du nombre de mes points blancs.<sup>23</sup>

The play also marks a return to earlier subject matter in its ruthless satire of bourgeois life 'en famille'. But it is interesting to see that whereas in his earlier plays Adamov had concentrated on the stifling effect of parents on children, he here satirised for the first time the husband-wife relationship. In this respect it is worth noting that the first performance of a play that Adamov remembered at all vividly from his youth was Vitrac's Victor at the Théâtre Alfred Jarry in 1928.<sup>24</sup> Like Victor, M. le Modéré also contains a precocious child, Mado, and both plays satirise bourgeois family life in a particularly violent manner. The scene of Adamov's play which reminds one most forcibly of Victor, however, is a fairly mild sequence in tableau 7, in which M., in order to become sexually aroused, dresses his wife in a gown of the 'Directoire' period, and makes her recite a list of all the French Generals of the Empire.

In the first part of the play, Adamov makes liberal use of the cliché in inappropriate situations, and this, combined with the comically pointless bickering between Clo and M., gives it something of the tone of Ionesco's early plays, which Adamov never ceased to admire.<sup>25</sup> Several

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<sup>23</sup> Théâtre IV, pp.15-16.

<sup>24</sup> I am indebted to Barbara Bray for this piece of information.

<sup>25</sup> As one of his contributions to a series of radio programmes in 1969, in which well-known playwrights chose and commented on plays by authors, Adamov chose Jacques. Ionesco returned the compliment by choosing Le Professeur Taranne.

of the comic effects regularly used by Ionesco are to be found in this play. For example, there is the old woman who acts the young flirt, as in Les Chaises:

CLO: ... (Elle glisse la clef dans son corsage.)  
 Tu ne l'auras pas, na! Ose un peu, vieux satyre,  
 aventurer tes grosses pattes dans mon doux  
 corsage blanc!<sup>26</sup>

Or her reaction to marital infidelity, to which she replies by exacting a revenge that is laughable in its small-mindedness: after M. has been seduced by Mado and her friend from Copenhagen, she cries that she will be avenged:

M. LE MODERNE, (timide, bas): Mais... comment cela?  
 CLO, (soudain debout, toute droite, emportée par un bel et légitime élan de colère): Comment cela? Mais en quadruplant le prix de la chambre de cette Copenhagaise. (Menaçante:) Je dis bien en le quadruplant!  
 M. LE MODERNE, (joignant les mains): Tu ne pourrais pas, Clo, te contenter de... de... de le tripler?<sup>27</sup>  
 (Clo a un hochement de tête négatif et farouche.)

This type of comic procedure, combined with M.'s excessive moderation in all things, give the first part of the play a humorous appeal very reminiscent of the 'absurdist' theatre that Adamov had turned his back on. He said that when he wrote it, he was so near to despair, that he had to write something comic or commit suicide. This explains his temporary return to a humour that has its roots in despair. In addition, there is a recurrence of certain images, familiar from his early plays, particularly those connected with eroticism or

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<sup>26</sup> Théâtre IV, p.23.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p.33.

impotency - for example the kissing of the foot and the bicycle with the bar. In Les Retrouvailles, Edgar was given a bicycle without a bar; here it is Mado who rides one with a bar, suggesting the virile, predatory nature of the modern 'dévergondée'.

The final scene of the first part shows M. Havas, the agent of American imperialism in Europe, announcing to M. that he is to be appointed head of state of Le Jura. M.'s shouts, on hearing this news, of "Le Jura, c'est moi!", make a transition to the second part, which takes on a more 'Ubu-esque' quality: we see M., like Ubu, making inflated speeches and promulgating inhuman decrees. His chief of police, Ernest, falls in love with Mado, and there is a hint of the Erna-Neffer relationship in La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre. But it is not developed at all; Mado quickly tires of Ernest, who retaliates by over-throwing M., which brings the second part to a close.

This part brings out the political content of the moderation which Adamov wished to satirise. It is a fundamentally right-wing, authoritarian attitude, which disguises its tyrannical intentions beneath a show of moderation, thus not only appearing outwardly to be 'liberal', but also giving itself the feeling of great virtue. For example, M. explains that he wants only half, not all the strikers to be sacked, and only one in ten to be shot:

Secondement, qu'un gréviste sur dix soit fusillé, mais cela régulièrement, légalement, humainement, après un examen sérieux et... serré de sa formation technique, de ses opinions politiques, et de sa situation physique... (Bas, rêveur:) aussi bien que mentale.<sup>28</sup>

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28 Ibid., p.52.

The second part has some good moments, but is less successful than the first, because Adamov was once more trying, as in Sainte Europe, to satirise a precise political attitude in a vague, generalised setting.

Finally, the third part depicts M. and his family in England. This part is almost entirely unsuccessful. It tries to continue in the grotesque manner, introducing a homosexual prince of Wales, who wants to marry Mado. But it is perhaps not quite grotesque enough. Adamov lends M. his own problems, his feeling of being paralysed, and his alcohol, hoping to conquer them by laughing at them, but the humour is not effective. Perhaps these things were too terrible for him at the time, and he could not achieve sufficient detachment from them. For example, M. is given precisely the alcoholic problem of Adamov in real life, with almost no transposition, and the result simply fails to be comic:

Oui, oui, que je me contrôle, et que je ne prenne pas à jeun plus de dix à douze bières allemandes, danoises, néerlandaises, qu'importe; et deux à ... quatre gins, et c'est tout.<sup>29</sup>

The play closes with M. once again stammering out self-justifying phrases rather like those with which the play started:

LA VOIX DU SEIGNEUR, (basse, sépulcrale): L'Europe!  
 M. LE MODERE, (dans le noir): Je vois, je vois.  
 Je n'ai peut-être, sans doute même, oui, sans doute, pas assez fréquemment mentionné le nom... le nom du continent auquel, pourtant, appartient bel et bien le pays romand... Mais, Seigneur, j'y pensais, je le jure! Seulement... j'oubliais d'en parler. C'est involontairement, je t'assure, bien involontairement...<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p.77.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.84.

Everything in his life has been done 'involontairement', and, like the characters of Paolo Paoli, 'involuntarily' dragged into war, he never ceases to make excuses and to try to justify himself.

After these two rather unsuccessful attempts at expressing a simple political idea in generalised, allegorical terms, Off Limits was something quite different: an extremely complex work situated in a precise time and place. Adamov had made two visits to America; one in 1959, when Le Ping-Pong was produced off Broadway, and one later in 1965. The first visit was short, particularly because the play failed miserably and was taken off after only two nights. But according to René Gaudy it was during this first visit that he met the people who were to serve as models for most of the characters in Off Limits; the second, longer visit helped him to see how he could confront them with the Vietnam war.<sup>31</sup>

As well as this first-hand experience of the country, Adamov drew on a wide reading of American poets (especially Ginsberg and Kaufman) and of books about contemporary American society. Jim and Sally show this dual genesis, having their origins both in a young couple whom Adamov met in America, and also in a couple of young 'junkies' described by James Mills in his book published in France under the title

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<sup>31</sup> René Gaudy's article 'Les sources autobiographiques et littéraires d'Off Limits' appeared in a 'dossier' issued by the Théâtre de la Commune, Aubervilliers. It contains some interesting information and also a photocopy of a page of Adamov's copy of Au carrefour de la drogue in which he made notes for a projected scene with a drug squad policeman. This scene was dropped from the final version of the play.

of Au Carrefour de la drogue in 1967. Adamov did not see it until after his second visit to America, but it helped him to fill out his own observations and also gave him the idea of including a character modelled on James Mills, who could provide a bridge between the establishment and the young rebels. In Off Limits, he becomes James Andrews, an English journalist doing a report on drugs in America for The Guardian. The play contains a series of 'happenings', which had their origins in another book called The Four Suits, edited by Dick Higgins and published in New York in 1965. A very thorough piece of work has been done on this by René Gaudy, showing just what Adamov borrowed from the descriptions of happenings given in this book, and what he invented.<sup>32</sup>

But despite the well-defined and well-documented setting of Off Limits, Adamov did not abandon the use of his private obsessions, as he had for Paolo Paoli and for Le Printemps 71. Several of the characters in the play share his masochistic, self-destructive urge, and there are a number of actions which have a clear relationship with Adamov's own most personal experiences as recounted in the journals, or in Je... Ils...: foot-kissing, splashing with liquid, flattening oneself on the ground, and various acts of humiliation. More important, the action of the play turns around the subject of death. There are four sudden deaths and two suicides in the play; Jim and Sally are possessed of a nihilistic rebellion that is almost a death-wish and George and Dorothy copy Adamov's own attempts at a 'mithridatisation'

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<sup>32</sup> Gaudy's work on The four suits has not yet been published, but he was kind enough to let me see it. I have drawn heavily on it for pages ?

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of death through masochism.

In Off Limits, Adamov was able, quite legitimately, to set his own obsessions in a precise social context. His obsession with self-destruction, his erotic masochism, his experiences with drugs and with alcohol, these were all part of the show-business and university worlds which he discovered in America. The commercial side of the show-business world was something he knew about. With its deliberate distortions, its devotion to material success, it seemed to offer a good picture of what young people in America were rebelling against. Adamov therefore decided to set his play in the world of commercial television. In the American universities he found he had a political link with the anti-war feeling of some students and intellectuals, and with their preoccupation with how to make an act of rebellion that would be more than just an empty gesture. Faced with this sick society, he felt he understood the sickness and could unmask its causes.

The play is complex and successful, first and foremost because of this illuminating combination of the 'private' and the 'public', which has a real bearing on the problems of a real society. Its success is also due to a number of other important factors. The first is the quantity of characters in the play. Off Limits is no longer built around one character, but, like Paolo Paoli, presents a small world which is in some sense a microcosm of the United States, and in which he devotes an equal amount of attention to a dozen or more characters. Secondly, Off Limits marks the reinstatement in Adamov's dramaturgy of the principle of repetition; as in Paolo Paoli, the play consists of a number of scenes which resemble one another but

which, despite their similarities, contain a gradual progression, a spiral, in the course of which the blatant contradictions of modern America become more and more exaggerated to the point where they culminate in disaster.

A third factor in the play's success is the reinstatement of the importance of dramatic action. Whereas the appeal of the previous plays lay principally in the verbal humour of the text, Off Limits relies a great deal on physical action, and, like the early plays, resembles a musical score; the complete play is not to be found on the page, only a condensed plan full of violent contradictions, described by Adamov as "ma pièce préférée parce que la plus abrupte".<sup>33</sup> It is a difficult play to read and a difficult play to imagine on the stage, because so much is left to the producer's imagination. This explains why the first two productions, at Aubervilliers and Milan, could be so different the one from the other.<sup>34</sup> Several French reviewers mentioned the difficulties of staging Adamov; Claude Olivier expressed this by saying that Adamov's language and construction escaped from conventional dramatic structures:

C'est d'une grande complexité et demande à la fois une rigoureuse soumission à l'oeuvre écrite - y compris ce qui est dit en dehors - et une invention généreuse qui, par le jeu des acteurs, des décors, des lumières, des mouvements, des accessoires... rende lisible le propos, tout le propos.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Journal for 24th January 1969. My emphasis.

<sup>34</sup> See above Part I, Chapter 4, pp. 84-85.

<sup>35</sup> 'Ce que dit Adamov', Les Lettres Françaises, 29 janvier 1969.

The difficulty lies in Adamov's peculiar use of realistic, even naturalistic dialogue, action, etc. in a framework (or 'structure') that is anything but realistic. This was something he very deliberately sought after; we have mentioned his description of it as 'réalisme légèrement décollé de la réalité'.<sup>36</sup> He reformulated this again in 'Presque', his last article on the theatre:

le théâtre, le vrai, c'est celui où l'on se  
trouve presque dans la réalité, mais sans  
y être absolument, une distance vous sépare  
d'elle.<sup>37</sup>

In order to see how he achieved this in Off Limits, we must examine the structure of the play, which is far from being naturalistic. It consists of six tableaux; the first five all represent parties given by different characters in the play, and the last, an 'épilogue', represents a rehearsal in a television studio. No attempt whatever is made to provide circumstantial explanation for the parties being given, for the particular guests' presence, for the length of time elapsing between each of them. In one sense, they are no more than a simple anonymous place where people may meet, fulfilling the same function as 'a tavern' in Romantic drama. But more than this, they are used in an extremely unnaturalistic, repetitive manner; each party contains desultory discussion of an idea for a television programme, a happening, a case of extreme drunkenness or overdose of drugs, one or more acts of violence. The order of the different episodes is changed around from party to party, and there is a gradual degeneration to show the

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<sup>36</sup> See above, Part II, chapter 5, p.259.

<sup>37</sup> 'Presque: le théâtre ou le rêve', Les Lettres Françaises, 4 février 1970.

deterioration of the overall situation. But the repetition of individual incidents is deliberately used to demonstrate, in as literal a manner as possible, the sterility of the world in which the play takes place. All of the characters in the play are heading towards an 'impasse'. For some, this is brutally materialised in suicide or death - Luce Herz, Humphrey, Jim and Sally - for others like George and Dorothy this is not necessary, since they are already spiritually and mentally dead. They are 'des morts vivants', and their 'impasse' is expressed in the futile repetition, day after day, of their participation in a world they abhor.

