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Susan Lesley Moss

Neurosis and Commitment in the Theatre of
Arthur Adamov.

M.A. Thesis, 1980.

Abstract of the Thesis

The present study is intended to trace consistencies in the work of Arthur Adamov, and to refute critical opinion that he underwent a Marxist conversion in the middle of his career which divided his plays into distinct, dissimilar categories. The areas of consideration are : neurosis in the private life of the author, and its repercussions upon his plays, and the way in which neurosis can be linked to social commitment in the lives of Adamov and of his characters.

The opening chapter traces the biographical background to Adamov's writing career, showing its basis in neurosis and attempting to elucidate the author's character. It is followed by a chapter devoted to Adamov's philosophy of Separation and the State of Man, seen as highly influential in his theatre. Chapter Three deals in detail with specific elements highlighting neurosis in the plays, and is paralleled by Chapter Five, which adopts a similar procedure in respect of commitment to social existence, whilst Chapter Four demonstrates the nature of Adamovian commitment as humanitarian rather than politically active. In Chapter Six the dramatic techniques of the author are discussed, and are found to be consistent throughout his plays, and themselves based largely in neurosis.

Use is made of interview material and previous critical works on Adamov's life and plays, many of which have been able to supply opinion and evidence to support the thesis of a consistent, developing Work based in neurosis.

Susan Lesley Moss

Neurosis and Commitment in the Theatre of
Arthur Adamov

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Thesis submitted for the Degree of Master of Arts in
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Bibliographical Note

For further details of works listed here, see Select Bibliography.

Because of the frequency with which it occurs, the title of L'Homme et l'enfant is in general abbreviated in the text of the thesis to H.E., and after its first appearance, is referred to thus in footnotes also. On all occasions, the text referred to is the Gallimard edition of 1968. The text is divided into two main sections - Souvenirs and Journal, both of which are subdivided. The former is a retrospective appraisal and account of those incidents in Adamov's life up to early 1967 which he chooses to note and comment upon, while the latter is a fragmented diary in six parts, dating from December 1965 to August 1967, and is extremely subjective and disturbing in places.

After its first appearance in footnotes, Ici et Maintenant, Adamov's collection of essays on literary topics, is referred to simply by its title, and references are always to the Gallimard edition of 1964.

Subsequent to its first appearance in footnotes, L'Aveu is mentioned by title alone, and all references are to the Editions du Sagittaire edition of 1946, whilst references to Je...Ils are always to the Gallimard edition of 1969.

References to the plays in the text under their own titles, or in footnotes under the titles Théâtre I, II, III or IV are to the Gallimard editions of collected plays, in four volumes, published in 1953, 1955, 1966 and 1968 respectively. Exceptions to this are references to those plays which do not appear in the collected editions, and have volumes of their own:

References to Comme nous avons été are to the transcription of this



radio play, which appeared in March 1953 in La Nouvelle Revue Française.

References to En Fiacre (Un acte inédit) are to the reproduction of this play in 1963 in no.294 of L'Avant-Scène du Théâtre.

References to Les Apolitiques are to the reproduction of this play in November 1958 in La Nouvelle Critique.

References to Le Temps vivant are to the transcription of this radio play, which appeared in La Nouvelle Critique, supplément au no.66 (Aug./Sept. 1973).

References to Les Ames mortes are to the Gallimard edition of 1960.

References to Off Limits are to the Gallimard edition of 1969.

References to Si l'été revenait are to the Gallimard edition of 1970.

References to Théâtre de Société, which contains three short sketches : Intimité, Je ne suis pas Français and La Complainte du ridicule are to the Editeurs Français Réunis edition of 1958, subtitled 'Scènes d'actualité', and, unless the titles of individual sketches are mentioned, refer to the whole work.

On occasion, to facilitate presentation, the titles of plays have been abbreviated in footnotes. The abbreviations are as follows:

A.M. - Les Ames mortes.

C.N.A.E. - Comme nous avons été.

G.P.M. - La Grande et la petite manoeuvre.

I. - L'Invasion.

M.M. - M. le Modéré.

P. - La Parodie.

Pa.Pa. - Paolo Paoli.

P.P. - Le Ping Pong.

P.R. - La Politique des restes.

P.T. - Le Professeur Taranne.

P.71 - Le Printemps 71.

R. - Les Retrouvailles.

S.E.R. - Si l'été revenait.

S.M. - Le Sens de la marche.

T.C.T. - Tous contre tous.

T.S. - Théâtre de Société.

References to L'Heure Nouvelle are to the review which Adamov edited with Marthe Robert, of which only two volumes appeared, in 1945 and, it is assumed, 1946. The review was subtitled 'Cahiers de littérature, d'art et de critique', but allowed Adamov to expound many of his highly personal philosophical views. It was published in book form by Editions du Sagittaire, and references are to these editions. References to Anthologie de la Commune are to the Editions Sociales edition of 1959 of Adamov's collection of posterwork, letters, articles, views and commentaries on the Paris Commune. The volume consists of much of the contemporary and later material which Adamov collected as documentation for Le Printemps 71.

In quotations, the use of square brackets indicates a deliberate omission on my part of some portion of the original text.

INTRODUCTION

The work of Arthur Adamov has been documented and commented upon by a relatively small field of critics worldwide, but very few have, like Dr. David Bradby, penetrated the almost hermetic shell of the plays to seek the motivations of the author. The remarks of the majority of critics are remarkably closely grouped around the central thesis that Adamov's work, abstract and 'Absurd' in his early plays, changed course during the 1950's, as a result of a political conversion in Adamov's life, and that it grew from that time into a politically-oriented work which bore little or no relation to his earlier work. The plays have been categorised into groups, each belonging to a 'First' or 'Second Period', and have been regarded by many critics as completely independent entities.

It has come to the notice of the present author that most of the criticism of Adamov's plays is dated prior to his death in 1970, and that the remarks are therefore only half-truths, as they often lack an important perspective on the entire work, which is afforded by the last plays. It also seems unlikely to the present author that the creator of such introspective and neurotically-based characters as Le Professeur Taranne could conceivably undergo a political conversion of any kind which could alter his thought and his work so drastically as many critics have suggested. Investigation of the personal, non-dramatic works of Adamov, such as his journals and those which resulted from his early philosophical exploration, reveals a highly intriguing character, whose soul is laid bare for all to see, and it becomes evident that these writings have much to contribute to a study of the entire gamut of Adamov's plays. The author of L'Aveu and of L'Homme et l'enfant displays an alarming array of

neuroses, which brings to mind incidents in all his plays, and not only those of the early years of his playwrighting career, and the question arises as to how much of these neuroses has been channelled into the plays. It seemed worthwhile, then, rather than to accept a superficial classification of the plays into separate groups, to trace consistencies in the entire work of Adamov, and to attempt to show a consistent and natural development into the style of those plays which had been simply dubbed 'political'.

The present thesis is concerned to examine first of all the nature of Adamov's neurosis, and it does this in Chapter One, which is based largely on information provided in the journals, and which concerns itself in particular with family influences, digressing at length into some aspects of Adamov's fetishes.

Having discussed the nature and causes of the neurosis in Adamov's youth, and having established its domination of him, the second aim of the thesis is to demonstrate the way in which neurosis operates throughout the author's work, and not, as critics have tended to suggest, merely through the earlier plays. An effort has been made to investigate the possibility of a break in continuity in the mid-1950's, but a lack of real evidence to support this thesis, and increasing evidence from the plays themselves to suggest rather a developing consistency, reveal that the social, and allegedly political, preoccupations of this time should be attributed to the same obsessions as determined the nature of the plays prior to it. This continuity of neurosis and obsession, and of social commitment and awareness is the mainstay of the thesis.

Thirdly, the thesis aims to demonstrate neurosis and commitment as they are materialised on the stage in Adamov's plays - to unmask his process of exteriorisation, and to discover behind the objects

and characters who people his plays the truths which they have to reveal about Adamov and his world-picture.

In dealing with an author of Adamov's nature, one is quickly enmeshed in a web, fantastical and terrifying, of neurosis and obsession, of fanaticism and despair, and in which hyperbole, hysteria and melodrama are realities which the author must live day to day. For this reason, material is used in the thesis which may appear hysterical, hyperbolic and melodramatic, and it must be remembered that this reflects the life and work of Adamov. One direct result of this nature is one of the principal factors to emerge from Adamov's writing, be it in journals or in plays, and it is one which is present at almost every turn in the thesis : paradox. From firmly-held views on Adamov's part come seemingly impossible reverses. There is a section in Chapter Three of the thesis, concerning death and suicide, which highlights this point, and which reveals what appears to be a puerile, weak argument on Adamov's part, ignoring the implications of his previous assertions, but it is typical of him, and is best viewed as an example of his life-long tendency to clutch at straws in his search for the truth. Ironically, the preponderance of paradox in Adamov's life is one of the main pointers to consistency in his plays, and a major argument against the Marxist conversion thesis. It is this very fact of paradox which has led critics, misguidedly in the present author's view, to compartmentalise Adamov and his work without taking an overall picture of the one constant : an overriding conviction that there exists somewhere a universal truth applicable to all mankind, which determines our existence, is intangible, and which, through all the paradox, must be sought. The present thesis aims to express this fact, to elucidate the various

forms in which Adamov envisages and searches for that truth, and to emerge, having presented and accepted the paradoxes, with the constant intact.

Chapter One elaborates the family and psychic background to Adamov's developing neurosis, and follows this through to the end of his life. Chapter Two deals with the formation of a philosophy and the major theme which emerges from Adamov's neurosis : separation, discussing various forms of this concept and highlighting the paradoxes involved in Adamov's thought on the subject. The third chapter illustrates by close reference to the plays the consistency of the presence of neurosis - the Incurable - in all Adamov's work for the theatre. Following this, Chapter Four examines the nature of the Curable, and this is shown to emerge from obsession and neurosis, so that commitment for Adamov is seen simply as a logical development from and still integral part of it. Chapter Five demonstrates the presence of the Curable throughout the length and breadth of the plays. The final chapter examines the techniques used by Adamov to materialise his neuroses and his commitment to human values. There is no section devoted to characterisation in this chapter, as it is hoped that the reader will appreciate the inappropriateness of this concept to a theatre of neurosis.

The Bibliography, though extensive, is a selective one, as many of the sources consulted were not used directly in the writing of the thesis, and these have been omitted. The Bibliographical Note is designed to clarify references to many of Adamov's works which appear in the main body of the thesis.

CHAPTER ONEThe Background - Persecution and the Search for Self.

Arthur Adamov, born in Kislovotsk in the Caucasus in 1908 to a wealthy family of Caspian oil-well owners, spent the greatest part of his youth between the ages of six and sixteen travelling a Europe torn by political strife, until, in 1924, he landed in France, where he was to stay for the rest of his life. His death in March 1970 saw the end of a strikingly traumatic existence, the end of a man whose perspicacity in respect of his own condition had led him through years of anguish and obsession of which he left three fascinating accounts: L'Aveu, L'Homme et l'enfant and Je... Ils. These works furnish us with an essential background to the man and to his place in his time, without which much of his dramatic work would be hermetic and inconsequential. It has been a frequent preoccupation of critics to seize upon the obsessional nature of Adamov's plays, their exhibitionism and their metaphysics, without considering in sufficient depth the characteristics of Adamov's psyche which they display, and without tracing back these characteristics through the autobiographical works to facts and events which, in the author's early years, were to determine his extraordinary personality:

'Pour que naisse un véritable créateur, il faut une extraordinaire conjonction de nature, de race, d'hérédité, de tempérament, de caractères physiologiques, sans compter l'apport morbide, les troubles pathologiques presque toujours nécessaires en notre ère maudite pour ouvrir la fissure foudroyante par où l'âme universelle filtrera lentement dans la conscience du dormeur.'(1).

(1) Roger Gilbert-Lecomte, Testament, Gallimard, Paris, 1955, p.83.

Roger Gilbert-Lecomte's analysis of creative genius may seem a truism when we consider any number of cases like Rimbaud or Nerval, but it impressed Adamov sufficiently for him to quote the same paragraph in his introduction to Gilbert-Lecomte's Testament when he edited his dead friend's poems. Adamov had nursed Gilbert-Lecomte through the final stages of his drug addiction, and, as far as he could see, Gilbert-Lecomte had described his own situation exactly. In his turn, by quoting the words of his friend, Adamov describes to us precisely his own predicament. The analysis is appropriate to Adamov perhaps as much as to any other creative artist, as its evidence is clearly apparent through the souvenirs of L'Homme et l'enfant, where episodes in the author's early life can be seen to build up the picture of a psychic background custom-built to be conducive to creative writing based on Gilbert-Lecomte's criteria.

The Family and Related Problems

As a wealthy family, the Adamovs lived comfortably, entertained frequently, and had a series of governesses, nurses and demoiselles françaises to bring up their children. Kept very much enclosed within the home, Adamov found himself as a young child surrounded by women whose job it was to educate, amuse and care for him - a host of surrogate mothers: 'J'ai passé les premières années de ma vie entouré d'un peuple de servantes[...]'(1).

Madame Adamov appears to have preferred her son to her daughter, and the souvenirs which mention her are in the same claustrophobic vein as those which describe his entourage of mother-substitutes. She was a lady of leisure and luxury, rather dignified in Adamov's recollection of her, but given to a certain hypochondria which her son was to inherit with disastrous consequences, and with a strong

(1) H.E., p.15.

tendency to spoil and mollycoddle Arthur in public. By the very nature of the souvenirs, only small episodes are noted by Adamov, but it is significant that the first memory of his mother should be an overpoweringly oppressive one:

'Ma mère, je la revois comme je l'ai vue encore dernièrement sur une photo, les cheveux noirs très lisses, le nez grec, le maintien digne. Mais je me la rappelle aussi, courant comme une demente d'un bout à l'autre du wagon-restaurant pour bien s'assurer auprès des garçons qu'ils m'apporteraient uniquement de la purée de pommes de terre sans beurre ni sel. Elle m'attribuait une maladie d'estomac, la même bien sûr qu'elle s'était déjà attribuée.'(1).

Although direct references to the mother are rare in the souvenirs, the retarding influence exerted by her is evident even in Paris in 1928, when Adamov, aged twenty, having decided to live with Irène, his first great love, would return home regularly to collect food cooked for him by his mother.

Adamov experienced an inordinate difficulty in attaining manhood, and there are passages in the souvenirs which cast light on this problem. On p.15 of H.E. Adamov recounts a dream which he had frequently as a child, where a dwarf would appear and terrify him, so that he would awaken, scream and be carried to his mother: 'J'aboutissais dans le lit de ma mère. Le nain prenait son sens, le but était atteint'. This ongoing problem is symbolised by Adamov's impotence, discovered painfully in 1927 at the age of 19. We shall see that one of his greatest fears in childhood was that of growing up, and it seems reasonable to associate this fear with his relationship with his mother - one where everything was done for him, where decisions were made for him, and where the household world revolved around him. The section of Souvenirs entitled

(1) H.E., pp.15-16.

Jeunesse, although constituting merely a small proportion of the work as a whole, takes the author from birth to the age of forty; the section entitled Tardive Maturité begins at 1948: ' "Je ne veux pas grandir." Ce n'est pas par hasard si j'ai eu tant de mal à me comporter en homme à l'âge d'homme'(1).

Poverty was another prominent object of Adamov's fear throughout his childhood. He recalls moaning into his grandmother's skirts at the age of four: 'Je ne veux pas être pauvre, je ne veux pas être pauvre'(2). Adamov does not relate any specific incident which may have given him a conception of what it is to be poor, much less have inspired such terror in him, but he does associate the idea of poverty with his mother by recalling that she was from a family of lawyers and doctors, and thus a clear station below his father's aristocratic origins. Of his paternal grandmother he writes:

'Je la préférais à ma grand-mère maternelle; elle était moins sèche, mieux habillée surtout (la famille de ma mère, par rapport à celle de mon père, pauvre, composée en grande partie d'avocats, de médecins tous libéraux, réclamant la Douma) (3).

Whether it be her projected hypochondria, the relatively humble origins of her family, or her suffocating concern for her son, Adamov's mother emerges from H.E. as a negative force against his development into adulthood. On numerous occasions throughout the account of his life, Adamov refers to la paresse which prevents him from acting positively in a given situation. His failure to join the Republican cause during the Spanish Civil War, or the Resistance movement in France, his failure to comply with the administrative requirements in his financial affairs are all put

(1) H.E., pp.13-14. (2) *ibid.*, p.13. (3) *ibid.*, footnote to p.13.

down to paresse. The oppressive nature of his mother's influence over him in tender years is psychologically the biggest single factor contributing to this character weakness, and it acts as a form of castration, resulting in paralysis of the will, a facile capitulation to the fatigue which was to be a permanent feature of Adamov's life, in particular towards the end of it, and which was to haunt his early characters in the theatre. As we have seen, the most obvious physical manifestation of this was Adamov's sexual impotence. But he was rendered impotent also to conceive of an individual identity for himself by the oppressive mother force, as it denied him the need to discover a 'self' in his childhood. Adamov spent the rest of his life in search of that elusive self.

If his mother was a retarding influence upon him, Adamov's older sister, Amrik, was a terrifying one. If his nurse read him scary stories at night, his sister knew how to sow the seeds of a life-long phobia by far more terrifying means:

'C'est elle qui me persuada que ma chambre comprenait plusieurs zones, dont certaines maléfiques, où je ne devais à aucun prix me hasarder. Je n'osais pas aller du côté des fenêtres, m'approcher du radiateur, regarder sous mon lit. Si je transgressais ces interdictions j'étais perdu'(1).

At this time Adamov was not yet six years old, but the memory is one which was to remain vivid, and to develop into a profound persecution complex in which dark, oppressive forces were incessantly at work to threaten him with unknown punishment should he transgress their incomprehensible laws. This menace, which appears to take root in a simple childhood game, soon became a source of psychic terror for Adamov. That the forces which persecuted him were unseen, unseeable, but all-powerful, that he could have no control over them whatsoever, became an obsession. He could

(1) H.E., p.15.

never know when he might be offending them, and when or how they might exact retribution. The fears multiplied, and in L'Aveu, independently of, and thirty-seven years prior to H.E., Adamov wrote: 'La peur me travaille comme la putréfaction un cadavre. Sa contagion prolifère'(1). René Gaudy, whose edition of témoignages by several of those who knew Adamov was the first complete work devoted to the author notes that:

'Dès sa première enfance, Adamov vit dans la peur[. . .]
Ces peurs, Adamov adulte ne parviendra jamais à
les vaincre totalement, malgré les remèdes des
rites magiques, de l'amour, de la politique, de
l'écriture'(2).

The last three of these 'remedies' will be discussed at later points in this thesis, but the rites magiques mentioned by Gaudy comprised numerous superstitious rituals, largely involving fire - the element of virility - and designed as a system to placate the evil forces. On taking a manuscript of one of his plays to a publisher, Adamov involved himself in an elaborate ritual of shaking the papers, turning round, laying them on the floor, then shaking them again, in the hope that this operation might cause the mystical forces to make his play appear favourable to the publisher. In H.E., Adamov describes other such rituals, for example, in 1941:

'Je demeure fidèle à mon cérémonial superstitieux.
Avant de m'endormir, je dois craquer une allumette.
La flamme qui sauve.

Mais une nuit, la première passée sur le Massilia,
je n'ai pas d'allumettes et, dans tout le dortoir,
personne n'en a. Je m'attends au pire, je n'ai pas
tort'(3).

Adamov was on his way to the concentration camp at Argelès-sur-

(1) L'Aveu, p.97. (2) René Gaudy, Arthur Adamov, Stock, Paris, 1971,
(3) H.E., p.66. pp.12-13.

Mer. The danger of the system is obvious: if ever the ritual cannot be performed, the terror is increased, and the mental angoisse becomes intolerable. This notion of angoisse will be examined in depth in Chapter Two of this thesis.

Superstition is a matter of objects which hold quasi-mystical significances. It is thus that Adamov became obsessed by certain objects, and developed an extraordinary series of phobias. The traditional black cat superstition is supplemented by terror of the figure 8 (1), its structure somehow embodying all the malevolent force of the powers of darkness for Adamov. An inability to write words beginning with the letter M (2) testifies to the same kind of illogical fear. Such a relationship with 'things', an intense awareness of their life-force as external to man, led Adamov easily into the realms of obsession, and we shall see later how his work in particular became an object of his obsession. The plays themselves contain many items - 'objects' - which recur time and again endowed with some special significance, such as the bicycle seems to have for Adamov in H.E. He mentions this vehicle on several occasions (3) at different ages, and always in a masochistic, sexual context.

Feeling himself to be a puppet in the hands of invisible forces which persecuted him, and prey to an obsessional nature which endowed everyday objects with dark significances, it was inevitable that Adamov should develop a fascination with death itself: the abyss threatened ultimately by those other factors. For Adamov death was, as Inge Pruks has pointed out: 'la castration suprême' (4). The souvenirs abound in references to the deaths of friends, and during the 1940's in Paris, Adamov came face to face with death in dire

(1) See H.E., p.193. (2) See H.E., p.52. (3) For example H.E., p.21. (4) Inge Pruks, 'Arthur Adamov and the Business of Living', Meanjin Quarterly, Vol.29, no.3, 1970, p.341.

circumstances on two notable occasions. The suicides of Roger Gilbert-Lecomte and of Antonin Artaud, both of whom were intimate friends and mentors of Adamov, and whom he had nursed and supported publicly during their illnesses (Adamov and Marthe Robert had led a successful campaign in 1945 to liberate Artaud from an asylum in Rodez), had a profound impact upon him. In his youth, a school friend had committed suicide at the age of twenty, his own father, as we shall see, was to take his life in 1933, and all these events are noted minutely and crisply in H.E. On the second page of the work Adamov writes: 'J'ai voulu me suicider à vingt ans, puis à trente, puis avant d'atteindre la quarantaine'(1).

During the years of pain and illness at the end of his life, the notion of death is ever-present in H.E., and Adamov analyses his motivations in avoiding suicide. Three factors militate against it: his work, his love for his wife and a fear of what he terms le saut (2). Death represents le néant, and is thus the unknown, the terrifying. It is neither a moment of glory in tragedy nor a catharsis of the soul; it is inevitable for all men, and hence is the dark forces incarnate. All of life is a slippery slope plunging into death, and life itself embodies certain physical manifestations, symbols of la chute. Adamov's sexual impotence is one of these.

There is an oppressive cloud over all of H.E.: it is the menace of death. In his dramatic work too, Adamov was permanently preoccupied by the concept in all its facets. From La Parodie to Le Printemps 71 death as a theme may undergo some analytical changes of perspective, but it remains nonetheless a physical feature of all but four of Adamov's plays (3). As we shall see in Chapter Three of this thesis, Si l'été revenait is perhaps the play which deals most

(1) H.E., p.14. (2) ibid., p.202. (3) These are: Le Professeur Taranne, Paolo Paoli, Je ne suis pas Français and La Complainte du ridicule.

subtly with death, making of it merely the dividing line between being and non-being, a hazy area of cloudy dream consistency. This last play, written shortly before Adamov's death, may finally have convinced him that this notion of death was preferable to continuing his life of agony on the physical and mental levels, for although his death is surrounded by mystery (no report ever determines the cause of death), it is widely accepted, though rarely stated openly, that he took his own life on the night of March 15th. 1970.

It is significant that life is seen by Adamov merely as a correlate of death. It takes its meaning solely from its relation to death. This attitude is responsible for Adamov's manichean view of experience as reflected in his plays (in particular in La Parodie and Tous contre tous). Maurice Regnaut isolated what he termed le sens du fétichisme in Adamov's theatre, and said of La Parodie: 'L'absolu ici, c'est la mort. L'activité humaine est sécrétion de mort'(1). He went on to differentiate between action and passion, the one being human effort to combat the irrepressible forces dominating man's fate, the other being indicative of man's state as an object at the mercy of these forces, with no possibility to free himself. This condition, Regnaut's passion, is termed by Adamov angoisse. Death is the centre of all thought and action, abhorrent as it may seem; Adamov is drawn to it, fascinated by it, as a moth by a candle flame, and just as in that case, he will be consumed by it. Such was Maurice Regnaut's appreciation in 1958 of Adamov's death=fetish, which in itself can be traced back through Adamov's persecution complex, superstitious rituals and contemplations of suicide, to the early influence of his sister Amrik and her terrifying threats.

(1) Maurice Regnaut, 'Arthur Adamov et le sens du fétichisme', Cahiers de la Cie. M. Renaud-J.-L. Barrault, nos. 22-23, May, 1958. All references on this page to remarks made by M. Regnaut refer to this article.

Amrik is responsible for one other major preoccupation of her brother's: the theme of treachery. In Souvenirs it is a notion which recurs frequently - often in peevish tones, and is treated rather as a terrestrial version of persecution from the 'powers' above. Adamov feels cheated by Ionesco, for instance, whose Les Chaises became a success when his own work (as he felt, essentially the basis for much of Ionesco's development) was floundering in the theatre. Amrik it was who had betrayed her young brother (aged eight) in his private games:

'J'invente un tommy - je suis anglophile - qui me prendrait entre ses bras, me hisserait sur ses épaules, avec qui je m'amuserais. Je ne parle que de lui, seulement il n'existe pas. C'est ma soeur qui découvre la supercherie'(1).

This amounts to the same kind of castration of the self as had been developing in response to Adamov's mother's behaviour, and it constitutes a further serious obstacle to Adamov's ability to conceive of a real identity for himself.

The final member of Adamov's immediate family, his father, played a very ambiguous role in his son's life, a role which did not dissolve with his death in 1933, but which was to have a haunting effect on Adamov films even during his own last years.

Throughout the early years of Adamov's childhood, his father was well-off and respected. He laughed at the misfortunes of those whose oil wells caught fire, but this was acceptable since his own were secure, and there was no danger of his family losing their livelihood. When political matters in Armenia deteriorated and revolution threatened, Adamov père removed his family in 1914 to Switzerland, where money began to grow scarce, but where, as a result of his father's friendship with the Pitoëffs, Adamov saw his

(1) H.E., p. 19.

first theatrical performance: Macbeth. Adamov confesses to have hated Switzerland during his eight years there(1914-22).

Germany (1922-24) saw the family sinking into relative poverty, and it is this period which highlights much of Adamov's bitterness towards his father. From being a wealthy, high-living family with aristocratic ancestry on the father's side, and whose relative, the King of Wartemburg, had helped them to escape the bolshevik threat in their own country, the Adamovs were to be left penniless in comparison with their accustomed standards. We have seen how as a child Adamov feared this very situation. Such a state of affairs was brought about not only by the revolution, and nationalisation of the oil wells, but precipitated by Adamov's father's insatiable appetite for gambling. The period in Germany ruined the family, as the internationally-famous gambling houses there claimed the father as victim. At fourteen years of age, Adamov it was who was sent to fetch his father home from the casino. Humiliation at the hands of porters who refused him entry because he was under age, humiliation imposed by his father, always losing, and unable to stand as any kind of example to his son. Adamov began to hate his father:

'Je passe une nuit sur deux à aller chercher mon père au casino, c'est ma mère qui commande, j'obéis. Mais ce que je peux les haïr, ce casino, et cet escalier qui monte jusqu'à la salle de jeu, et ce portier blême par lequel il faut nécessairement passer, et ce père enfin, menteur, lâche et plus blême encore que le portier: "Va dire à maman que je gagne, que j'arrive aussitôt." '(1).

The shame and humiliation imposed by Adamov's father had begun long before these particular events, in a different context. The first souvenir of his father, and one which is repeated much later

(1) H.E., pp.24-5.

in H.E., concerns sex, and is another manifestation of that fear wherein Adamov risked punishment by the invisible forces:

'Mon père venu spécialement me voir pour m'annoncer que mon sexe était une pierre noire, que cela voulait dire que je me masturbais. Si je continuais, je deviendrais fou'(1).

Thus sex and death - the ultimate punishment - became associated in Adamov's mind from an early age. His father had instilled in him the concept of guilt, where Amrik had brought fear. For he was sinning consciously in masturbating, where the forces with which his sister threatened him appeared to act on somewhat more arbitrary stimuli.

If Adamov, then, was taught to be ashamed of his own body, if the traditional sexual taboos were introduced early in his life, as they are to many children, that of itself is hardly exceptional. It is in the context of Adamov's whole psychic development, which is particular, that it can be seen to have a greater significance than in normal cases.

Adamov's father taught him to feel guilt, and for the rest of his life Adamov bore the stigma of that lesson precisely in relation to his father. The hatred which grew up in him for the man who had humiliated him, caused his mother so much intense suffering and reduced his family to wandering in poverty across Europe, living from the charity of others, became the very instrument of a life-long guilt complex:

'Janvier 1933. Mon père - une dette de jeu, la peur de l'avenir fermé? - s'empoisonne au gardénal. Je dormais cette nuit-là dans ma chambre, tout près de la sienne, et ne me doutais de rien.

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'à présent sûr du contraire'(2).

(1) H.E., p.14. (2) ibid., p.45.

The influence of Adamov's parents on him appears in H.E. to be oppressive, negative, designed to rob him of any sense of a developing self. The family situation imposed on him involved a great deal of travelling, changing schools (though with the snobbish attitude of his mother, even during their lean years, Adamov was sent to private schools) and surroundings, and it precluded the formation of stable relationships with boys of his own age. Many and varied foreign influences were brought to bear upon the boy Adamov, and he found himself a refugee in the centre of Europe's biggest upheaval in decades. His status as a foreigner in all the institutions he entered as a youth added to his budding persecution complex, and is referred to bitterly several times in Souvenirs: 'On nous nomme macaques, on nous accuse de manger le pain suisse. La xénophobie poussée à l'outrecuidance'(1).

It was inevitable that such a child should turn inwards, should become hyper-sensitive to his condition and to his status among those around him. That Adamov was destined also to find extreme difficulty in cementing lasting relationships is hardly surprising in the light of these early experiences. Two important facets of Adamov's character were to emerge and develop from his childhood, both of which would mark his plays indelibly: a morbid fascination with his own body and with his inner self, which he would struggle to identify, and an extraordinarily sensitive and analytical nature.

(1) H.E., p.19.

Fascination with the Body and the Self

'Je suis un point d'interrogation'(1), Adamov was moved to say when doctors could find no definite cause nor diagnosis for his illness in 1967. He acknowledged at the time that the description had a far wider significance, and H.E. reveals a succession of attempts by various means to solve the question mark, whilst at the same time admitting that the self is a paradox. In his introduction to that work Adamov confesses his dual nature, of which the black, the depressing side predominates over the sense of fun and good humour which others appreciated in him, as we shall see at the end of this chapter:

'Mais qu'on ne voit dans ce livre aucune image fidèle de ce que je suis. Il est évident que je ne me souviens 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'(2).

Written in the throes of a crippling illness which had severely attacked mind and body, H.E. may well appear hysterically, even melodramatically pessimistic, inclined to sensationalism and a totally one-sided representation of the man and his life. It is, arguably, all of these things, but a later chapter will point out the importance of this constant tendency in Adamov's writing and character for his plays, and, just as on the stage he attempted to present physical manifestations of interior conflicts, so in his life his preoccupations can be seen to reflect the obsessions and neuroses already mentioned, and those to be developed in Chapter Two.

As a child, Adamov's fascination with his body took the form of simple masochism. He was riveted by the sight of his own blood, and

(1) H.E., p.206.

(2) *ibid.*, Introduction.

enjoyed pain. Accounts of this pleasure often occur in a sexual context in Souvenirs. He recalls steam baths barely tolerable, and subsequent masturbation before steamed mirrors. The enjoyment in pedalling naked on bicycles to watch his torn feet bleed, cutting himself with a penknife and watching the blood flow in front of a mirror all reveal a delight in his own body, and an attempt to learn about himself, to sound the limitations of his senses through being at once instigator of pain and victim. We have seen how his lack of consistent contact with his peers made it inevitable that he should turn to himself and to his own body for the sexual exploration which is commonplace in adolescent experience, at a time when many adolescents become inquisitive about other people's bodies in relation to their own. In later life the tendency was intensified, and developed into a form of obsessional philosophy, whilst maintaining its original, physical nature on occasion. In 1936 Adamov went fishing for mussels in Ireland: 'Je me blesse les mains, je saigne. Le trouble plaisir bien connu'(1).

During his last illnesses, the descriptions of his awareness of the degeneration of his own body are quite terrifying, and it is evident that the old fascination has created a vicious circle involving fear and a recurrence of hypochondria. Awareness also of the psychic nature of the origins of the illness, reflecting Adamov's entire approach to his constructed self:

'Cette démangeaison, était-elle d'origine psychique? Il semblerait'(2).

'Si je descends ou monte l'escalier, c'est mon sang qui salit le tapis[.] Je patauge dans mon propre sang'(3).

'Je me crois paralytique, pouvant difficilement marcher'(4).

(1) H.E., p.61. (2) ibid., p.186. (3) ibid., p.196.
 (4) ibid., p.159.

Masochism of a different kind - wishing to have his face crushed by the heels of prostitutes, to become a 'thing', to be swallowed into mud and filth until unrecognisable as a man - developed into a system for which Adamov himself formulated one famous and much-quoted rationalisation, and one far less often quoted, but equally important, respectively: 'mithridatisation de la mort'(1), and 'mithridatisation du ratage social'(2). The former is clarified by numerous critics, including Jean Pierrot, whose psychoanalytical approach seems particularly sound:

'[.]le masochisme lui apparaît comme une "mithridatisation de la mort", une tentative pour en atténuer l'horreur par une expérimentation volontaire de la souffrance'(3).

He sees masochism as the logical outlet for a sense of guilt, where guilt must be absolved through expiation, which in turn leads to a fascination for suffering physical and mental pain. This reasoning is supported by the short récits of Ils (4), written, for once, in the impersonal, as opposed to the Je of L'Aveu , which was reprinted in the same volume:

'Et lui aussi, ce qu'il voulait, c'était n'être plus qu'une chose'(5).

'Il rêva d'une piaule si sale, si couverte d'immondices qu'ils ne distingueraient même pas leurs propres corps, qu'ils seraient tous les deux recouverts, submergés'(6).

The latter quotation picks up Adamov's definition of masochism as 'mithridatisation du ratage social', which he adopted in 1962, partly as self-parody, and partly in bitterness at the unfavourable reception which his work had always received, and which was one of the principal sources of his depression.

Exhibitionist he may have been, narcissistic he certainly was,

(1) H.E. , p.172. (2) ibid. , p.144. (3) Jean Pierrot, 'Névrose et rêve dans l'univers dramatique d'Adamov', Travaux de Linguistique et de Littérature de l'Université de Strasbourg , vol. 10, pt. 2, p.260.

(4) See list of abbreviations. (5) Je...Ils , p.92. (6) ibid.

and by his own admission: 'Je ne suis fasciné que par moi-même. Epoque de narcissisme qui va se prolonger longtemps'(1). That this narcissism constituted more than a superficial fascination there is no doubt:

'A aucun moment je ne pense à Irène comme à une personne, un être objectif qui doit faire face à ses problèmes, elle n'existe qu'en fonction de moi. Egoïsme total'(2).

The anthropomorphism with which he endowed his long illnesses harks back to those childhood fears of dark forces, and accounts for Adamov's horror of madness such as afflicted Artaud, his friend. As much of an enigma as he may be to us, Adamov was no less a paradox in his own mind, and what remains consistent throughout his life and work is his ceaseless, obsessive probing into the depths of his own motivations.

Acute Sensitivity and Awareness

It has been noted that the souvenirs are composed of images; individual events remembered and recorded minutely as a series of mental photographs. Adamov seems to have been extraordinarily aware of events and of people at the time when they made an impact upon his life, and to have possessed powers of recall which can evoke the mood and intensity of an occasion, even to present-day readers. Thus it is, that his whole life as presented in H.E. affords us a panoramic vision of a series of tableaux, in much the same way that his plays present a picture of the universe of his characters. Images stand out in the plays, as in Adamov's personal itinerary through life. One such image, in Souvenirs and Journal alike, is that of the sun. Adamov's sun-orientation leads him to borrow vast

(1) H.E., p.23. (2) *ibid.*, p.41.

sums of money in order to take vacations on the Côte d'Azur, where the sun appears to rejuvenate him, and to give him the will and the energy to renew the struggle of existence. With his delicately-balanced psychic state, the grey mistiness of Paris was capable of enfeebling him in mind and body until he could no longer work.

Objects also hold the potential for obsessive fascination in Adamov. They seemed to embody certain secret significances which, once penetrated, could reveal to a man some part of his hidden self. This notion is expounded in L'Aveu, and in typically paradoxical fashion, later in the same work, Adamov remarks upon the inauspicious nature of certain objects, a remark which points up the fearsome relationship between the extraordinarily sensitive consciousness to which he was prey, and the invisible forces previously described:

'[...]pourquoi[...]une terreur panique m'envahit-elle chaque fois que je suis mis en présence d'un signe de mort, d'un symbole, objet ou substance, dont la nature est liée à l'idée de mort?'(1).

Dreams fall into this category of awareness by virtue of their obsessive, repetitive nature, and of their obvious connection, in common with 'objects', with fetish and superstition, the whole given authenticity through Adamov's familiarity with Freud and Jung (2), and the analytical workings of his mind. H.E. abounds in recounted dreams, for which some pseudo-psychoanalytical explanation is always proffered. Adamov had stressed the significance of dream in L'Aveu:

'Le rêve de la nuit est une porte ouverte sur les grands couloirs ténébreux de l'être et c'est derrière la porte du sommeil que surgit la métamorphose'(3).

This idea of different levels of consciousness will be elaborated

(1) L'Aveu, p.84. (2) In 1938 Adamov published his translation: Jung, Le Moi et l'inconscient, Gallimard, Paris. (3) L'Aveu, pp.37-8.

in Chapter Two, but it is vital to appreciate Adamov's sensitivity to it on a physical as well as a philosophical level. Before he could begin to reason out his theories of separation and suffering, he was acutely aware of the physical sensation of these forces, and of the lucidity which they afforded him:

'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'(1).

All the aspects of Adamov's psyche mentioned combine to define what the man himself termed his névrose. This concept is a personal one, and constitutes the fundamental essence of psychological being, which I have tried to establish so far. Névrose is the mental state which underlies its own physical manifestations, these being masochism, fear, obsession, and all the other characteristics mentioned. Névrose is essentially physiological, and Adamov himself traces its roots to his early life:

'Les névroses, viennent-elles forcément de la première enfance, ou bien peuvent-elles naître dans l'adolescence ou même beaucoup plus tard, créées alors par le contexte social? Posé la question à L. Pas de réponse. La prédisposition?'(2).

Acute awareness of hatred and of evil, of the oppression of man by man, and of himself by, amongst the numerous dark forces, time in particular ('Le temps pèse sur moi de son énorme masse liquide, de tout son poids obscur')(3), serve as concrete examples of a ripe sensitivity searching through physical links with the everyday world of being to establish an identifiable self - a role within a framework. Adamov attempted to achieve this on a physical level by the following three principal means.

(1) L'Aveu, p.24. (2) H.E., p.178. (3) L'Aveu, p.23.

Women

Adamov's relationship with the women in his immediate family has already been discussed. Their oppressive presence was not to be repeated in his sexual relationships. On the contrary, Adamov appears to have desired a stable relationship with a woman, as he sensed that this might provide for him a point of reference for his elusive self. He might achieve a positive status through an established relationship with a woman, the natural 'other self' of the male since the androgyn. It is for this reason that he could see Irène only as a function of himself, as has been pointed out.

His need to use women in this fashion, and his tendencies to masochism and auto-eroticism, coupled with his sexual impotence, make Adamov's relationships with and attitudes towards women ambiguous and characteristically paradoxical. Woman is seen as protectress, torturess, saviour, object to be corrupted, at all times one of the two prime motivating forces behind Adamov's way of life: 'Le seul sentiment capable de me faire oublier la femme, c'est la peur'(1).

Guilt complexes, masochistic tendencies, led Adamov to seek out the lowest prostitutes, for, degraded by them and entwined in their web of vice, stripped of all human appearance, he might draw his very being from that humiliation. Prostitutes provided a scratching-post for his masochism - where else could he reasonably expect to find women so eager to comply with his peculiarities, and with whom he could feel such affinity? All his visits around Europe as an adult were punctuated by visits to the world's most infamous red-light districts, and the attraction of prostitutes never waned until

(1) L'Aveu, p.75.

his physical condition near the end of his life supplanted even that hope of survival.

Even in his long-term relationships, Adamov felt compelled to involve the woman close to him in pornographic sexual rituals, and until he met Jacqueline Autruseau in 1945, never appears able to have felt anything remotely resembling a mutual caring such as is termed love. In H.E. he notes in 1922 a: 'Séparation absolue déjà entre l'érotisme et tout ce qui de près ou de loin peut ressembler à de l'amour'(1).

Jacqueline, who was to become his wife in 1961, and who seems to have remained more independent than his other mistresses, was thus capable of causing Adamov great pain. A certain mysticism sprang up between the two of them, embodied in their mutual being which they called Le Proson, and in Jacqueline's attributed being Le Bison. She had the advantage of being a support and material aid to Adamov through his writing, and it is significant that towards the end of his life, during periods of preoccupation with suicide, Adamov continually cites two things which prevent him from taking his life: '[...] l'amour total que j'ai voué à une femme unique, et l'effort désespéré [...] d'exprimer ma pensée'(2). Le Bison may have been the closest Adamov was capable of coming to an 'ideal' relationship, and she seems to fall firmly into a definition formulated by Adamov in L'Aveu: 'La femme règne au coeur de ma damnation [...] Toi dont le rôle est sauveur, toi la grande médiatrice'(3).

The women in his life may have eased the pain of existence in positive moments, and caused him great anguish in times of despair,

(1) H.E., p.24. (2) L'Aveu, p.159. This quotation, taken from the earlier text, is interesting in its prefiguration of Adamov's sentiments late in H.E. (3) *ibid.*, p.99.

yet despite his repeated affirmations of profound feelings for Jacqueline, there is no real evidence in the prose work nor in the plays, as we shall see, that they helped him to establish an identity for himself.

Work

'Pour quelques hommes et femmes, qui devraient être fraternellement unis, la vie découle de la littérature à peu près dans la même proportion qu'elle en est la source'(1).

André Pieyre de Mandiargues observes quite correctly that for Adamov, his work constituted an integral part of being. It enabled him to construct part of an identity; his inner self could be concretised on stage, or committed to the pages of a journal. In either case Arthur Adamov was proven to have had an identity. Writing became a frantic obsession late in Adamov's life, during his illnesses of the 1960's. It provided him with a life-line to the actual world, remained his means of asserting his existence. Adamov felt convinced that he could 'be' through his writing, and it became a matter of life and death to him that his plays should be produced. It is extraordinary to note in H.E. how his angoisse, his seconds of unmeasured jubilation, his spasms of unreasoned pessimism are never so clearly marked as in references to his work, or to the progress of his plays in the theatres. He admits to a certain fanaticism: 'Une idée enfle dans ma tête, abusive, en chassant toutes les autres: être joué'(2).

If he was to engender an identity through his plays, this could be satisfactorily fulfilled only when tangible, concrete proof of its creation were available. It is for this reason that in 1966,

(1) André Pieyre de Mandiargues, 'Une vie réussie', Le Nouvel Observateur, no. 190, 3-9 July 1968, p.34. (2) H.E., p.93.

after almost twenty years of writing for the theatre and being rejected either out of hand or after a pitifully small number of ill-attended and heavily-criticised performances, Adamov could still write from the depths of his malady:

'Si Gallimard fait paraître mon tôme III en mars, et si La Politique des restes est créée au Stabile de Gênes ce même mois de mars, cela, je pense, ira mieux'(1).

When such productions are imminent, Adamov's journals take on an almost childish gaiety. On the other hand, the overall lack of success of his work gives rise to depression, not a little peevishness, and further physical degeneration, enhancing the link between life and literature for Adamov:

'Pense de nouveau à la déception professionnelle, source en grande partie, j'en suis sûr, de mes malheurs'(2).

The act of writing was itself of vital importance to Adamov, and this appears to be closely related to a will to live. Adamov repeatedly states that writing is his révolte, his only means to attack the mal which assailed him from all sides - the dark forces, of which critical persecution and physical infirmity were but two manifestations. Thus, if ever he stopped writing, the symbolic fight was lost, and all hope of survival, let alone identity, gone:

'Ecrire, je dois écrire, coûte que coûte, en dépit de tous et de toutes. Car si je cessais d'écrire, tout s'écroulerait'(3).

Adamov had been helped by the personal writings of Artaud, Lecomte and others, and felt it his duty as a poet to express his anguish, that others may read his work and take hope and comfort in it. This concept will be elaborated in Chapter Two. Literature provided Adamov with a therapeutic device, a means to *purge*

(1) H.E., p.178. (2) ibid., p.168. (3) L'Aveu, p.26.

his névrose. His friends among literary critics are always ready to raise this point:

'Il a certainement pensé que créer des personnages arriverait à le débarrasser de ses obsessions'(1).
'Le théâtre le faisait sortir de lui-même en même temps qu'il parlait de lui-même'(2).

As the role of women in Adamov's life is ambiguous, even paradoxical, so too is that of his work, and for the same reason: it held in part the secret of his elusive self. Work brought joy and pain to its author, the wonder being that he never appeared to lose his propensity for optimism. Bernard Dort has suggested that 1970 saw Adamov precisely losing his faith in future plays, and hence for life itself: a cue for suicide.

If his work disappointed him, Adamov devoted his life almost exclusively to it one way or another, and we are left in no doubt whatsoever of exactly what it meant to him to commit himself to paper:

'Il est terrible de perdre ce que l'on a écrit, lorsque, comme moi, on s'efforce de n'écrire que l'essentiel de peur de l'oublier. C'est alors perdre l'illusion de la continuité psychique, seule garante de la personnalité devant le chaos et la folie'(3).

La Bande

The third way in which Adamov attempted to define himself, to achieve a concrete identity, was manifested in his need to belong to an established group. From a group identity he sought a personal one through a kind of osmosis. An only son, he attempted to be associated with groups of boys at school. The constant removals of

(1) Emmanuel Jacquart, 'Adamov était le roi des trois points', interview with Roger Blin, French Review, vol. 48, no. 6, 1975, p.1001.
(2) Roger Blin in R. Gaudy, op. cit., pp.50-1. (3) L'Aveu, p.134.

the family militated against this, but Adamov is quick in H.E. to pick up the consciousness of membership of an expatriate group, which, isolated from accepted groups of Swiss and German boys who were natives, proved unsatisfactory. On his arrival in Paris in the mid-1920's, Adamov made a bid to move into the surrealist circle around André Breton, but was rejected for his taste in poetry. The recollection of this fact is still painful:

'Déception. Le même sentiment qu'enfant, déjà, je ressentais, voulant faire partie d'une bande et ne faisant partie d'aucune'(1).

The nous form is often used in H.E. to recall convivial discussion sessions in Paris cafés, or to demonstrations in which Adamov took part as a member of the intellectual fraternity with a leaning towards human rights sympathies. Mixing as he did with such people in those establishments, like the Dôme, which were meeting-places for them, it was inevitable that Adamov should become aware of the possibility of 'belonging' in the political sense. This aspect of his life will be discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis.

In the early 1950's it appeared that Adamov's childhood dream may have come true, with the Avant-Garde triumvirate Adamov-Beckett-Ionesco. Although the group was more intellectual hypothesis than factual literary movement, and was rejected by both the latter protagonists on aesthetic grounds, Adamov revelled in it on personal grounds. It afforded him a tenuous reality:

'[.] je n'étais plus seul, je faisais partie d'une "bande". Mes vœux enfantins étaient comblés. Il me semblait aussi que de la sorte je pourrais plus facilement remporter la victoire'(2).

(1) H.E., p.29. (2) ibid., p.111.

Adamov was later to deny his early plays, and those of the Avant-Garde in particular, but by then, the construct of the triumvirate had crumbled beneath him. In fact, none of his three means to establish an identity was satisfactory. The menacing forces which terrorised his nights as a child appeared to be manifesting themselves in a whole series of obstacles, and inhibiting his fulfillment. As an expatriate, Adamov retained his Russian papers, and was constantly hounded by the police who demanded to see proof of his identity. The necessary papers were neglected; Adamov seemed incapable of managing his administrative affairs. His tax returns were always late, so that he was constantly under the threat of admonishment for some petty infringement. Audiences and censors joined the list of persecutors, so that the over-riding atmosphere of H.E. is pessimistic. This tendency has been discussed, and leads us to Adamov's interesting, double-edged conception of fate. The forces of darkness which menaced him as a child were in fact unalterable, incurable as Martin Esslin has called them(1). Man is their puppet. Yet there is also for each individual a ligne de forces (2), preordained before birth, and according to which the constant incurable is interpreted. Thus, there is an infinite number of possible fates. How this concept developed into a system for Adamov's dramatic work will be examined in Chapter Four, but it is important to note its origins in a persecution-oppression complex.

The fact that Adamov's persecution complex may be seen simply as a failure to accept responsibility for his own shortcomings, that he attaches blame to anyone and anything for his lack of success, be

(1) Martin Esslin, 'Arthur Adamov: the curable and the incurable' in The Theatre of the Absurd, Pelican, London, 1968, pp.88-124.

(2) L'Aveu, p.122.

it in love, in money matters or in the theatre, highlights his paradoxical nature; the centre of his introspective universe, lashed by masochism and degraded publicly, Adamov blames others for unfortunate events which befall him.

Despite the seemingly undesirable aspect of the man as we have seen him, Adamov did not lack friends and admirers in literary, journalistic and street-walking circles all over Europe. The more acceptable of his acquaintances are scarcely mentioned in his journals; those who take precedence are involved with: 'Mon attachement discutable pour les dégénérés, les dépossédés, les paumés de toute sorte'(1). Nonetheless, many of his literary associates have left touching accounts of the man Adamov. They proclaim variously his fidelity, playfulness, sense of humour, sincerity, dedication, and provide a much-needed counterbalance to the dismal self-portrait of H.E. and L'Aveu. On Adamov's death, several radio plays of his were re-run, obituaries abounded in literary journals and national newspapers. Les Lettres Françaises published a series of articles by some of those closest to Adamov in the theatre under the collective title: Hommage à Arthur Adamov. Three years later La Nouvelle Critique published a supplementary issue on Adamov, for which there was no shortage of contributions. Adamov always had his supporters and his entourage of young women. Edmond Buchet remarks that this is odd, considering his appearance and bearing: a ragged, grubby, shuffling person, bringing for publication his translation of a book which could not more suitably describe him: Rilke's Livre de la pauvreté et de la mort (2).

(1) H.E., p.153. (2) See Edmond Buchet, Les Auteurs de ma vie, Buchet-Chastel, Paris, 1966. On p.50 there is a fascinating verbal portrait of Adamov dated 25th. February 1939.

Gabriel Garran saw in Adamov: 'Homme de coeur'(1), whilst Michel Berto recalls his: 'Tendresse, personnalité d'écorché vif, redoutable humour'(2). René Gaudy's collection of articles (3) depicts Adamov the man as well as the dramatist, and critics would do well to examine the numerous personal anecdotes, setting the plays and in particular the journals in perspective.

Arthur Adamov's home environment, his family background, his youthful experiences and encounters have been seen to correspond closely with Roger Gilbert-Lecomte's formulation for artistic creativity, which opened this chapter. His innate characteristic of extraordinary perspicacity was turned aside into the channel of metaphysical questioning, and he failed to emerge with any long-standing answer as one half-solution after another slipped from his grasp. For Adamov: 'La vie n'était pas absurde, difficile, très difficile seulement'(4). The lucidity of which Adamov was painfully aware (Chapter Two will clarify this point) he nevertheless regarded as essential for his work. From his névrose he created characters in the theatre who could both concretise and hope to exorcise his anguish, the roots of which will be seen to lie in a fundamental sense of séparation.

Jean Pierrot has assessed the importance of Adamov's private world as expressed in L'Aveu and H.E. for his work in the theatre:

'[...] il est possible d'y découvrir (in the work), s'exprimant avec une particulière fidélité, le psychisme inconscient de l'auteur, tel que les écrits autobiographiques nous permettent simultanément de l'éclairer'(5).

(1) Gabriel Garran in his article in Gaudy, op. cit., p.101.

(2) Michel Berto, *ibid.*, p.108. (3) See note (2) p.18 .

(4) H.E., p.111. (5) Jean Pierrot, op. cit., p.273.

Adamov himself, conscious of the increasing intensity of his névrose, the widening scope of his superstitious ritual, had begun, long before his first serious steps in the theatre, to apply a cosmic significance to his psychic state, to project it beyond himself. L'Aveu is the expression of this exercise, later to be denounced by Adamov for its metaphysical nature and facile conclusions:

'Mais le mal que je confesse - ce mal si bien installé au centre de moi-même qu'on ne saurait me juger sans le juger, lui - mon mal est-il autre chose que la parodie? Les gestes par lesquels je tente de conjurer l'angoisse, mes prosternements superstitieux sont les survivances exsangues d'un antique cérémonial, jadis illuminé par la plus haute conscience, maintenant perdu dans la nuit qui s'étend sur tout ce qui fut l'âme des anciens jours'(1).

It is at this point that the facts of Adamov's existence coincide with an embryonic metaphysic. Many of the occurrences described in this chapter preceded and paved the way for the formulation of that metaphysic. Many of them appeared subsequently, as physical manifestations of it. The precise nature of the metaphysic forms the substance of Chapter Two of this thesis.

(1) L'Aveu, p.85.

CHAPTER TWOThe Metaphysic of Separation.

'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'(1).

L'Aveu, written between 1938 and 1943, constituted Adamov's first attempt to come to terms with his neuroses, to exorcise them by analytical exposure, and to alleviate the burden of them by sharing them with mankind. His early awareness of the existence of consciousness on more than one level, in particular the superstitious conviction that inanimate objects could hold significances beyond our grasp, but more powerful than our existence in objective reality, had mesmerised Adamov, already the victim of psychic disturbance through his family relationships in childhood, and tantalised him with the prospect that, although he could not see it clearly, there was a self hidden deep within him. Chapter One, in its preliminary examination of these facts, drew attention to the metaphysical investigation of his condition to which Adamov was drawn in fascination. L'Aveu traces the progress of that investigation, and its opening paragraph, as quoted above, provides the key not only to that work, but to much of Adamov's autobiographical material and to his subsequent development in the theatre. The fear which he had claimed to be a prime motivating factor in his life was a direct result of his condition of séparation, which can be equated with souffrance and angoisse. In its exposition of these concepts,

(1) L'Aveu, p.19.

L'Aveu covers a period of intensive development in the thought and experience of Adamov, and the inevitable paradoxes are blatant, both in L'Aveu itself, and in the review L'Heure Nouvelle, which Adamov directed with Marthe Robert in 1945-6, and which treats the same notions in the light of the events of the previous six years.

The Exile of Existence

Carlos Lynes Jnr. links Adamov and Artaud as 'Two of the most extreme victims of the twentieth century malady of alienation'(1). In Adamov's case, the nature of that much-used term is defined by the author. Feeling himself to be 'condamné à la solitude'(2), he explains the inevitability of this state:

'Exister signifie: se tenir au dehors. Du seul fait qu'il existe, l'homme est déjà exilé, expulsé, donc mis hors de tout'(3).

Adamov was later to admit the speciousness of this argument in its basis on a linguistic fallacy, yet he was never to be free of the notion itself: that man is necessarily and irremediably isolated. Imprisoned in the concentration camp at Argelès in 1941, Adamov's recollections in L'Aveu and in H.E., which devotes a whole section to the experience, are not concerned with conditions in the camp, nor with the horrors of war, but with the internal question which, since 1938, had been the central theme of his evolving metaphysic:

'Séparé littéralement du reste du monde dans un camp de prisonniers, je devais prendre enfin conscience que je vivais séparé de tout au temps où tout est séparé de tout'(4).

It remains to be seen in which specific ways Adamov sensed

(1) Carlos Lynes Jnr., 'Adamov or "le sens littéral" in the theatre', Yale French Studies, no. 14 (Winter 1954-5), p.49. (2) L'Aveu, p.74.
 (3) ibid., p.70. (4) ibid., p.141.

himself to be isolated, and from what. Certainly he had never been able to establish a firm identity for himself in his own mind. This ideal eluded him, but Adamov's constant interchange of personal confession and soul-searching with more general considerations applicable to all mankind in L'Aveu suggests a cosmic aspect of this concept of séparation. It is the general principle which was to be elaborated in L'Heure Nouvelle .

Le Sens du Sacré(1)

That man is separated from God is a truism of our age. Adamov comes nearest to defining what God is for him in terms of prayer, an occupation to which he admits in times of despair, despite his confessed objections to religious doctrine:

'Ce que j'appelle la prière, c'est le besoin éperdu de l'homme immergé dans le temps de recourir au seul principe qui puisse le sauver, c'est la projection hors de lui de ce qui en lui participe de l'éternité'(2).

This reaction of man is now no more than a reflex, a remnant of a consciousness of the eternal which stretches back to classical times and beyond, where religious ceremony was sacred ritual and embodied a code by which all could live in communion with the cosmic forces which govern man and the universe. The sacrificial victim had a vital role to play in the ritual of being, his fate was accepted as a natural element of the code. Man was then an integral part of the elements, and could see to the centre of himself, le sens du sacré giving meaning to his existence. The myth of true being was alive. Language constituted a vital element in the

(1) Adamov's term throughout L'Aveu for the infinite sense of being and communion which man has lost the ability to experience.

(2) L'Aveu, p.42.

myth: an object designated by a given linguistic form could be conjured in its cosmic significance - its essential meaning - by the utterance of its linguistic symbol. It is for this reason that what Adamov terms 'la dégradation du langage'(1) can be seen to lie at the centre of modern man's separation from initial truth:

'Le processus de dégradation commencé dès avant l'ère chrétienne - dégradation du langage, des rites qui perdent leur sens - peu à peu aboutit à la dissolution de tout ce qui, hier encore, permettait à l'homme d'accepter les raisons faites à son existence'(2).