But, beneath the parallelism of the parties, there is in fact a very traditional structure of exposition, development, crisis. Adamov criticised Garran for playing all the parties at the same level of intensity. He clearly thought there should be a gradual growth of intensity. The first party 'chez Humphrey' introduces, as it were, all the different characters, concentrating on Humphrey and Lisbeth as an embodiment of the American situation in which the action is to take place. They show, in their behaviour, the aggressive instinct for domination and exploitation that tends to be admired as 'drive'. The second party 'chez les Watkins' completes the exposition by taking us into a very different milieu, that of the unsuccessful misfits. Humphrey falls into the background; considerably more space is devoted to Dorothy and George, their obsessions with masochism and death are developed in some detail; the first suicide of the play, that of Milton, is announced, which gives rise to discussion on the subject. The currents in American society running counter to Humphrey's great

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American dream are depicted in short, and a first suggestion is made that the country is adrift.

At the third party 'chez Doris Roan', Jim and Sally, who have been gaining importance since the beginning of the play really come to the forefront. Jim tears up his draft papers, and there is the longest continuous sequence between them in the whole play<sup>38</sup>, in which the theme of their love is developed. There are two other important developments in the 'plot'; firstly, George and Dorothy attempt to befriend Jim and Sally, George paying Jim's bail for the crime of tearing up his military papers. Secondly, the exploitation and degradation of Molly becomes clear, and she is befriended by Jim and Sally.

The fourth 'party inachevée' is the culminating crisis of the action: and, in making their decision to leave before it is finished, we see Jim and Sally also deciding to escape from America together. They have had enough, reached the end of the road. There is nothing more for them to do except give in and join the establishment, a solution which they reject in the most violent fashion in the scene of the stripping of Ethel. Their deaths, shot while trying to cross into Mexico, were not invented: "J'ai connu à New York un Jim et une Sally, et qui se sont plus ou moins suicidés essayant de passer la frontière mexicaine."<sup>39</sup>

For the fifth scene, we are back where we started, at Humphrey's

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<sup>38</sup> running from page 88 - page 95 of Off Limits published in the 'Manteau d'Arlequin' series, 1969.

<sup>39</sup> Off Limits, p.9.

house. There is a glimpse of the American life which goes on despite everything. The party is much the same as before: it starts with a happening, except that this time the happening has a clear anti-communist bias whereas before, it had been empty of political content, until Jim burst out with his yells; but now Jim is gone and there is no-one to play the opposition. Furthermore, we see the great American machine continuing its implacable course in a more serious sense; as soon as the deaths of Jim and Sally are announced, Humphrey begins to plan for the television programme which will 'appropriate' their death by making it seem like a 'terrible tragedy which nothing could avert', 'a touching story of a modern Romeo and Juliet', and which will remove even the small spark of nihilistic revolt which this semi-suicide possessed. The scene closes on a repeat of Jim's war-game by Bob and Peter, and when even this fails, through an accident to Bob, for which Peter has to apologise, all revolt against the system seems finished.

However, there is still the epilogue which makes a last comment on this story. It shows, in horrifying detail exactly what kind of a travesty is made of Jim and Sally's death, but it also shows two things; the sudden awareness on the part of Dorothy of what a travesty she has lent herself to, which awareness results in an awakening of political consciousness:

'Lâches je vous hais Humphrey je te hais  
 Et toi George gueule toi au moins vengeance  
 Vietnam vaincra  
 Jim Sally j'ai honte'

And George gives his assent to this:

'J'ai honte.'<sup>40</sup>

Secondly, the revolt of Peter Lerkins, the 'safest' of all the young people in the play is announced: he has torn up his draft card in public.

In this structure, which is perhaps the most original of any of Adamov's plays, the clearest thing is the perfect suitability of form to content: as in all of his best plays, Adamov has invented very little: he has adapted. He has taken a situation or set of situations observed by him in America and selected just those aspects which render the experience of reality most powerfully. He has set them in the context in which he saw them take place; he has not had to invent a setting. He was very keen to define most precisely that aspect of American society with which the play is concerned: "je n'ai pas voulu découvrir ici l'Amérique entière, mais un certain milieu social hétéroclite, qui s'étend à New York, entre Washington Square, La General Motors et la villa de Katharine Hepburn."<sup>41</sup>

Very little is done by means of the décor, which remains much the same throughout. The 'images fixes' which are projected onto a cyclorama preceding each scene set certain associations of ideas in motion, and evoke the publicity-conscious world of the mass media which is as important to the play as its geographical setting. More is achieved by means of the characters and their activities. The characters are divided into two camps, young and old. The old exploit the entertain-

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p.171.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.11.

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ments industry. The young have not yet been taken over by it, but some of them are already employed (Sally's 'publicités chantés'), others are tempted by it. The problem of the generation gap is central to the play: the young are contemptuous of everything the old stand for (success, wealth, etc.) and the old are frightened that the young totally refuse to follow the rules for life which they have accepted.

The regular actions of the characters are equally important in providing the setting. The 'war-games' of Bob, Jim and Peter set the play in the context of the young American protest movement; the 'happenings' provide the context of the rich but bored American bourgeoisie looking for new sensations to provide something more interesting than the normal round of social chit-chat. The old are seen to over-indulge in alcohol, the young in drugs.

The 'war-games' are particularly important in providing the setting for the play. For Adamov, as for many observers, the most important factor in the disintegration of American society was the Vietnam war. It was therefore important that the dominant place which this occupies in people's minds should be made clear in some special way. It comes into the normal party conversation from time to time, and Jim endeavours to force it into the happenings. But the war-games provided a special field of action in which something of the horror, anguish and central importance of the war could be conveyed. The decision to do this by means of games or charades, was a particularly brilliant stroke, since the protest which Jim and Peter can make in this way remains, by its very nature, agonisingly fruitless. Through it, they try to compensate for the constant falsification of information about

the war that goes out over Humphrey's television network; but they only succeeded in aping his own procedures and in angering him.

Adopting different rôles with lightening speed, Jim and Peter give their impression of the bloody and useless war in which both sides wildly exaggerate their claims, and both claim to be winning. They enact these scenes on two separate occasions, in the first and third tableaux. There is a final reprise in tableau five, in which Bob and Peter enact a torture scene. This is the last scene in tableau 5, and leads on to the epilogue, in which Bob takes one step farther into game-playing, by his travesty of Jim in the television programme, and Peter takes a step in the opposite direction, towards real revolt, by tearing up his draft card in a public demonstration.

Even more important than the war games for the setting of the play as a whole, are the 'happenings'. The book The Four Suits, from which Adamov appears to have borrowed much of the material for these happenings, shows that they are quite wide-spread in America, where their function is to generate erotic or aggressive relations between people who no longer have anything to say to one another. They are a particular form of sick self-indulgence like the excessive use of alcohol or drugs with which the play is also full. And as Adamov saw it, they were pernicious because they tried to unite or divide people on the basis of sex or of temperament, not on the basis of political criteria; thus their effect was to strengthen the status quo.

But they were useful to him as a dramatic device, since they provided a period of release, in which the 'sub-text' of the

characters could be spoken clearly and everything did not need to be expressed through the banalities of party chatter. T.S. Eliot's Cocktail Party showed how difficult it is to couch a serious drama entirely in the framework of a party; the happenings provided an additional dimension. The way he used them to bring out more clearly the attitudes of each character is illuminated by a comparison between the accounts of happenings from which Adamov borrowed, and his own versions in Off Limits. René Gaudy's work on the sources of the play includes a detailed study of this, and I will simply take one example in order to show what Gaudy achieved by such a comparison.

The example is the second happening which begins "Qu'est-ce que la réalité pour vous?"<sup>42</sup>. Bob leads the happening and he begins by suggesting five possible answers, all of which were among the ten given in The Four Suits: Adamov then makes each of his characters answer the question for themselves; three borrow one of the answers suggested in advance by Bob; for the other five, Adamov invents new answers. The whole sequence is very short:

BOB (commençant le happening)  
 Qu'est-ce que la réalité pour vous?  
 Une fiction?  
 Une manière qui vous est propre de regarder  
 le monde extérieur?  
 La somme des sommes?  
 Rien et tout à la fois?  
 Des lignes noirs sur du papier blanc?

GEORGE: La mort.  
 MOLLY: Une fiction, un rêve.

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42 Ibid., p.71.

LUCE: Une manière qui vous est propre de  
 regarder le monde, bien sûr.  
 JIM: (à tue-tête): La violation du 17e. parallèle!  
 SALLY (regardant Jim): Le découragement.  
 HUMPHREY: La somme des sommes des sommes.  
 DOROTHY: Mais il n'y a pas de réalité, il n'y  
 en a pas!  
 DORIS ROAN (se levant): Je n'en sais rien.<sup>43</sup>

If happenings were really as cleverly structured, and revealed  
 so much about the participants, they would be extremely valuable;  
 however, it is Adamov's prerogative, as the author, to make effective  
 use of the devices he wishes, in general, to criticise. To take the  
 three 'borrowed' answers first: Molly's reflects her life in which the  
 only reason for putting up with the anguish of her day to day living  
 conditions is for the periods of escape into the dream-world of drugs.  
 Luce's answer shows her fundamental subjectivism, her inability to  
 escape from her personal preoccupations which will lead her to suicide.  
 For Humphrey, the most real thing about the world is the infinite  
 possibilities it offers him for amassing capital. In the case of these  
 three characters, Adamov was able to choose a perfectly suitable answer  
 from his model. But for the others, he invented new answers. George's  
 shows with brutal simplicity his dominating obsession with death;  
 Dorothy's answer is even more negative: she feels that for her and  
 George reality has simply ceased to exist. They are living corpses.  
 Jim's answer deliberately tries to introduce a political element,  
 though later he says that Vietnam is less important to him than "la  
 came, et Sally aussi, bien sûr."<sup>44</sup> Politics, dreams and his lover were

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43 Ibid., pp.71-72.

44 Ibid., p.78.

also the most 'real' things in Adamov's life. Sally's answer points to her growing mood of despair which leads up to her speech at the beginning of tableau 4 where she plans to opt out and undergo a cure. Finally, the answer of Roan shows his fundamental stupidity and lack of imagination.

This analysis shows what a lot Adamov was able to reveal of his characters through a very brief, condensed sequence. But the value of the happening for him was very restricted. He stated in his 'préface' that he had wanted to:

utiliser les happenings, le 'Living Theatre',  
pour pouvoir les regarder et les critiquer.  
La confusion de la pensée des personnages ne  
doit pas entraîner la confusion dans la pensée  
du spectateur.<sup>45</sup>

Adamov had several reasons for giving these happenings a prominent place in his play. Firstly, they made up part of the American reality he had experienced and wanted to recreate; secondly, he wanted to show them up for what they were, the playthings of a bored bourgeoisie; thirdly, he wished to emphasise how they help to reinforce the status quo by channelling feelings of frustration into harmless sexual or 'metaphysical' experiences, likely to open out onto nothing more than the ill-informed discussion of Jung which terminates the second happening at the Watkins' party:

BOB (à Lisbeth) L'artiste croit nager, mais  
c'est un courant invisible qui le pousse en  
avant.  
JIM ... Vieillesse.  
LISBETH (sèche) Vieillesse peut-être, mais  
Jung l'a dit, et nous essayons, dans tous nos

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p.10.

happenings, de traduire en gestes et en cris  
 cette pensée... vétuste.  
 JAMES (s'approchant) Savez-vous que Jung était  
 antisémite?  
 LISBETH Jung, antisémite! Un si grand esprit.  
 Impossible. (George rit).<sup>46</sup>

Whether the happening revealed something or not, Adamov felt that it could not avoid acting as a false escape valve for legitimate revolutionary aspirations, diverting them into fruitless channels approved by the rich dilettantes, the admirers of 'les grands esprits'.

These different types of games are most important for the structure of the play. By means of abrupt changes of mood, the play moves with great freedom from one action to the next, from one group to another; groups of people form and reform, conversations are interrupted, dropped, and resumed, just as at a party. But the audience is never tempted to lose itself in the rhythm of the party: the change from one action to another is too abrupt (like cross-cutting in the cinema) the scenes are too short; in this way Adamov achieved a certain 'distanciation'.

In this way, he also hoped to seize the reality of present moment in all its ambiguity, although the play was in fact very carefully structured. In his journal, Adamov called Off Limits:

la pièce de moi que je préfère, celle qui  
 fait que convergent le présent terrifiant et  
 la mélodie de Tchekhov, la vraie simple  
 psychologie, où des êtres brisés, face à

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., pp.75-76.

face, se regardent, s'épient, pleurent,  
s'aiment.<sup>47</sup>

The characters are much more complex than those in the other plays studied in this chapter, and, for the first time since Le Ping-Pong, they are treated with some of the warmth which Tchekhov showed towards his characters; although they are hopeless failures, George and Dorothy, Jim and Sally, Molly, etc., are described with sorrow, not with contempt, since Adamov had shared and understood their experiences.

He went on, in the above extract from the journal:

Ce n'est pas Brecht qui m'a marqué, ni même  
Strindberg, c'est avant tout Tchekhov  
(mouvements perpétuels des personnages, des  
souvenirs, des regrets, des espérances).  
Chambres spacieuses, vous avez été le lieu de  
tout ce va et vient. Le passé aimé, vécu, ne  
nous lâche pas.<sup>48</sup>

This was no sudden declaration of love for Tchekhov. Throughout his life, Adamov had been an admirer of his, and had frequently referred to him when discussing his own plays.<sup>49</sup> As a child, Adamov had known the restless life of the aristocracy in Tchekhov's plays, constantly moving round, yet uncertain of themselves, uneasily feeling that life was leaving them behind, weak, memory-haunted, constantly lamenting past failures or escaping into future dreams which they knew to be

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<sup>47</sup> 24 janvier 1969.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> See for example his reference to Tchekhovian dialogue in Théâtre II, pp.9-10, or his pleasure at Dort's comparison between Paolo Paoli and Tchekhov in 'Quand les critiques sont dans la pièce.'

impossible. Confronted with Tchekhov, he felt he knew this world, felt part of it. His translations of Tchekhov were among the few that he felt really pleased with, and, as has been seen, he wove Uncle Vanya into the structure of Finita la commedia.

Strictly speaking there is nothing very Tchekhovian about Off Limits, with the possible exception of the ending, its deaths by suicide and its minute ray of hope for the future in the revolt of Peter Lerkins. But the despair of the central characters, their vain longing for a great cause, their sordid compromises, their inability to extract themselves from situations which they know to be false, all these things have their counterparts in Tchekhov.

And perhaps the most Tchekhovian feature of the play is a point at which it rejoins Adamov's earlier work: the description of a general social situation by means of a small, limited circle of people. As in Le Ping-Pong, and as in Tchekhov, the small circle is divided into old and young: the old are disillusioned or power-mad, and the young are disgusted by the old, but nevertheless dominated by them.

The best way of appreciating the complexity of Off Limits is perhaps to examine the characters and their psychological make-up. Adamov's own analysis of the characters in the journal was done by approaching them as couples, calling it a 'pièce jumelée'<sup>50</sup>. The

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<sup>50</sup> All these quotations on pages 456-60 come from the three pages of notes he devoted to Off Limits on 24th January 1969.

first couple he talked of was Jim and Sally, "l'indissociable, et le pourtant vaincu." For the first time since Le Ping-Pong, he had succeeded in creating a couple of young lovers, touching without being sentimental, whose love is a genuinely positive element, though they are destroyed by the great American monster which devours everything it produces, and although they themselves are unable to break free from their death-wish. Jim and Sally provide a faithful picture of a young couple in love, with all their contradictions, their cruelty to themselves and to others, their immaturity, their mixture of depravity and innocence, and the slow realisation of their failures and limitations.

Particularly successful is their uncertainty about one another and about their own feelings. They do not conform to the Romeo and Juliet archetype of love at first sight. Instead they each, at some stage, think they want to break with the other. Sally, for example, realises that they have to find a solution to their two major problems, drugs and the draft, and that they will never find it while they stay together. So she decides to leave Jim and to give herself up as an addict so that she can undergo a cure. But when she realises the effect this desertion would have on Jim, she abandons the plan, preferring to stay with him and risk destruction than to save herself alone. 'La tendresse', for Adamov, was rather like humour: something which acted as a compensation for the harsh realities of life. In this play, the tenderness between Jim and Sally and also between them and their friends Molly and Neel, has the power to banish total despair, despite the play's ending which shows that Jim and Sally have died almost entirely in vain.

The next couple Adamov mentioned was George and Dorothy. They

are the most prominent couple after Jim and Sally, and one feels that Adamov put a lot of himself and Le Bison into this portrait of ageing despair and disillusionment. In the journal, he called George "le blackboulé du maccarthysme, mais en même temps l'obsédé, le masochiste", as if to acknowledge that if, in his own life, political persecution had accounted for many of his problems, it was nevertheless true that more important still was the damage done by mental disorders having nothing to do with politics. Dorothy, who is an extraordinary character, at the same time infinitely touching and infinitely ludicrous, he described as "elle la douloureuse, la masochiste aussi, mais jouant par ailleurs." Early on in the play there is a comic moment when the guests at Humphrey's party are involved in a 'happening'. They have been told to crawl around and then to read from a book; but Dorothy remains on all fours chanting "je rampe, je rampe, je rampe". Rightly produced, this should seem ludicrous, but without sacrificing the sense of Dorothy's real anguish. George and Dorothy are what Jim and Sally would turn into if they survived.

Humphrey and Lisbeth are the most important couple in the power hierarchy; and they maintain this position by a policy of ruthless self-interest:

Le couple Lisbeth-Humphrey, les maîtres de maison,  
 les sourcils froncés devant tout ce qui les gêne,  
 et ce poing qui s'abat sur tout ce qui les menace,  
 même de loin, de très loin.

In Humphrey, Adamov wished to create the archetype of the 'self-made man'. Everything he does is calculated to make sure he has the aggressive, dominating rôle in whatever action is taking place on stage.

Humphrey's power is based both on his commercial assets, and on his control over communications. He is both industrialist and director of a television network: the rules of one hold good for the other. His salesman's flair enables him to see what the public want and he serves it up on his network in the form in which they want it. Hence his instant intuition, after the deaths of Jim and Sally, of the programme he could construct around them, cashing in (literally) on all the contemporary fads (transcendental meditation, for example) and on the older generation's perpetual desire to believe that youth is not dangerous, only mistakenly, harmlessly idealistic.

Humphrey is a mystifier: he has the power to make others see life in terms which suit his own interests. His death, occurring in the middle of the making of the programme that is to turn the deaths of Jim and Sally into a commercial proposition, is reminiscent of the death of another great mystifier, Le Vieux of Le Ping-Pong. In both cases their deaths, the traditional death of the energetic business man who collapses 'on the job', have overtones of the Oedipean slaughter of the Father, whose power can never decline, but can only be overthrown in a violent spasm.

The next couple Adamov mentioned was "le couple Doris Roan - Molly, le bourreau et la victime." Roan is a stupid and brutal character, but Molly is more than just his victim, since Adamov also talked of "le couple Sally-Molly, la protectrice et la protégée." Molly, as Gaudy pointed out in his article for the Aubervilliers 'dossier', has a dual importance as Sally's friend:

Adamov a été frappé par le fait que lorsque deux copines sont ensemble, il y en a presque

toujours une qui, étant plus favorisée, devient pour l'autre l'image idéale. Molly est un personnage secondaire, mais dans ses récitatifs, un peu comme les confidants du théâtre classique, elle en dit plus sur les héros que ceux-ci n'en disent sur eux-mêmes: elle exprime l'inexprimé de Jim et de Sally.<sup>51</sup>

In his Journal, Adamov wrote that Sally and Molly were "le couple qui me touche le plus." This may have been because he felt that the device of the confidante worked particularly well, or because he was impressed with the two actresses who took their parts; he also wrote: "Juliet Berto, Catherine Ardit, je ne vous oublierai pas de sitôt. C'est ma propre voix que, grâce à vous, j'ai redécouverte."

Another good way of approaching the characters is through their different acts of physical violence, and this can help to show the place of violence, of which there is a striking amount, in the play. The social reality depicted by Adamov is a violent one; in consequence, his stage action includes violence, which gives back to the dramatic action some of the immediacy and impact that he had demanded for the theatre in the 'Avertissement' to La Parodie and L'Invasion. Here, in his penultimate play, he really achieved a theatre of cruelty in the Artaudian sense of a theatre in which the brutal realities of life are not attenuated, but rendered in literal, physical action. There are numerous beatings, knockings down, acts of degradation. A study of these helps to bring out the meaning of the play as well as suggesting the powerful effect it would have on stage.

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<sup>51</sup> 'Les sources autobiographiques et littéraires d'Off Limits'.  
(See above, note 31.)

Humphrey, as might be expected, is the character who most frequently indulges in violence. In the first party he slaps Dorothy who has provoked him by making jibes about the war and by kissing him. Later on in the same scene, he knocks down Jim particularly brutally because he considers Jim's 'war-game' to have been an insult to him. These acts of physical brutality are paralleled by his brutal treatment, over the telephone, of someone who has not fulfilled an agreement over a business deal, and whom he blackmails openly, by threatening to reveal what he knows about him over the television network.

The other actions in the first tableau which might be qualified as violent are Dorothy's kiss and George's deliberate spilling of his drink on Luce Herz. Both express a desire to be punished rather than a self-assertive aggressiveness; Dorothy receives her 'claque' from Humphrey and George receives his reminder that the establishment regards him with a distrust which matches his own disgust with them and with himself. So the violence in the first tableau is mostly perpetrated by Humphrey, thus bringing his power mania into relief. As well as expressing this in the literal form of violence, Adamov also makes a return to his earlier forms of literal expression, particularly in his use of objects. When Humphrey takes the telephone, this is the stage direction:

Humphrey prend le récepteur qu'il pose entre  
ses genoux. Le téléphone, c'est sa chose à lui.<sup>52</sup>

At the beginning of the second party, we are thrown into quite

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52 Off Limits, p.30.

a different sort of violence, the violence of Jim's associates, which is not a violence of aggressive domination, but of despair and frustration, since they cannot reach what they want in life, nor express what they want to reach. Thus, for example, Bob and Jim have a tiff; both fall, neither is victor, neither is hurt, there is no 'point' to the violence and nothing is achieved by it: it is their manner of being, that is all. The overriding mood of irony and despair, with which they face the world, is confirmed by their manner of ending the hostilities, itself turned into a joke: Jim had insulted Bob: "toi, avec ta sale tignasse de rouquin", but afterwards he pretends that Bob had said this to him:

JIM ... Il m'a traité de sale rouquin.  
 BOB Comment oses-tu dire ça alors que  
 c'est toi? .. au contraire ...  
 JIM (riant) Inversion! ... Arrêt des  
 hostilités. Solution négociée.<sup>53</sup>

Thus the little episode is turned into a wry joke about the whole conception of a negotiated solution, when the aggressor claims he was really the injured party, and the parallel with the United States, and the sort of negotiated solution that would be acceptable to them in Vietnam, is unavoidable. In the course of the happening which comes towards the end of the second party, Jim again adopts the desperate violence of the war-game in an attempt to express frustrated horror:

JIM (bondissant) Na...na...na...na...na...pal..  
 palm. (A tue-tête) Napalm! Mort: aux enfants;  
 Mort aux moins de treize ans! Tous atteints!  
 Victoire acquise!<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., pp.65-66.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p.76.

And once again Humphrey takes it upon himself to punish him for this lack of good taste, this time by throwing his drink in his face. Doris Roan, the sadist who had simply laughed in the previous party when Jim had been knocked down, this time insults him: "Enculé!"

In the following party 'chez Doris Roan', there is a return to the violence of frustration as Sally throws a homosexual insinuation at Jim and Jim slaps her in return. But again, it is without any real malice, and in a moment they are reconciled. In this scene it is Molly who 'pays', she is the one who acts as target for the aggressions of the others. First she leads the happening, on the orders of Doris Roan, who apparently has proprietary rights over her, by virtue of the drugs he procures for her. But she does it with so little imagination that Jim forces her to strip in order to lend some excitement to the proceedings. This is the point at which Sally interposes herself to defend her from Jim. Shortly afterwards there is a scene in which she comes to Doris Roan for protection against someone who has maltreated her, but he only treats it as an occasion to give her a sound thrashing. At the end of the following party, she returns once more, having had another beating from Roan and this time gets help from Jim and Sally: despite their frustrations, disappointments, and feelings of dissatisfaction with self, they find a tenderness for one another stemming from a sense of shared suffering, which is one of the things Adamov was most pleased with in the play.

But earlier in the same tableau (4), the extremism of Jim and Sally also becomes apparent, and this too is rendered in a violent episode, when Bob arrives with his new wife, Ethel, still in her wedding

gown. Between them, Jim and Sally manage to overpower Bob and to strip Ethel naked. The cruelty of this sequence is not for a moment minimised. The whole episode is deliberately included to show that Jim and Sally 'vont jusqu'au bout'. They are already possessed of a death wish:

La mort les prend tous les deux, mais aussi  
c'est parce qu'ils lui ont parlé, lui ont dit oui.<sup>55</sup>

Like many other characters of the play they are consenting victims of the system. But they are more extreme; they go to the logical conclusion. They cannot see any other alternative than to offer oneself as a victim, and to be crushed, with the result that they cannot bear the thought of anyone else climbing out of their world of total despair and hypocritically embracing the system he knows to be at the root of all evil. The 'récupération' of Bob by the system is symbolised by the traditional wedding dress of Ethel and the only way Jim and Sally can express their disgust is by stripping off this symbol of social conformity, this disguise for the faded would-be virgin, which they express in both action and words: the stripping and the howl of Jim as Sally brandishes Ethel's pants "Amérique, tes sous-vêtements puent!"<sup>56</sup>

The final act of violence in the play occurs at the end of the second party 'chez Humphrey'. Bob and Peter Lerkins are playing out an even more anguished form than usual of the war-game, in which they pretend to torture each other, in order to escape from their usual

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<sup>55</sup> See above, note 50.