Analogy, metaphor, linguistic sophistication in all its forms has led to disparate items being designated by the same term, thus prostituting that term, robbing it of its pure, cosmic significance. In addition, everyday language has become increasingly objective as material considerations in a man-made world have taken precedence over nebulous concepts of ritual, so that objects are now designated for their function and not for their entity. Thus, that which once was the centre of man's universe, le sens du sacré, can no longer adequately be rendered linguistically, and the notion of quintessential being has been reduced to the word 'God', which is devoid of real meaning. What remains is simply now unnameable - l'ignominie. Adamov uses the term for his section in L'Aveu which describes the death of language in our time. It will be seen that language is of paramount importance in Adamov's plays, and that, inspired by Artaud's dream of 'universal theatre', he attempted to reinstate language as a true means of communication by denuding it of its false attributions and returning to a universal language.

Adamov's object-fetishes spring to mind as a prime example of

(1) L'Heure Nouvelle (I), Editions du Sagittaire, Paris, 1945. The phrase occurs on p.5, in an article by Adamov entitled 'Assigination'.
 (2) ibid.

this form of separation. The name of an object provoked in him an awareness of the link between that object and its mystical significance, and it was this hidden sense which he felt, and which fascinated him:

'Pour l'homme que vient hanter l'ombre de l'inconnu, chaque objet est un creux révélant le mystère de l'intérieur obscur de lui-même'(1).

The elusive centre, then, the hidden truth, is the reality of the self. If a man is to glimpse this, he must first strip away the layers of false, attributed meaning, and try to see into the clear depths. There is an interesting example of Adamov himself attempting to do just this in H.E., where he can be seen consciously facing his own tendency to suicide:

'Le tout est de connaître la portée de ce mot "vouloir" et ce qu'il veut dire quand je crie: je ne veux plus'(2).

We have seen that Adamov sensed extraordinary significances in incidents and things, and in L'Aveu he reaches a temporary conclusion that if men are shown how to strip away the superficial levels of meaning, they may then behold the inner truth of themselves:

'Aujourd'hui il ne reste plus à l'homme que cette tâche: arracher toutes les peaux mortes, se dépouiller jusqu'à se trouver lui-même à l'heure de la grande nudité'(3).

This solution was soon to be rejected as naïve optimism, and as being beyond the capabilities of all but a few, who were destined to suffer intolerably for their lucidity.

As language is degraded, so man continues to degrade himself, idealising first Esprit above God (4), and removing the truth from

(1) L'Aveu, p.36. (2) H.E., p.194. (3) L'Aveu, p.115. (4) The article by Adamov entitled 'Le Refus' in L'Heure Nouvelle(II), Editions du Sagittaire, Paris, 1946, pp.3-6, deals with this question in detail.

himself, and latterly elevating the cult of man above Esprit, so that he regards himself as the centre of the universe, the power from which all being emanates. Man has raised la multiplicité discordante des apparences (1), humane values have been lost, and man, on turning into himself, sees only a gaping void - the void of separation which reveals him as a being in solitude, that solitude of which Adamov became acutely aware in Argelès, and which is the root of all fear. As Adamov remarks, it is not for nothing that contemporary art is based on the cult of absence. His own dramatic work was destined to draw its significance as much from non-presence as from actual presence:

'La suprématie donnée par l'artiste moderne à l'absence sur la présence, à l'innommé sur le nommé, suit la marche inéluctable de l'esprit'(2).

These nebulous arguments can be seen to lie firmly rooted in Adamov's personal neurosis, and to be essentially concerned with his search for his elusive self. They constitute largely rationalisations of his central problem, and appear to propose their generalised 'truths' for mankind within the restricted framework of their own limited scope:

'La dernière planche de salut de l'homme est le grand réveil hors du temps et des sombres enchaînements de l'histoire, l'accession à la fixité de la toute-conscience, à l'immobile éternité'(3).

Nonetheless, for his own work, the concepts of séparation and of la dégradation du langage were to have a profound impact.

Dreams

The importance which Adamov assigned to dreams was mentioned in

(1) L'Aveu, p.33. (2) L'Heure Nouvelle(I), p.5. (3) L'Aveu, p.107.

Chapter One of this thesis, and with regard to the inner reality to which few men can aspire, dreams offer glimpses of that reality which, unfortunately, cannot be grasped. Throughout his life, Adamov appears to have been subject to vivid dreams, many of which are recounted in considerable detail, and with the habitual Freudian analysis, in H.E. Towards the end of that work, in his diary of May 7th. 1967, Adamov remarks upon his compulsive relation of dreams:

'Que veut dire cette manie de transcrire des rêves, si insignifiants soient-ils? Fuite devant le réel, ma souffrance? Ou reconnaissance du bien-fondé de n'importe quel rêve?'(1).

In 1970, he published an article in Les Lettres Françaises, entitled 'Presque: le théâtre ou le rêve' (2), in which the near-certainty of reality in each is highlighted, for although in L'Aveu in 1938 he had affirmed that: 'Tout ce qui est rêve existe, se projette sur un certain plan'(3), the validity of the reality projected therein grew increasingly suspect, whilst the fundamental fascination with dream material and its potential depth remained. Margaret Quinn Dietemann, in her thesis (4), traces this tendency to Adamov's association with the surrealist group around André Breton, and claims that despite his merely fringe involvement with the movement, certain ideals of surrealism attracted him and influenced his early work, in particular the concept of automatic writing, transcription of dream material as creating a reality of its own. That Adamov's motives were parallel with those of the surrealists is questionable: that he used dream in his plays (both transcription of actual dream and adaptation of themes in his dreams, as well as

(1) H.E., pp.218-9. (2) Arthur Adamov, 'Presque: le théâtre ou le rêve', Les Lettres Françaises, no. 1320, February 1970, p.11.

(3) L'Aveu, p.20. (4) Margaret Quinn Dietemann, The Theatre of Arthur Adamov, PhD. Thesis, Cornell University, 1970.

fabricated dream) as a means to glimpse what he hoped was the face of internal reality is indubitable, and the point will be examined at a later stage.

For all that dream may offer ideally a view of the hidden depths of truth beyond the closed door of waking consciousness, Adamov does not fail to recognise the problem in juxtaposing reality and unreality. The difficulty arises in deciding exactly how we are to perceive that which is true reality; how we are to know whether we have truly unmasked false reality. Hence Adamov's doubts as quoted above from H.E. Dreams may be no more than an intensified manifestation of man's separation from inner truth, and may lead him not towards glimpses of that truth, but towards the creation of a further level of unreality based on the misconception that a solution has been glimpsed. Adamov's doubt testifies to his continuing, unsatisfied awareness of separation above all else. It is easy to see how his interest developed in mythomania, one of the obvious dangers in the reality-unreality principle, and which he explored in several of his plays.

Jean Genet's favourite device for testing reality against unreality is the mirror; it is a leitmotif in his plays and prose writings. The mirror itself is seen to be a concrete reality, to exist of itself, so that the reflected image is more real than the original. It is interesting that Adamov too dabbles in considerations of this kind in L'Aveu, as the result of meditations on one of his superstitions. For him a mirror is an object personified, a fetish endowed with powers to harm him, and to reduce him to a base object of mere terrestrial reality:

'Miroirs, correspondances magiques de la conscience dont le reflet est à la fois fidélité et trahison, témoins fallacieux qui tendez à

l'homme une image trompeuse où le haut répond au haut, où le bas répond au bas, mais où la droite tient le lieu de gauche, et la gauche de droite, comme si votre authenticité se limitait au sens de la hauteur et que vous compensiez par le mensonge de l'horizontalité terrestre'(1).

Adamov is not always so convinced that he is master over the mirror. It is capable of terrifying him precisely by confronting him with the question mark which hangs over his reality, and by demonstrating his contingency, inherent in his nature as a human being:

'Ce miroir qui tant de fois a recueilli mon image, il est impossible qu'il n'en ait gardé quelque chose. En se brisant, il a cassé l'image de moi-même'(2).

Paradoxically, Adamov's investigation of dream and mirror reality leads him into inconsistency with his consciousness of the unconditional reality which underlies all existence. This may be explained by his inability to extricate the two notions from their foundations in contingent reality itself, and to elevate them to the all-embracing, cosmic significance of his original proposition, to which he adheres superstitiously, fanatically, to the end of his journals.

La Mission du Poète

Given that there does exist a potentially visible universal truth, Adamov maintains that those who are given the gift of perception are few, and rare in nature. He lists contemporaries such as Gilbert-Lecomte and Artaud whose extraordinary lucidity (as we have seen, Adamov subscribed to Gilbert-Lecomte's definition of the

(1) L'Aveu, p.84. (2) ibid., p.76.

psychic requirements for this) afforded them an absolute vision which, Margaret Quinn Dietemann claims, Adamov considered could only be achieved by the chosen few through words and through a woman. The man who is capable of seeing: 'non les choses mais à travers elles'(1) belongs to an élite in awareness:

'Poète est celui qui se sert des mots
moins pour dévoiler leur sens immédiat
que pour les contraindre à livrer ce que
cache leur silence'(2).

Such a man has a duty to the rest of humanity to expose his situation, to: 'dévoiler l'esprit caché dans les apparences'(3) in order that others may be helped by the consciousness that the problem can be faced. Without mentioning it as such, Adamov touches here upon the paradoxical situation of solidarity within isolation. In L'Heure Nouvelle he takes the poet's duty a stage further: the inherent cruelty which exists in mankind through fear and isolation, masochism and sadism being resolved into one, must be presented to mankind so that society may learn to control its cruelty. L'Aveu does not consider such social repercussions. In those pages, lucidity is equated with intense suffering - angoisse. For the delicate sensibility of the poet, a confrontation with the essential truth is exhausting, but glimpses of that eternity, whether they be artificially induced or the result of natural inspiration, are necessarily fleeting, and, like the drug which wears off, the return to everyday 'unreality' is increasingly appalling. Thus neuroses may be conducive, indeed necessary, to creativity, but the anguish which this engenders can constitute a severe barrier also. In Chapter One, Adamov's fear of madness was noted, because for him madness constitutes a

(1) L'Aveu, p.35. (2) *ibid.*, p.15. (3) *ibid.*, pp.105-6.

permanent state of torture, neurosis beyond control, and where creative art is, as he envisages it, impossible. Suffering is the physical presence of séparation, and no-one is more aware than Adamov of the dangers of continual subjection to intense suffering of this kind:

'Exilé une seconde, l'esprit vit incommensurablement plus haut et plus loin qu'il ne fait de coutume au long des jours... une telle seconde porte en elle la toute évidence de sa seule réalité face aux ombres illusoires de la durée au sein de laquelle elle éclate comme un coup de tonnerre.

Seulement, cette seconde n'est même pas une seconde. Même pas un clin d'oeil. C'est un choc qui nie le temps. Et l'homme illuminé jusqu'aux tréfonds de lui-même aussitôt n'est plus'(1).

The concept itself is banal in literature. What makes it fascinating in Adamov's case is the realisation that the man lived every word of it, and his theatre works out the aesthetic admirably in concrete form which has little to equal it.

Further Forms of Separation

The central issue of séparation has various manifestations which become apparent through the works of Adamov, but which are not specifically discussed by him in his metaphysical writing. These can be grouped under two broad headings: the separation which man feels between his mind and his body, and that of which he is conscious between himself and other men.

i) Mind and Body

There is a distinct awareness during his last illness of a clear division between mind and body. Adamov seeks to determine whether it is his mind or his physical being which is afflicted,

(1) L'Aveu, p.47.

and he is subject to hallucinations that he is not present within his own body (1). L'Aveu also testifies to Adamov's inability to discern the limits of his physical being in a railway carriage, where in the heaving mass of bodies he was unable to distinguish his own limbs from those of people around him (2). Perhaps best illustrating the problem that: 'entre moi et moi il y a toujours écart'(3) is the difficulty which Adamov confesses in expressing himself on paper. After months of painful effort his work invariably disappoints him; the result is always impossibly separated from the idea in his head. It is as if Adamov is failing yet again to assert his identity, to prove that his thought exists, and he is tormented by: 'la hantise de ne pouvoir exprimer sa pensée'(4).

We have noted the discrepancy between language and its true meaning, and the inadequacy of language as a means of communication, dependent as it is upon false conceptions of reality and unreality, and upon people conditioned by those conceptions, so that a poet such as Adamov finds inordinate difficulty in bridging the gap not only between what he says and what he means to say, but also between what he does and what he means to do, as analogously he feels to have no control over the actions performed by his body, for these are interpreted by others, and their purport beyond his jurisdiction:

'Il me semble que mes actes sont séparés
de moi, que j'en suis le témoin paralysé,
jamais totalement présent, jamais pris
vraiment par la lutte des intérêts en jeu'(5).

ii) Man and his Fellows

The most common form of separation, and that felt by most human beings, is the separation inherent in existence between a

(1) For example, H.E., p.167. (2) L'Aveu, p.40. (3) ibid., p.23.
(4) Arthur Adamov, 'Introduction à Antonin Artaud', Paru, no. 29, Paris, 1947, p.7. (5) L'Aveu, p.69.

man and his fellow human beings. In a universe with no possible means of adequate communication man is alone. Separated from woman by the division of the androgyn he is 'l'homme altéré'(1). There is a discrepancy between the image which he has of himself and that which others have of him, so that in order not to be alone he tends to conform to a general pattern. This involves him in questions about his identity and throws him back on the angoisse of solitude.

Chapter Four will discuss the social implications of conformity, and the way in which Adamov came to the realisation that men have situations in common if not language. The mystical union of a man and a woman seemed for a long time to be a solution to isolation, with woman as mediator between the eternal and man, but the point has been made that even his own idealised relationship appeared in the last analysis to fall short of that mark.

Adamov's metaphysic of absence and separation is suspect at numerous points, but it remains a vast rationalisation of human motivation as stemming from fear and solitude. Man's endless humiliation of himself projects from his innate sense of guilt. In Adamov's case that guilt is personal, but, just like his fellows, he feels a need for pardon. Man's sense of alienation, his failure to comprehend the universe terrifies him, and is unbearable for those whose neurosis affords them particular vision. In the face of these superior issues, it is man's most difficult problem to find a true sense of 'being'. Maurice Regnaut, in his contribution to the special edition of La Nouvelle Critique mentioned in Chapter One (see p.39) makes some fascinating remarks on Adamov's approach

(1) L'Aveu, p.21.

to this problem in reply to his own question: 'Séparation, telle était pour vous l'origine et telle la mort?'(1).

The notion of névrose, as elucidated in Chapter One, is extended through separation and suffering in its metaphysical aspect, bringing Adamov to the important conclusion that his fate was, after all, that of every man, and paving the way for a concerted effort in society to take a hand in fate, a potentially 'curable' fate, as opposed to the 'incurable' dark forces of Chapter One. Adamov was to develop this idea into a system for his dramatic work in the late 1950's, and it will be examined in detail in a later chapter. L'Aveu prefigures the event by its constant darting between the highly personal and external generalisation. This is highlighted in the general principles of the section entitled Ce qu'il y a, and the introspective avowal of L'Humiliation sans fin. Adamov had begun to link his personal itinerary with the situation of mankind in his world. Within the pages of L'Aveu the pendulum swings from the purely personal to the potentially universal, and the psychic constant of the work is precisely this balance. S.R.C. Jones has pointed out that Adamov's avowal in L'Aveu of his neurosis is expounded in the early plays, and that the later plays turn rather to utilisation of the neurosis to exploit on stage other considerations (2). For Adamov himself, writing was the only way to liberate himself from his mal, the means by which to sublimate his humiliation. That he was ready to move into a new creative dimension, the theatre, is amply attested:

(1) Maurice Regnaut, 'Ern', La Nouvelle Critique (Supplément au no. 66), Paris, 1973, pp.7-8. (2) S.R.C. Jones, Le Théâtre d'Arthur Adamov, M.A. Thesis, Southampton University, 1968.

'The anguish expressed here underlines everything that Adamov ever wrote [...] his works could be seen as one perpetual effort to investigate this anguish and to come to terms with it'(1).

'A tout ce que j'ai essayé de balbutier je dois maintenant donner forme'(2).

(1) David Bradby, The Theatre of Arthur Adamov, PhD. Thesis, Glasgow University, 1971, p.17. (2) L'Aveu, p.159.

CHAPTER THREEThe Incurable - Obsession and Neurosis in the Plays.

When he began writing seriously for the theatre in 1947, Adamov was thirty-nine years of age, with a history of neurosis and obsession which had dominated his thought and his writing since childhood. Its overriding characteristic was that consciousness of the 'incurable' aspect of human existence which struck fear and horror into its victim, relentlessly, throughout his life. There were forces beyond man, incomprehensible to him, and which were bent on persecuting him, destroying his personal unity, his sense of being. Throughout his years of inconsistent allegiance to beliefs and groups of acquaintances in the literary, political and social spheres, this is the pre-eminent constant. He was acutely aware of an inevitable limitation to the human state of being, a limitation which found expression in all his theatrical writing, and which is most terrifying in its implication, its unstated threat:

'Il y a des choses que l'on peut faire et
d'autres que l'on ne peut pas faire...
parce qu'on n'est pas fait pour elles...
c'est l'injustice des données!'(1).

Man, for all his sophistication, has neither physical nor meta-physical control over this aspect of Adamov's universe, and it is the ramifications of this fact upon the principal human activity of existence, and in particular the way in which it manifests itself in his plays, that the present chapter is concerned to discuss.

During the thirty-year period (1938-68) spanned by the publications of his autobiographical writings, Adamov became involved with a wide range of activities, individuals and ideologies. His

(1) Théâtre II, p.52.

commitment to the preoccupation of the moment was absolute, almost obsessive. It is for this reason that paradox features so largely in Adamov's life and thinking, for as each new preoccupation demanded his total attention, so his previously feverishly-held convictions were brushed aside. His obsessive neurosis dictated his approach to everything he encountered in life.

Adamov had stressed the importance for their work of neurosis in the lives of both Artaud (1) and Gilbert-Lecomte (2), and in his study of Strindberg in 1955 he remarked: 'Qu'on le veuille ou non, il y a entre la névrose obsessionnelle et l'auteur un rapport indiscutable'(3). This statement, along with the fact that those authors with whom Adamov chose to associate himself most closely - Tchekhov, Strindberg, Kafka and Artaud - were all characters with a neurotic, tortured psychic vision, is revelatory as much of Adamov as of his subject. His own neurotic vision was to be the driving force behind all his work, even at a time when critics have seen him renouncing his metaphysical theatre for a politically oriented one, precisely because neurosis dictated the way in which he approached his material, and even the choice of material.

As he was drawn to a particular section of humanity for social intercourse, so in his work he was attracted to subjects which bore the hallmark of névrose and obsession. Critics have remarked, and Adamov has admitted, that from La Parodie to Le Professeur Taranne his plays constituted a physical representation of those neurotic elements inherent in the state of man which he had explored in so obsessive a fashion in L'Aveu. What has been neglected by many

(1) See note 4, p.53. (2) See note 1, p.13. (3) Arthur Adamov, Strindberg, Paris, L'Arche, 1955, p.59.

critics is the fact that although the plays which followed Le Professeur Taranne deal with more closely-defined subject matter, the nature of this must still be considered obsessional. Le Ping Pong, for example, is based on a mass obsession with the machine. The Paris Commune fascinated Adamov primarily since its 'poésie folle'(1) appealed to a passion within himself, and for him: 'Les voies de la névrose sont celles mêmes de la poésie'(2).

Clinical cases of psychic neurosis provided material for La Politique des restes, En Fiacre and Le Temps vivant, whilst three of the last plays, M. le Modéré, Sainte Europe and Si l'été revenait, treating once again wider problems of man facing his own existence, contain repetitive, oneiric material which will be seen to lie very close to the reality of Adamov's personal obsessive neurosis. In his first play, La Parodie, Le Journaliste, a character divorced from the central, compulsive action of the play, whose role appears rather as that of commentator, observer, analyst of the situation in the fashion of the author himself, is moved to make, in reply to a personal question which was not addressed to him, the generalised statement for the whole of mankind that: 'Nous ne pensons pas à grand-chose. A vrai dire, les sujets de réflexion sont plutôt limités'(3).

That possible subject matter was strictly limited to a number of essential issues of which he felt all too acutely aware has been adequately demonstrated as Adamov's private conviction, and that it continued to preoccupy him throughout his career as a dramatist is proved by his choice and treatment of material, and frequently also by remarks made by him in interviews. Of Off Limits, his play of 1969 which depicts a marginal society in contemporary

(1) H.E., p.131. (2) L'Aveu, p.89. (3) Théâtre I, p.49.

America, he notes that:

'Et il y a eu en quelque sorte une espèce d'étrange transmission des pouvoirs [...] entre ma maladie à moi, dont je souffre intérieurement, et la maladie dont crève l'Amérique'(1).

It was impossible for Adamov to conceive of subjects for his plays which were not directly related to his personal neuroses. Where writing was related to his psychic being his chance for salvation lay in externalising his neurosis in his work. Thus the scope of his material has been criticised as being introspective and hermetic. It is for these reasons also that critics cannot reach an adequate appraisal of Adamov's plays unless they first acquaint themselves in detail with his journals.

The Circularity of Neurosis

Neurosis describes a circular movement, revolving around a focal point of obsession like a planet around its sun. The point has been made in Chapter One that Adamov's acute awareness of the 'significance' of situations led him to retain images rather than whole memories. It is likewise a characteristic of his plays that they centre on a single image, whose significance pervades the entire work. H.E. gives accounts of the inception of one or two such images, for example, the final scene of Le Ping Pong, where two old men play a game of table tennis, was Adamov's original idea for that play, of which it is an essential codicil embodying the ethic of the completed work.

Similarly, within the plays there is always a recognisable focal point, to which all the other facets gravitate in an obsessive

(1) Arthur Adamov, 'Le Théâtre et l'Amérique' (Interview with Marc Rombaut), Clés pour le spectacle, March 20th. 1972, p.13.

fashion. In Le Printemps 71 it is the people's newspaper, the life-blood of the Commune. In La Parodie it is Lili, the Woman. David Bradby has distinguished between 'central characters' and 'peripheral characters' (1) in Adamov's plays, the latter representing the physical embodiment of the neurotic preoccupations of the former. This notion of the focal point, of the centre of gravity, lies at the heart of neurosis, and is one of the mainstays of Adamovian theatre. It will come under discussion in Chapter Six.

Maryse Labriolle in her Mémoire (2), an intricate study of Sainte Europe, points out that all the plays of Adamov follow the pattern of the Pirandellian circle. A given situation is presented, over which Adamov can be seen to be in total control, whilst his characters merely act out their fatal roles, impotent to alter their situation. For Adamov is so much in evidence in his plays, as will be made clear, that it is impossible to forget who manipulates the wires of his marionettes. His interest in historically-based material for such plays as Paolo Paoli or Le Printemps 71 stems in part from the very fact that such topics are all the more poignant for the theatre today, since their movement is determined by the force of history, pulling inexorably the characters towards an end which is nothing more than a point on the continuum, and insinuating that for those who follow the same mechanism will obtain. In Adamov's plays no solution is ever reached which can quell the sense of unease created by the action, and it is this uncomfortably open-ended aspect of his theatre which enhances the circularity of movement noted by Labriolle. The ways in which Adamov achieves this by

(1) Bradby, op. cit. devotes a chapter to character definition.

(2) Maryse Labriolle, Rêve, onirisme et politique dans Sainte Europe, Mémoire, Unité d'Enseignement et de Recherches des Lettres et Arts de l'Université de Bordeaux, 1972.

technical means will be a topic for discussion in Chapter Six, but it is of interest for the present chapter to point out that in some cases the circular nature of the action is symbolised within the play itself, and that this reflects a neurotic motivation.

Undoubtedly the most explicit expression of the phenomenon occurs in the radio play Comme nous avons été (1), where the action begins with the ring of an alarm clock. This appears to be the signal for the beginning of what develops into a ritual. The character A. is awoken by La Mère, apparently his landlady, who asks if A. has seen her young son whom she suspects of hiding in A.'s room. A series of fraught exchanges between A., La Mère and the latter's sister-in-law develops into an argument concerning the death of La Mère's husband and the unwitting collusion thereof by the missing child. It is at this point that A. begins to answer for the absent child, to recount the events leading up to what is now seen as the death of his father, and as the characters of A. and of the child merge, and the mother puts him to bed, the aunt begins to play with a toy train which she has bought for the boy, and by which she is mesmerised as it chugs round and round the track:

La Tante: Regardez. Il suffit de le remonter...
et il marche tout seul... sans s'arrêter,
jusqu'à la fin (2).

It is this statement which places the whole play in its perspective as a continual re-enactment of the ritual degradation of A. The action of the play is symbolised by the circuit of the train, and wound up by the starting signal of the ringing alarm. We are left with the disturbing certainty that this action has taken place many times

(1) See bibliographical note. (2) C.N.A.E., p.442.

before, and will continue to do so.

Le Professeur Taranne joins up the circle in the play which bears his name by finally performing the act of which he was accused at the beginning: undressing in public. Paolo Paoli ends with Paolo giving money to the worker Marpeaux, so that it will not be ploughed into the eternal circuit of capitalist business. The very gesture, however, implies the inevitability of the perpetuity of the circuit. In La Grande et la petite manoeuvre and Tous contre tous, the prevailing political system is overthrown only to be replaced by another which so resembles it as to maintain the status quo, a potentially indefinite cycle of powers succeeding one another without progression. Les Ames mortes presents a similar pattern in the life of an individual. Tchitchikov, imprisoned for illegal purchase of dead souls, purchases his release by bribery and by relinquishing his ill-gotten gains, and departs into the vast expanses of Russia in precisely the manner in which we first encountered him arriving in the town of his unfortuitous exploits, determined, it seems, to begin the whole business again elsewhere.

Involved in the concept of circular movement is also that of fate. Adamov's characters are brought face to face with their own destiny, abruptly, painfully, in full consciousness on the part of the author of what Antonin Artaud called 'la cruauté'(1). Characters hurl themselves headlong at the wall of their ultimate limitation - be they the Communards who were always fighting a losing battle, or Pierre of L'Invasion, whose ability to decipher what he felt sure was the message of truth left behind in the work of his dead

(1) A concept discussed in detail in Artaud's Le Théâtre et son double, Paris, Gallimard (Idées), 1964.

friend, and which his self-imposed task it was to transcribe, could not match his consciousness of the importance of the task.

Although mortality is not the only limitation of man which haunts the characters of Adamov in the theatre, it is the ultimate one, as it had been in L'Aveu, and death remains the absolute symbol of the void within man, an inevitable correlate of the tragic circle. Death is outside man, it is imposed upon him, and it represents metaphysical persecution of the kind which obsessed Adamov. It is no surprise, therefore, to find that his characters are persecuted from all sides, as we shall see, and that they are nervous, ill at ease, angoissés, yet unaware of their angoisse. It is Adamov himself who must suffer that awareness. Joseph McCann, whose thesis divides the plays of Adamov into interesting categories, makes the point that for the author there are two types of hell - interior and exterior hell - and that the stage is the place where man fights himself, that Adamov exorcises his interior hell through his characters (1). His first division is entitled 'Interior-Hell Plays', including L'Invasion, Comme nous avons été, Les Retrouvailles and Le Professeur Taranne, all of which deal with the mental anguish of characters who attempt to come to terms with their own existence. The disadvantage of so schematic a study is that it fails to take into account the consistency of this aspect throughout Adamov's entire theatrical output.

The neurotic vision sees the world from its own, particular

(1) Joseph McCann, The Theatre of Arthur Adamov, PhD. Thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1971. McCann identifies five categories of play: 'Interior-Hell Plays (I, P.T., C.N.A.E., R.)', 'Police-State Plays (G.P.M., S.M., P., T.C.T.)', 'Synthesis (P.P., Pa.Pa.)', 'Political Plays (A.M., P.71, T.S.)', 'Social Plays (O.L., M.M., P.R.)'.

slant, and with adjustments to reality made accordingly. So it is that the plays of Adamov each create their own universe. A world is presented which bears many physical resemblances to our own, but which always maintains a quality of unreality, of haziness, of other-worldliness. Each play conforms to its own rules, and is consistent within its own vision. If the spectator is made to feel ill at ease when the plays (as many of them do) begin with disembodied voices speaking through blackness, or with bursts of hyper-activity, it is because Adamov succeeds in projecting on to the stage the feverish thrashings of his mind, or the terror of unknowable forces.

Based in neurosis and obsession, rife with transcribed incidents from Adamov's everyday experiences, his dreams and his superstitions, his plays can be seen to move in the circles of the main preoccupations of L'Aveu and H.E., never losing sight of the incurable aspect of existence which haunts man everywhere.

In conclusion to this section concerning the circularity of neurosis, it is interesting also to recognise the circular movement of Adamov's professed stance in the theatre, a subject of much critical argument. He claimed unashamedly to have been greatly influenced in writing La Parodie by that most obsessional of all Strindberg's highly neurotic plays: Dream Play. For a period during the late 1950's to the mid-1960's, Adamov denied Strindberg as a current influence, claiming that he had grown out of that subjectively-involved theatre into a more socially- and politically-situated style, yet at the very end of his life, in typically paradoxical Adamovian fashion, he admitted:

'Quiconque sait l'influence que Strindberg a exercée jadis sur moi, verra que cette influence,

il l'a aujourd'hui, bien que d'une toute autre manière, reconquise'(1).