<sup>56</sup> Off Limits, p.123.

feelings of futility and more especially from the memory of the death of Jim and Sally. The game gets more and more violent, until Bob is seriously hurt. But here the physical violence seems a comparatively healthy relief mechanism compared with the television programme devised by Humphrey which 'does violence' of a more durable nature to the memory of Jim and Sally.

There are also cases of violence irrupting from the outside, although these are very much less important than the violence which stems from the characters themselves. In the first scene George arrives with blood on his neck: he has been coshed in an argument with a policeman - George, from the beginning, is seen as the consenting whipping boy. In tableau 4, violence again breaks in from the outside in the form of a black who has been shot by some whites. This episode was cut out by Garran, perhaps rightly; it is a little too 'easy', does not possess the rigour of the other acts of violence in the play, which can be seen to arise necessarily from the conditions. There are shades of La Putain Respectueuse in the convenience with which this dying black appears just when the plot needs him, having never been mentioned before.

But the episode does provide an interesting moment in Jim's psychological development. Up until this point, he and Sally, though motivated by powerful feelings, could not express them clearly and hence were driven into histrionic speeches or 'wild' gestures, like Jim's destruction of his draft papers. Jim was under a compulsion to declaim, to shout his impotence, and his inability to say what he meant. But the death of the black shocks him for a moment into silence; he stops

declaiming for once, and begins to think.

But these irruptions do not obscure the fact that most of the violence is enacted by the extremists in the group: Humphrey, the 'maître de maison', Koan the sadistic slave-master, and Jim, Sally, Bob, Peter, the rebels uncertain of their cause. In between these two extremes, are the characters who are chiefly victims of the violence.

Molly is perhaps the most moving because the most sincere and the most helpless. Luce Herz is a victim of a very different kind. She is pretentious, insincere, snobbish, of the same breed as Cécile de Saint Sauveur and Lucette Grenier, the theatre owner of Finita la commedia. She is the only real case of mythomania in the play, and is more to be pitied than condemned. The rôle she most constantly plays is that of the seductress, and yet she never manages to seduce anyone. She imputes her own faults to others, tells Jim he is a 'vaincu' and criticises Milton for his suicide before proceeding to take her life in the same way. There is no love lost between her and her sister Lisbeth, since Lisbeth knows that Luce would give anything to win Humphrey away from her. But she has nothing to fear, since Luce imagines she can win Humphrey by pretentious sex-talk, an attempt which of course fails after the following ludicrous speech:

Toute femme, il me semble, rêve d'être  
possédée, pénétrée, mais aussi, et cela, on  
ne le dit pas assez, aussi enveloppée par l'homme. 57

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57 Ibid., p.97.

But the most interesting of the victims are Dorothy and George, who have rejected the worlds of both old and young. They have rejected that of the O'Douglas, partly because it has rejected them (George was a victim of the McCarthy purges) and partly out of sheer disgust; George expresses this graphically at the beginning of the play by emptying his glass down Luce Herz's dress. They would like to join the world of the rebels, but their overtures of friendship to Jim and Sally are rejected. Their negation of the system is not sufficiently complete to make Jim and Sally feel they are really one of them: they are still too reliant on it for money. Dorothy runs a chain of smart restaurants, and George is prepared to do hack work for Humprey in order to live, and to indulge his obsessions. Indeed, it is he who finally does the scenario for the programme which travesties the deaths of Jim and Sally. The system may have harmed them but it has only partially destroyed them, not wholly, and they are not prepared to go the whole way. Above all they are sufficiently intelligent to see Jim's faults, describing him accurately enough as "petit révolutionnaire en chambre."<sup>58</sup> They are revolutionaries in theory, they understand the problems, but they never risk the step of action. They remain throughout 'outsiders', onlookers who despairingly watch the story unfolding, and yet who can do nothing about it. This fact is thrown in their faces at one point by Jim himself, when they are watching the stripping of Ethel, and Dorothy exclaims delightedly "Mais c'est du Bunuel!", Jim spits out his

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58 Ibid., p.129.

hatred: "toujours voyeurs, vous deux, à ce que je vois."<sup>59</sup>

It is interesting that such accusations do not normally meet with the frantic disclaimers that were a regular feature of the characters' rhetoric in the radio plays, or Paolo Paoli. In Paolo Paoli, every character with the exception of Rose and Marpeaux was guilty of an imposture (or two). In Off Limits, it is not the same thing. There is very little imposture in the world of hard-headed American business. Those who profit and exploit know they are doing so, and are proud of their success, like Humphrey. Certainly, they like to give themselves airs; Léonide Bernhardt, in Humphrey's eyes, fulfils the simple function of enabling him to pose as a patron of the musical arts. But they are never so hypocritical as Hulot-Vasseur, pretending that he would like nothing better than to follow the reforms of Millerand while blocking them in his own factory. Indeed, one of the things that fascinated Adamov about America was the way in which the rich bourgeoisie seemed to have an innate understanding of the colour problem in Marxist terms: they realised that as long as they were kept apart, in conditions of reasonably pleasant servitude, the blacks presented little threat to the establishment; only if they 'got together', discovered their identity as an exploited group would they constitute any real opposition. This comes out in the words which Adamov heard spoken by a rich woman while he was in the States, and which he placed, unchanged, in the mouth of Lisbeth Humphrey:

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p.122.

JAMES (à Lisbeth) Si vous craignez les Noirs, Mrs.  
O'Douglas, pourquoi prenez-vous justement une  
nurse noire?  
LISEBETH Parce que les Noirs adorent les enfants.  
Et puis, quand ils ne sont pas ensemble, ils  
ne sont pas dangereux.  
JAMES (ironique) Très juste.<sup>60</sup>

Humphrey and Lisbeth understand this only too well, and one realises that all their efforts will be devoted to ensuring that this 'class-consciousness' is impossible for them. As Adamov expressed it in his Journal: 'ce poing qui s'abat sur tout ce qui les menace, même de loin, de très loin'. This couple is, for Adamov, the incarnation of America, the monster which eats its children; they are typical of the establishment which has been so successful in preventing any real attempt at revolt by a process of 'appropriation', whereby any attempted revolt is 'récupéré', presented in such a way that it looks like a confirmation of the wisdom of the established order, even if some of its minor executants are perhaps to be criticised.

The milieu of television, in which the play takes place, is particularly well chosen to illustrate this 'récupération' since with all the 'big' problems that are raised by various characters, the war, the problem of broken families, poverty in the third world, etc., are always being discussed in the perspective of a future television programme and with a view to seeing how such material can be used, not what can be contributed to the problem. Thus a general tendency of the capitalist world can be particularly well pointed out.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p.26.

But this careful avoidance of all opposition which worked so well during the forties and fifties, is seen by Adamov to be nearing the end of its effective life. This is expressed in the two events which bring the play to a close. The first is the death of Humphrey. In answer to the question "Qu'est-ce que la réalité pour vous", he answered "La somme des sommes des sommes."<sup>61</sup> But Adamov reminds us that the only ultimate reality is death with Humphrey's words just before he collapses, still supremely concerned with turning reality to his own profit:

GEORGE ... Jim n'aurait jamais dit ça dans la  
réalité.

HUMPHREY (ricanant:) La réalité! La réalité!  
(Il s'écroule.)<sup>62</sup>

Secondly, not only does Humphrey collapse under the impact of reality which he had ignored, but the news also comes through that Peter Lerkins, who had been praised by Humphrey at the beginning of the play as one of his own kind, has torn up his draft papers in public. The implication is that when even this kind of person, who has all the doors open for an entry into the establishment, decides to rebel, when even the 'respectable' youth begins to turn, then there is some hope that an effective opposition might at last come into being. The protest war-games, which up until this point in the action were never more than a game, have opened out onto the possibility of real revolt.

The success of this play lies in its character portrayal and in the close links that exist between the personal preoccupations of the

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<sup>61</sup> See above, p. 451.

<sup>62</sup> Off Limits, pp. 172-173.

characters and their social and political situation. But equally important is its achievement of stylistic variation. It manages to combine, united in the framework of a fairly simple 'story', four different 'registers' of verbal communication. Once again, it is the musical metaphor that seems called for: as if he were playing an organ, Adamov can employ different tonalities or registers. First there is the simple everyday speech of the parties, although as the basic register of communication, this already constitutes a heightened reality, since one is always slightly 'larger than life' at a party. Secondly, there are the happenings which, as we have seen, are a sort of truth game in which the real preoccupations of the characters are revealed almost without their knowing or wishing it (the strip-tease of Molly provides a concrete picture of this process). Thirdly, there are the war-games, in which some of the young people try, in dream-like, broken images, to reconcile their disgust with the war, their outrage at its injustice and their strong personal fear at what it may do to them. Finally, there are the 'récitatifs': blank verse poems usually coming at the end of a tableau, adding to what has been revealed in that tableau, giving a different person's point of view on the action that has occurred or, as in Dorothy's final outburst, showing an awakening of political consciousness.

These 'récitatifs' may be usefully discussed in the context of an analysis of the Brechtian features of the play; for this is in some ways Adamov's most Brechtian play. This can be seen in its overall aim, which is to show how it is possible for the capitalist world of big business to appropriate any would-be gesture of revolt and turn

it to its own profit. One only needs to think of Adamov's favourite Brecht play, St. Joan of the Stockyards, to see a similar example of this, which also has a similar ending. Joan's canonisation by Mauler for her work among the poor shows the same 'appropriation' by the established powers of what was originally meant as a gesture of revolt, as that which takes place at the end of Off Limits.

But in a broad sense, one can see a Brechtian technique in the fluency and freedom with which Adamov changes from one register to another, using each to comment on the other, and all in a profoundly individual manner. The 'récitatifs' commenting on the action are an obviously Brechtian device, though in their composition they are closer to Ginsberg and American beat poetry than to anything Brecht ever wrote. They are frequently followed by an advertising jingle sung by Sally, presumably in her new function as 'chanteuse de publicité' for Humphrey's television network. These are reminiscent of the jingles pumped out through the loudspeaker of L'Agence Universelle, for example:

Ouvrez les yeux et cherchez et trouvez  
 Une affaire indépendante  
 Gérée sans peine PAR VOUS  
 Qui marche toute seule POUR VOUS. <sup>63</sup>

The artificial tone of these jingles, concealing the exploitation of big business, contrasts sharply with the sincere, relaxed style of the 'récitatifs'. Once again, the Aubervilliers 'dossier' contains a most interesting piece of work by Gaudy in which he compares three

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p.83. For L'Agence Universelle, see Appendix I.

American poems, by Ginsberg, Kaufman and Ferlinghetti, with the three poems in Off Limits for which they served as models. Two of them are recited by Jim, but the third becomes the first 'récitatif', given by Molly, in which she explains how Sally and she came to be appropriated by Doris Roan and Humphrey O'Douglas.

Two examples will suffice to show the varied way in which the 'récitatifs' are used. The first, given by James Andrews at the end of tableau 3, isolates in a stark, objective manner, the real effects of actions that have just been shown in all their complexity:

George paye la caution de Jim le jugement sera  
ajourné  
Sally peut chanter en paix pour Humphrey  
Le petit héros ne fera pas preuve d'héroïsme  
Tout est bien.<sup>65</sup>

The last few lines of the same 'récitatif' remind one of the multiple links that can be found between the events in Vietnam and the disorientated state of American youth, often in unexpected ways:

La marijuana entretenant la combativité du soldat  
Le haut commandement américain encourage  
sa consommation C'est tout naturel  
Mais Jim et Sally c'est à quinze ans qu'ils en  
ont pris de la marijuana Alors elle ne  
leur fait plus rien  
Plus rien.<sup>66</sup>

A second example may be taken from Dorothy's final 'récitatif' in the epilogue. The audience has seen the television rehearsal, with

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65 Off Limits, pp.110-111.

66 Ibid., p.111.

Dorothy acting Sally, chanting her false lines:

Dieu, Matière-Vie, Mexique, tu nous auras  
préparés. Prêts au voyage! (Ouvrant les bras,  
extatique:) Soleil, Père des Mondes, nous sommes  
à toi ... L'esprit nous guidera. Nous marcherons  
vers la Connaissance.<sup>67</sup>

The end of this charade is immediately followed by Dorothy's 'récitatif'  
in which she gives the lie to what has gone before:

Sally toi qui ne reviendras jamais jamais pardon  
Nous t'avons tous démentie neutralisée Cadavre  
maquillé  
Dorothy l'Anesthésiée a pris la place de la  
petite vivante morte  
Le téléspectateur en pyjama bleu clair s'émeut  
Ces enfants si jeunes si purs et sur qui l'Esprit  
est descendu  
Pèlerinages hindouistes payés par la fondation  
Carnegie Le Bouddha n'est pour rien dans  
l'affaire Il envoie un hôpital de  
campagne au Vietnam-Nord Recrudescence  
des attentats  
Happy End

(criant:)

Sally pardon pardon petite fille aux yeux pâles  
n'en pouvant plus  
Ne sachant plus <sup>68</sup>

These poems have a strength of their own which is partly independent  
of their particular function in the drama. Clearly their function is  
in some ways similar to that of the poems which Brecht inserted  
between the scenes in many of his plays to point the moral of the  
action which has gone before. But their originality is so striking  
that one forgets such links of influence.

The most obviously Brechtian scene in the play is the final

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p.168.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p.170.

57 'Eloge funèbre de Humphrey O'Douglas dit par sa femme et ses deux associés Reynold Day et Doris Roan.' In it Adamov employs a process of inversion similar to that frequently employed by Brecht. Just as he showed Anna, in The Seven Deadly Sins, forced by the pressures of a capitalist society to shun the normal virtues as if they were sins, so the 'éloge funèbre' raises to the level of virtues all Humphrey's vices, and in particular his belief in everyone's basic right: the right to make money:

DORIS ROAN: Ex-Directeur de la General Motors qui, année par année, salua sa compétence.  
 REYNOLD DAY: Homme généreux. Signataire du Manifeste des Citoyens pour la Paix dans l'Honneur.  
 DORIS ROAN: Défenseur entêté de la Libre Entreprise.  
 LISBETH (bas, grave.): Il me disait: Dans l'économie d'abondance, le problème n'est pas de produire ce que demande le consommateur, mais de décider le consommateur à absorber toute la production.<sup>69</sup>

With Off Limits, Adamov really felt he had succeeded in integrating obsessions and politics: it joined Paolo Paoli and Le Ping-Pong as one of his preferred plays. In his Journal, he called it:

ma pièce préférée parce que la plus abrupte et celle où le mince et le doux sourire de la tendresse surgit entre tous les fantômes. Mon Ping-Pong renouvelé.<sup>70</sup>

Off Limits contains no 'padding'; it is tautly constructed: episode follows episode with the minimum of realistic stage setting. The spectator is thrust straight into the contradictory world of modern

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69 Ibid., p.175.

70 24 janvier 1969.

America, with no preparation: he has to experience its contradictions for himself, and he is left to draw his own conclusions. But as well as this, Adamov succeeded for the first time since Le Ping-Pong, in creating a couple of young lovers who, in their generous gift of each to the other are exceptional in Adamov's theatre. It also resembles Le Ping-Pong in another important respect; in the latter, the material and the characters were equally close to Adamov's own, most powerfully felt obsessions. In the plays which followed, he often tried to combine a political situation with an obsession of an extreme nature, but he usually borrowed such obsessions from outside sources. In Off Limits, Adamov was not only writing about obsessions he knew well, but he was also inserting them in a situation about which he cared, and for this reason the play has a truth to life and an urgency about it.

This is increased by the fact that Adamov did not allow himself the complaisance for his obsessions that one finds, for example, in the theatre of Arrabal, where obsessions are nurtured like nursery plants for their saleable value. On the contrary, as he showed in his journals, he was not patient with his weaknesses. Knowing he had to give up drugs, he did so; when it became vital to cure his addiction to alcohol, he did that as well. With its absence of sentimentality and its concentrated 'abruptness', Off Limits could be seen as the dramatic counterpart of the journals. It embodies the same attempt to come to terms with all the elements of life, and a similar style, bare and startling. As Adamov's late prose works went back over the same material as his earliest, so the material of Off Limits (and still more of Si l'été revenait) presents similarities with that of the early

plays. The violence, the cruelty, the neuroses employed in this play all recall Artaud's insistence that:

théâtre de la cruauté veut dire théâtre  
difficile et cruel d'abord pour moi-même.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> See above, Part II, Chapter 1, p.107.

CONCLUSION

"Son oeuvre est l'expression d'une quête angoissée absolue: elle va bien au-delà de la littérature."<sup>1</sup> This was Ionesco's tribute at the time of Adamov's death; the term "une quête angoissée" describes accurately Adamov's refusal ever to settle down in a position of intellectual comfort. His work constitutes a remarkable record of experiences going far beyond the normal human range into the uncertain worlds of private terror inhabited by the characters of Kafka and Strindberg. But as Adamov developed, the scope of his work was enlarged; from the isolated figures of the theatre of the Absurd, locked in the prison of their own perceptions, his characters broadened until they also embodied the problems of Man in society. Fundamentally, he had always seen Man as a victim, 'un persécuté'. Gradually, his picture of the suffering individual deepened, bringing into focus the conditions which make for suffering, so that his later plays present a picture of Man enslaved by modern industrialised capitalist society. He attempted not only to depict these conditions, but also to help towards changing them by exposing the methods used by the few who wield power to maintain that power over the many who are enslaved.

For Adamov, literature was not a cosy retreat from harsh realities; it was a way of life. Stronger than any political conviction, as fundamental as his sense of suffering, was his urge to write, which appeared in the opening pages of L'Aveu:

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<sup>1</sup> Le Figaro Littéraire, 23 mars 1970.

Ecrire, je dois écrire, coûte que coûte, en dépit de tous et de tout. Car si je cessais d'écrire tout s'écroulerait.<sup>2</sup>

For him it became as necessary to write as to draw breath, and when he found he could no longer write, he died.<sup>3</sup> The action that he took and the protests that he made during his lifetime were always through his writing. Dort pointed out that,

pour Adamov, écrire est en effet la seule réponse qu'il sache donner à ce qui, profondément, le hantait, à la séparation essentielle dont il n'a cessé de souffrir.<sup>4</sup>

And because of this, his autobiographical works are important, since they provide the middle ground between the man and the plays, showing that for Adamov, there was no separation between life and literature. André Pieyre de Mandiargues, in his review of L'Homme et l'Enfant insisted on this point, saying that it was because of what he had made of his life in his writings that his was "une vie réussie", despite its apparent failures:

Je pense encore que cette vie, qui la plupart du temps fut à faire peur, est, somme toute, enviable. Je pense qu'elle est exemplaire.<sup>5</sup>

It was not only Adamov's life, but his literary career itself that was exemplary. Adamov was incapable of resting on his laurels.

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<sup>2</sup> L'Aveu, p.26.

<sup>3</sup> Dort believes that the most important factor contributing to Adamov's suicide was the unprecedented difficulty he was having with his new play.

<sup>4</sup> 'La Liberté d'Arthur Adamov', Les Lettres Françaises, 25 mars 1970.

<sup>5</sup> 'Une vie réussie', Le Nouvel Observateur, 3 juillet 1968.

He could not settle down to the comfortable exploitation of one literary style or technique. In Off Limits and Si l'été revenait, he was still experimenting with dramatic form in as radical a manner as in his first plays. This was perhaps the one characteristic most responsible for the poor critical reception which his plays so often received. No sooner had the critics mastered the complex task of 'reading' Adamov correctly, than his methods had altered, and they found that their analytical tools no longer fitted the new work. Paolo Paoli, for example, was seen by many as merely a sordid realistic drama; because the characters of Adamov's earlier plays had been important chiefly as isolated beings, or as powers in relation to one central character (la Mère, la Soeur, etc.) many critics completely overlooked the complex interplay of different social forces which is so important for an understanding of the function and meaning of the characters in Paolo Paoli. Adamov's unwillingness to fit into a neat critical pigeon-hole, combined with his outspokenness on political matters, was enough to win him the hostility of most of the bourgeois press.

His career was exemplary for other reasons. First because of his unique role in the development of French drama since the war.

Lemarchand, recalling the one week in November 1950 when two of his plays opened within four days, wrote:

C'est à ces dates, et indiscutablement grâce à Adamov, que s'ouvrirent les portes des 'petits théâtres' à ces personnages étranges qui s'appelèrent Samuel Beckett, Ionesco, Vauthier, Jean Tardieu, Audiberti.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Le Figaro Littéraire, 23 mars 1970.

Four years later, Adamov was the first French playwright mature enough to sense the full importance of the discovery of Brecht and to assimilate its impact into his own work.

He is the only French playwright, with the possible exceptions of Genet and Gatti, who has succeeded in creating a synthesis between the techniques and preoccupations of the Absurd theatre and the demands of commitment. In his last plays he showed that he was still acutely conscious of the terrifying power of the irrational world of the imagination which his early plays had revealed, but at the same time equally conscious of the real world in which the laws of cause and effect hold good. He was concerned to confront the imaginary and the real in such a way as to reveal their respective importance and the way in which they interreact. In the best of his later plays, notably Paolo Paoli and Off Limits, neither the intensity of his world of private experience, nor the complexity of his understanding of public life is sacrificed.

But, with the possible exception of Le Printemps 71, Adamov's plays were never realistic in the accepted sense of the word. "Même les pièces les plus réalistes d'Adamov ont une structure onirique"<sup>7</sup> said Planchon, the producer who understood Adamov the best. The question "Quel rapport entre le rêve et le théâtre?"<sup>8</sup> was one which haunted him all his life. He came back to it in the last article he

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<sup>7</sup> Les Lettres Françaises, 25 mars 1970.

<sup>8</sup> 'Presque: le théâtre ou le rêve', Les Lettres Françaises, 4 mars 1970. My quote is Adamov's opening sentence.

ever wrote/which was intended as an introduction to Si l'été revenait and which he entitled 'Presque':

Le théâtre, le vrai, c'est celui où l'on se trouve presque dans la réalité, mais sans y être absolument, une distance vous sépare d'elle. ... Ce grand jeu des ressemblances, des dissemblances à peine constatées, mais qui existent toutefois. Voyons, elles grandissent, et ce n'est presque plus les mêmes images que vous aviez tout à l'heure devant les yeux, qui sont là à présent.<sup>9</sup>

Throughout his life, Adamov had insisted on 'un réalisme légèrement décollé de la réalité". His highly original form of heightened realism was an essential part of his achievement in uniting the preoccupations of Absurd and committed theatre, whether in a dream play which appears only too horrifyingly realistic, like Le Professeur Taranne, or in a play like Off Limits, which seems at the outset more realistic, but whose small, inbred world begins to assume nightmarish proportions.

Dream and reality come together in his theories of poetry and ambiguity, which enabled him to say "rien n'est plus poétique que la réalité"<sup>10</sup>. By this he meant, as he demonstrated in his plays, that because men are so clever at disguising their motives and aims, both from themselves and from others, there was as much suggestive ambiguity to be found in an analysis of real events as in more traditional poetic images. He had a gift for showing up deceptive behaviour, either the self-deception of a character like l'Abbé in

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> 'Adamov', La Nouvelle Critique, no.24, mai 1969, p.36. Interview with René Gaudy.

Paolo Paoli, or the deception of others as practised by Le Vieux in Le Ping-Pong or Humphrey in Off Limits, characters who transform everything that comes their way into suitable consumer material which they can turn to their profit.

His work is also exemplary in the way that it combines so many of the influences that have been most important in twentieth century cultural developments, but never loses its own unmistakeable originality. He was among the first to achieve a revitalisation of the theatre by his insistence on the importance of a concrete stage language. In this, he succeeded in putting into practice something of the vision that Artaud had revealed in Le Théâtre et son Double. But he did not remain on the metaphysical plane, like Artaud. In fact his love of the concrete provided a link with Brecht, who also had an eye for representing feelings and ideas in their most concrete form, of 'realising' them in action. In both dramatists, this led to concentration on specific issues in a specific time and place, thence to an admiration for Marxism as the scientific study of History, and thence to a commitment to Communism.

In his earliest plays, Adamov achieved an extremely free, unnaturalistic use of time sequence for the purposes of dramatic construction, and this formal mastery of the time problem enabled him to conduct, through his plays, an analysis of the way the time dimension affects our lives. This problem was investigated in its effects both on individuals, such as those in Le Temps Vivant, and groups, such as the Paris Commune in Le Printemps 71. One of Dort's

most penetrating articles, entitled 'Entre l'instant et le temps'

explains that the theatre for Adamov represented:

La possibilité réelle, concrète, d'instituer  
une confrontation entre des instants vécus au  
présent et l'écoulement inlassable du temps.<sup>11</sup>

The anguish which stems from the individual's awareness of living in time appears in almost all of Adamov's plays from the agonised waiting of N. and L'Employé in La Parodie to the death-obsessed couple George and Dorothy in Off Limits.

Finally, Adamov's exploitation of language could be said to be exemplary: his cutting down of inflated rhetoric and his search for the brief, condensed means of expression that would carry over into action. Planchon, writing after his death, summarised two of the linguistic procedures that we have analysed in the plays:

Lorsqu'il parlait de ce qu'il aimait, ses phrases devenaient brèves (petites phrases sèches de L'Homme et l'Enfant); par contre, lorsqu'il donnait la parole à ceux qu'il méprisait, la phrase gonflait jusqu'à éclater. Tous les bourgeois dans ses pièces politiques s'installent dans une rhétorique creuse qui débouche sur la bouffonnerie, outrant l'emphase et soulignant le vide. C'était sa façon malicieuse de démolir les choses par l'intérieur.<sup>12</sup>

As well as this, many of his plays are notable for the humour which Adamov achieved by his parody of linguistic habits, a procedure which is particularly clear in Le Ping-Pong. And more important perhaps, his plays also contain a forceful analysis of the power of language:

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<sup>11</sup> Les Lettres Françaises, 31 juillet 1968.

<sup>12</sup> Les Lettres Françaises, 25 mars 1970.

its power when used by individuals to cover the base motives for their actions with fine feathers, or, simply, to justify the fact that they do not act at all; its power when used by the mass media which capitalism has evolved and appropriated in order to ensure that nothing can threaten what Marx called "that unconscionable freedom - Free Trade".