Fear

In his plays, as in his personal writings, fear is one of the commonest elements of Adamov's consciousness. It arises in conjunction with two principal forces: persecution and guilt.

i) Persecution

'L'homme menacé [...] est en réalité manoeuvré. Chacun de mes personnages est persécuté, mais sans pouvoir dire de quel côté vient la persécution. Elle vient de toutes parts et les hommes manoeuvrent le long de la peur'(2).

As Adamov remarks, the instruments of persecution are manifold. One of those which he uses frequently in his plays is the family, and in particular the mother figure. David Bradby has stated that:

'His inability to grow up, to break loose from the emotional domination of Father, Mother, Sister, is the clearest single influence on his theatre'(3).

Whether one agrees with the generality of this statement or not, the fact remains that many of Adamov's plays display this form of persecution. L'Invasion is the earliest example, where Pierre's mother stands firmly between Pierre and his wife Agnès, contriving to force the latter into the arms of Le Premier Venu, thus isolating her son, imposing her will upon him, her increasing domination of him symbolised by her armchair, which moves from the side to the centre of the stage during the play, until finally it stands guard in front of Pierre's door. His voluntary exile to his room and his

(1) Arthur Adamov, 'Notes préliminaires' to Si l'été revenait, Paris, Gallimard, 1970, p.11. (2) Arthur Adamov, 'Avant La Manoeuvre' (Interview with Pierre Berger), Nouvelles Littéraires, 2nd. Nov. 1950. (3) Bradby, op. cit., p.5.

death there at the end of the play is a return to the awful womb of the mother. Jean Rist suffers the same oppression at the hands of his mother in Tous contre tous. She insinuates her way between Jean and his wife Marie, and by the use of the same symbol which Pierre's mother gave to Agnès - the iron. She invents an illness for Jean as Adamov's own mother did for him, and she tries to direct his life by finding him jobs. Hers is a more blatantly despicable, but less sinister role than that of Pierre's mother, or than that of Edgar's mother and mother-surrogate in Les Retrouvailles. Both these women bring to Edgar news of the deaths of his fiancées, the mother ending the play by pushing Edgar into a baby carriage. Lars of Si l'été revenait is haunted by the spectre of his mother, whose mere passive presence in the play exerts pressure on her son. Whether it be the legacy of parental treatment in childhood, as the three sisters of En Fiacre claim, or the direct result of present machinations, as in the case of Johnnie Brown's brother and wife in La Politique des restes, the family is seen by Adamov as an instrument of persecution and oppression. The most striking example is the one already mentioned in Comme nous avons été, where almost every allusion in the play can be linked to a direct parallel in the Souvenirs of H.E. The mother forced her son to fetch his father from the casino, fed him potato purée for his weak digestion, exhibits a catalogue of characteristic actions which make the play the apotheosis of family oppression in Adamov's dramatic work. Adamov expresses his attitude to maternal influence particularly poignantly through the character of Edgar himself in Les Retrouvailles, a victim of severe oppression by his mother:

'La présence perpétuelle de la mère provoque chez l'enfant un... amollissement désastreux.

Rien de tel pour entraver son évolution,
pour l'empêcher de devenir un homme parmi
les hommes'(1).

Another of Adamov's eternal fears, that of the menace of the forces of evil, is omnipresent in particular in the early plays:

'Tout homme qui est un je ne supporte pas
de rester ce je. Ou il cherche un toi dans
l'amour ou il approuve le besoin de dire
nous, et il est toujours happé par ils'(2).

These Ils are the subject of La Grande et la petite manoeuvre, where they are embodied in anonymous voices which Le Mutilé, the only character to hear them, is compulsively bound to obey. When he returns from doing their bidding, he is mutilated successively, until he is a legless, armless cripple. H.E. recounts a dream which prompted this play - a dream where Adamov himself was forced to answer voices from nowhere (3). The disembodied voices of the radio in Tous contre tous, or the spectre of M. Havas in M. le Modéré, are manifestations of this same notion that beyond the control and comprehension of man are forces which can compel him to bend to their will, and which can exact whatever punishment and retribution they choose from him. As Artaud wrote in his Le Théâtre et son double:

'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'(4).

The disaster may be mediated through woman, as we shall see, or it may take the form of social persecution, which will be discussed in Chapter Five, but Roger Blin has been careful to

(1) Théâtre II, p.85. (2) Arthur Adamov, 'La Grande et la petite manoeuvre' (Interview with Maurice Rabin), Le Figaro, 14th. Nov. 1950. (3) H.E., p.95. (4) Artaud, op. cit., p.121.

make plain that persecution, whatever form it may take (and it appears in every one of Adamov's plays), springs from: 'l'état obsessionnel d'Adamov'(1).

Man is persecuted, finally, by time itself. Pierre is hindered by it in his task: 'Si seulement mon temps n'était pas compté'(2), and it militates against the Communards of Le Printemps 71, who are crushed beneath its wheels before they have a chance to organise themselves. For many characters, life in the present is impossible. They are caught on each side of the argument which arises in La Parodie between N. and L'Employé. On the one side is the belief that the meaning of life lies in hope for the future, whilst on the other lies a backward-looking vision, where everything lies rooted in and is determined by the past. Time and again the past projects itself on the present and clouds all issues. Mathilde of Le Sens de la marche is visited by the same leg complaint as afflicted her father; Paolo Paoli's wife Stella is sharply reminded of her German origins when war threatens, and finds that her dual nationality now ensures her no safe place in either country. Thea, in Adamov's last play, is tortured by the thought that she is responsible for the death of her mother, and this leads her to suicide. The shadow of 1848 and its unhappy consequences hangs over Le Printemps 71, as if the past were a constant threat to undermine the success of the present.

The weight of oppression and persecution is to be felt in all Adamov's plays, like a dark cloud emanating from L'Aveu.

(1) Roger Blin, 'Adamov était le roi des trois points' (Interview with Emmanuel Jacquart), French Review, vol. 48, May 1975, p.997.
 (2) Théâtre I, p.63.

ii) Guilt

The fear which possesses all characters who are victims of persecution manifests itself in two ways. The first is a physical reaction, such as the uncontrollable shaking of Le Mutilé when the voices begin to call him. The other is a guilt complex. Since they are victims, but unaware of the exact nature of their anguish, they begin to feel guilt. If one is punished, they reason, there is a reason for it, and this can only be a fault which one has committed in respect of the unknown forces. N. is quick to point out in La Parodie: 'Il n'y a pas de hasard. Il n'y a que les fautes qu'on commet'(1). This statement, whilst appearing paradoxical when one considers Adamov's profession that the dark forces alone govern man's destiny, in fact merely adds credence to the terror of the validity of that profession. The forces are at work, and man is their victim, failing to understand why he is punished, and able to attribute it only to his own fault, which he is also unable to comprehend. The guilt feelings which he experiences are thus irrational, but they demonstrate man's feeble attempt at rationalisation from his inferior position. By admitting their fault, the characters are expressing a need for expiation. Their confession of guilt is intended to appease the forces, much as were Adamov's personal superstitions, and with as little effect, for as Viktor points out to Thea in Si l'été revenait: 'Le remords, ça ne pardonne pas'(2). Thea, Le Mutilé, N., L'Employé, Karl, even Tchitchikov, are but a few of Adamov's characters who find themselves guilty. Their guilt both derives from and perpetuates their fear of punishment. They appear not only in Adamov's early plays, but

(1) Théâtre I, p.21. (2) S.E.R., p.41.

throughout the length and breadth of his work.

The results of fear, guilt and persecution upon Adamov's characters are predictably in line with those in his own experience. An inability to grow up and to accept the challenge of manhood plagues Edgar and A., who end up under the physical domination of their mothers in child-state. Paralysis of the will and of the body, fatigue, capitulation, emasculation, psychic and physical impotence, ultimately death, are further ways in which characters are affected. The human body is degraded by existence. Adamov specifies that the characters of Le Ping Pong should age visibly at uneven pace, according to the intensity of their involvement in the degrading process of 'progress'. M. le Modéré's physical degeneration from a sprightly, mountaineering head of state to a broken-down alcoholic whose incapacity is inversely symbolised by the ever-increasing sophistication of his wheelchairs, is painfully close to Adamov's own condition at the end of his life. Jean Rist is reduced to abject capitulation:

'On est comme on est, on n'y peut rien. Et
les choses aussi, elles sont comme elles sont.
Inutile de geindre et de faire des grimaces'(1).

Edgar finds everything too much of an effort, and even Le Ridicule of Adamov's political allegory La Complainte du ridicule is about to give up the struggle to debunk political figures, as he is too exhausted, and the enormity of the task seems beyond him. Towards the end of his reign in Sainte Europe, Karl tires, and N. cannot even rise to his feet by the latter stages of La Parodie. None can muster the strength to assert himself.

(1) Théâtre I, p.150.

There is a danger in this attitude, and one of which Adamov was to accuse himself. The conviction that all men are oppressed can lead to 'les renoncements faciles'(1), even 'la lâcheté'(2), a criticism which he levelled on numerous occasions at La Parodie, La Grande et la petite manoeuvre and his other early plays. It was too easy simply to accept mortality, man could nevertheless stand and fight. Yet years later Adamov was continuing to write plays in which characters refused to accept the responsibility for what happened to them, and were buckling beneath the weight of forces beyond their own strength. Just as the sister of Le Mutilé had blamed her brother for her predicament, since he had failed to prevent her from marrying Le Militant, whose political activities had led the family to be hunted, and to the death of her child, so M. le Modéré attributes his downfall to a spontaneous military coup: 'Que peut-on faire quand sonne le cor des militaires?'(3).

Whether they consider themselves to be 'victimes de la foule'(4) or 'un navire entraîné sur les vagues au gré des vents'(5), Adamov's characters are constant in their fear. In Sainte Europe, Honoré de Rubens reveals the consistency of the theme in the whole of Adamov's work: 'Oui, fâcheux de constater combien la vie humaine est partout menacée'(6). Persecuted and guilty, hounded, whether by internal or external forces, psychically besieged, Adamov's characters are thus prey to angoisse in the same way as was their creator. Angoisse describes their state, their position in relation to the universe in which they are set. Adamovian characters do not 'behave' nor 'act', nor even 'react'; they exist solely as

(1) Arthur Adamov, Ici et Maintenant, Paris, Gallimard, 1964, p.142.
 (2) *ibid.* (3) Théâtre IV, p.83. (4) Arthur Adamov, En Fiacre (radio play published in L'Avant-Scène du Théâtre, no. 294, 1963), p.42.
 (5) Arthur Adamov, Les Ames mortes, Paris, Gallimard, 1960, p.216.
 (6) Théâtre III, p.228.

manifestations of their status as angoissés. So it is that they do not have developing personalities as such, but attributed psychic features. These features tend to be obsessional, as they represent the physical manifestations of angoisse.

The symptoms of neurotic fear are variously represented in the plays. Characters' angoisse may take the form of an obsessive fascination, the single-minded pursuit of an unchanging goal. Such would be Pierre's fixation with transcribing the work of Jean, or Arthur's obsession with the creation of a perfect pinball machine. In this respect, the plays themselves may all be considered to be obsessional, as they do not move of their own accord, but follow a preordained pattern. The same kind of pattern is described by man in the plays as he follows his innate fascination with death, his unavoidable tendency, so much a feature of Adamov's life, to self-destruct. His polyvalent attitude to death is revealed in the multiplicity of angles from which it is seen in the plays.

Death and Dualism

Death, whether considered as menace, object of fear, sole, absolute truth, result of suicide or degradation of man, is a permanent feature of Adamovian theatre.

'Anonyme, objective, produite indépendamment de toute volonté, c'est un phénomène social. L'individu se rapporte à elle comme à l'objet fascinant où tout depuis toujours est signifié. L'homme adamovien se propose comme l'homme en proie au fétiche'(1).

Adamov's dual reaction to this fetish results in the double standard of action and passion. The former proceeds by active means to assert itself in the face of death, the latter simply accepts passively the phenomenon of death, and allows itself to be acted upon by death. Adamov's early plays were constructed around this

(1) Maurice Regnaut, op. cit., p.82.

duality principle, and there remains throughout his work a tendency towards manicheanism. One thinks immediately of Sainte Europe, where Adamov specifies that Moeller Van der See and Francesca are the only two favourably-conceived characters, or of Off Limits, in which the character Humphrey is the epitome of evil in society.

Gerald Prince (1) has studied the recurrence of dualism in Le Ping Pong, in the shape of pairs of characters, and mention has been made of the hope and pessimism dualism which resolves interestingly into an ethic where characters look back over their lives and say: 'if only...', in much the same way that Adamov himself began to do when he realised the effect on his health and mental capacity of his excesses of drink, and of the way in which he had conducted his life. When all hope is gone there remains the comfort, which Adamov appears to have needed, of envisaging the possibility of a brighter outcome. Thus it is that Tchitchikov, if only he had left town immediately his business was finished, would have escaped arrest, that Henri, if only he had forced himself to leave with his friends, would have freed himself from the recurring persecution of his father, or that the Communards, if only they had taken the Banque, might still have won the day. Paradoxical as these instances may appear, when taken within the gloomy aura of oppression which pervades Adamov's work as a whole, they reveal yet another facet of his neurosis in his work. H.E., for example on p.175, expresses a need for a belief in hope, an inability in the last instance to yield to pessimism, to the fear provoked by death, the great leveller, the ultimate incurable.

None may escape the vice of death. The passivity of N., the mute acceptance of pain and suffering on the part of Le Mutilé,

(1) In his article 'Le Couple dans Le Ping Pong', Romance Notes, vol. 12, no.1, 1970.

and M. le Modéré's thanksgiving to God that He should have paralysed him only in one side, are destined to the same reduction to emptiness as L'Employé's feverish bustling: '[...] je ne vis qu'en marchant'(1), or as the political involvement of Le Militant, whose degeneration takes place before the eyes of the spectator during his political address in the ninth Tableau of La Grande et la petite manoeuvre, when his ideals are revealed to him through his own speech as merely oppression under another name, and when the death of his son, whom he has sacrificed to the Cause, looms larger in his consciousness. Similarly in Le Ping Pong, Arthur, the bohemian, the artist, captivated by the pinball machine and involved with its capitalist entourage, is governed by the same destiny to which his friend Victor, the doctor, the decent chap who opts out of the dirty world of the Consortium, succumbs in the final scene at the ping-pong table. Arthur's words in his youth:

'[...] j'aime encore mieux corriger des copies que de perdre ma jeunesse pour, à soixante-dix-sept ans, faire, tous les dimanches après-midi, une partie de billard avec un collègue du même âge'(2),

strike a pathetic note as the Leveller strikes down his friend in just such a situation, one which neither, despite his life's convictions, has taken any step towards changing, which was always to be their lot.

For some Adamovian characters death constitutes a sublimation, which is more easily interpretable as Adamov's own mithridatisation de la mort, through masochism. The character of N. in La Parodie, who desires so passionately to die at the hands of Lili:

(1) Théâtre I, p.13. (2) Théâtre II, p.111.

'Je désire mourir lentement sous votre regard comme une bête anéantie à petit feu'(1),

to feel the moment of slipping away and to savour it, lives only for that moment when he may experience death through her. In that moment he expects to glimpse the element which otherwise eludes man. But the fact is that in N.'s case, death comes as a final word in degradation, under the wheels of a taxi, and his body is swept away by street cleaners. This incident is close to Adamov's personal experience, and the fact highlights his interest in the degradation of death. In H.E. (p.38), he recounts his suicide threat to throw himself beneath the wheels of a taxi in front of Irène and her mother, because of her engagement to a German.

For Karl, death brings the end of an historical era. His 'Il est temps'(2) is a submission to the inevitable, to the fact that the great cog of history must with his passing click into the next slot of the wheel.

For Pierre of L'Invasion, death is both the only truth and the void. As his sight deteriorates and he is unable to decipher the fading letters of his manuscript, he comes to the realisation that:

'[...] rien ne me sera donné tant que je n'aurai pas trouvé le moyen de mener une vie tout à fait ordinaire'(3).

For him this is impossible, as his wife has been forced into the arms of a stranger, his friends have deserted him, and the influence of his mother is increasing. The only normal aspect of his life left to him is death, where the manuscript becomes meaningless and is torn to shreds. The same is true of Jean Rist, whose life has

(1) Théâtre I, p.18. (2) Théâtre III, p.257. (3) Théâtre I, p.92.

been built on sham and inauthenticity, and for whom the only significant way to prove that he has been alive is to die. For perhaps suicide is the single meaningful choice man is ever freely allowed to take. In Le Sens de la Marche, Henri's murder of the father-surrogate Berne is not at all the same manner of effective act as Jean Rist's suicide, for, as Adamov has himself pointed out on several occasions in Ici et Maintenant, in cases of neurosis, we attack the last manifestation of our obsession, as being the closest to us, but this does not kill the root of the problem, which will contrive to recur in new manifestations. Only by taking one's own life can one escape the fatality of the human condition. Neurosis and angoisse can only exist in living individuals, and therefore, if he can face le saut, a prospect far more daunting to a névrosé with his heightened awareness, a consenting individual can effectively put himself beyond the reach of the forces of darkness, or can at least take the risk of so doing and not meeting them on the other side of death.

Unsound and paradoxical as this appreciation of suicide may be from an ideological point of view, it is consistent with Adamov's vision, and in particular with the ethic of his work. It is because of the potential escape from the dark forces offered by suicide that the death of Humphrey in Off Limits is necessary to Adamov's thinking. Critics have persistently seen the death of Jim and Sally, two young drug addicts who choose to flee to South America to escape the sick society in which they exist, as being invalidated by Humphrey's exploitation of it for commercial television. On the contrary, Humphrey's own death does not only enhance the dualism construct, but it underlines the fact that Sally's death in particular (she had legal documents to enable her to cross the border, but

pretended that she did not, and was shot with Jim whilst making a break) was a chosen act, so that whilst all are razed by death, Sally and Jim do, in a sense, triumph over Humphrey, who is seized by a heart attack resulting from his decadent way of life.

Maurice Regnaut's view of Adamov's characters as being prey to the death fetish is borne out, finally, by a long list of characters who connive at their own destruction. They appear wilfully to opt for the most difficult path. Paolo Paoli refuses to change with the times, and in the name of art risks financial destruction, which will mean the collapse of his world. L'Abbé Saulnier admonishes Paolo for this:

'Mes chaussures se délaçant indépendamment de ma volonté, mais vous, Paolo, vous souffrez aujourd'hui parce que vous l'avez voulu'(1).

Pierre refuses Tradel's paraphrases, preferring to strain every nerve in an effort to reach the true transcription, and destroys his own humanity, and ultimately the system of beliefs on which his world had been built. As Tradel tells him:

'Vous savez ce que vous risquez. Je vous ai prévenu [...] Eh bien, qu'ils les prennent. Qu'on vous prenne tout. Vous l'aurez voulu!'(2).

The Communards pursue lines of action which are calculated to accelerate their downfall. Choice is meaningless for man in an historical context, as it too is subject to the will of natural forces beyond man.

In the last years of his life, Adamov's mental state had so degenerated that he was to write of M. le Modéré: 'Cerné par le malheur, il fallait que j'éclate de rire ou me suicide'(3). It was not long before there remained no laughter, and his plays could be

(1) Théâtre III, p.110. (2) Théâtre I, p.88. (3) Théâtre IV (Note préliminaire), p.11.

seen to prefigure his own end.

Physical Objects and Psychosis

'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'(1).

In his life, Adamov's neurosis projected itself into objects of superstition: the mirror, the figure 8, the black cat, and in particular the flame. It is therefore not surprising that his plays are littered with heteroclitic objects whose presence is not arbitrary, but which are a concretisation of the neurosis of the protagonist. This procedure of exteriorisation is a favourite ploy of Adamov's; his dramatic work itself is one such exercise of his personal obsessions.

There are certain series of objects which recur frequently throughout the plays. The most common is literary material: papers, notebooks and the typewriter, which gives rise to an obsession with ordre and désordre, which is to be found constantly from La Parodie to Si l'été revenait. Le Désordre represents chaos, the unnatural state of man in the world, cluttered by trivia and unable to glimpse essential truth. Désordre is Adamov's mortal enemy in his autobiographical writings. In his plays his characters find it obsessional. Robert Oudet's desk in Le Printemps 71 is littered with papers, the disorder of which prevents him from seeing the clear way to victory, and represents the death of the Commune. Edgar of Les Retrouvailles is unable to work due to the disorder of the papers

(1) L'Aveu, p.89.

which surround him:

'On ne peut pas travailler éternellement dans le désordre, l'incurie. Cela finit par influencer sur la qualité du travail'(1).

The same problem is experienced by Pierre in L'Invasion, although he is unaware of it as such. A victory for him - the discovery and correction of an error in his transcription - constitutes a fearful defeat by the forces of disorder, as the possibility of further, undiscovered errors increases indefinitely. Pierre is literally invaded by the mounting disorder of the work which is his obsession until the meaning is lost to him for ever, the disorder of sheaves of papers explodes into the void of meaninglessness, and Pierre rips the sheets to shreds until he is half buried beneath the débris. In La Parodie, the equivalence of the destinies of N. and L'Employé is prefigured at the end of Part One, as N., ignored by everyone in the office of Lili's boss, a newspaper editor, is buried beneath piles of papers which the Directeur is signing furiously, and as L'Employé, endeavouring to impress a prospective employer (played by the same actor as Le Directeur) in an identical office, is drowned out by the rising wave of hammering typewriter keys.

That désordre is dangerous, is reiterated in Tous contre tous: 'Une fois le pays en proie au désordre, qui pourra encore sauvegarder ses valeurs?'(2), and in Le Sens de la marche: 'Ce désordre, c'est ce désordre qui me tue'(3), and as Arthur makes to take advantage of Sutter's free shots in Le Ping Pong, thus colluding at the dealings of the Consortium, the machine is thrown into disorder, symbolising not only the death of the game, of the mechanical object,

(1) Théâtre II, p.76. (2) Théâtre I, p.163. (3) Théâtre II, p.25.

but the fate which inevitably awaits Arthur.

Woman is often the bearer of désordre, as, logically, it is often she who fills the role of secretary. Erna of La Grande et la petite manoeuvre distributes paper to the typing class, and it is she who will wreak havoc in the life of Le Mutilé. Pierre's wife Agnès, whose aid to her husband is rejected, departs to become the secretary of a stranger, but the typewriter, for which she returns, is again endowed with significances far beyond itself. It is not the machine she desires, so much as to return to her husband, a wish denied her by La Mère, for whom Agnès is the root of all their problems:

'Mais le désordre, c'est elle, et elle seule, qui en est responsable. C'est elle qui l'a introduit dans notre vie'(1).

In the name of restoring order, Agnès is banished, and Adamov is in the throes of paradox yet again. For the order established by La Mère, and which Pierre notes, is sterile and castrating, as is the order established, or at least desired, by Henri's father, and by those Versaillais sympathisers who are to be seen processing through Le Printemps 71 shouting: 'Vive l'ordre'(2).

That Adamov should attach significance to literary objects is not surprising. The importance for him of his own journals as proof of his existence adds a new dimension to Taranne's sense of loss and bewilderment at the blank pages of notebook which betray his imposture, and also to Alma's burning of her diary in Si l'été revenait, that no-one should possess her, nor know her inner secrets. She too must remain a question mark.

If literary objects are used to signify metaphysical neuroses

(1) Théâtre I, p.94. (2) Théâtre IV, p.119.

of the kind prevalent in L'Aveu, Adamov uses the bicycle in several plays to embody a particular, personal neurosis: that of the inability to assert masculinity. Edgar and Lars both suffer the ignominy of falling from ladies' bicycles, whilst M. le Modéré's perverted daughter races merrily round before her father's eyes on a man's bicycle. Similarly, the vehicles such as M.'s wheelchair and Le Mutilé's carriage are visible evidence of their capitulation; dependence upon them precipitates further degeneration.

Mother-domination, symbolised by the perambulator into which Edgar is thrust, is represented by the swing in Si l'été revenait, as David Bradby has remarked in his thesis. Lars is pushed higher and higher between women, by one of those who have succeeded in suffocating him in the now familiar parental fashion.

The sewing machine mentioned in several plays represents the objectivised masochism of those persecuted characters who are stabbed by the maternal, dominating aspect of Woman, in the same way that the typewriter has been seen to represent the desire in man to be hit by Woman as the key strikes the page. If Alma procures Brit as typist for Lars, it is because she has accepted the masochistic needs in man.

It is clear, then, that the types of object which appear in Adamov's plays are closely related to his own neuroses, and in the same way that he was able to draw energy from his fetishes, so his characters centre their obsession on certain objects, or on particular idols which they have objectivised, and in which lie all their hopes. These objects and idols determine their behaviour. The prime example of this is the pinball machine of Le Ping Pong, which becomes an insidious obsession for all those who bow to its lure, providing the motivation for Arthur's and Annette's poetic inspiration, for

Le Vieux's dreams of immortality and Mme. Duranty's and Sutter's dreams of wealth and social acceptance. In La Parodie, L'Employé's raison d'être is the city in the sun for which he searches relentlessly, whilst N.'s obsession is fixed on Lili. Off Limits is the culmination of all Adamov's fixations. Whatever it is possible for a human being to fear, to want or to need, is contained within that object of compulsion of which Adamov had first-hand knowledge: drugs. For the characters of Off Limits, the obsession with their 'dose' destroys all human values, all beliefs. The search for a 'fix' is single-minded and blind. Because it is a real fact of life, it is not easily recognisable as a manifestation of Adamov's consistent theme of the projection of the inner self to external objects. Yet as life itself only exists in the grains of heroin, so life for Edgar disappears with the loss of his train ticket, and cannot be restored by the symbol of castration and domination which is the new ticket purchased for him by La Plus Heureuse des Femmes.

In fact, all the objects mentioned are destined never to fulfil the hopes of those whose fascination they constitute. Like the moth, man will burn in the flame which fascinates him, and Adamov's characters will be destroyed by their neuroses.

In each of Adamov's plays there is at least one character for whom some thing constitutes an element of neurosis of the types discussed. It is but a small step thence to man in the grip of psychotic obsession, which Adamov used for La Politique des nestes in the shape of Johnnie Brown, possessed by his terror of rubbish of every conceivable description. Declared by Dr. Perkins to be: '[...] aussi normal que nous tous dans la situation anormale qu'est la nôtre'(1),

(1) Théâtre III, p.155.

given that the abnormal universe of the play resembles any racist country in our world, Johnnie is a terrifying indictment of the state of modern man. Pierrot has linked Johnnie's particular problem to a fundamental reality in the life of his creator:

' [...] fascination où se mêlent l'horreur et le désir, et qu'il faut relier à l'attitude masochiste d'Adamov lui-même; l'angoisse des 'restes' nous révèle en réalité le désir, mêlé d'horreur, de voir son propre corps réduit à l'état de rebut, d'objet, de détritius'(1).

Although this play was based on medical fact, Adamov was quick to detect similar neurotic possibilities in the characters of his own invention, and to underline the importance for his dramatic work of this element, and the ways in which it can make itself visible to the spectator:

'Anatole de Courmont happens to be on the brink of a psychosis, and it is because he is afraid [...]
One of the characters I prefer is Pierre Fournier, and it is clear from his behaviour that he is repressing something'(2).

M. le Modéré's obsessive compulsion to display moderation is his neurotic reaction to his taste for sexual perversion, his inability to direct situations and to make decisions, and his lust for power, all of which he has tried in vain to inhibit. Hulot-Vasseur's collection of butterflies is the pathetic expression of his consciousness of his own lack of humanity in his principal obsession of making money.

Things are placed in Adamov's plays because, wittingly or unwittingly, they incarnate anguish and neurosis of which characters may not even be aware themselves.

(1) Jean Pierrot, op. cit., p.271. (2) Arthur Adamov, Interview with Peter Gelbard, Drama Survey, vol. 3, no.2, 1963, p.253.

Woman

In the whole Gallimard collection of Adamov's plays there is not a single work whose principal protagonist is a woman. Women are amply represented, and in a diversity of roles as uncanny as that apparent in Adamov's personal life, but they are viewed through the eyes of the main character, who is always male, and to whom their relationship is the sole purpose for their presence. It is therefore not surprising that considerable inconsistencies occur within characters, that Adamov's women are at least ambiguous.

Joseph McCann has, in his thesis, isolated Woman as a promise unfulfilled, a notion which is closely linked to obsession and projection of hope, as discussed in an earlier section of the present chapter. For many Adamovian characters, Woman is eternal, a talisman, a source of strength and inspiration. She literally constitutes man's other half, and he is unable to be Man without her. The idea of Woman as a talisman is more important than the being of a particular woman. *Le Mutilé* is acutely aware of this:

'S'il y avait eu une femme à laquelle j'aurais pu penser, ce ne serait peut-être pas arrivé...'(1).

Agnès points out to Pierre that:

'Tu sais bien, il suffit que tu restes près de moi pour que je trouve des tas de choses. A nous deux, on aurait fini par se débrouiller'(2).

Henri admits to Lucile:

'Tu sais bien que, sans toi, je ne suis rien...'(3).

In all these cases, as in that of Edgar, and those of N., *L'Employé*, Sutter, Arthur and Victor, of *Le Vieux*, as well as of the young

(1) Théâtre I, p.112. (2) *ibid.*, p.61. (3) Théâtre II, p.44.

Communard Riri, Woman fails in her ascribed role as saviour. She may be used as a talisman, an object upon which to fasten neurosis, but she is devoid of mystical powers to satisfy hopes which are, after all, metaphysical.

On the contrary, she is often the executioner as well as the protectress. Erna, who appears to be the answer to Le Mutilé's disintegration, and who tends him gently, develops into a terrestrial arm of the forces of darkness which terrorise him, kicking away his crutches, and finally shoving him to his death in the street. Taranne thinks momentarily that his identity and his innocence are assured, when a woman in the police station where he is being systematically stripped of his self, recognises him, but he is quickly disillusioned as she thinks, after all, that he is Ménard, the professor whom Taranne is accused of plagiarising. For Adamov, such a treacherous role must be allotted to a woman.

M. le Modéré's wife, Clo, and Le Mutilé's sister fulfil a role which Adamov claimed (on p.192 of H.E.) to despise: that of sick-nurse, and yet both are sexually involved in a perverted way with the protagonists. Clo is made to dress in clothes of the Directory period as a preliminary to sex, and La Soeur has blatantly incestuous leanings towards her brother. The point has been made in Chapter One that for Adamov, the relationship between sex and death was very close, so that where characters are personally involved with women, the potential for destruction is always present. In the case of those plays which are taken from clinical reality, however, this does not obtain, and the question of sexual relationships does not arise on this metaphysical level. Thus, the fact that in Le Temps vivant Katherine saves her lover from death is purely a function of her mastery of her neurosis, and is meaningful in that context alone.

For much of the time in Adamov's plays, Woman is treated as no more than a prostitute. Erna's rebuke of Le Mutilé for his apparent jealousy speaks for womanhood in its entirety: 'Voyons, il faut que je sois gentille avec tout le monde. C'est mon travail'(1). Lili too accepts the universality of her role: 'Je ne cherche rien. On me cherche, c'est très différent'(2). Her situation is exactly that of the Pauvre Prostituée, condemned to running in the streets with policemen chasing her, and customers waiting for her. Mado, M. le Modéré's daughter, and Teresa of Sainte Europe behave like the most outrageously licentious whores with father and Christ respectively, and even Sofia, having incensed her Communard colleagues with her political fire, and encouraged them to destroy themselves, is left free after the carnage to fly elsewhere in Europe to sell her wares.

In his preface to Théâtre II, Adamov states that in La Parodie he took revenge through the character of Lili. Revenge for what, he does not specify, but Lili is made to suffer in the play. First of all, physically. She begins to tire, never to be able to satisfy herself, as she must constantly be at the beck and call of men. Her arrogance is paradoxically replaced by ~~disconsolate~~ ^{disconsolate} when she is no longer in demand, and when no-one needs her, and she is threatened with oblivion. Her capacity for genuine love is demonstrated at the end of the play by her encounter with Le Journaliste. Inconsistent as this may be with her previous image, it allows Adamov to avenge Mankind for the treachery of Woman, who, like Agnès and Marie, is wont to leave her husband, and who, in general terms, poses an

(1) Théâtre I, p.128. (2) *ibid.*, p.13.

unavoidable threat to all men. For Le Journaliste reckons himself to be: '[...] peut-être le seul à pouvoir me passer d'elle'(1).

He rejects Lili, depriving her of both her potential satisfaction and of the feeling of being desired. His love is real, which means that he does not need a physical proof of it. It is sufficient unto itself. It is absence.

Finally, Woman is seen as an object of currency, for bartering purposes. This is the position of Paolo Paoli's wife Stella, given to Hulot-Vasseur for financial gain. Brit is offered by Alma to Lars, and Zenno tries to use Jean Rist's wife Marie as a means to secure his own safety. In none of these cases is the role of Woman as such given metaphysical importance, and it is interesting to note the levels of degeneration in human relationships to which Adamov's plays can sink.

Of idealised relationships between the sexes there is no actual trace. Jean Rist's with Noémi has been seen as the sole example of a redemptive woman figure in Adamov's plays, but far more realistic is the interpretation of Jean's suicide as an attempt to break the tragic circle, to commit an existentialist act in the Sartrean sense. Brit and Lars are the only other couple who appear to achieve peace together on this earth, but critics have failed to remember that the ending of Si l'été revenait, like the rest of the play, is a dream sequence, a mere projection of the internal state of Alma, and, as such, can be no more than illusory wish-fulfillment. In Si l'été revenait, characters do not come face to face with their fate; they are allowed to live inside their own neurosis, protected from an outside world by unreality, but forced to suffer the agony

(1) Théâtre I, p.52.

of self-examination.

Woman as fetish, as torturer, saviour, instrument of doom or hope, is as permanent a source of fascination for Adamovian characters in the theatre as for the author himself.

Self

If Adamov's characters are restricted to a view of Woman largely blinkered by their own neurosis, this is a reflection of the intensely introspective nature of their entire vision. They are preoccupied with themselves; their internal battle finds its way into every situation. Because Jean Rist's wife has been killed by border guards whilst helping Zenno (who had lured her away) to escape, Jean orders the shooting of a young girl who resembles Marie, for aiding the escape of her lover: 'Pas comme ça! Pas comme ça! A coups de fusil! Comme eux!'⁽¹⁾.

The body itself, its degeneration and decay, are to be found frequently in the plays as a physical manifestation of the decay that is living at the hands of the incurable. Afflicted by gout, both Marthe and her father in Le Sens de la marche are made painfully aware of their physical selves. Le Militant's child is the innocent victim of an unspecified disease which his mother suffers as if it were her own. La Plus Heureuse des Femmes begins to suffer back trouble, and to measure the days in terms of her increasing debility. N. grows progressively more abject and more lethargic as La Parodie unfolds, and his spasm of activity in the sixth Tableau is his death-jerk. Madame Duranty's health deteriorates appreciably during Le Ping Pong, and M. Roger breaks a foot whilst searching through

(1) Théâtre I, p.186.

old files to revive plans for pinball development. All of these ailments had been witnessed by Adamov at first hand, or had been experienced by people close to him. His obsession with his own body, with the self, is constant in his plays, and never more so than in M. le Modéré, where Inge Pruks detects that:

'[...]many of the characters, while being objects of ridicule, are also reminiscent of Adamov himself, as though his life had suddenly splintered into unrecognisable fragments'(1).

There can be little doubt that the Ubuesque figure of M., paralysed at the end of the play in one half of his body, appallingly alcoholic and dependent upon the goodwill of his wife and daughter for what little mobility he has, acutely conscious of, and in moments of despair agonised at the prospect of his body slipping beyond him into decay, is a caricature of Adamov himself, who, by his own admission, had to force a laugh in order to survive. The sexual aberrations of his younger days are embodied in Mado, gleefully pedalling her bicycle, his flirtations with homosexuality present in Freddy and the Prince of Wales, and his eternal terror of the voices of darkness conjured by M. Havas' shadow and the tonitruant rumblings of Le Seigneur.

The self which his characters are at such pains to gratify or to assert, is none other than that of their author, in particular in the case of Jean Rist, whose bad faith at masquerading as a refugee, and adopting the limp which characterises them, in order to save his skin, is that of Adamov as he pretended Jewish identity in order to escape deportation to Germany during the German Occupation. Jean's attempt to regain his authentic self is an important pointer

(1) Inge Pruks, op. cit., p.345.

for Adamov, and it raises the question which is at the root of all these obsessive fascinations: that of trying to prove existence, of leaving an indelible mark on the world to show that one is, or at least, that one has been.

Assertion of Being, and Révolte

The need felt by Adamovian characters to assert themselves, and the frustration of this by the inevitable and progressive debilitation and degradation which they suffer, has been stressed throughout this chapter. Some, like *Le Mutilé*, N., Karl, Annette or Victor, are snuffed out in the natural course of events, over which they neither have any jurisdiction, nor attempt to exercise any control. Some are aware of the problem of existence, and are conscious of their own inordinate difficulty in facing it. These are probably the closest to Adamov's actual position. In 1962, denouncing yet again the 'Absurd' label attached to his plays, he made this point abundantly clear:

'[...] quand Antonin Artaud, au milieu d'un poème, fait dire brusquement à une vieille femme: "Comme c'est difficile, difficile!", voulant par ces mots exprimer tout simplement, tout bêtement la difficulté réelle de la vie, je trouve que cela est beaucoup plus vrai, beaucoup plus tragique que quand on parle de l'absurdité de la vie'(1).

One such character is Henri of Le Sens de la marche, who finds it impossible to follow his friends in their revolutionary struggle, who tries in vain to tear himself from the mesmeric influence of his father, and who is incapable of conducting a lesson before a class of heckling boys. Each time he attempts to assert himself, he fails. Similarly, Edgar discovers in Les Retrouvailles that his

(1) Ici et Maintenant, pp.131-2.

apparent liberation from domination, achieved, he believes, in his new life with Louise and *La Plus Heureuse des Femmes*, is simply rendering activity more difficult than ever. He cannot deliver his books adequately for his employer, nor make the required effort to complete his studies. Writing a letter to his fiancée is too problematic, as the right words elude him, and he needs to find the exact phrases with which to break the news of his new love. This particular problem, experienced by Pierre in *L'Invasion*, for whom every discovery constitutes a still greater pile of difficulties, was one with which Adamov was very familiar:

'J'écris une pièce, *L'Invasion*, dont je ne sors pas. Les phrases les plus simples m'arrêtent. Je passe des journées entières à les reprendre.

Ce que j'ai pu me fatiguer, et la fatiguer, par mes retouches successives.

Les variantes de la pauvre simple réplique d'Agnès: "Mais tu n'as qu'à tirer les rideaux..."(1).

The act of creative writing is one of assertion of being, and when so much is at stake, and the possibilities infinite, with no certainty of finding the 'right' one, it is easy to appreciate that the simplest matter appears insurmountably difficult. Nevertheless, the fact cannot be ignored that Jean wrote his mysterious work, and Adamov his plays. Paradoxically, the statement is facilitated, indeed prompted, whether for exemplary or cathartic purposes, by the difficulty itself:

'Bien sûr, il parlait de détruire ses papiers, souvent même. Mais c'était aux moments terribles, quand tout lui apparaissait d'avance inutile. S'il n'avait pas connu ces moments-là, je me demande s'il aurait jamais écrit'(2).

(1) *H.E.*, p.88. (2) *Théâtre I*, p.65.

Life is perhaps most difficult of all for A. of Comme nous avons été, as he is more aware than any of his predicament:

'Pour les autres, tout est simple, aucune question ne se pose. Ils sont de plain-pied avec les choses. Ils prennent des papiers, ouvrent des portes, déposent les papiers, ouvrent d'autres portes, et ça ne les empêche pas d'avoir toujours une main libre pour la tendre à celui-ci, à celui-là. Moi, je ne peux pas'(1).

And he points the way to a third type of Adamovian individual:

'Mais c'est un état de choses qui ne peut pas s'éterniser. Il faut réagir'(2).

The fact that the stand to be made is against an incurable need not prohibit the gesture; Adamov's conscience at his own facile capitulation at a time when he felt perhaps stronger to face the difficulty, caused him to profess a somewhat Camusian belief that:

'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'(3).

Perhaps this was Jean's conclusion in preserving his manuscripts. It is certainly the case, however unconsciously, with L'Employé, who only feels alive when walking frenetically, an embryonic glimmer of révolte, and a clear sign that this factor is far from absent in the so-called metaphysical plays.

In Les Apolitiques (4), Camille Falaise, actor and despiser of political dogma and cliché, in his final scream of disgust against Fascism, is involved less in a purely political experience than in an act of personal revolt. The act of brutal inhumanity which provokes his outburst, the beating-up of a suspected Communist sympathiser by two Nazi thugs, is a manifestation of the cruelty

(1) C.N.A.E., p.435. (2) ibid. (3) Ici et Maintenant, p.143.
 (4) See bibliographical note.

inherent in man's state, and Camille is compelled to express his abhorrence of it, in whatever form. In the same way, the characters of Le Printemps 71 exist because of their adherence to the Commune. The revolt is at least in part a personal one, as is underlined by their failure to produce an adequate new code for government, and their destined defeat. Le Temps vivant provides one of the most convincing révoltes in Adamov's theatre. Katherine must overcome her psychosis, her terror at the passing seconds, the interminable clicking of the clock hands, and accept a consciousness of the real world in which she is doomed to decay and die with the passage of time, in order to save her lover from capture by the Germans. She must hold the invaders in conversation, convince them of her insanity, but remain sane enough to ensure that they are occupied in questioning her for a sufficient length of time for her lover to make his escape. The time neurosis must inevitably haunt her again, and wreak its vengeance upon her, as it must on all men, but that hour of révolte has earned her grace from its psychotic stranglehold.

Still other characters create for themselves an image to which they can conform. By inventing this entity, they can build an existence which is real in their own minds. This is the phenomenon of mythomania, a psychically dangerous one, as it erases the demarcation line between reality and unreality, and is ultimately self-destructive. When forced to face the worldly reality to which others conform, the personality of the mythomaniac may begin to crumble, as its being is questioned. So it is that the two elder sisters of En Fiacre cast their younger sister from their carriage to her death rather than face a threat to their self image as decent ladies of good family, temporarily importuned by the loss of their home through the philanderings of their degenerate sister, and in

full control of a life which, to them, is perfectly acceptable and normal. The youngest sister, by her dealings with men, in particular cab drivers, and who is reputed to have stolen the eldest sister's fiancé, threatens to bring the outside world into their lives, and must be got rid of. The pathetic collapse of their entire psyche under medical inquiry can produce only the affirmation that: 'Nous avons cru bien faire'(1).

In the more tragic case of Taranne, who does not have the failsafe device of medical psychosis as excuse or justification for his actions, the professor is brought face to face with his self image in the light of public accusation. He is first accused of exposing himself on a public beach to a crowd of young boys, and then of leaving litter in a bathing hut. During the course of his interrogation his identity is called into question at every turn. Unable to prove his identity, he is mistaken for another famous professor named Ménard. His own name is unknown to anyone, and by leaving the room whilst he is still speaking, the police underline the fact that he does not appear to exist at all. Indeed, he is even ready to sign a confession admitting to indecent exposure rather than be forced to continue facing his own non-existence. But the police leave without the signature. The second charge consolidates the damage of the first by presenting Taranne with a notebook which he claims to recognise as his property, but in which the writing on the front and back pages is not his, and which is completely blank in the middle. The work which might have established his authenticity is non-existent, and Taranne begins to appear very much like the notebook: a superficial smattering of sham, cribbed

(1) En Fiacre, p.42.

from someone else, and an absolute void at the centre. This void is represented to Taranne, who must finally accept it, in the shape of a seating plan for a dinner aboard some huge ship where he has been invited to sit on the top table. The plan is nothing more than a blank sheet of grey paper. His plagiarism of Ménéard has been recognised and denounced by colleagues in a Belgian university, where his invitation to lecture has been withdrawn, and despite a weakening indignation:

'Nous avons eu les mêmes idées au même moment. Ce sont des choses qui arrivent. Ce n'est pas la première fois...' (1),

Taranne ends the play undressing with his back to the audience, denuding himself before himself, accepting the transparency of his mythologised existence. Jean Duvignaud describes his predicament thus:

'Pris dans une logique irréductible, le professeur est condamné à ressembler à ce qu'on attend de lui' (2).

We have noted that some characters refuse to submit. They fix on a distant hope of salvation or catharsis. David Bradby points out in his thesis that for Adamov's characters, being is knowing that they suffer, though it is not necessarily having an awareness of why they suffer nor of the precise ways in which they suffer. Suffering engenders fear, such as that expressed by Anatole de Courmont as the Communards threaten to destroy his art treasures and his house, the very bricks and mortar of his existence: 'Moi, un objet qui...qui change de place!' (3). Man's final recourse in his fear is to ritual and prayer for expiation, as Adamov had known all

(1) Théâtre I, pp.235-6. (2) Jean Duvignaud, 'La Nouvelle Comédie', Nouvelle Nouvelle Revue Française, 19th. July, 1954, p.114.
 (3) Théâtre IV, p.171.

along. It is Honoré de Rubens who brings this to the theatre in Sainte Europe. He weighs his fate in the balance, as Adamov weighed love and work against the powers of neurosis (1). Honoré weighs the obsessions and neuroses of a whole range of characters in his balance, and his action is futile, for he and they must bow to the eternal circle of malevolence which governs them, and accept that at best man can attack only its most recent manifestation. The rest is beyond him, in a dimension which must eternally escape him.

The Cause: Separation

It has been established that Adamov's characters suffer. As his creatures, their suffering results from the void within them: they are séparés. The action onstage is an attempt by Adamov to fill the void within himself, to purge his personal sense of isolation, but, as he has stressed in interview, the more the empty stage is filled physically, the more it accentuates the isolation of the protagonists. L'Invasion manifests the point better than any other play:

' [...] l'envahissement insidieux d'un homme à la fois par ses préoccupations obsédantes, par la présence des autres qu'obsèdent leurs propres préoccupations...Donc cette invasion est un désarroi'(2).

We have seen ways in which characters search for authenticity to fill the void, and how bodily decay, for example in Le Mutilé, and dispossession of the self such as is experienced by Taranne represent the void. Separation takes many forms in the plays, ranging from an awareness of the distance between the physical being and the motivated being within, which is not visible to others, an

(1) See H.E., p.226. (2) Arthur Adamov, Interview with Jean-François Devay and Vilar, 'Jean Vilar: Avec L'Invasion A. nous offre un Helzapoppin tragique', Combat, 15th. Nov. 1950.

awareness sensed by Le Mutilé, who cannot make his body obey him, to an entire absence ethic.

It is given to very few of Adamov's characters even to be aware of what he termed le sacré, and to none of them to glimpse it. The quintessential is always hidden from them, a fact which can serve only to sharpen their anguish. Darbon, in Tous contre tous, voices a fact which is blatantly evident in the life of Jean Rist: 'Il y a des forces qui nous dépassent'(1), and Pierre of L'Invasion is convinced of the value of the message contained in the work of his friend Jean, but equally aware that it is beyond his reach. The onset of blindness symbolises his increasing distance from the truth. Blindness is used by Adamov in La Parodie also, as L'Employé's faith in the future begins to succumb to the inevitable forces. His small révolte has enabled him to draw no nearer to an essence of which he is unaware, than Arthur is allowed to go, despite his search for the ultimate pinball machine, capable of satisfying every conceivable need in mankind. For not only is the number of possibilities too great for him to master, but his efforts must necessarily be thwarted by that dimension which eludes him.

The characters of Off Limits, aware of the void at the centre of their lives, try to fill it with 'Happenings', in which their inner selves are supposed to emerge to bring a new awareness of the meaning of their existence, and with drugs and alcohol, which, it is hoped, will stimulate the mind so as to make the way to true experience open to it. Unfortunately, this too is all a myth. The bubble bursts for Sally and Jim when a friend almost dies from an overdose, and when a Negro, shot in the street by racists, dies on

(1) Théâtre I, p.204.

their floor. The reality of mankind, that man degrades and humiliates his brother, is nothing whatsoever to do with the plastic world of their 'trips', whose potency flags with habit, and from which the landing is increasingly unbearable. Once the spell is broken by the departure of Jim and Sally, it is not long before the others realise the shallowness of their sham, and conscious suffering sets in.

Separation from other members of humanity is the most common form in which the void appears in Adamov's plays. His central protagonists are at odds with the world around them; as has been pointed out, they see things differently, from their personal, neurotic viewpoint. They are not aware of the entire alienated state of humanity, simply that they are alienated from their fellows in the universe of the play. L'Employé is unable to tell the time from the clock without hands, whereas other characters appear to be able to do so without difficulty. He is literally out of time with them. The dance music which is out of time with the dancers is heard from his point of view, and Le Journaliste walking on his hands is absurd only for him. We see the world through his eyes, and we are made uncomfortably aware of his alienation. Paolo Paoli ends his play at odds with his world, faithful to the values of art when economics has superseded it. Le Mutilé is separated by his terrible neurosis, Pierre alienates himself from those close to him through his obsessive work, only to find the void irremediable, and work not the solution he had hoped for. Taranne's unacceptable standards of reality, Jean Rist's inability to assimilate himself absolutely into the prevailing system and to adapt to the changing face of his situation, Anatole de Courmont's fear and self-interest, separate them from their fellows. Paris isolated, the Commune leaders unaware

of the fate or the feelings of their brothers in different parts of the city, they too are out of time, reacting to events which are long-since past, or not yet fact. The physical problems of communication in the besieged city echo their metaphysical counterparts throughout the plays of Adamov. Time and again language communication is seen to break down. N. meets the problem in La

Parodie:

'Et l'autre, tout à l'heure, qui m'a
étourdi de paroles. Je n'ai pas compris
un seul mot de ce qu'il voulait dire'(1),

and Edgar is acutely aware of it in Les Retrouvailles:

'A la place! Qu'est-ce que cela signifie?
Pourquoi, je me le demande, les gens usent-
ils toujours d'expressions toutes faites et,
par conséquent, dénuées de sens? On n'est
pas à la place d'un autre, on est à la sienne,
on est ce qu'on est, ni plus ni moins!'(2).

As the characters, like Adamov, set so much store by objects and modes of expression which for them have particular significances, it is inevitable that in all the plays there should arise a rift of comprehension such as that previously quoted, where Agnès' request for the typewriter is misinterpreted. Annette is bitterly aware of this rift: '[...] personne ne peut rien pour personne [...]'(3), and its logical result, enunciated as a phrase toute faite by Honoré de Rubens, must provoke fear in spectator and author alike:

'L'homme demeure seul en face de son destin
et du sens de sa vie'(4).

In his thesis, J.J. McCann has highlighted a further separation theme in certain of Adamov's plays; namely that from a priori human values such as compassion. This, he feels, is the cause of alienation

(1) Théâtre I, p.32. (2) Théâtre II, p.81. (3) Théâtre II, p.144.
(4) Théâtre III, p.268.

between characters. Plays such as Paolo Paoli and Les Ames mortes illustrate this point particularly well. Sobiakevitch's remark to Tchitchikov that: 'Décidément, une âme humaine ne vaut pas plus cher pour vous qu'un navet'(1) is entirely true in the accepted moral sense of the phrase. Tchitchikov's interest lies not in the metaphysical souls, but in their status as dead serfs for whom tax must still be paid.

No scruples are exercised, either, in the blithe exchange of wives for profit, nor in the sale of slaves by the Church, nor in the manipulation of Marpeaux, ex-convict labourer, who is expected to risk his life catching butterflies in Africa for the gain of his employer, Paolo Paoli. It must be said that no compassion is spared for the spiritual collapse of Taranne, nor for Le Militant's wife deprived of her child. Adamov's is a brutal theatre, stark, devoid of humanity in our sense of the word, like his own neurosis, yet full of humanity, since he presents his view of human life in the clutches of the incurable.

Adamovian theatre is a theatre based on absence rather than on presence. What is not said or done is as important as what is said and done. Each play has an absence which is central to it, whether it be the absence of the dead Tom Guinness in La Politique des restes, or the absence of a concrete, waking representation of reality in Si l'été revenait, the powers incarnate in disembodied voices in La Grande et la petite manoeuvre and Tous contre tous, or the absence of recognisable humane features in En Fiacre. Le Printemps 71 has as its central absence that of an historical time-consciousness, as is pathetically reflected in Pierre Fournier's statement:

(1) Les Ames mortes, p.97.



'Le jour où j'ai su à peu près tirer
on n'avait plus une seule cartouche'(1).

Each play's absence acts upon that play like the voices of the Moniteurs on *Le Mutilé*, determining the inevitable grinding of the play's universe towards its destruction. This mechanism will come under discussion in Chapter Six of this thesis.

Presence spotlights absence and isolation: the more people who surround Taranne, the further he is from proving his identity, the more situations Henri is subjected to, the further away seems his individuality.

Of all the themes of separation in the plays, Le Professeur Taranne and L'Invasion represent extended metaphors of isolation. In his last interview, Adamov refused to accept the judgement that his writing for the theatre had ever abandoned altogether this theme, and he accentuated once again its importance for all his work:

'Je voulais que l'homme se sente tel qu'il
est, c'est-à-dire qu'il prenne conscience
de son isolement'(2).

Richard Sherrell, possibly because of the spiritual insight afforded him by his profession of clergyman, has been one of Adamov's most sensitive critics on the question of séparation, and has sensed its fundamental role in his plays:

'Adamov's man is alone, bewildered by the
circumstances of his existence, bound by a
sense of responsibility, though incapable
of effectively discharging it, unable to
achieve significance through language, and
finally reduced to a gesture of alienation
and withdrawal as the sole means of asserting
identity'(3).

(1) Théâtre IV, p.214. (2) Arthur Adamov, Interview with Emmanuel Jacquart, 'La Dernière Interview d'Arthur Adamov: mon théâtre est une lutte', Nouvelles Littéraires, 20th. Aug. 1971. (3) Richard Sherrell, The Human Image - Avant-Garde and Christian, Richmond, Virginia, John Knox Press, 1969, p.128.

Sherrell is also at pains to point out the close relationship between the personal neurosis expressed in Adamov's autobiographical prose, and the metaphysical problems which face his characters in the theatre. They are as living cells in the psyche of their creator.

Dream

The world of his dreams constitutes for Adamov an integral part of his being. His awareness of their influence upon his life is amply recorded in H.E., for it is in dream that neurosis found embodiment in a form which was closely aligned to the theatre. The ethereal quality of his plays, the few degrees which separate them from worldly reality, but which leave them close enough to it to provoke terror in recognition, correspond clearly to the nature of dream itself. In addition to this qualitative aspect, Adamov's use of actual dream material, or of adaptation and development of such material, is extensive in his plays. It is interesting to note that plays in which dream and oneirism are used most explicitly, correspond chronologically to periods of intense psychic struggle in Adamov's personal life, periods when his névrose, as described in his journals, was at the peak of its power over him. Sainte Europe, M. le Modéré, Si l'été revenait and Le Professeur Taranne are particularly indicative of this fact, the first two written under conditions of extreme pain and suffering and under the influence of alcoholic despair, the third, his most complex and intriguing play in which, it is the present author's contention, he worked systematically through the compartments of his own life to draw a conclusion which had always been inevitable for him, and which was worked out in its final ritual on 15th. March 1970, and the last a direct transcription of a dream experienced by Adamov, and in which, he

claims, the only alteration is the Professor's cry of desperation: 'Je suis le Professeur Taranne'(1), the original having been: 'Je suis l'auteur de La Parodie'. This play remained one of Adamov's personal favourites, the only one of his pre- Paolo Paoli plays to escape the lash of his scathing retrospective self-criticism. In 1964, he dedicated to the play an affectionate paragraph in his pot-pourri article entitled De quelques faits (2), claiming it to be his only efficacious dream play to date, as its transcription was pure and unadulterated:

'Pourquoi, de toutes mes anciennes pièces, faussement "oniriques", ai-je excepté Le Professeur Taranne? Parce que, dans Le Professeur Taranne, je n'ai pas cherché à travestir encore par des exégèses métaphysiques un contenu déjà travesti par le rêve. La carte blanche du navire que le Professeur Taranne accroche à la fin de la pièce ne prétend pas symboliser le vide du monde : elle est tout simplement une carte vide. Peu importe que ce vide ait été pour moi, à un moment donné, l'expression d'une peur personnelle'(3).

Dream, as a pure form of insight into the inner being of man, purer than any he could hope to achieve on a conscious level, proved to be an ideal expression of those essential aspects of human life discussed in this chapter.

Le Professeur Taranne was not the only play to be based on actual dream. La Grande et la petite manoeuvre, whose essential theme, Ils, had haunted Adamov's nights since childhood, is attributed in H.E. to a dream in which Adamov, sitting on a parapet with his sister, was called by voices audible only to himself, and which he was compelled to obey. In this case, the central motivation of the dream

(1) The phrase appears repeatedly in the first part of the play, as in Théâtre I, p.224, but not in the second part, where Taranne capitulates. (2) The article is reproduced in Ici et Maintenant, pp.149-66. (3) Ici et Maintenant, p.150.

is taken, and a play is structured around it. The mechanism of the dream is not visible through the fabricated structure, thus for Adamov its essential quality is lost (1). Nonetheless, for our purposes, the basis of the play in neurosis and dream allows for development within it of a neurosis applied specifically to itself, and continues the thread of obsession and neurosis as the foundation of all Adamov's work. Similarly, Tous contre tous, which Adamov declared to be a restatement of La Grande et la petite manoeuvre, based on the same precepts and stemming from the same source, and Les Retrouvailles, in which he tried to repeat the success of Le Professeur Taranne by deliberately inventing a dream and by trying to transpose its mechanism into theatrical form, are considered by the author as failures, but provide a sound link in our chain. The essential point which emerges from these plays is the intense inner conflict which they produce, the same angoisse with which Adamov was confronted in his private dreams. In this sense, all his characters live a dream which turns to nightmare, the point at which their destiny turns to face them.