As a man, Adamov was passionate, extreme, but honest. Dort praised his "honnêteté scrupuleuse vis-à-vis de lui-même"<sup>13</sup>, and Garran declared that "on ne lui pardonnait pas ... la permanence et la fidélité de ses convictions".<sup>14</sup> To anyone who met him for the first time, this honesty, his refusal to cheat in any way, was his most striking characteristic. Although he did not formulate a precisely committed political position until late in life, all his work can be seen as one long, developing protest against the tyrannies of modern society. This protest was never crude or simplistic. He nearly always achieved, at the same time as his protest, a full and complex picture of the world that remained true to reality and was never confused by ideological rhetoric. In this, he came close to Tchekhov, the writer whom, in some ways, he most greatly admired. The influence of Tchekhov on Adamov was like that of Dostoyevski, rather than like that of Brecht; it was with him all his life. In his most recent article, Dort commented on this:

Peu de metteurs en scène l'ont vraiment compris.  
On l'a tiré soit du côté de Strindberg, soit de  
celui de Brecht... Or, c'est plutôt du côté de  
Tchékhov qu'il aurait fallu aller chercher: dans

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13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

un théâtre à mi-voix et comme en équilibre instable, où chacun a sa chance même si tous sont condamnés. Dans un théâtre entre la caricature et le trompe-l'oeil, entre le rire et les larmes, un théâtre qui, sous l'apparente froideur avec laquelle sont agencés les fausses rencontres des personnages et leurs perpétuels bavardages, est fait d'attention et de tendresse. 15

APPENDIX I Some early plays written for the O.R.T.F.

Three early plays written for television or radio demand a mention, although they are not of crucial importance and do not fall conveniently within the general structure of this thesis. They are La Parole est au prophète, La Plus heureuse des femmes and L'Agence Universelle. The first of these is of little importance. Adamov, it seems, had very little share in the writing of this television play, and his name was appended as co-author through the kindness of Bernard Hecht in order to help Adamov over a difficult financial period. The plot concerns a village idiot who has a prophetic vision which leads rapidly to his adoption and exploitation by all the local powers that be. A story that must have appealed to Adamov, it is nevertheless not close to his strongest preoccupations at this time, and contains little that can be closely compared with his other plays.

La Plus heureuse des femmes and L'Agence Universelle were both written for radio. The former is a strange little experiment: the plot and most of the dialogue are the same as those of Les Retrouvailles, the only difference being that it is nearly all sung and not said. There is no indication of what music should be used, and the desired overall effect is not very clear. Presumably it was not judged a great success, since the singing device was abandoned for the published version of the play.

L'Agence Universelle, unlike the two plays just mentioned, is of considerable interest, since it is clearly an early version of Le Ping-Pong, and it is regrettable that no published version of this play exists. My reason for including it here is that it could not very

conveniently be discussed with the other radio plays in Part III Chapter 3, and I wished to restrict Part II to a discussion of the stage plays.

L'Agence Universelle describes the efforts of its two anti-heroes, Parmentier and Petitgant, to get themselves taken on by 'L'Agence Universelle'. The play has five tableaux; the first four are set in the same corridor of the Agence, the fifth in Parmentier's new office. The first four tableaux take place on succeeding days, the fifth a fortnight later. In the course of this mock-epic, which is at times extremely amusing, Parmentier and Petitgant find themselves rebuffed in every imaginable manner - rudely, politely, firmly, in a procrastinating manner, etc. They are referred to committees which do not exist, they try to get at one of the directors through his mistress, they go or are sent on a number of wild goose chases. The Agence itself is incredibly noisy, with a constant clatter of typewriters, and the one idea which the pair think up to offer the Agence is to install a system of sound-proofing. They suggest this idea, only to have it turned down and then to see it plagiarised, just as Arthur and Victor will find their first idea for improving the pin-table is plagiarised. However, in the last tableau Parmentier has inexplicably achieved an appointment as sous-directeur, but as a result of his elevation, he no longer has any time for his old friend.

As in so many of Adamov's early plays (including Le Ping-Pong) there is an enchanting young 'dream-woman', named Eliane. It is for love of her that Parmentier struggles so hard to obtain his post, but he is disappointed to discover, on achieving this, that she has

disappeared. Like Erna and Lili, she behaves in a very ambivalent fashion: at first she is all sweetness, but later she ignores Parmentier and Petitgant, apparently trying to spite them by flirting with her boss in front of them. Her behaviour is governed by the same curious 'décalage' that was evident in La Parodie, for example she first sings a gay little love song in a very doleful voice, and later sings a sad song very gaily.

The play contains a successful blend of humour and menace, which combine in the creation of the Agence itself. This has much in common with the Consortium of Le Ping-Pong: its tentacles spread far and wide, its authorities are inaccessible, and the Directeur, when he finally appears, turns out to be perpetually ill, like Le Vieux. But the play concentrates chiefly on the varying mental states of Parmentier and Petitgant rather than on the Agence itself; in this respect it is closer to La Parodie than to Le Ping-Pong.

However, it does foreshadow the later plays in one important respect: in it, Adamov was beginning to show how commercial concerns distort communications to suit their own ends. The Agence corridors are filled with loudspeakers which are constantly broadcasting slogans remarkably similar to the commercial television jingles of Off Limits.

The following examples are drawn from various points in the play:

(voix de femme forte, maternelle, persuasive:)

Les temps ont changé  
 Vous n'êtes plus abandonnés.  
 Il y a place pour vous sous l'aile  
 De l'Agence Universelle.

(voix d'homme, emphatique:)

Unité, pluralité  
 Sont maintenant réalités,

Car l'Agence Universelle  
Est en tout et tout en elle.

(voix de femme, autoritaire:)  
Que peut-on~~e~~ encore désirer  
Quand déjà on est adopté  
Par l'Agence Universelle?

(voix d'homme, très ample:)  
Vous êtes riche et vous ne le savez pas,  
Mais l'Agence Universelle est là.  
Les trésors qui dorment en vous,  
Elle les découvre du premier coup.

In the contrast between these soothing jingles and the frustrations experienced by Parmentier and Petitgant, Adamov shows how big business exploits the common need to belong, taking over the functions of family, church, nation. In the jingles, he achieves just the right blend of seductive silliness, and their clear affinities with the sort of thing broadcast through the loudspeaker system of any modern supermarket gives an almost realistic dimension to this Kafkaesque play, which in other respects seems close to La Parodie.

Although Jaqueline Trehet is officially given as co-author of this play, Mme Adamov claims that she helped him no more with this play than she always did, as is shown by Adamov's repeated acknowledgements of her help in L'Homme et l'Enfant.

APPENDIX II    Si l'été revenait

Adamov's last play, Si l'été revenait, is surprisingly unlike any of his other plays of the sixties. In it, the obsessions are triumphant, and the politics almost non-existent. He had intended to make of it a play about the inadequacies of the Swedish welfare state, both material and spiritual, so as to combine in his picture of Sweden the governing obsessions of both public and private life, as he had combined them in Off Limits. His Journal shows that he did in fact spend some time gathering information about Sweden in order to achieve the right degree of authenticity, as he had done for other plays. But in the final version of the play, all that is left of the welfare state theme (the play was originally to have been called L'Etat providence) is a recurring sequence in which Brit, wishing to help people, is shown how to operate an emergency telephone service for would-be suicides: she has to select an appropriate record (e.g. "Des amis penchent sur vous...") and play it to the caller. There is also an episode satirising the traditional concept of 'good works' in which Mrs. Petersen reads out passages from the Bible to an assembly of mine-workers.

The play is made up of four 'dreams', all of which concern what is fundamentally the same pattern of relationships between Lars, his sister Thea with whom he is in love, his wife Brit, their friend Alma, his Mother Mrs. Petersen, and his friend Viktor. The first dream is Lars', followed by those of Thea, Brit, Alma. The play, as Adamov himself said in his Journal, is involved and very difficult to follow, and this is true despite its remarkable number of objects, actions and themes similar or identical to those used in Adamov's earliest plays. The objects, for example, are, as in his first plays, quite banal in

themselves, but they take on a power that is almost fetishist as a result of patterns of action which recur around them and their isolation on an otherwise empty stage. The most important objects are the typewriter, notebook and bicycle, all of which appeared in early plays, and one new object, a child's swing, which the four central characters mount together in differing combinations, and which others are made to push. The play's main themes, guilt, incest, mother domination, separation, can all be traced back to Adamov's early work.

But despite these many familiar elements in the play, it is by no means easy to understand. Si l'été revenait is structured exactly like a dream, far more so than any of the early plays, by the deliberate placing of objects, actions and events in an illogical sequence. By means of this method, Adamov doubtless intended both to create something of the shock which a non-rational sequence of actions on the stage usually achieves, and also to imitate as closely as possible the fragmented reality of the dream, whose sense and consequence is seldom immediately apparent. He presumably hoped that, by repeating four times over the same dream as dreamed by four different characters, he would make it possible for the audience to establish for itself the importance of the diverse elements in the whole, and to appreciate the play of shifting relationships as viewed through four different pairs of eyes.

But one nevertheless has difficulty in interpreting this play, chiefly because of the very private nature of the images it uses, which are never explained in general terms and which have no close connections with the world of common experience such as were to be found in Off Limits. Moreover, the themes and actions are so fragmented

that the play fails to make sense, as the early dream-plays did, through a clearly recognizable progression towards death and destruction. In addition, the lack of connections between the various actions and episodes makes it difficult not to see some of them as extremely gratuitous, the ceaseless variations of lesbian attraction between the three girls is an example.

One still feels much too close to this difficult play to assess it at all satisfactorily. Moreover, until it became available in the bookshops in January 1971 it was difficult to get, existing only in typescript form. I have therefore left it outside the main structure of this study. In it, I feel that Adamov was not so much striking out in a new direction, as succumbing once more to the temptations of the past. Faced with the complex realities of Sweden, he appeared to become mesmerised by Strindberg all over again.

The entries in his 'Journal IX' suggest that he was dissatisfied with the play, but felt incapable of improving it. Earlier, in March 1969, he had stressed the importance of achieving an interplay between the individual and the state, and a genuine dramatic development:

Bien montrer les rapports de chacun avec cet état idéal, et ces rapports se trouvent modifiés au fur et à mesure que la pièce s'avance, s'amplifie, que la tranquillité extérieure s'installe, que le tourment intérieur grandit. (17 mars 1969)

But a week later he wrote:

Ma pièce suédoise n'existe pas, parce qu'elle n'est pas en mouvement, parce que, face à cet Etat-Providence qui en est la toile de fond, les personnages ne prennent pas d'attitude. (23 mars 1969)

He realised that he had not succeeded in conferring life on his characters:

Je l'ai immobilisé, mon Lars, il est comme un mannequin.

Beneath the crushing weight of the different obsessions with which Adamov himself was struggling, his characters could not survive. Each took on some element of Adamov's own fears and obsessions. Lars in particular is constantly trying to come to grips with a sense of domination by his mother, with an inability to escape infancy, with sensations of guilt, complicity in his sister's suicide, need for punishment. The relations between Lars and Thea are those which Adamov had or might have had with his sister, his fascination with Alma and Brit, that of Adamov with the young girls of the Quartier Latin whom he befriended.

In point of fact, the very first entry in the Journal concerning the play shows that it had been, from the beginning/associated with specific obsessions of his:

Ma pièce suédoise... le souvenir des rapports que j'ai pu avoir, enfant, avec ma soeur... mon remords de n'être pas allé voir ma mère à l'Hôpital de Brévannes. Et le père détesté, mais dont l'image demeure, l'implacable. (23 janvier 1969)

Perhaps the need to write this play came as a result of his course of 'psychothérapie', which forced him to delve back into his childhood. Whatever the personal reason, this play reads like a tortured return to old battle grounds, where everything is once more put in question, where the victory is by no means certain, and where he finds himself once more confronted by powers which he does not understand, but whose power over him he can feel only too strongly.

Lacking the dramatic progression and interplay between character and state, which Adamov himself had prescribed, the play falls into the same vagueness and lack of contact, with the real world that marred some of Adamov's early plays. Just as his growing mental stability had been accompanied by an increasingly realistic dramatic style, so it is perhaps permissible to see the lack of realism in this play as a concomitant of the relapse of his mental health that was to culminate in suicide.

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Les Lettres Françaises, 26 janvier 1961 (Scenes 20 and 21 with an introduction); La Nouvelle Critique, no.123, février 1961, pp.13-34 (Extracts following the interview reprinted in Ici et Maintenant, pp.118-123); Le Printemps 71, Gallimard, 1961 (with an introduction by Adamov); Théâtre IV, Gallimard, 1968 (with the same introduction).

Le Temps Vivant. Radio play produced by Alain Trutaut for the R.T.F., 1962.

La Politique des Restes. Produced: O. Bernhardt, Unity Theatre, London, 31st May 1963; Paolo Giurana, Stabile Teatro, Genoa, March 1966; José Valverde, Théâtre Gérard Philipe, Saint-Denis, 26 octobre 1967. Published: Théâtre Populaire, no.46, 2ème Trimestre, 1962, pp. 61-101; Théâtre III, Gallimard, 1966.

Finita la Commedia. Radio play produced by Claude Roland Manuel for the R.T.F., 1964.

Sainte Europe. Produced: -. Published: Théâtre III, Gallimard, 1966.