Those plays which involve characters who dream on stage highlight this point, and clarify it for the rest of the plays in which there is no overt dream sequence. Characters who dream are given a double standard to their existence. Suffering from acute neurosis, their dreams reveal the neurotic grounding of their everyday lives. In Sainte Europe, for instance, Karl's waking activities in the political sphere - expanding trade through foreign alliances, aid to underdeveloped states, and his crusading mission to the Orient -

(1) The account of the dream itself is to be found on H.E., p.95, and the following page recounts the author's subsequent attitudes to the play.

are set in perspective by his dreams, in which his greed for power is given free rein, as those on whose support he depends in reality, such as Crépin, grovel at his feet, and in which his terror of the dawning of a new age which he knows must inevitably supplant his deified reign is personified in the menacing aspect afforded to Moeller Van der See. Teresa's religious devotion is revealed in dream as perverse sexual desire to prostitute herself to God, to be possessed by Christ, and her hatred of Francesca is seen to be an inverted neurosis at her desires of prostitution and at her jealousy of Francesca's purity in this respect. The play's masked ball is the physical manifestation in real life of the fantasy world of all the characters, as they each dress in a costume which reflects their dream existence. Their subconscious life materialises on the surface, and they are brought face to face with their decadence - the degeneration of their world. Their dream turns to nightmare, their era is overthrown by outside forces, disembodied voices, this time of the hitherto oppressed. For Adamov's playwriting has, for the purposes of this play, shifted its focus from that of the plays of the 1950's. Those who were oppressed then held the centre stage, whilst here they are a threat from beyond the play. The political aspect of this will be discussed in Chapter Five; for the present it must be realised that the characters of Sainte Europe continue the Adamovian tradition of oppression by neurosis, for they are brothers in suffering of *Le Mutilé* and of *N.* If Francesca and Moeller Van der See are considered by Adamov to be exceptional in the play, it is because they are aware of the circularity in destiny which dictates that their world must die, because they do not suffer from a conflict between their inner life and their external being, and because they

can accept in good conscience that the time has come for change.

Dream is of paramount importance in the question of identity.

Pierrot's study sees in Adamov's dream characters:

' [...] les figures plus ou moins travesties, d'un "moi" dissocié par la névrose, tel qu'il apparaît, sur la scène du théâtre onirique, et qui aspire à l'impossible unité'(1).

They are fragmented doubles of facets of Adamov's own nature, and that of his central character in a given play. This point has been made already of M. le Modéré in another context, and Si l'été revenait brings to an apotheosis its potential in dream. Adamov describes the play as a 'suite de rêves'(2), and a measure of its efficacy is that he recognised in it, as Inge Pruks has pointed out in her aforementioned article, a quadruple vision of Le Professeur Taranne. Lars, Thea, Brit and Alma are each revealed through their own dream, and through the dreams of the other three. All are inextricably linked through incestuous, adulterous or lesbian desires, although none of these is openly discussed, being repressed by social convention even in Sweden, that most liberal of societies, and merely ridiculed by Viktor, an outside voice who does not dream, and who as such is exterior to the play's universe. One by one the four principals take their place on the first level : that is, they dream. The others are seen through the eyes of their dream. Thus, each dream presents a new, fragmented vision of them, tarnished by the neurosis of the dreamer. None of the action takes place outside dream, and it is thus impossible to establish a fixed identity for any of the characters, all of whom are a series of figments of the others' neurosis. It is fascinating that the four principals all bear

(1) Pierrot, op. cit., p.267. (2) Si l'été revenait, p.9.

characteristics of Adamov's neurosis as identified by him, and that the play revolves around the figure of Lars, who is neurosis personified. Brit embodies all the aspects of Woman as depicted in the other plays : she is the Eternal Woman. Thea personifies guilt in family relationships : jealousy, sexual perversion and inadequacy, masochism and fear. Alma is the work she does, and the help she tries to offer others, abortive as this may be. She appears to be the solidity of the play, to be in control, to hold sway over the other characters, to dictate relationships, but in giving herself to humanity, she destroys herself. Alma it is who loves and dominates the others.

There is no adequate study of this most hermetic of Adamov's plays. One could wish for as intensive a work as Labriolle's on Sainte Europe, mentioned earlier in this chapter. Such a study is regrettably beyond the scope of the present work, but it is hoped that the foregoing provides an indication of its importance as the culmination of obsession and neurosis in Adamov's work, and of the importance of dream therein. Pierrot has identified an æsthetic of the dream in Adamov's preface to Volume II of his plays in Gallimard. The mechanisms by which this æsthetic operates will be discussed in Chapter Six of this thesis, but a consideration of three of the points included has given rise to much of the substance of the present chapter. These are: a) The presence in the heart of the work of a character who is a double of the moi rêveur, and through whom all the action is viewed, b) a rarefied atmosphere, oppressive, of fatality, and which is expressive of anguish, c) the symbolic nature of objects and of language. The translation of Pierrot's points, made in the work which has been referred to several times in this chapter, is my own.

In the plays of Arthur Adamov, all men are subject to incurable oppression, whether from forces of darkness beyond themselves, or from the voice (perhaps it is the same one) of their own neurotic obsession within. This obsession corresponds closely to Adamov's personal névrose:

'Each play is in its own right just one more poetic concretization in theatrical form of the nightmare, obsessions and fears of a single, consistent vision'(1).

Leonard Pronko has seen this phenomenon as: '[...] in great part an exorcism of private terrors'(2), a view held by many critics. It is certain that Adamov's involvement in his plays is profound. There are innumerable occasions where he includes events which have occurred in his life, or where he attributes to characters behaviour which we can read as his own in the journals, and when the psychic procedures and universe of the plays parallels his own, much-analysed neurosis. The consistent, neurotic foundation for his work to which he admitted in 1962, despite his professed affiliation to a socially committed theatre, gained a progressively stronger hold in his last plays, which returned to the cathartic mode of his first ones:

'Tout cela provient de ma névrose, mais vous savez, même dans les pièces poétiques, la seule base certaine est presque toujours la névrose. Et je n'ai pas changé d'opinion. Marxiste ou non-marxiste, le seul problème est de savoir comment utiliser ses névroses'(3).

The period at which Adamov turned precisely to utilising, rather than merely displaying, his neurosis, and the ways in which he did so, will form the basis for the following chapter.

(1) J.J. McCann, op. cit., p.246. (2) Leonard Pronko, Avant-Garde : The Experimental Theatre in France, University of California Press, 1962, p.131. (3) Ici et Maintenant, p.131. The italics are Adamov's. Although the text reads as reproduced, one might read for poétiques : politiques.

CHAPTER FOURRevolt, Not Revolution.

Critical opinion has tended in general to adhere to a conception of the dramatic work of Arthur Adamov as divisible into two distinct manières, the first comprising those plays, prior to Le Ping Pong, which are variously termed Avant-Garde, 'metaphysical', or simply première manière, the second grouping subsequent plays, whose basis is seen to lie in Adamov's alleged conversion to Marxism during the mid-1950's. In 1958, Maurice Regnaut described Adamov's work for the theatre as 'causalité fétichiste' turned 'dialectique historique'(1), emphasising a movement towards realism and situation in a recognisably contemporary world. Few critics have questioned the validity of the argument that Adamov underwent a political conversion, and that his plays changed direction as a result, but in very recent years more attention has been paid to attempts to determine the motivation behind such a change. During the 1950's, and, to a lesser degree, the early 1960's, there is a wealth of critical comment in literary journals concerning Adamov's work, and interviews with the author abound. So universal was the acceptance of the formula for his plays that Adamov frequently refers to his work as première or deuxième manière. It is interesting to note that in his last interview (2) he discusses a troisième manière, discerned by friends and a few critics, which would include his last three plays. Since that period there has been little critical work on the author, and no major contribution, until the early 1970's, and

(1) Regnaut, op. cit., p.190. (2) See note 2, p.102.

precious few critics have heeded Adamov's comments on that troisième manière or its implications for an overall view of his work.

The play which prompted most of the talk of a new, political orientation was Paolo Paoli, and such discussion is centred around the period 1955-60, after which time it abated into general acceptance, whilst Adamov appears during the period to have been developing an intricate system of involvement for his theatre, of which each play is a new manifestation. It is essential to consider Adamov's dramatic writing in terms of its place in a life of constant reappraisal, change and paradox, and to this end H.E. is an invaluable document.

In childhood, as we have seen, Adamov experienced political climates all over Europe, and was made acutely aware of his personal status as an apatride. On his arrival in Paris, his literary leanings brought him into immediate contact with intellectual groups whose interminable round of discussion centred on politics, at a time when art and politics were considered by many to be synonymous. Adamov found himself surrounded by politically-conscious contemporaries. His involvement seems to have been on the fringe of their activities - participation in mass demonstrations such as that for Sacco and Vanzetti (1), but in an anonymous capacity. His failure to join the Popular Front in Spain in 1936, or to become active in the Resistance during World War II, does not escape mention in Souvenirs (2), and it appears to be in the nature of his personality that he found himself unable to espouse to the ultimate any political

(1) An account of this incident is given in H.E., p.29. (2) H.E., pp.58 and 77-8 respectively.

cause. During the 1940's and 1950's, this tendency was heightened by his acquaintance with such figures as Jean-Paul Sartre and Jacqueline Atrousseau, who was to become his wife, and who joined the Communist Party in 1958, an act of independence which saddened Adamov. He was never to be affiliated because of 'certains problèmes'(1) in Party line which he could not reconcile with his own beliefs. Nonetheless, he continued to frequent those friends who were confirmed Party members, and it appears that any political feelings he may have had were in sympathy with their cause. Given his neurotic psychic state as described in Chapter One, it is significant to note the obvious pleasure which Adamov derives from his fringe involvement:

'Avec les communistes, nous, intellectuels non-communistes, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, quelques autres dont je suis, nous manifestons'(2).

This demonstration took place in reaction to de Gaulle's movement in Algeria, which Adamov saw as a Fascist coup. This was the sole event against which Adamov rose in anger, and it resulted in three playlets under the title Théâtre de Société ('pour ne pas dire théâtre politique') (3). Propaganda in allegorical form, rather than direct political portrayal, was Adamov's method in these works. Despite the profound effect the Algerian events had on Adamov at the time of their perpetration, however, and despite the fact that in Ici et Maintenant he attributes to them part of the reason for his alleged change of direction in his work, the effect seems to have been short-lived with the dismal failure of Théâtre de Société. It appears that, once having made a statement which he felt compelled to make,

(1) H.E., p.127. (2) ibid. (3) Ici et Maintenant, p.100.

he felt *purged* of the actual effects of the event, and able to react, as usual, only to his characters and to the public's reception of his work. He never involved himself in any movement to take political action, nor to campaign against the events. His was a typically introspective reaction, provoked by an awareness of the parallel between the situation and his own neurotic state. It was the very notion that men should be robbed of the human right of free choice in their social destiny which appalled Adamov, and this is reminiscent of his early metaphysical writings rather than of any defined political line. One is clearly reminded of L'Heure Nouvelle, the metaphysical review which Adamov produced in 1945 and 1946 with Marthe Robert, in which he had denounced all dogma out of hand, as it denied essential human freedom. This brings into focus yet another paradox: a desire to be involved with the cause of Communism in its ideal, metaphysical implications, but the inability to subject this to the rigours of Party policy, without which, as Adamov was to show in Le Printemps 71, there is no hope of success.

What makes Adamov so difficult to pinpoint in terms of a political stance is the intensity of his involvement with a particular event at a given time. The project in hand commands his whole being, and his conviction appears obsessional, only to be cast aside when the next idea strikes. His attitude to his past plays is especially indicative of this fact. His denunciations of such plays as La Grande et la petite manoeuvre, having claimed them to be definitive in his conception of the theatre, are legendary. It is for this reason that there is a danger in taking isolated statements by Adamov, rather than an overall impression, as support for a thesis.

Two constants in his political itinerary are a tendency towards

anarchy and a consistent concern for humanity. The journals abound in small incidents involving individuals whose pain and suffering are portrayed in images of devastating intensity. The Great War, for instance, is evoked for Adamov in a procession of old folk, women and children in Berlin, whose lined faces, together with the absence of young men, tell the story (1). Adamov's private militancy against evil in the form of dark forces brought him to a hatred of evil and oppression in all its forms. This hatred is evident in all his plays, and at the time under discussion - the mid-1950's - appears to have become the foremost concern of Adamov. After intensive examination and denunciation of the anonymous forces of evil and oppression which crush humanity, he came to the logical realisation that, as he had hinted (though failed to perceive the true significance of the fact) in L'Heure Nouvelle, those forces are mediated by man in society. Man is not only persecuted, but also persecutor.

Plays prior to Le Ping Pong express this notion in their background noise, a distant rumble, and in the mid-1950's the rumble drew nearer, swelled to rolls of thunder overhead, and took its place in the foreground of Adamov's plays, though by no means ousting the other side, the obsessional, as we shall see. This was the reverse face of the Incurable coin : the Curable, that is to say, those elements of society which are directed by man against man, which were thus abhorrent to Adamov, for whom persecution of his fellows by man is the foulest manifestation of evil, and against which, theoretically, man ought to have some powers of révolte. Roger Blin has underlined the importance of révolte for Adamov, and, whilst declaring the author to have had profound convictions, does not

(1) See H.E., p.130.

equate these with affiliation to a political party:

'Ce qui intéressait Adamov - et Genet - c'était la révolte. La révolution l'intéressait dans une certaine mesure, comme suite à la révolte. Mais la prise du pouvoir ou la réorganisation de la société, il était beaucoup trop bohème pour la désirer vraiment ou pour se la représenter clairement'(1).

Adamov underlines this point in a discussion for Clarté in 1962, parts of which were reprinted posthumously in Pensée:

'[...] je ne demande pas du tout à l'auteur d'être orienté dans le sens politique où je suis et où nous sommes orientés ... je demande simplement à l'auteur de se placer quand même dans le monde'(2).

The fact that Adamov's own orientation is some unspecified point towards the left is irrelevant to his fundamental desire for a theatre which is meaningful for man's situation in society today, a point on which he was fervently in disagreement with the Avant-Garde of Ionesco, whose metaphysical capitulation he saw as politically reactionary and dangerous for mankind.

In his last interview (3), Adamov declares that the themes of his early plays : suffering, solitude, persecution, may indeed have been the unconscious (and he stresses this point) reaction to the crimes against humanity of the Second World War. Bearing in mind Adamov's temperament, it is important to recognise Roger Blin's remark that:

'[...]aussi solitaire qu'on veuille être, ou qu'on soit, il se produise une osmose avec l'époque, avec le climat politique, avec les événements'(4).

It would appear that these two facts are responsible for a shift

(1) Roger Blin. Interview with Emmanuel Jacquart, 'Adamov était le roi des trois points', The French Review, vol.48, no.6, May 1975, p.1003. (2) Arthur Adamov, 'Propos sur le théâtre politique', Pensée, no.154, Dec. 1970, p.64. (3) See note 2, p.102. (4) Blin, op. cit., p.1003.

in emphasis in Adamov's dramatic work, and that talk of a sudden conversion to Marxism is too simplistic a rationalisation to make. The precise timing of the development is attributable to a conjunction of major factors.

Adamov's collection of essays on literary topics entitled Ici et Maintenant includes a piece dated April 1963, called Ma "Métamorphose" (1), which marks the period 1953-55, the years of the gestation of Le Ping Pong, as a watershed, a period during which Adamov took stock of his work to date, and made a thorough reappraisal of it. He had reached a point where constant reworking of the abstract, metaphysical concept of man as victim to forces beyond himself had led to a tacit acceptance of:

' [...] la fausse fatalité, celle qui n'en est pas une, celle qui n'existe que dans la mesure où l'histoire existe, l'histoire qui est faite par des hommes, des êtres susceptibles de changer' (2).

Awareness of this fact did not in any way diminish the powers of a true fatality in the form of illness or other inescapable and inexplicable misfortunes which might befall man, but it pointed up the need in everyday life for révolte, as well as fighting on the metaphysical plane, and it provoked a sharp reaction against the established theatre of the Avant-Garde and its tendency to: 'justifier les renoncements faciles, je dirais même la lâcheté' (3).

It became increasingly obvious to Adamov that the vast scope of his plays, encompassing the whole of human destiny, had been exploited to its full potential, and was now counter-productive restatement. He required a theatre which was situated in time and space. Questioning his own motivation in building plays around a

(1) Ici et Maintenant, pp.142-7. (2) *ibid.*, p.45. (3) *ibid.*, p.142.

limited number of characters and a single set, and acutely aware of the curable nature of man's condition in society, it became apparent that if man is alienated in a cosmic sense, then he is also alienated within the confines of society, by the same means of intimidation and persecution. There is an entire machinery in society which manipulates the man in the street, and society represents a microcosm of the movements against mankind perpetrated by the cosmic forces of the macrocosm. Similarly, in scaled-down form, the private interaction of human beings follows a pattern described in the machinations of society as a whole. This is the construct which Adamov had discovered to such advantage in La Grande et la petite manoeuvre, a play which he now denied for its adherence to that doctrine of renunciation described above.

The course of history seemed to provide Adamov with adequate support for his vision: 'Car l'histoire n'est pas une mosaïque d'évènements hasardeux'(1). The whole gamut of historical past is brought to bear upon the events of the present day, and upon our actions in the present, which, whilst emanating inevitably from things past, will determine the course of the future. We are thus involved in a gigantic machine, and must recognise ourselves to be responsible for its future direction within the framework pre-ordained by forces beyond our control. Thus, for the dramatist:

'[...] l'intérêt d'une pièce historique vient de ce que le recul accordé au spectateur par rapport à l'action permet à celui-ci de jeter sur elle un regard critique'(2).

By revealing to the spectator the mechanism of a society, the consequences of which are already known to him, a dramatist should

(1) Ici et Maintenant, p.37. (2) *ibid.*, p.31.

be able to elicit some response which might stimulate révolte in his own society, whose roots lie in that revealed mechanism.

Just as history is a whole constituted from a pattern of interrelated events, so social consciousness is the outward manifestation of private consciousness. The two reflect each other. The point is easy to illustrate if we consider Adamov's reason for his interest in the Weimar Republic as the theme for a play on which he was working at the end of his life:

'La République de Weimar ne tenait plus debout, et tout ce qui, d'une manière ou d'une autre, ne tient pas debout dans l'homme s'y trouvait agrandi'(1).

By using in his plays a recognisable political situation, Adamov was able to demonstrate its nature as essentially social, the product of the interaction of the internal states of its protagonists. Interviews and articles of the period betray Adamov's enthusiasm for his latest discovery:

'Ce qui m'intéresse beaucoup c'est l'interférence de la politique et de la vie privée des individus'(2).

He began to make:

'[...]un effort pour faire saisir le lien entre une névrose individuelle et une névrose collective aiguillée, dirigée par un certain régime social'(3).

The solitary neurotic of the Avant-Garde and the workings of society must be seen to be mutually reflective. S.R.C. Jones, in his thesis (4), makes the point that for Adamov, real truth lies in the coincidence of the internal and the external, and this is a constant throughout

(1) Ici et Maintenant, p.182. The play in question was to have been La Chanson des Malheureux, but Adamov never completed the project.

(2) Arthur Adamov, 'Arthur Adamov nous dit les raisons d'un printemps', Interview with C.B., Jeune Afrique, 17th. June 1963, p.29.

(3) Arthur Adamov, 'Du côté d'Adamov: Sainte Europe et le Père Ubu', Interview with Guy Leclerc, L'Humanité, 15th. July 1966. (4) See note 2, p.55.

his twenty-three years of dramatic production. In 1938, when writing L'Aveu, Adamov had stated an intention from which he did not deviate during his career:

'[...] j'ai tenté de faire entrevoir le rythme de l'esprit humain qui palpite entre les pôles extrêmes du centre de lui-même et du centre de tout'(1).

By the time he had written two plays this intention had realised part of its potential:

'Une pièce de théâtre doit donc être le lieu où le monde visible et le monde invisible se touchent et se heurtent [...] la manifestation du contenu caché, latent, qui recèle les germes du drame'(2).

In reaching its logically ultimate potential it became:

'[...] cette interférence, la seule chose qui m'importe au théâtre, de la vie sociale et de la vie individuelle sans que ni l'une ni l'autre soit sacrifiée'(3).

The principal fact to emerge from all of these stages in development was that man is oppressed. In the latter case, oppression presented itself as a class struggle, and it was on this aspect of man in society that many of Adamov's later plays were centred. This was the result of an ever-increasing awareness of the implications of the road which Adamov had travelled in his work from the very beginning, and not a sudden reaction to political commitment.

Throughout his career Adamov remained an avid reader and translator of all manner of authors. His cosmopolitan upbringing had enabled him to translate the German Expressionists and Tchekhov, for instance. He was passionately attached to Strindberg's drama for a time, and, in addition to his work on the author, admitted to

(1) L'Aveu, p.14. (2) Ici et Maintenant, pp.13-14. (3) Arthur Adamov, 'Propos sur le théâtre politique', Pensée, no.154, Dec. 1970, p.63.

basing much of his first play, La Parodie, on Strindberg's Dream Play. He greatly admired Sean O'Casey's work in later years, mainly because of: 'the way he mingles the private and the political'(1), but , although he is inconsistent in his statements concerning those authors whose work he prefers, it is Bertolt Brecht of whom he says most frequently : 'le plus grand écrivain de théâtre du siècle'(2). Such was the influence of the German on the emerging theatre in France on his first visit there in 1954 (a crucial period in Adamov's development) that Adamov devotes many pages of Ici et Maintenant to discussion of his work. Adamov saw in Brecht the ideas of which he had the germ come to fruition on the stage. The celebrated Verfremdungseffekt seemed tailor-made in conception and technical construction for Adamov's growing preoccupation with the interference of the private and the public consciousness. Brecht's Communist politics were certainly the least point of interest in his work for Adamov, who was unable to condone perversion of historical truth for political ends, but he applauded Brecht's demystification of the mechanisms which underlie the capitalist system, as a denial of human rights and a creation of false myths of fatality. However, Brecht's didactic theatre did appeal in one particular respect to Adamov, insofar as it developed in practice a theme which Adamov had begun to glimpse, namely the social (if not the political) efficacy of the theatre. Many critics have remarked upon Adamov's evolution

(1) Arthur Adamov, Interview with Peter Gelbard, Drama Survey, vol.3, no.2, Oct. 1963, p.254. Margaret Quinn Dietemann's thesis (see note 4, p.48) devotes an admirable chapter to literary influences on Adamov, as well as one on political influences. She learnt in interview with Adamov that during 1953-4 he read Mao Tse Tung's On Contradiction, and was greatly influenced by its statement of the principle of the dialectical nature of change. She claims that this work opened Adamov's eyes to the possibility that duality as depicted in his early plays can lead to change, rather than simply parallelism. If this is the case, Adamov became disillusioned with the notion, and he never mentions it in his writing. (2) H.E., p.130.

towards Brechtian theatre in his later works, and have equated a conversion to Marxism with a total absorption of Brecht's technique and subject matter, but the present author feels that Brecht is rather a precursor than a large-scale direct influence, as Adamov uses Brecht's work to support theories long held by himself, and openly argues against it when it fails to comply with these. For example, on p.130 of Ici et Maintenant, Adamov condemns Brecht for not giving sufficient importance to his characters themselves, for not endowing them with névrose.

Perhaps the biggest single development at this period in Adamov's work, and one which had been essential to Brecht's theatre, is a direct appeal to the spectator to judge and criticise what he sees on the stage. Adamov was no longer satisfied merely to confess and display his personal névrose; this was the moment and the means by which he was to utilise it:

'[...]il ne s'agit pas de provoquer l'adhésion du spectateur à un spectacle positif, mais sa désolidarisation d'un spectacle négatif'(1).

1953 saw the inception of the Théâtre Populaire review, in which Adamov maintained an active interest. Theatre became for him a potential means of social education, a means whereby to make the public aware of their responsibility in society. The thinking bears a great resemblance to Adamov's views concerning the role of the poet, as expressed in L'Heure Nouvelle, but now in a concrete form. Social efficacy could be achieved only by central organisation, for which the Trade Unions should be responsible. This notion was indeed being put into practice in a minor way at this period. The point is made

(1) Ici et Maintenant, p.42.

and emphasised in the discussion previously quoted from Pensée (see note 3, p.119), which demonstrates Adamov's absolute dedication to his current belief, even if it seems paradoxical that he should advocate centralised control by Trade Unions when condemning it on the part of political parties.

During the last ten years of his life, Adamov constantly reiterated in interviews his conviction that:

'[...] le théâtre est inséparable de la politique et qu'un théâtre où il n'y aurait pas de politique serait un théâtre misérable, amputé, un théâtre bourgeois'(1).

It is essential to remember that, for Adamov, politique signifies the mechanism and organisation of society, and not any narrow political cause. Politics is a matter of humanity, not a theoretical construct. Despite this fact, it is widely accepted that Adamov's is not a theatre for the masses, that it demands a high degree of intellectual concentration, and presupposes a level of knowledge far beyond that of a popular audience. In addition to this, Adamov does not envisage at any point in his work any solution to social problems in terms of political action, around which to rally popular support. Roger Blin has pointed out that:

'Adamov ne pouvait pas être un auteur populaire. Il a essayé de le devenir, mais il a échoué, d'autant qu'il a changé de manière'(2).

It is for this reason that the Communist Party criticised Paolo Paoli, demanding a more blatant and outspoken commitment than Adamov could provide. He benefitted from Party support when Le Printemps 71 was performed at St. Denis, but after a short period, and much pressure

(1) Arthur Adamov, 'Le Théâtre et l'Amérique', Interview with Marc Rombaut, Clés pour le spectacle, 19th. March 1972, p.13. (2) Roger Blin, 'Adamov était le roi des trois points', Interview with Emmanuel Jacquart, The French Review, vol.48, no.6, May 1975, p.1000.

from the Government, support was withdrawn. Adamov's work was too equivocal to merit total Party backing, and too dangerous to be accepted in the established theatres. It is for this reason that Adamov's later plays have been produced abroad far more than in their country of origin. Eastern Block countries in particular welcomed Adamov's plays, and in H.E. Adamov laments being classed as an 'auteur nul, un communiste'(1) by western critics shocked at his visit to Berlin. His reputation as a Communist writer, despite being largely unfounded, was to dog him until the end of his life, and he was to be unfavourably reviewed by many critics as a result.

The mid-1950's were thus years of rapid unfolding in Adamov's dramatic thought. The conjugation of his own work's coming to a head, the revelation of Brecht, and the new role being ascribed to the theatre by political organisations, created a melting-pot out of which, through his familiar process of osmosis, Adamov emerged with a wider field of vision. The period which resulted in this heightened vision also marks a change in the subject matter and physical presence of Adamov's plays. Whilst maintaining his early preoccupations and themes, together with newly-appreciated values of the significance of these for mankind in society, he began to populate his scenes, and to dress and decorate them far more lavishly. Plays like Paolo Paoli, M. le Modéré, and in particular Le Printemps 71 and Sainte Europe, are on a massive scale in comparison with the introspective plays of the late 1940's and early 1950's. Their subject matter partly dictates this, but also largely responsible is Adamov's attempt to put into practice his theories concerning

(1) H.E., p.126.

the relationship between private and social neuroses.

As he was drawn to certain types of person in his private life, so Adamov was drawn to certain types of material for his plays. Commissioned to write the Mémoires of the notorious butterfly collector Eugène le Mout, whom he considered to be 'une canaille'(1), he became fascinated by the absurd image of a convict wielding a butterfly net. The historic and economic importance of the trade in frivolous items such as plumes during the Belle Epoque, at a time when Europe and the world were grinding opulently towards war, begged to be dramatised under Adamov's unfolding conception of the parallelism between private and public consciousness. He sensed the same possibility whilst compiling his anthology of works from the Paris Commune of 1871 (2), and was captivated by the pulsating rhythm of those three historic months, during which the Communard intellectuals, at least, lived a lifetime:

'Ces pauvres semaines, du 18 mars à la fin de mai, sont d'une richesse stupéfiante. Tout était là, tout ce qui nous tient à coeur'(3).

Illness in its pathological extremes captured his imagination in the same way. Adamov's fixation with his own physical afflictions has been commented upon in Chapter One, and in 1968 he declared:

'Je veux relier d'un trait d'union le monde de la maladie au monde dit réel'(4).

Political content alone was not sufficient for his purposes in the theatre. Time and again he was to utter that comment on which he chose to end Ici et Maintenant:

'Tout ce qui ne relie pas l'homme à ses

(1) H.E., p.117. (2) Arthur Adamov, Anthologie de la Commune, Paris, Editions Sociales, 1959. (3) Anthologie de la Commune, p.7. (4) Arthur Adamov, 'Un Clown fantomatique qui ressemble à Ubu', Interview with Emile Copfermann, Les Lettres Françaises, 18th. Sept. 1968.

propres fantômes, mais aussi, 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'(1).

For both Paolo Paoli and Le Printemps 71 there were massive documentation programmes, in which Adamov immersed himself totally in his familiar fashion. Studies of medical case histories provided material for La Politique des restes, Le Temps vivant and En Fiacre in particular, dealing with themes such as mythomania, mass hysteria and psychopathic fantasy. Whilst evidently based in neurosis, Adamov found that they provided an excellent ground on which to construct his worldly plays. They enabled him to demonstrate side by side his two concepts of fate : Curable and Incurable. In La Politique des restes, for example, Johnnie Brown's psychotic fear of accumulating rubbish which he will be compelled to swallow is incurable, a blight cast upon him by the dark forces. Its counterpart in society, the whites' fear of proliferating blacks, and their terror that they may lose their status and identity by intermarriage, or simply by sheer force of numbers, the societal behaviour which this fear provokes in them, is curable. Neither is openly condemned on moral or political grounds. Adamov seeks, by his own admission, merely to demonstrate, to present the spectator with a detailed cross-section of the internal machinery of society. From the demonstration he must draw his own conclusions:

'[...] il est très intéressant de dénoncer les tortures, mais il est beaucoup plus intéressant et fructueux de dire qu'il n'y a pas de guerre coloniale sans tortures ...'(2).

(1) Ici et Maintenant, p.240. (2) Arthur Adamov, 'Propos sur le théâtre politique', Pensée, no.154, Dec. 1970, p.74.

The ways in which Adamov put his findings to the test in his plays will be the subject of Chapter Five. They are by no means new discoveries for him : his work had contained germs of them since La Parodie, had manifested the same preoccupations, and, as Chapter Six will show, had maintained its means of expressing them. The psychic consistency throughout Adamov's creative career is admirably represented in one example of his fascination for external concretisation of internal awareness. It is also an example which highlights a facet of Adamov's character too easily overlooked - his boyish humour - tinged, as ever, with black irony. A Souvenir of April 1917:

'Les Etats-Unis déclarent la guerre à l'Allemagne. Genève soulevée, enthousiasmée. Sur les emballages des bonbons à la framboise, la tête du président Wilson apparaît'(1).

The interview in 1970, shortly before his death, in which Adamov discusses his third manière (2), is of vital importance to this thesis, as it places the question of Adamov's political conversion (or otherwise) truly in perspective within his life of constant change. In that interview, Adamov admits to having denied Strindberg and his own early plays because he felt too close to them. He had sought personal regeneration through the exposition of his neuroses, and had attempted to achieve social regeneration by using collective neurosis in the same way. He realised that these had been one and the same aim. In December 1965, H.E. prefigures this admission:

'Martin Esslin a eu raison de souligner que si Brecht a adhéré au communisme c'était en grande partie pour fuir les obsessions personnelles.
Cela ne diminue en rien le communisme'(3).

(1) H.E., p.20. (2) See note 2, p.102. (3) H.E., pp.168-9.

As so often, Adamov's comments about other authors are more revealing of himself than of those under discussion. David Bradby has pointed out that:

'Communism was not for Adamov, any more than it was for Brecht, a sovereign remedy for all ills. Rather, it provided a possibility for hope'(1).

If man in society could be made to accept his responsibility, to appreciate and to use his role as a potential determining factor in history, to use those choices which are open to him, even in the face of a predetermined cosmic destiny ... The trois points of which Adamov was so fond, and of which Roger Blin called him 'le roi'(2), are the only suitable climax to such a hypothesis, for, as Adamov recognised:

'Passer du cri aux raisonnements esthétiques, politiques et à la description froide des faits. Le cri ne sera pas exclu bien sûr. Comment le serait-il?'(3).

The ultimate fate of man remains the same, révolte in the final analysis is fruitless to rescue him from absolute persecution. Adamov's last plays, Sainte Europe, M. le Modéré, Off Limits and Si l'été revenait make this point abundantly clear. They were written under conditions of extreme physical suffering and mental anguish, and their increasingly oneiric quality is indicative of Adamov's slide into death - metaphysical annihilation, with which his itinerary had failed to reconcile him. His neuroses had, for a period, blossomed in the feverish hope of at least a half-solution, an inevitable development had taken place, and an equally inevitable

(1) David Bradby, op. cit., p.417. (2) See note 2, p.122.
 (3) H.E., p.189.

void was the end product. Adamov had defended the cause of mankind in varying aspects, with differing emphases, and always with passionate commitment and verve. Inge Pruks has suggested the interesting and convincing point that there remained only one way in which Adamov could still prove himself to be master of his own destiny (1). The circumstances surrounding Adamov's death on the night of 15th. March 1970 have never been publicly exposed, but those who have commented upon it, and who knew him well, such as Bernard Dort, would seem to indicate that Inge Pruks may be correct in her assumption that Adamov took his own life. His last radio interview is powerful support for the argument:

'Adamov went on to admit that he had never been able to shake off his past, that he had not found a solution to his personal problems in political ideologies, but that he firmly believed in the hope for social progress [...] However [...] he adds: "there still exists a complete antimony between the ideas I profess, and all that I feel most deeply" '(2).

Throughout his life and his writing, Adamov never advocated revolution itself. He seems to have been incapable of formulating a clear enough principle for that. His concern lay with revolt - an awareness of and a facing up on a personal level to that which oppresses man. Whatever politically-linked ideas his plays may have demonstrated, whether they were intended to please a group whose approbation he desired, or whether they serve his own theoretical ends, Adamov finally admits that at the heart of all his work, the prime motivating force was at the end, as it had been all along, the anguished cry of his own neurosis. Whatever he professed, his representation of it was destined to be coloured and directed by

(1) Inge Pruks, op. cit. (2) *ibid.*, p.345. The author translates parts of Adamov's interview with Lucien Attoun, which preceded the R.T.F. 3ème Chaîne presentation of Si l'été revenait, 7th. Feb.1970.

that inner turmoil, and those plays which manifest social turmoil can be seen to reflect the internal strife and to develop it. The way in which this thinking is apparent in not only Adamov's later plays, but throughout his work, will provide the subject for Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FIVEThe Curable in the Plays.

By the mid-1950's, Adamov felt that he had exhausted the cathartic and dramatic potential of the purely neurotic material in his early plays. It was his stated intention now to put to use his neuroses, rather than simply to expound them, although the specific use to which they were to be put remained a nebulous concept, like so many of Adamov's generalised notions. There is no doubt that the surface reality, the physical presence of the characters and the backdrop to those plays which followed Le Professeur Taranne are remarkably distant from, and in some cases, more sophisticated than those which preceded them. This fact makes it too easy to overlook consistencies from La Parodie to Si l'été revenait which are underlined and in part explained by Adamov's need to utilise his neuroses. Neurosis itself did not cease to represent an integral part of his theatrical work. On the contrary, one of its principal correlates was simply moving to the fore, so that neurosis, whilst remaining a prime motivating factor, was eclipsed as the focal point for the drama. It was the notion of révolte which now held the author's attention. From the metaphysical révolte of characters such as A. and Edgar, Adamov's vision was widening to embrace a consciousness of a revolt against more curable aspects of life, those dictated by man in society. Where the former had proved abortive for his characters, the latter offered at least a new dramatic possibility.

The Curable, the man-made side of life, is involved with real-life people in real-life environments and in plausible situations. This had not been the case with the ethereal nature of the primary material for such plays as Les Retrouvailles or La Grande et la petite

manoeuvre. Nevertheless, even in those plays, as we shall see, Adamov had always incorporated some background element of cold, hard reality. As he said in a debate on the political theatre:

'[...] on dépeint la société dans laquelle on est, on dépeint le monde dans lequel on vit, et non pas le monde réconcilié d'après-demain'(1).

It is true of all Adamov's plays that the world in which his characters move is unmistakably our own world, and he accepts that this fact leaves his work permanently open to political interpretation, although of themselves the plays may not be oriented in a specifically political direction. Of M. le Modéré, a play which has sustained a good deal of political criticism, he said:

'Ma pièce n'a rien de réaliste ni donc rien de politique'(2).

The statement implies not only that the play is one of his most intimate, but that any play which contains elements of realism is susceptible to interpretation by, and hence to be seen to hold significance for any political tendency. The present author has found no substantial evidence whatsoever for the adherence to any political party on the part of Adamov, the creed of which might be manifest in his plays. It is rather that the material treated, and the manner in which it is treated, lend themselves at times to manipulation into a political dogma. This applies in particular to those plays which were written between 1955 and 1963, which made a more direct appeal to the social sensibility of his audience than had hitherto been the case, and which were thus termed 'political'. They are, as is all Adamov's work, committed, but in a way which

(1) Arthur Adamov, 'Propos sur le théâtre politique', Pensée, no.154, Dec. 1970, p.72. (2) Arthur Adamov, 'Qui est M. le Modéré?', Interview with R. Desné and R. Gaudy, L'Humanité, 27th. Sept. 1968.

can more usefully be termed 'social' or 'humanistic' than 'political'.

The Appearance of Real Life

Although it has been associated solely with his middle-period plays, the appearance of real, curable, external, man-made life, the life of man in the society he has created, can be seen in the background of all Adamov's plays. From La Parodie to Le Professeur Taranne, with the marginal exception of Tous contre tous, the real world appears as an element intruding from the exterior on the private, neurotic world of the central protagonists. This situation recurs in Sainte Europe, La Politique des restes and Adamov's last plays. In these cases, as in the earlier ones, the real world presents a threat; in the former it is a threat to the entire structure of the universe of the central protagonists, in the latter it is a threat to their personal well-being. This demonstrates an interesting development in Adamov's conception of the Curable, which will emerge as this chapter progresses.

La Parodie, L'Invasion, together with La Grande et la petite manoeuvre, are played out against a backdrop of political activity which threatens N., immigrants and partisans respectively. Police sirens, Government measures to control immigration, witch hunts, are all features of the external reality in these plays, a reality which inspires fear and terror. The same external reality of revolution which underlies La Grande et la petite manoeuvre gnaws at Henri in Le Sens de la marche. He is called by his friends to take a stand against the Curable in life, but is unable to do so for fear of psychic reprisals. The reality of the prevailing social system is harshly revealed to Henri as his friend Albert is tortured and killed. In a symbolic fashion, the same occurs in Les Retrouvailles

where for Edgar the real world is represented by trains which potentially can transport him to freedom and afford him an autonomous identity, but which, in fact, are the instruments of destruction, as they kill both his fiancées. Similarly, the real world in Le Professeur Taranne invades the Professor's private world in the shape of figures of authority - the police - and, perhaps more importantly, as the letter from Belgium which announces the cancellation of his lecture, and sets the seal on his internal dispossession. Adamov claimed that this letter constituted the first example of realism in his theatre. It was the first occasion on which he had actually named and described in detail an object of 'real' significance. This was the Belgian stamp on the letter. It is typical of Adamov to settle on such a point as the beginning of realism in his plays, and equally typical that he should fail to acknowledge the fact that all previous manifestations of a real life beyond the neurotic central considerations of his work set the plays unmistakably in our time, and were from the outset open to political interpretation. This is particularly true of Tous contre tous, perhaps the most forward-looking of all his early plays, in which the principal issue is Jean Rist's personal struggle with his own neurosis precisely within a clearly-defined social situation whose reality is that of man oppressing and threatening man. Jean Rist, although still alone at the heart of the play, is not now alone in being threatened. It is the entire fabric of the social situation which is at risk, and which is itself a central element in the play, where it had provided merely a periphery in La Grande et la petite manoeuvre, the play which Tous contre tous most closely resembles.

With Le Ping Pong, the social reality that men face each other, and the decisions of men in everyday life, become the starting point

of the play. The world-view is now external, firmly rooted in the real world and looking in on neurosis, where previously it had been encased in a bubble of neurosis, from which it looked out onto the world. Tangible objects such as the pinball machine and the feathers, and tangible characters, weave a tissue of reality on the surface of Le Ping Pong, Paolo Paoli, and that apotheosis of Adamov's realist achievement in the theatre Le Printemps 71. The latter two plays, being based on considerable documentation and research on Adamov's part, are undoubtedly the most factually realistic of all his plays, and since they deal with historical fact, are also those most likely to contain and to have ascribed to them the most overtly political indications. The extent to which these are justified will be made clear during the course of this chapter.

Following Le Printemps 71, the plays begin once more to ascribe a background role to real life, and to approach it again from the standpoint of neurosis. As it is relegated to an outside position, so it regains its menacing aspect for the central protagonists. Thus, in Sainte Europe, the political reality of the state of the world causes Karl to have nightmares and to live a double existence, the one haunted by fear and menace, the other feeding on compromise and sham. Reality bursts into the private haven of neurosis of the characters in the shape of natural disasters, incurable it is true, but which foreshadow that greatest of all 'real' threats, that which is the ultimate horror for all those in power, that which destroys them all in the end: the man-made threat of revolution. Karl recognises that he personally is not threatened, so much as the entire social system for which he stands. His death means the end of an era. Doctor Perkins has the same awareness in La Politique des restes, where, once again, social reality is seen through the eyes of neurosis,

and where the Negro threat is not only to Johnnie Brown but, more importantly, to the whole of the white oppressor community. M. le Modéré stands in a similar relation to external reality in the shape of M. Havas, who can at will create and destroy the political universe in which M. struggles against his neurosis.

Of Adamov's specifically political plays, that is to say those plays which he wrote deliberately on the subject of, and as a social (and, as he admits, a highly personal) comment upon the Algerian question (1), it is extremely interesting to note the way in which, although based superficially in political reality - the situation itself in Algeria - the true reality which emerges is that which lies outside the central characters. In Les Apolitiques, the real world appears to Camille Falaise as a free-thinking youth is beaten up by Fascist thugs. This threat from within the system is far more real than the trumped-up reality of the political situation which claims the attention of the entire country. Similarly, in Théâtre de Société, the true reality is precisely that which the authorities who occupy the foreground deny : on the home front the workers, who are a result of the system, and who have rights which they will begin to claim, and on the Algerian front the Algerian himself. In these plays Adamov presents a real-life situation whilst unveiling a hidden social reality beneath the surface. He had always constructed his plays in this way to some degree, as has been shown, by the permanent feature of dual levels of vision. In Si l'été revenait the dual level is created by the presence of Mme. Peterson and of Viktor, neither of whom dreams, and who are thus situated in real life. In

(1) Théâtre de Société (see bibliographical note) contains three playlets : Intimité, Je ne suis pas Français, La Complainte du ridicule. Les Apolitiques (see bibliographical note) is included in this group of plays.

Comme nous avons été it is created by the opposition of the outside world to which A. would like to escape, but which holds the threat of reprisals for his part in his father's death, and the inner world of neurosis to which he is eternally condemned. En Fiacre and Le Temps vivant bring face to face the protective world of madness and the terrifying, disastrous one of everyday reality, whilst Les Ames mortes, seeming to stand on a firm bed of social and political reality, begins to shift on the sinking sands of corruption and human frailty.

It is Off Limits which perhaps succeeds best in bringing together outer and inner reality. Adamov adopted a particular theory in respect of this problem, a theory which will be brought under discussion later in this chapter. In Off Limits, it can be said, everything is real life. The journalist represents the outside world for the other characters, but he is essentially of their world in the broad sense, as they are part of his world. The synthesis which Adamov achieved in this play is a fine conclusion to a trend which had been present in his dramatic work since he began writing for the theatre. The police sirens of La Parodie had followed a swift but logical road of evolution into one and the same function as the neurotic motivations of L'Employé and N. One of the chief ways in which Adamov had arrived at this synthesis was by exploring, in his middle-period plays in particular, the mechanics of society, and by attempting an analysis of the workings of social interaction.

The Social Machinery of Oppression

The dramatic efficacy of demystifying neurotic motivations was so apparent to Adamov that when he became aware of a shift into real situations in the direction of his plays, he proposed to approach

the curable aspect of being in the same analytical vein as had prevailed for the incurable aspect:

'I intend to show the real motivations of this world. As always, these are economic in origin'(1).

There was, then, a defined area of study for these plays, and with the clear intent to debunk what Adamov saw as an entire, fabricated social system devised and operated by sections of humanity, a system which, as we shall see, has parallel effects with those of the oppressive forces beyond man which operate in the cosmic field.

Adamov takes the main crime of those who run the mechanism of society to be imposture, a notion which pervades many of his plays, even those prior to his alleged conversion to Marxism. It is true that in a play such as Paolo Paoli imposture is given a far more wide-reaching socio-political significance than in one such as L'Invasion, but nonetheless, in both instances it is seen to be an essential function of human interaction, and is socially curable. In Paolo Paoli, Paolo, for example, sends Marpeaux off to risk his life amidst a raging war in Morocco not, as he alleges, so that Marpeaux may be safe from the French authorities from whose Devil's Island prison he has escaped, but so that the convict may catch for him the most valuable butterflies in the world, which will make his, Paolo's, fortune. In L'Invasion, Pierre's mother declares that her son is too busy to see his wife who returns on a pretext, and who evidently wishes to return to her husband. The mother claims to be protecting her son, to be acting in his best interests, whereas in fact her real motives are selfish and constricting. She wishes to swallow her son whole, to have him return to his ante-natal state.

(1) Arthur Adamov, Interview with Peter Gelbard, Drama Survey, vol.3, no.2, Oct. 1963, p.256.

These two examples illustrate further the shift in emphasis attached to a constant facet of Adamov's theatre, from the metaphysical to the Curable - the social. That imposture constitutes for the author a fact of human life is attested not only in his plays and in his other writings on the theatre, but also in his journals. It is mentioned bitterly, perhaps unwittingly, in connection with Serreau's production of La Grande et la petite manoeuvre:

'[...] je dois rire des scrupules de Jean-Marie Serreau, effrayé par mon "anarchisme". La vérité, c'est qu'il craignait que Brecht, réellement effrayé, lui, refuse à Vilar de jouer au Palais de Chaillot Mère Courage dans une traduction de Geneviève Serreau'(1).

So sharp a sensibility to persecution was bound to attach itself very firmly to this notion of imposture, and Adamov never forgot it:

'Car je n'y peux rien, il y a des êtres vrais (en l'occurrence les Communards) et des êtres dont toute la vie est fondée sur l'imposture (en l'occurrence les Versaillais)'(2).

Following the comic irony which had resulted from juxtaposing real motivation and apparent reality in Paolo Paoli, and in particular with L'Abbé Saulnier, who is made ludicrous by his Catholic justifications (religious education) for aiding and abetting his brother in a yellow slave trade, Adamov turned imposture to social tragedy in Le Printemps 71:

'La continuité des intérêts sans cesse masquée par la discontinuité des opinions'(3).

Such continuity is as evident in Thiers as it is in Hulot-Vasseur, but most interesting of all is the peasant woman of the Commune, who begins by begging help from the Communards, and ends by denouncing them when she finds it suits her interests better. It is significant

(1) H.E., p.99. (2) Ici et Maintenant, p.136. (3) ibid., p.34.

that for Adamov the lower classes, oppressed and humiliated as they may be, have the same capacity for bad faith as their oppressors. Political ideology and idealism are not for Adamov. Yet the impostures of the Government, and in particular of the clergy (who are severely attacked in Paolo Paoli, Le Printemps 71 and Sainte Europe, probably because of their assumed power which stems from reflected glory of centuries gone by and which depends now solely on fear and persecution in Adamov's eyes, a dogma which he despises), determine the living conditions of the real-life people in the street. They claim to act on behalf of the people's interests - many of Thiers' speeches in Le Printemps 71 are taken from historical speeches made by the leader - whilst actually defending their own position. A system created by man which so exploits man is abhorrent to Adamov. On a smaller scale, Johnnie Brown's family is guilty of the same fault in trying to have him certified as insane. They really desire to control his company, just as Humphrey is out for a quick, cheap television hit with his so-called homage to Jim and Sally in Off Limits. In many of Adamov's plays, and in particular in those after Le Professeur Taranne, there are to be found several characters whose behaviour is suspect, who are not to be trusted at face value, and who represent a social parasite of the sort so engagingly represented in the dream-allegory Sainte Europe, where there is just sufficient contemporary allusion to the Common Market, to the Rockefeller-type concerns, the Krupp organisations and the compromised position of the Church to make us grind our teeth at:

'L'imposture de ceux qui osent aujourd'hui
user du langage moyenâgeux, jouer aux croisés,
aux chevaliers, aux ménestrels'(1).

(1) H.E., p.153.

Adamov does not propose solutions to the question of imposture. He merely advertises it, making barefacedly serious comment upon it in the case of Le Vieux of Le Ping Pong, who cheats the likeable Arthur and Victor by pretending that an invention of theirs is old hat, turning it to ridicule as in Paolo Paoli, to tragic consequences in Le Printemps 71, or to shockingly contemporary realism in Sainte Europe and Off Limits.

Of the two designations of character in Adamov's plays - oppressor and oppressed - those who practise imposture hold power over their fellows, can exert pressure on them, and present a threat to them. It is within their grasp to determine the terrestrial destiny of their victims, and to perpetrate social cruelty of the kind described by Adamov in L'Heure Nouvelle. Tous contre tous presents a fine example of this, with destiny being firmly replaced by the guns of Jean Rist's guards, and by the radio propaganda which governs public behaviour and attitudes. When the powers decide that those who limp are to be persecuted, the ordinary people snap into their ascribed role and begin displaying hostility if they do not limp, fear if they do. With social acceptability their behaviour is still curbed, but their instincts remain preconditioned, as is manifest in the case of the yokel who is abusive to Jean Rist even when his immunity is law. The Police States of La Parodie, of L'Invasion, La Grande et la petite manoeuvre, Le Sens de la marche and M. le Modéré bear evidence of human conflict in society, of man inventing and imposing his own politics, and of a systematised order being imposed upon the mass of people in order to keep them in a state of separation from their own free-thinking minds. Characters such as La Mère of L'Invasion are conditioned into social conformity, blurting out slogans of the system of the type: 'Le mal vient de leur paresse à tous, quels

qu'ils soient'(1). The characters of Off Limits also conform socially to an image of their society which is projected on the television screen, which requires that they 'rebel' against the system, but which turns out to be nothing more than a fabrication of the system designed to ensure its perpetuity. Adamov disapproves of social conformity for its own sake. It destroys the psyche of Taranne, as we have seen; it likewise robs the sisters of En Fiacre of their identity, and it allows the society families of Les Ames mortes to make fools of themselves by taking social protocol as their only standard in a real world where real people live, suffer and die at their hands. Individuals are not to blame for this state of affairs, but society itself - the system which allows a Tchitchikov to get away with buying dead souls. Adamov, as we have seen, had no doubt as to the root nature of that system which allows man to oppress and manipulate his fellows even unto death:

'La vie morale et la vie économique vont de pair. Qui s'en prend à l'une porte à l'autre un coup qui pourrait leur être fatal à toutes deux'(2).

It is not until Le Ping Pong that the nature of man's power over his like is particularised as economic, although Jean Rist and Edgar, as well as L'Employé and Henri's father, stress the necessity of having a job and earning money, without which no satisfactory life in society is possible. With the Consortium Adamov introduces an essentially capitalist system which conditions, controls and condemns to a futile existence all those who are drawn by its fascinating lure. The system finds a niche for all its children. Sutter is driven to emptying the bowels of every pinball machine

(1) Théâtre I, p.62. (2) *ibid.*, p.188.

operating in cafés, and to fantasising about his importance in the Consortium hierarchy. Arthur is wooed in his creative genius by the system, which can exploit his ideas for financial gain under the familiar pretence of satisfying the customer. Annette debases herself and becomes the sexual plaything of the decrepit Vieux for the sake of social prestige and the advancement brought by the Consortium's money. Madame Duranty has installed the machine as a means of financial gain, and when it begins to lose custom, she flits from her café to a bath house, and subsequently to a dancing studio in her search for financial betterment, as the Consortium constantly changes the machine in order to attract an increasing number of players. In this play, the frenzied struggle to achieve greater profit margins is never in the foreground - it is rather presented in the abstract, not so much a goal as an inevitable path which must be followed. Money as such is mentioned only in terms of the coins inserted by players into the machine, and by the vast sums extracted from it by Sutter. Yet this is exactly the foundation of the economic system which dictates everything else in the play. The system uses an object of fascination to capture its victims, and then incorporates them into its workings. It has one advantage, and a definitive one, over humanity : when the machine goes into Tilt, it can be repaired by the insertion of a new coin, but when a man, even the head of the Consortium, reaches paroxysm and goes into Tilt, he is irreparably destroyed.

With Paolo Paoli, the system is demonstrated in its economic machinations. Money almost literally talks in this play. Paolo has the power to direct Marpeaux's life because he has money. He pays Marpeaux, enabling the convict to live in a world which demands money in return for life. Paolo can expect anything of Marpeaux's

wife, he can build a solid, moral reputation for himself in society because he has employed her, given her financial support, the greatest gift anyone can offer within the system. Economic reasons motivate Hulot-Vasseur to change his business from feathers to uniform buttons when a war is imminent. He not only anticipates, but actively hopes for a war, so that his profits may soar. This change means disaster for Stella and her plumed millinery business; Stella, whom Hulot-Vasseur had claimed to adore. She is simply ground to dust beneath the wheels of the machine's chariot, driven by her erstwhile lover. If profit requires that the workers be humoured, then Hulot-Vasseur can pander to Marpeaux and his Union supporters. He can let them have some breathing-space, but when times change - a war is coming and jobs will be scarce - he can dispense with them and know that his product and his employment are always in demand. Such is the nature of social machinery as Adamov sees it, and, although critics saw in this play hope for social revolution:

'Paolo Paoli vaincu par des Hulot-Vasseur
respectueux de la loi d'arain, du capitalisme,
la parole est à Marpeaux'(1),

Adamov is careful at the end of Paolo Paoli not to make Paolo pro-proletarian, nor to allow him any facile conversion to the cause of humanity. The financial symbol of power - the rare and beautiful Charaxès butterfly - which has been returned to him is useless to make his economic position viable in the event of war. He is unable to move with the times and their requirements as Hulot-Vasseur can, and his frustration at his inability to adapt to the new situation causes him to pay the vast butterfly ransom to Marpeaux and Rose, purely to spite Hulot-Vasseur. There is no suggestion that his

(1) Bernard Dort, 'Paolo Paoli ou la découverte du réel', Les Temps Modernes, no.142, Dec. 1957, p.1114.

motives are altogether humane. Far from this, Adamov has termed Paolo's gesture an act of 'demi-conscience'(1). The circuit which Paolo despises because it has beaten him will continue.

In Le Printemps 71, although moving away from the conscious effort to define and illustrate the workings of social machinery, Adamov has continued his theme in an undercurrent which regulates the entire movement of the Commune's fall through the play. For the play does not concern itself with the victory of the Communards - they have already achieved their apotheosis as the play opens - but with the failure of their ideals. As the Internationalist Sofia puts it, they fail to occupy the National Bank, and this accounts for their ultimate defeat. Pierre Fournier, and in particular Robert Oudet, are convinced that the heart of the system, the people, the Hôtel de Ville, the administration must be conquered, and that they alone will bring victory to the Commune. Sofia recognises that without its heart the system can still function until its brain cells have been controlled. These brain cells lie, true to Adamov's conviction, within the vaults of the Banque. It is evident also in this play that the reasons which attract the man in the street, the non-ideologist, to the Commune, are also economic. The waiving of rent arrears, of pawn tariffs, the promise of reductions in food prices and of financial aid to the needy are far greater incentives than victory over the oppressor. All members of society are conditioned to value money as an end in itself.

Even in an oneiric play such as Sainte Europe, the power over his fellows which money accords man is demonstrated. Honoré de Rubens and Crépin can dictate the behaviour of Karl, mystical though his

(1) In an article entitled 'Paolo Paoli c'est la demi-conscience', Ici et Maintenant, pp.50-55.

presence may be, and of the Agha, whose inebriation dissipates immediately money is mentioned. Karl and the Agha are anxious at any cost to personal dignity or belief, not to alienate the economic might of their two fellows. Honoré's money can even buy him into heaven in a comic episode towards the end of the play, which is nonetheless an indictment of the state of society and of the Church's role in it (see Théâtre III, pp.280-285).

An ethic of profit and of the profitability of exchange is a common feature of Adamovian drama, whether as the focal point of the play, or as a background of motivation. In Les Ames mortes, for example, it is not until the end of the play that Tchitchikov's real motive for buying dead souls - his desire to cheat the Government out of a large amount of resettlement money - is divulged, although the entire structure of the play has relied on barter, as does the fabric of society. Yet the exchange system is far from an ideal Communism. Each side is constantly on the look-out for a means of making a profit. When Tchitchikov's urgency to buy souls is realised, the price increases : the basic economic principle of supply and demand. So it is that people can also be incorporated into the system, as currency. In this context Stella in Paolo Paoli, Marie in Tous contre tous have been mentioned in Chapter Three of this thesis. The profit ethic, then, affects the moral system of society, and opens the way to calculated treachery as manifested by the poor woman in Le Printemps 71. Adamov is acutely aware of the danger to humanity of this ethic, and it is this aspect of it more than any which appalls him.

Personal freedom is a notion alien to Adamov's picture of society at the mercy of the machine, the effects of which bear a close resemblance to the neurotic threats of his early plays.

Characters are paralysed by the system, reified by it, as Adamov points out of Le Ping Pong:

'Aliénation, réification de l'homme captif d'une société où l'appareil à sous brille, règne, trône. Il ne spécifie pas encore clairement la société dont il est l'image mais mon impression mi-voulue mi-involontaire n'empêchait pas que l'on reconnût le coupable: le système capitaliste'(1).

It has already been mentioned that social conformity constitutes one of the results of the system, and it is the significance of this fact for humanity which concerns Adamov. Conformity renders all men undifferentiated, dehumanised. Gaston Renaud has noted that:

'[...] Adamov s'engage à lutter contre ces principes qui avilissent la condition humaine encore plus qu'elle n'est avilie par la mort, ce mal incurable'(2).