M. le Modéré. Produced: André Steiger, Théâtre des Mathurins, 25th September 1968. Published: Théâtre IV, Gallimard, 1968.

Off Limits. Produced: Gabriel Garran, Théâtre de la Commune, Aubervilliers, 25th January 1969. Published: Off Limits, Gallimard, 1969 (Le Manteau d'Arlequin).

Si l'été revenait. Broadcast by the R.T.F. in February 1970, and again after Adamov's death, March 1970. Due to be published by Gallimard (Le Manteau d'Arlequin).

English Translations: Paolo Paoli. The years of the butterfly, transl. Geoffrey Brereton, Calder, 1959. Two Plays. Professor Taranne and Ping Pong, transl. Derek Prouse, Calder, 1962. Professor Taranne is also included in Absurd Drama, Penguin, 1965.

Plays broadcast in English by the B.B.C. Third Programme:-

Paolo Paoli, transl. Geoffrey Brereton, 31st August 1958.

En Fiacre, transl. Humphrey Hare, 10th December 1959.

Dead Souls, transl. Peter Meyer, arranged for radio by William Glen-Doepel, 16th May 1961.

Living Time, transl. Peter Meyer, 9th November 1961.

Professor Taranne, transl. Peter Meyer, adapted by William Glen-Doepel, 21st June 1962.

Spring '71, transl. and adapted by Peter Meyer, 8th March 1963.

Ping Pong, adapted by Martin Esslin, 3rd January 1964.

Finita la Commedia, transl. and adapted by Peter Meyer, 11th September 1964.

### 3. TRANSLATIONS and ADAPTATIONS

BUCHNER, La Mort de Danton, L'Arche, 1953 (Collection du Répertoire T.N.P., no.9. Re-issued for the play's revival, 1959). Also published in Paris Théâtre, no.157; also: Le Monde illustré théâtral et littéraire, no.35, 13 novembre 1948; also published in Büchner, Théâtre Complet, L'Arche, 1953. The other two plays, Léonce et Léna and Woyzeck are translated by Marthe Robert. There is a good 'préface' signed by both translators, pp.7-11. (1st performance 15 July 1948 Avignon, produced by Vilar.)

DOSTOIEVSKI, Crime et Châtiment, Club Français du Livre, 1964; also: Editions Rencontre, Lausanne, 1967.

DOSTOIEVSKI, Une Femme Douce, adapted for a French television broadcast 1968. Published in Italian in Il Dramma, anno 46, no.4, April 1970.

GOGOL, Les Ames Mortes in Contes Fantastiques, Editions Rencontre, Lausanne, 1967; also 'préfacé par Arthur Adamov', Verviers, 1962 (Marabout géant no.148); also 'préfacé par Arthur Adamov', La Guilde du Livre, Lausanne, 1956; also 'Préface' as above and illustrated by Chagall, Club des Libraires de France, 1964.

GOGOL, Cinq Récits, Club des Libraires de France, 1961.

GOGOL, Le Revizor (with L'Orage, Ostrovski, Le Tsar Féodor Ivanovitch, Tolstoi, Les Basfonds, Gorki), Editions Rencontre, Lausanne, s.d.; also in L'Avant-Scène, no.398, 1er mars 1968; also: Le Revizor, L'Arche, 1959 (Répertoire pour un théâtre populaire no.14).

GONTCHAROV, Oblomov (with Dans les forêts, Melinkov-Petcherski), Editions Rencontre, Lausanne, 1967; also: Club Français du Livre, 1959.

GORKI, Les Ennemis in Théâtre Populaire, no.27, novembre 1957, pp. 33-58 and no.28, janvier 1958, pp.27-75.

GORKI, La Mère, Club Français du livre, 1958.

GORKI, Les Petits Bourgeois in L'Avant-Scène, no.206, 15 octobre 1959; also L'Arche, 1958 (Répertoire pour un théâtre populaire no.12).

GORKI, Vassa Geleznova, in Théâtre Complet tome VI, L'Arche, 1966; also published on its own, L'Arche, 1958 (Répertoire pour un théâtre populaire no.16).

JUNG, Le Moi et l'Inconscient, Gallimard, 1938.

KLEIST, La Cruche Cassée in Théâtre Populaire, no.6, mars-avril 1954, pp.49-92. With an 'avertissement' by Adamov.

MARLOWE, Edward II, unpublished adaptation produced by Roger Planchon at the festival of Lyon Charbonnières, June 1954.

PISCATOR, Le Théâtre Politique (with Claude Sebich), L'Arche, 1962.

RILKE, Le Livre de la pauvreté et de la mort, Editions Charlot, Alger, 1941 (Collection 'Fontaine' (directeur Max-Pol Fouchet) no.1); also in Fontaine, 3e année, tome 2, no.12, janvier 1941, pp.143-165. Includes an 'avertissement' by Adamov.

STRINDBERG, Le Pélican in Théâtre Populaire, no.17, 1er mars 1956, pp.37-62. Also in Théâtre VI, L'Arche, 1961.

STRINDBERG, Père, L'Arche, 1958 (Répertoire pour un théâtre populaire n.17).

STRINDBERG, La Sonate des Spectres (with C.G. Bjurström) in Théâtre VI, L'Arche, 1961.

TCHEKHOV, L'Esprit des Bois, Gallimard, 1958 (Le Manteau d'Arlequin). With a short introduction by Adamov, reprinted in Ici et Maintenant, p.199.

TCHEKHOV, Oeuvres tome 12, Théâtre III, Editions Rencontre, Lausanne, 1965. Contains: Oncle Vania, Les Trois Soeurs, Les Méfaits du Tabac, La Cerisaie.

TCHEKHOV, Théâtre, Club Français du Livre, 1958. With a short 'Note préliminaire' by Adamov, reprinted in Ici et Maintenant, pp.197-198.

#### 4. RADIO and TELEVISION WORK 1948 - 1970 (in chronological order)

'Van Gogh'. A short programme about Artaud's book Van Gogh, le suicidé de la société.

'L'Eternel Féminin'. With Marthe Robert. Six programmes which traced the image of the woman in lyric poetry from the Troubadours to the present, ending with 'Cécile' by Artaud.

'L'Invasion'. Adapted for radio by Adamov.

'La Logeuse'. Adapted from Dostoievsky.

'L'Art et la vie de Frantz Kafka'. With Marthe Robert.

'Polly'. An adaptation for radio of the second part of John Gay's Beggars/Opera.

'L'Eternel Mari'. Adapted from Dostoievsky.

T 'La Cruche Cassée'. Adapted from Kleist.

'L'Agence Universelle'. Original radio play by Arthur Adamov and Jacqueline Trehet. (Pseudonym for Jacqueline Autrusseau.)

'Georg Büchner'. With Marthe Robert.

'Le Potier Politicien'. Adapted from Ludwig Holberg.

T 'La Parole est au prophète'. Original Television play by Arthur Adamov and Bernard Hecht.

'Distribution Réduite: l'évolution des personnages dans le théâtre occidental'. Seven programmes designed to illustrate the development of different character types in Western theatre from the Greeks to the present day.

'Oubliés et précurseurs: les petits romantiques'.

'Autour de Verlaine et de Mallarmé'.

'Lady Macbeth du Village'. Adapted from Nicolas Leskov.

'Tous contre Tous'. Adapted for radio by Philippe Dechartz.

'L'Art et la vie de Gustave Flaubert'. With Marthe Robert.

'La plus heureuse des femmes'. An adaptation for radio of Les Retrouvailles.

uél/ 'Parallèlement'. Adaptation of Georg Kaiser's Nebeneinander.

'Les Ames mortes'. Adapted from Gogol.

'L'Etrange Promeneur: Gérard de Nerval'.

'Rire Jaune et humour Noir'. Six programmes with Marthe Robert.

'Ce qu'ils pensent les uns des autres'. Seven programmes, each devoted to two or three great authors who were contemporaries, quoting their opinions of each other, and also the opinions of other authorities.

'La Vie et l'oeuvre de Gérard de Nerval'. With Marthe Robert.

'Moby Dick de Melville'.

'Nicolas Gogol, un démystificateur malgré lui'. Three programmes with Marthe Robert.

'Raillerie, Satire, Ironie et Signification plus Profonde'. Adapted from Christian Dietrich Grabbe.

- T 'La Logeuse'. Adapted from Dostoievsky.
- T 'Le Ping-Pong'. Adapted for television by Adamov.
- 'Du Matin à Minuit'. Adapted from Kaiser.
- T 'Les Trois Soeurs'. Adapted from Tchekov.
- 'L'Autre Rive'. Adaptation for radio of Gontcharov's La Falaise.
- 'Pierre et Jean'. Adapted from Maupassant.
- 'Le Temps Vivant'. Original radio play.
- T 'La Cigale'. Adapted from Tchekov.
- 'En Fiacre'. Original radio play. (France's entry for the Prix Italia in 1963)
- 'Georg Büchner'. In the series 'Galerie Romantique'.
- 'Finita la Commedia'. Original radio play.
- T 'Le Manteau'. Adapted from Gogol.
- T 'La Mort d'Ivan Ilitch'. Adapted from Tolstoy.
- 'Féodor Mikhaïlovitch Dostoïevsky, L'Effrayant, L'Effrayé'.
- T 'L'Esprit des Bois'. An adaptation for television of his translation of the play by Tchekhov.
- 'L'Homme et l'Enfant'. Extracts from his book with a few additional comments.
- T 'La Mort de Danton'. An adaptation for television of his translation of the play by Büchner.
- 'La Politique des Restes'. Adapted for radio by Adamov.
- 'Une Femme Douce'. Adapted from Dostoievsky.
- 'Si l'été revenait'. (Première)
- 'L'Enfant'. Adapted from Jules Vallès.

(T = Television. All the other programmes were for radio.)

5. ARTICLES, INTERVIEWS, etc. (In chronological order.)

'Poèmes', Cahiers du Sud, 20ème année, août 1933, pp.438-439.

Discontinuité and Mise au Point. Short-lived literary reviews.

'Présentation' to Claudine CHONEZ, Il Est Temps (poèmes), Rodez (Aveyron, Zone Libre), Novembre 1941.

L'Heure Nouvelle (edited by Adamov). No.1, 1945, No.2, s.d. (Published by Sagittaire; the second, undated volume appeared in 1946.)

'Assignation', L'Heure Nouvelle, no.1, 1945, pp.3-6.

'Légitime Défense' (with Noël Roux), L'Heure Nouvelle, no.1, 1945, pp.7-8.

'L'Aveu', L'Heure Nouvelle, no.1, 1945, pp.12-13.

'Discussion sur le péché' (following a paper by Georges Bataille, with Sartre and others), Dieu Vivant, no.4, 1945, pp.83-133.

'Le Refus', L'Heure Nouvelle, no.2, pp.3-6.

'Sur la Cruauté' (with Marthe Robert), L'Heure Nouvelle, no.2, pp.7-13.

'Une fin et un Commencement', L'Heure Nouvelle, no.2, pp.14-18.

(edited by Adamov) Roger GILBERT-LECOMTE, Testament, Gallimard, 1955. (Collection Métamorphoses) Includes an interesting introduction by Adamov dated 1947.

'Introduction' to STRINDBERG, Inferno, Edits. du Griffon d'Or, 1947.

'Rêve de Mort', 84, no.2, 1947, p.25.

'Introduction à Antonin Artaud', Paru (Monaco) no.29, avril 1947, pp.7-12.

Book Reviews by Adamov in Paru: Marthe ROBERT, 'Introduction à la lecture de Kafka', Paru, no.29, avril 1947, pp.65-66; Henri de MONTHERLANT, 'Le Maître de Santiago', Paru, no.32, juillet 1947, p.43; Luc DIETRICH et Lauza del VASTO, 'Dialogue de l'Amitié', Paru, no.33, août 1947, p.56; Ramon del VALLE-INCLAN, 'Farce Enfantine de la Tête du Dragon', Paru, no.34, septembre 1947, p.41; Paul CLAUDEL, 'Les Révélation de la Salette', Paru, no.35, octobre 1947, p.94.

Untitled text on Artaud, 84, nos.5-6, 1948, pp.138-140. This was a "numéro spécial de 84 consacré aux derniers textes d'Artaud et aux témoignages de ses amis".

'L'Oeuvre indéfinissable d'Antonin Artaud', K, juin 1948. (This has been lost in the Bibliothèque Nationale.) Republished in Cahiers Littéraires de l'O.R.T.F., 8è.année, 1970, no.12, pp.15-17.

'Roger Gilbert-Lecomte' (with Marthe Robert), Mercure de France, vol. 304, no.1022, octobre 1948, pp.257-260.

'Avertissement' prefacing La Parodie. L'Invasion, 1950. Reprinted in Ici et Maintenant, pp.13-15.

'Le Théâtre ici et maintenant', 84, no.13, 1950, pp.52-53. Republished as 'L'Avilissement du théâtre', in Ici et Maintenant, pp.187-188.

'Le Théâtre vivant face à l'incompréhension', 84, no.14, septembre 1950, pp.93-96.

'Relâche', 84, no.15, octobre 1950, p.77.

Interview about La Grande et la petite Manoeuvre, Combat, 1er novembre 1950. Interviewer: Jean-François Devay.

Interview with Vilar about L'Invasion, Combat, 15 novembre 1950. Interviewer: Jean-François Devay.

'Un monde qui s'en va', Combat, 22 février 1951. (On Gide.)

'Je veux faire rire', Opéra, 9 janvier 1952. Interview by Michèle Barat.

'Rimbaud et M. Prudhomme', Arts, 15 février 1952.

'Pour Ionesco et Tardieu', Arts, 21 mai 1952. A series of protests against the bad critical reception of Les Chaises and Les Amants du Métro at the Théâtre Lancry by Adamov, Beckett, Duvignaud, Queneau and others.

'Tous contre Tous', Paris Commedia, 14 avril 1953.

'Tous contre Tous aux mardis de l'Oeuvre', Le Monde, 14 avril 1953. Unsigned interview.

'Büchner', Arts, 17 avril 1953.

'Note de l'auteur' prefacing Le Professeur Taranne, Théâtre Populaire, no.2, juillet-août 1953. Reprinted in Ici et Maintenant, pp.28-29.

'Une peinture obsessionnelle: l'oeuvre d'Atlan', Les Lettres Nouvelles, no.22, décembre 1954, pp.932-934.

'Note de l'auteur' prefacing Théâtre II, 1955. Reprinted in Ici et Maintenant, pp.16-27.

'Strindberg le Comptable', Les Lettres Nouvelles, 3è.année, no.25, mars 1955, pp.347-366.

'Adamov apporte deux billards électriques', Combat, 2 mars 1955.  
Interview by Jean Carlier.

'Le Ping-Pong, Balles et répliques d'Arthur Adamov', Le Monde, 2 mars 1955. Interview by Claude Sarraute.

'J'ai ri en écrivant Le Ping-Pong', Arts, 9 mars 1955. Interview by Michel Perrein.

'Théâtre, Argent et Politique', in Ici et Maintenant, pp.30-45.  
Originally in Théâtre Populaire, no.17, 1er mars 1956, pp.5-18.

'Quels sont les responsables de la crise du théâtre?', Nouvelles Littéraires, 30 août 1956. An 'enquête' led by Gabriel d'Aubarède, whose questions Adamov answers.

'Le Théâtre et l'Argent' in Impasses du Théâtre Aujourd'hui, Paris, 1957. (Record of a debate by the "Cercle Ouvert".)

'Les Papillons du Baigne', in Ici et Maintenant, pp.46-49. Originally in Les Lettres Françaises, 21 mars 1957.

'Encore et toujours Baudelaire', Les Lettres Françaises, 5 décembre 1957.

'Du théâtre populaire au théâtre impopulaire', France Observateur, 26 décembre 1957, pp.18-19. A discussion in which Adamov took part.

'Paolo Paoli, c'est la demi-conscience', in Ici et Maintenant, pp. 50-55. Interview by Claude Olivier. Originally in Les Lettres Françaises, 16 janvier 1958.

'Avec Paolo Paoli Arthur Adamov définit un nouvel art poétique', Le Monde, 19 janvier 1958. Interview by Claude Sarraute.

Interview about Paolo Paoli, Libération, 20 janvier 1958. Interviewer: Paul Morelle.

'A propos de Paolo Paoli', in Ici et Maintenant, pp.56-64. Discussion with André Gisselbrecht. Originally in Théâtre Populaire, no.28, janvier 1958, pp.99-104.

'A propos de Paolo Paoli', Libération, 10 février 1958. Interview by Jean-François Held and Max-Pol Fouchet.

'Le théâtre peut-il aborder l'actualité politique?', Une "table-ronde" avec Sartre, Butor, Vailland, Adamov. Ici et Maintenant, pp. 65-73. Originally in France-Observateur, no.405, 13 février 1958.

'Quand les critiques sont dans la pièce...', Entretien sur Paolo Paoli. Ici et Maintenant, pp.74-92. Originally in La Nouvelle Critique, no.94, mars 1958, pp.90-105.

'Courtes remarques sur la mise en scène de Paolo Paoli', in Ici et Maintenant, pp.95-97. (No date)

'Qu'est-ce que l'avant-garde en 1958?', in Ici et Maintenant, pp.98-99. Originally in Les Lettres Françaises, 10 avril 1958.

'Parce que je l'ai beaucoup aimé', Cahiers Renaud-Barrault, nos.22-23, mai 1958, pp.128-9. (On Artaud.)

'Entretien sur l'Avant-Garde en art et Le Monument d'Elsa Triolet', La Nouvelle Critique, no.96, mai 1958, pp.112-140. This records the contributions of a number of people who took part in the discussion. Adamov's is on pp.123-125.

'Enquête sur le théâtre en Province: les centres dramatiques', Théâtre d'Aujourd'hui, no.5, 1958, pp.3-26. Adamov answers the question, "Que pensez-vous de Planchon au théâtre de Villeurbanne?", pp.8-9.

'Présentation du programme de Paolo Paoli au Städtisches Theater, Leipzig, 1959', in Ici et Maintenant, pp.93-94.

'A propos du Ping-Pong américain', in Ici et Maintenant, pp.105-106. Originally in France-Observateur, no.470, 7 mai 1959.

'Il ne peut pas y avoir de société sans théâtre', Arts, 17 juin 1969. Interview by Jacques Damase.

'Maxime Gorki ou le travail sur soi-même', in Ici et Maintenant, pp.193-196. Originally in Les Lettres Françaises, 22 octobre 1959.

'Retour d'Allemagne', L'Humanité, 16 novembre 1959. Unsigned interview.

'Arthur Adamov nous parle des Ames Mortes', Libération, 5 décembre 1959. Interview signed A.L.

'An Interview with Adamov', Plays and Players, vol.7, no.6, March 1960, p.9. Interview by Peter Lennon.

'Adamov (Arthur Sourénouvitch) de Kislovodsk: auteur dramatique français 1910-19-', Figaro Littéraire, 16 avril 1960. Interview by Jean-Paul Weber.

'Pourquoi faire vivre Les Ames Mortes au théâtre?', in Ici et Maintenant, pp.109-114. Originally in Les Lettres Françaises, 21 avril 1960.

'Adamov nous dit comment il a adapté Les Ames Mortes', Le Monde, 21 avril 1960. Interview by Claude Sarraute.

'J'aime le réel mêlé à l'irréel dans Les Ames Mortes', in Ici et Maintenant, pp.115-117. Interview by Mireille Boris. Originally in L'Humanité, 22 avril 1960.

'L'irrésistible ascension de La Mère', in Ici et Maintenant, pp.200-204. Originally in Les Lettres Françaises, 16 juin 1960.

'Roses rouges pour moi est la pièce des temps modernes qui m'a le plus bouleversé', in Ici et Maintenant, pp.205-207. Interview by Mireille Boris. Originally in L'Humanité, 5 septembre 1960.

'En 1960, selon vous, à quoi servez-vous?', La Nouvelle Critique, no. 120, novembre 1960, pp.5-127. An 'enquête' containing the replies to the above question of 75 public personalities. Adamov's piece is pp.5-6.

'A propos du Printemps 71'. Interview by André Gisselbrecht, in Ici et Maintenant, pp.118-123. Originally in La Nouvelle Critique, no.123, février 1961, pp.9-13.

'Jean Anouilh deviendra-t-il un auteur classique?', Arts, 27 septembre 1961. (A discussion in which Adamov participated.)

'Où en sommes-nous avec Brecht?', Entretien avec Roger Planchon et René Allio, in Ici et Maintenant, pp.208-220. Originally in Les Lettres Françaises, 3 août 1961. Also reprinted in Sinn und Form, Heft 5-6, Berlin, 1961. (NB wrong date given in Ici et Maintenant.)

'De Quelques Faits', in Ici et Maintenant, pp.149-166. Originally in Théâtre Populaire, no.46, 2ème Trimestre, 1962, pp.46-60. (NB wrong no. of Théâtre Populaire given in Ici et Maintenant.)

'Piscator, le politique', in Ici et Maintenant, pp.221-223. Originally in Arts, 4 avril 1962.

'L'Etoile devient rouge à Aubervilliers', in Ici et Maintenant, pp. 224-226. Originally in France Nouvelle, 27 juin 1962.

'Arthur Adamov ... s'explique', Tribune de Genève, 3 août 1962. Interview signed 'Cath.'.

'Réflexions sur le théâtre après une simple lecture des journaux du soir', in Ici et Maintenant, pp.167-170. (Dated septembre 1962.)

'L'Etoile devient rouge au Théâtre Récamier', in Ici et Maintenant, pp.227-229. Originally in L'Humanité-Dimanche, 28 octobre 1962.

'Pour finir', in Ici et Maintenant, pp.171-184. (Dated Octobre 1962.)

'François Mauriac aujourd'hui', Arts, 3 octobre 1962. A discussion in which Adamov participated.

'Un nouveau répertoire et un nouveau public', in Ici et Maintenant, pp.230-233. (Dated Novembre 1962.)

'On demande un nouveau théâtre', Interview by Carl Wildman, in Ici et Maintenant, pp.128-132. Originally in English in The Observer, 1962.

'Avant le Théâtre Gérard Philipe la B.B.C. crée Le Printemps 71', Arts, 13 mars 1963..

'Lettre à Otto Haas sur la mise en scène du Printemps 71', in Ici et Maintenant, pp.133-141. Originally in Les Lettres Françaises, 25 avril 1963. (NB wrong date given in Ici et Maintenant.)

'Ma "métamorphose"', in Ici et Maintenant, pp.142-146. Originally in France-Observateur, no.677, 25 avril 1963.

'Le mur des fédérés encore, toujours', France Nouvelle, 22 mai 1963.

'Le Théâtre Gérard Philipe donne le dernier Printemps 71 de la saison', L'Humanité, 25 mai 1963. Interview by Mireille Boris.

'Hommage à Paul Gilson', Les Lettres Françaises, 30 mai 1963. Tributes by Adamov and others.

'Cuba et l'Art', Les Lettres Françaises, 19 septembre 1963.

'La Danse du sergent Musgrave au Théâtre de l'Athénée: une vraie grande pièce moderne', in Ici et Maintenant, pp.234-237. Originally in L'Humanité, 23 octobre 1963.

'An Interview with Adamov', Drama Survey, vol.3, no.2, October 1963, pp.253-256. Interview by Peter Gelbard.

'Quelques mots encore sur la représentation du Printemps 71 au Théâtre Gérard Philipe de Saint-Denis', in Ici et Maintenant, pp.147-148. (Dated Novembre 1963.)

'Woyzeck ou la fatalité mise en cause', in Ici et Maintenant, pp.238-239. Originally in Les Lettres Françaises, 28 novembre 1963.

'Télévision: Dramaturgie Nouvelle', Cahiers Renaud-Barrault, nos. 47-48, décembre 1964. A discussion between Adamov and the 'chef de la section dramatique de la télévision (Belge)' which was about to perform Paolo Paoli, takes place pp.47-52.

'Gespräch mit Arthur Adamov', Sinn und Form, 18 Jahrig. Heft 1-2, 1965, pp.98-109.

'Souvenirs de voyage', L'Humanité, 5 avril 1966.

'L'Art et la vie de Gustave Flaubert' (with Marthe Robert), Cahiers Renaud-Barrault, no.59, mars 1967, pp.66-105. Material drawn from a radio broadcast made in 1953.

'Le Théâtre, la politique et le reste ...', Scène Saint-Denis, no.1, septembre 1967, pp.3-7. Interview by Lionique Stalens and Jacques Poulet.

'Adamov ou le retour', Les Lettres Françaises, 25 octobre 1967. Interview by Emile Copfermann.

'A propos de La Politique des Restes', France Nouvelle, 25 octobre 1967. Interview by René Gaudy.

'Sur Artaud', Les Lettres Françaises, 25 octobre 1967. Fragments which were later published in L'Homme et l'Enfant.

'Entretien avec Adamov', Le Monde, 27 octobre 1967. Interview by Nicole Zand.

'Libre Cours', Téléciné, no.142, 25e. année, mai-juin, 1968, pp. 28-29. Interview by André Laude.

'L'Absurde', Le Monde, 30 juin 1968. A strongly anti-government piece after the announcement that there was to be a referendum.

'Entretien avec Arthur Adamov', Les Lettres Françaises, 3 juillet 1968. Interview by Jacques Henric concerning L'Homme et l'Enfant and Off Limits.

'Né d'un rêve', Cahiers Littéraires de l'O.N.T.F., 6e. année, no.12, 1968, pp.14-15. On the occasion of a new broadcast of Le Professeur Taranne, a reprint of (a) the section concerning the play in the 'Note' to Théâtre II, and (b) the introduction in Ici et Maintenant, pp.28-29.

'Entretien avec Arthur Adamov', Le Monde, 26 septembre 1968. Interview by Nicole Zand.

'Qui est M. le Modéré?', L'Humanité, 27 septembre 1968. Interview by Roland Desné and René Gaudy.

'Arthur Adamov: M. le Modéré', Combat, 27 septembre 1968. Interview by Thierry Garcin.

'Unser Werkstatt gespräch mit dem Dramatiker Arthur Adamov', Theater der Zeit, Heft 20, 23. Jahrgang, November 1968, pp.23-25. Interview by Pierre Lacroux.

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