Society does not immobilise its members through fear so much as through direct subjugation, a conscious operation perpetrated largely by means of subterfuge and imposture. Man is degraded to puppet status. L'Employé is imprisoned without understanding what is happening to him, Karl makes villeins dance before him like marionnettes, the barrack soldiers of Le Sens de la marche follow a prescribed, mechanical set of operations at particular stimuli. M. le Modéré is ironically aware of the power which will eventually be brought to bear over him:

'Car c'est au travail qu'il aura fourni que chaque citoyen sera jugé : oui, jugé et ... et classé'(3).

This function of society enables Adamov to approach his early plays in a manner which presents characters who are types. He and we are

(1) H.E., p.112. (2) Gaston Renaud, 'De l'aliénation à l'engagement ou le théâtre d'Arthur Adamov', Revue de L'Université d'Ottawa, vol.42, no.3, 1972, p.383. (3) Théâtre IV, p.47.

conditioned to a view of humanity where men fall into certain categories, and although his aim may not have been such in writing the plays, he is presenting a facet of our society which his later plays claimed to have appreciated anew. The undifferentiated characters of La Parodie, of Les Retrouvailles and so on, are just as much the victims of the mechanisms described and illustrated in Paolo Paoli as are Marpeaux, Annette and M. le Modéré. Neither must it be forgotten that the system is designed and operated by man - witness, as David Bradby has remarked in his thesis, the constant appearance in the plays of figures in authority (1) : directeurs (La Parodie, La Grande et la petite manoeuvre, Les Retrouvailles, Le Sens de la marche, Paolo Paoli, Le Ping Pong, Si l'été revenait), forces of law and order (L'Invasion, Tous contre tous, Le Professeur Taranne, Le Printemps 71, La Politique des restes, Off Limits, M. le Modéré and Théâtre de Société). The question is then posed : if social cruelty is curable, then man must be endowed with a degree of choice, so why is that choice never exercised?

In Adamov's plays there are many trouble-makers - characters who do not entirely conform to the requirements of the system, but they are always crushed, as we shall see. However, they are not alone in their defeat, for even those perpetrators of social cruelty cannot escape the ultimate power of the forces of darkness. Death awaits all men, even Humphrey and Le Vieux, who leave behind the frightening realisation that the system itself, that most inhuman of human creations, can continue without them, indeed at their expense, feeding on a constant diet of human life. Adamov never escapes this view in any of his plays, for this reason limiting himself to analysing, to

(1) David Bradby, op. cit. On p.172 of the thesis, he provides a diagrammatic analysis of Adamovian characters.

debunking, to laying bare the mechanisms operating upon man in society, but he does not propose a political creed, a recipe for revolution. This point will be elucidated further in the section of this chapter which deals with Adamov and history.

Social Responsibility

A playwright's convictions are generally discernible, largely through his attitude to his characters as expressed in his treatment of them in his plays. In Adamov's case this is a vexed question, as his work is essentially one of balance. He is always at pains to demonstrate the negative as well as the positive side to his characters. In his early plays he uses parallel characters such as N. and L'Employé; in later plays he adopts a dual attitude to their behaviour. It is probably fair to say that only in Le Printemps 71 does he betray wholly partisan feelings, and that, it seems likely, is at least in part due to his being as it were commissioned by the Communist Party to write the play. Yet in political terms, even the Communards do not escape criticism by Adamov for their failure to adhere to a principle which has been demonstrated as one of the most important in Adamov's life : total commitment. Paolo Paoli speaks for his creator when he declares of Marpeaux:

' [...] quand on a des principes, on les applique, [...] quand on commence une grève, on va jusqu'au bout! Tandis que lui, avec ses petits camarades, il a repris le travail, il a cédé à Hulot-Vasseur'(1).

Paolo himself does not gain any particular favour with Adamov for making this statement, as he proceeds to debase it by using it to

(1) Théâtre III, p.96.

support his own falsely-justified, petulant, self-interested refusal to capitulate to Hulot-Vasseur over the Charaxès butterfly. Nevertheless, the point is made that if an assault is to be made upon those aspects of society's problems which are curable, then a ruthless, absolute commitment is required, and Marpeaux does not satisfy this requirement. Neither do the Communards, as they fail to take hostage key members of the administration, and to take control of the finance centre, and to march against Versailles. Half-hearted measures, however well-intentioned, are not sufficient to win the day, and they cause Oudet to betray those Communards who gave their lives trusting him. Jean Rist also fails in his social responsibility, aware as he is, of the perpetual motion of change which allows one manifestation of the system to be superseded by another whilst the machinery remains unaltered. He allows himself to be debased and classified as a refugee when this alone can save his life, and when all meaning to life is gone, he capitulates again to the system by giving his life, refusing to save himself, and thus perpetuating the status quo. In metaphysical terms, his act is an authentic one; in political terms it is merely reactionary, as had been Le Militant's revolt in La Grande et la petite manoeuvre, and as was to be the behaviour of the bourgeois characters of Off Limits. Adamov expects of his characters a firm conviction such as he described in L'Heure Nouvelle of sadism (1). Fully-espoused and conscious sadism is justifiable, where the absence of a real consciousness of it renders sadism intolerable. Thus, Jean Rist's killing of the young girl is consciously espoused and acceptable, where the Commune's failure to kill the Catholic Father, who is a potential

(1) In the second volume of the review, an article entitled 'Sur la cruauté'.

threat to them, is not.

Political justice for Adamov lies in authenticity, and the nature of society as described by Adamov makes this impossible to most of his characters. It is for this reason that Tchitchikov is deliberately rendered likeable by both Gogol and Adamov in Les Ames mortes. Here is a man with no social conscience whatsoever, whose dealings we ought to find deplorable, but whom we find delightful nonetheless. In this, we are indicted along with the members of Russian Imperialist society for failing to recognise, and ultimately espouse, our social obligation not only to stop such a man definitively from continuing to degrade humanity, but to correct our social system in order to prevent a recurrence of this phenomenon. Adamov rarely shows us an individual who is aware of the social significance of his position. One such is Le Vieux of Le Ping Pong, who is in full cognisance of his effect upon the population. His machines can lure people, and possess them. Yet this power is perverted, and the familiar imposture justification is put forward in favour of the exploitation of the masses.

The question of social responsibility is one which comes to the fore in the later Adamov plays, when his characters are brought face to face with the social consequences of their actions, as we have seen, but even in the early plays, there is, lurking in the background, just a hint of it. The director of the newspaper in La Parodie, for example, is conscious of the social importance of the news which he prints, and the partisans of La Grande et la petite manoeuvre, together with Albert of Le Sens de la marche, represent a small force of momentary figures who are seen to be accepting and espousing their social role, endlessly persecuted, but nevertheless making a concerted struggle against the system of Order. They

represent what at that early stage was a definite but fragmentary part of Adamov's consciousness, and as such can be idealised. As ever, when they finally appear in the foreground of his plays, they do not stand up to close examination. They are too human, too conditioned by the machinery of society, which they are powerless to harm. They are creatures of a world where values are categorised and dehumanised, and where peace and the rights of man are unfashionable concepts which fail to satisfy the addiction to the drug of the moneyed society:

'La paix! Mais c'est la vie médiocre,
l'adultère, les pièces d'Edmond Rostand'(1).

Théâtre de Société perhaps provides Adamov's only authentic characters in the worker of Intimité and the Algerian of Je ne suis pas Français, both of whom approach the political reality of their situation in a humanitarian but stoical fashion. The worker dies for his rights and not, this time, because he has failed in any detail of commitment, but because the sheer force of effects, primarily economic, defeats him. The Algerian utters only one phrase, the only one he needs, that which is his whole being, and that which even his economic and political impotence in his object-state cannot take from him. In his heart of hearts he feels precisely that he is not French. This is not the case for Camille Falaise of Les Apolitiques. His political revelation renders him no more effective than the confessed Leftists who refuse to react to the Fascist beating of the Communist boy, for his reply is to seek out the individuals responsible and to attempt to punish them physically. This can merely continue the system, as it can keep dissenters

(1) Théâtre III, p.68.

occupied on such petty business and carry on its own business on a large scale. Falaise is as guilty of lack of foresight and total commitment as is Robert Oudet, but, in typical Adamovian fashion, his humanity is responsible for this, and Adamov can never denounce entirely such a trait. Significantly, those plays which best show political ruthlessness, Théâtre de Société, are utterly devoid of humanitarian development, and, as such, fail as theatre in Adamov's eyes as well as in the opinion of critics.

Social Example

One considerable change in Adamov's plays following Le Professeur Taranne is his stance in relation to his audience. Where before he had sought to exorcise his private terrors and, if possible, to be of comfort to others who might share them, he now wrote plays which clearly had the audience more positively in mind, and which were designed with a more definite effect in view:

'Il ne faut pas que la confusion qui
règne dans la tête des personnages règne
dans la tête des spectateurs'(1).

The spectator was, then, expected to see a clear way through the plays to an enlightened point of view. Nonetheless, the plays were, for Adamov, still essentially theatrical, and this prime function must not be prostituted to political ends:

'Je montre des personnages. Je vous conseille
de ne pas leur ressembler, mais il est
inutile qu'il y ait parmi eux un personnage
qui vous donne ce conseil. Ce serait trop
mâcher la besogne'(2).

It is with very mixed feelings that Adamov regards Brecht in this

(1) Arthur Adamov, Interview with Marc Rombaut, French Review, vol.45, nos.3-8, 1971, p.13. (2) Arthur Adamov, 'Adamov apporte deux billards électriques', Interview with J. Carlier, Combat, 2nd. March 1955.

aspect. Conscious that all the German's plays contain some element of the Lehrstück, he cannot reconcile himself to the fact that Brecht tended all too often to deny the human element in his plays, and to bombard the audience with a positive, occasionally simplistic political attitude and an unmistakable, objective stance. Much as he admired Brecht, in particular his ability to isolate and illustrate the mechanisms behind social activity, Adamov could not entirely condone his use of the theatre for political purposes. This is reflected in those plays of the German playwright which he preferred: Sainte Jeanne des abattoirs, Mère Courage and L'Exception et la règle, which deal with wider problems of humanity than provide the topics for some of the more generally-appreciated Lehrstücke.

Le Ping Pong brought Adamov's audience into far greater contact with the characters than had his previous plays, which, steeped in cloudy neurosis, had tended to be regarded as somewhat hermetic. The new play was the first to depict absolutely everyday individuals indulging in everyday pastimes in everyday fashion and using everyday language. The use of students as his principal protagonists, and unemployed students at that, would bring the play within the physical grasp of a large section of Adamov's potential audience, students themselves. The fact that for the first time in his work Adamov allowed his characters freedom to choose their path in life, and to discuss this choice (however theoretical it may be, this was an innovation on the superficially social level), presented on the stage opinions hitherto absent in his plays. The spectator is effectively asked to decide whether he would choose to opt out as did Sutter, or to be willingly absorbed into the system in the hope of esthetic satisfaction as was Arthur, or to continue along his socially-prescribed path in the face of professional and emotional

disappointment as did Victor. All may end in pointless death, but the choice of path is at least open. And behind all that lies the most important lesson of all for the spectator who wishes to see - the works of his society are laid bare for him to scrutinise.

Paolo Paoli, by similar means, engages the spectator. The theatrical devices which Adamov began to use at this period will be discussed in the final chapter of this thesis, but it is important to note here that they involved the spectator physically, appealing to his senses and to his intellect by asking him to make an assimilation between the facts flashed before him on a screen at various intervals of the play, and the dramatic action which directly followed them. Also, by means of revealing the motivations of Paolo and his society, Adamov effectively shows his audience:

' [...] notre aliénation petite-bourgeoise:
ses sortilèges et ses trahisons'(1).

This, he hopes, will bring a social awareness in his audience, and from then on the spectator's course of action is his own affair. Similarly, Le Printemps 71 continues the principle by means of its Guignols and Transitions which, Adamov tells us in the preface to the play, are designed to fill in the gaps in the spectators' knowledge, and to provide breathing-space during which he can sit back to assess what has gone on before, making some kind of judgement upon it. As that judgement must be coloured by his experience of his own society, so any conclusions he may draw from the play must serve as a social education to him.

The comic technique is used in Sainte Europe to expose facts about our world. The Common Market is thinly disguised, as are characters such as General de Gaulle, but the sophistication of this

(1) Bernard Dort, op. cit., p.1114.

play lies in its ethereal quality, which enables it to leave a profound impression of Adamov's view of the political state of his world, without sinking into facility nor detracting from the pure theatricality of the play. The audience is wooed by such sympathetic characters as Francesca and Moeller Van der See into accepting the final revolution, but left entirely at sea as to what might be its achievements. This open-ended nature of the plays is a continuation from the early plays where a metaphysical void was suggested, but which did not always compel the spectator to draw conclusions for himself. M. le Modéré, on the other hand, provides the spectator with a fait accompli. M.'s political life has sprung up, flowered and been mown down, leaving room for reflection, as *Le Jura* can be interpreted in a number of political ways, with M. Havas undoubtedly representing the political might of the United States.

Adamov's interviews concerning his later plays frequently mention their setting in specified social situations. Off Limits represents 'L'Amérique malade de l'Amérique'(1), Si l'été revenait that supposedly liberal state of Sweden. Such a situated theatre brings its ideas much closer to its politically conscious audience than perhaps had the introspective plays of Adamov's first efforts, and this awareness of his audience, almost a self-consciousness as he took his audiences very seriously and very much to heart (as his journals and interviews reveal), is indicative of a social commitment which had always preoccupied the private Adamov, but which began to be apparent in his plays only after some time. It is evident that Adamov intended his theatre to reach as many people as possible, and that these people might benefit in the realm of awareness of their

(1) See note 1, p.60.

social situation, from seeing his plays. It is equally clear that nowhere in the plays is there evidence of political dogma. What political potential Adamov's theatre may have is external to the substance of the plays, in the hands of the Unions and those political punters who may choose to use them to their own ends. Unfortunately for them, Adamov never wrote a play sufficiently unequivocal to serve their cause unquestioningly. Unfortunately for Adamov, his plays fell between two camps : insufficiently radical to please the Left; too dangerously tolerant for the Right. Consequently, Adamov it was who suffered the greatest loss. His plays received very little support. It is curious that even those concerning Algeria do not approach the question from a political point of view, but from a humanitarian standpoint. Adamov felt himself too closely involved in, and yet too distant in terms of real knowledge of the war from it, and refused to write more than the representative tableaux which social conscience required of him. No direct political appeal to his audience, then. For Adamov, politics in the theatre consists of retrospective appraisal by the indirect means of balanced exposition, aided by solid documentation. That revolution is not his teaching is amply illustrated in the ways in which his characters seek to solve their social problems.

The Ways Out

There are characters in Adamov's plays who make some kind of an attempt to make a conscious use of the gift of choice which is offered to them. They strive to bring to fruition their stand against the system, but never successfully. When the Curable is seemingly beatable, the Incurable comes in to play to dog any chances of freedom a mere mortal may have even within his own society. Perhaps

this is in part a function of the nature of the revolts made by Adamov's protagonists. For the most part, these involve personal attempts by individuals to rid themselves of the shackles of society. In all cases they involve anarchic tendencies rather than organised political gestures, and inherent in the revolt is invariably a clash of personalities. The result of revolt is rarely anything less than death, but Adamov does not consider all action to be futile : only that which serves futile ends, for example, the enormous expenditure of energy devoted to so frivolous an enterprise as the pinball machine, or to the acquisition of trifles such as butterflies and feathers. In these cases the effort wasted is rendered ridiculous. In others human effort is regarded with the utmost seriousness. Nevertheless, as has already been pointed out, Adamov does not give his characters credit for simple acts of heroism. As in everything, he is most interested in the motivations behind their actions, and Jean Rist's suicide and those of Jim and Sally, whilst appearing to strike a blow for freedom against a dominating society, merely provoke a conditioned reaction, whereby consideration of their deaths preoccupies the populace, taking the spotlight from the actual system against which they died in protest. The metaphysical levelling of Humphrey, Jim and Sally in death simply serves to outline the ability of the system to absorb such an event and to emerge unscathed, having reaped every advantage from its exploitation of the unfortunate victims. On a political level, Jim and Sally are guilty of inefficacy.

In other plays, Adamov depicts characters refusing to be victimised by society, and exercising their choice in a less personal manner, by attempting to offer a pseudo-political alternative. Such are the cases of Marpeaux and of Le Militant. Marpeaux's case is hampered by the unlikely development by means of which he undergoes

the metamorphosis from obliging butterfly hunter to informed and politically active Union leader. This is perhaps accounted for to some degree by Adamov in interview:

' [...] dès qu'apparaît cette sorte d'élément trouble dans la vie sociale [jaunes briseurs de grève], qu'un mauvais coup se prépare'(1).

Having introduced as historical fact, and as a dramatic necessity for his Abbé Saulnier, the immigrant work force of Chinese slaves, Adamov needed a proletarian reply to this ultimate means of oppression by the ruling class. Marpeaux, in so schematic an undertaking as Paolo Paoli, was the obvious representative for the C.G.T. threat to the system. In any event, Marpeaux's political bid is destined to be thwarted by the workers' fear of total unemployment. It is Hulot-Vasseur who holds all the trump-cards, and although Marpeaux has at least made his proletarian presence felt, he can wield little threat to the economic system which has sent the world hurtling into war by its trade policies, and which promises now to profit from that war. It is the likes of Marpeaux who will suffer, bound, as he is, to depend upon the system for his livelihood.

Le Militant's bid for revolt ends in exactly the same position, but in a more personalised fashion, with Le Militant realising in the course of his victory speech that his promises, his ideas for the future, for change and for social reform, are not only conditioned by, but identical with those he has fought so hard and at such great cost to overcome. He has been unable to plan a new society, as one suspects might be the case with the revolution which destroys the world of Karl and Crépin in Sainte Europe. Social salvation is not to be found in the sterility of political revolt.

(1) Arthur Adamov, 'Avec Paolo Paoli j'ai voulu nommer ceux qui paient de leur personne et ceux qui paient de leur argent', Interview with Paul Morelle, Libération, 20th. Jan. 1958.

A third means of revolt is that perpetrated by Tchitchikov himself. This is a cynical solution, based on pretence and imposture, one of Adamov's favourite tools. Tchitchikov proposes to defeat the system by using its defects to cheat it. His is not, strictly speaking, a political revolt, as it is entirely self-interested, but Tchitchikov's justification for his method is that society has treated him appallingly for most of his life, and if it is sufficiently corrupt, and if he has the brains to devise a way of taking advantage of this corruption, then he deserves the benefits that this offers him. In time, by such means, corrupt society will either improve its laws to protect itself and the community, or be taken over by those who are more worthy to run it : those who have been able to reap best advantage from it. However specious this argument may appear, it is politically justifiable in Adamov's eyes, as Tchitchikov is one of the few characters to espouse wholeheartedly his conviction. In the whole of Adamov's theatre there is no more anarchic figure than Tchitchikov. The half-solutions of Paolo and of the party-goers of Off Limits also conform to this category of suspect justification. Paolo may hope to fool Saulnier, Hulot-Vasseur, and even fellow members of his society by claiming to make a stand in favour of the oppressed, against the system, but he cannot pull the wool over Adamov's eyes, nor those of his audience. He is simply a man in a fit of pique. Equally cynical is Adamov's treatment of Lisbeth, Dorothy and George and their friends, for whom Happenings, drugs and alcohol do not provide the revolution against society which they pretend, but are merely the norm, the simple way to avoid the strain of real life in America, a way to render their existence more bearable in a state where human meaningfulness is meaningless. At the end of the play there is a glimmer of hope, as Dorothy appears to accept

responsibility for what happened to Jim and Sally, and to be born again through Sally, but her declamation smacks of a conditioned reaction to reaction. She is merely reverting to the American Dorothy, the person she was prior to her escape act through the drugs scene. If she regards this as breaking away from the sickness of her society, and if others follow her example, they are simply returning to support the status quo on a primary level, instead of the secondary level which they have occupied in their drug parties.

Sutter's revolt in Le Ping Pong is also of this type, but it is more indicative of the effect of society upon the neurotic psyche than of his political intent. His decision to quit the Consortium comes after he has deteriorated progressively to an abysmal state of dress and filth, when his influence over Le Vieux is no longer valid. He declares the quiet life in a colonie de vacances more suited to him, but is his entertainment during the summer of the fee-paying offspring of those who are part of the mechanism of the Consortium really going to guarantee him a positive stance against the great machine? It is more likely that he is returning to the wilds where his son was lost, and amongst children of the same age as that boy, to salvage something of his personal identity before he is swallowed and digested by the system.

Despite all this pessimism as regards political revolt, there is one category of 'untouchables' in Adamov's plays. These are characters who, in a totally disordered fashion, and always with the result of death, but with every ounce of conviction that they possess, utter a cry from the very soul of mankind against political oppression in all its inhuman forms. Such characters are the young man and the young girl of Tous contre tous, who could beg for their lives, or lie, but who finally scream their hatred of their fellows and are prepared to

die for that privilege. They make no mistake. The men who pull the triggers are of flesh and blood. Human beings kill other human beings, not some anonymous entity beyond us all. Annette of Le Ping Pong likewise realises the inhumanity of the Consortium, having tried to take advantage of it and been rejected by it. No bitter outcry of personal resentment is hers, though. She shrieks for mankind that we must try to understand one another, to communicate in human terms, before all humanity is denied us.

Finally, the most heartfelt of all Adamov's social revolts is that of the Communards. Experience has taught the likes of Robert Oudet and Tonton where social justice must lie, and they are prepared to spread the word quietly, to die if necessary, but only effectively, so that ultimately the Cause may triumph. The Commune as a whole may be beaten, but if spirits such as theirs can live on, then hope must stay alive.

No revolt, then, is destined to success in Adamov's plays, but the validity of revolt is shown on occasion. If the oppressed live in fear, then so too do their oppressors. It appears that the whole of human interaction between oppressor and oppressed is based on mutual fear. Le Vieux trembles at the sight of Sutter who, potentially, could damage his personal position. The Guignol rulers of Le Printemps 71 shiver in terror at any movement from La Commune. The powers of Sainte Europe are similarly terrified of revolutionary forces in their countries. Revolt may do no more than shake the system, but men cannot ignore it.

Man's potential choice in life is dictated by factors which render him impotent to achieve anything by his choice. Either he is led merely to perpetuate the status quo, thanks to the double indemnity which it has taken out against itself, or else he performs an act which may be viable for the time at which he lives it, but

which will soon be judged by history as merely relative to that which preceded it. The only foreseeable alternative to this is to live in a state of permanent flux, of constant Disorder, as these moments alone seem pure of the noxious accompaniments to Order. In political life, this parallels Adamov's glimpses of truth in the metaphysical world, and is equally painful, equally impossible to sustain. It is not a state which appears in his plays, for it is so brief that even in Tous contre tous, where the social order alters three times, on each occasion it settles into human oppression. Socio-political revolt is as abortive against the mechanisms of society as is metaphysical revolt against the forces of darkness. And the two are closely linked:

'La guerre, la guerre! Mais elle a toujours existé, la guerre! Et si elle doit venir, ce ne sont pas vos discours...'(1).

Individual Neurosis and the Course of History

In his middle and late plays, Adamov dealt with that question which had begun to fascinate him in the mid-1950's : the link between private neurosis and political systems. He embarked on a serious attempt to demonstrate the link between private and public neuroses, envisaging the latter as the result of a social system.

As Pierre's separation from the permanent Absence of ultimate truth was his destruction, so in Le Printemps 71 a political Absence: that of the Communards from the political reality of their situation, destroyed their revolt. The parallelism between these two facts had been sown within the structure of L'Invasion itself. As Pierre's world had been increasingly inundated with papers, objects, people and linguistic problems, so the very country was being invaded by

(1) Théâtre III, p.121.

hordes of immigrants, causing border skirmishes and all manner of Disorder. To La Mère's great relief, the administration halts all immigration, and Order is restored, with the boundaries closed and the country is in isolation. This is political suicide. At the same time La Mère puts a stop to Pierre's visitors, he closets himself in his room to die, whilst she stands guard over the closed boundary of his bedroom door. There is no explanation of this parallelism nor of its social implications at that stage of Adamov's career, but with Paolo Paoli it was to begin to play a considerable role in his work. The point has been made that as man's inner being is permanently in an unstable state caused by metaphysical fear, so the perpetrators of the social system also suffer fear, and live in an unstable political environment, where their position may be severely threatened at any moment. Where the small man, the ordinary individual in the street, was the frightened subject of Adamov's first plays, those in control of society now take the fore, and are seen to be aware of the tenuous nature of their supremacy. Le Vieux of Le Ping Pong is the first real indication of this, and was to be followed by the businessmen of Paolo Paoli, the Government Administrators of Le Printemps 71, the magnates, monarchs and religious leaders of Sainte Europe, a politician in M. le Modéré, the corrupt principal figures in the Russian society of Les Ames mortes, the head of the national network, and thus the country's greatest propaganda merchant in Off Limits and the leaders of the white, racist, ultra-capitalist society of La Politique des restes. That their neurosis is inherent in the fabric of society was discovered and explored by Adamov in particular through the historical documentation which he undertook for Le Printemps 71 and Paolo Paoli, and in his clinical research for La Politique des restes.

By narrowing the scope of his plays to a specific field in the real world, Adamov was able to obtain an enlargement of vision. The human condition gave way to the history which had hitherto constituted its background, and itself took that less obtrusive role. Yet it was still foremost in Adamov's personal life, and was never far from his thoughts in the theatre. Of Le Printemps 71 he wrote:

[...]j'ai voulu montrer dans Le Printemps 71
le rapport infiniment simple et infiniment
compliqué de tel ou tel tempérament avec
telle ou telle tendance politique'(1).

George Wellwarth has underlined the point that for Adamov society constitutes 'a conglomeration of individuals'(2), and that it is the personal convictions of these individuals which determine the fabric of society. It is interesting and instructive to consider in relation to this point the differing degrees of meaning attributed to the word neurosis in Paolo Paoli and La Politique des restes. It is wiser to term it obsession, the former being distinctly normal in human terms, the latter being particular. In Ici et Maintenant (3), Adamov gives a thorough account of the phenomenon at work in Paolo Paoli. He lists all those who had interests in the feather business during the Belle Epoque, and explains their various reactions to the Protestant Audubon Society's attempts to prevent the continuation of the trade. In fact, all the rationalisations are one and the same in origin and intent : the traders' desire to ensure the flow of feathers and their own profit. There is the beauty argument : that so few people are allowed to see these feathers in the wild, and would miss a rare treat were the trade to be halted. The bosses' argument : thousands of employees will lose their valuable jobs

(1) Arthur Adamov, 'A.A. signera Le Printemps 71', Interview with Mireille Boris, L'Humanité, 3rd. Feb. 1961. (2) George Wellwarth, The French-Speaking Drama, Theatre of Protest and Paradox, London, MacGibbon and Kee, 1965, p.30. (3) See Ici et Maintenant, p.35.

should the trade collapse. The objective point : many feathers are collected from the moulting season, and birds are in no danger of extinction. Finally, the ethnographic point : if birds were not killed for the trade, then natives would soon destroy them. Such reasons reflect the particular interest of a particular group of people, and are designed to impress those groups and win their support, thus perpetuating the system. The mechanism intrigued Adamov, and he made Saulnier justify the sending of Marpeaux to Morocco by declaring it advantageous for the convict's sinful soul, when really he simply did not want to cross Paolo, who bought some Chinese butterflies sent by Saulnier's brother, the Missionary. Hulot-Vasseur, whose obsessions are money and status, justifies his switch to the button trade by claiming to serve the national need for uniform buttons in the coming war, and Paolo, whose obsession is his own image, justifies his seduction of Rose as aid to a girl in need, and his petulant final act of renunciation as aid to the deserving poor. These acts are all far more than simple imposture : they help to determine the course of history for the society upon which they are brought to bear. L'Abbé Saulnier recognises that:

'Je suis venu en effet, vous entretenir d'un sujet particulier. Mais ce sujet particulier se trouve, aujourd'hui, englobé dans la situation générale'(1).

With La Politique des restes, the situation is rather more acute. Johnnie Brown is suffering from a psychosis, believing that every piece of foul refuse in the world is destined to be ingurgitated by him. He has killed a black man for depositing refuse on his step, and for subjecting him to a confrontation with his obsession. Doctor Perkins' defence of Johnnie is that the psychosis is brought about by

(1) Théâtre III, p.63.

that which it reflects : the collective societal psychotic fear of The Black. His point is substantiated by Joan Brown, Johnnie's wife, who is rendered incapable of rational thought or speech at the memory of a sexually oriented instigation to which she alleges she was subjected by a group of Negroes. This is, in fact, reminiscent of Genet's Les Nègres, as the Negroes, if Mrs. Brown really did see them, were merely conforming to the white image of them as abundant in sexual prowess and appetite. If she did not actually see them, then they were figments of her terrified, prejudiced imagination, and a complete social system can now be seen to be constructed upon psychic fear. A further point in favour of Doctor Perkins' theory is that Johnnie's behaviour is variously justified by all present as self-defence, the natural reaction of a man faced with the unnatural behaviour of a man whose colour is known to make him dangerous, and his right as a superior, law-abiding citizen, for the protection of others. Killing a black man is regarded as acceptable social behaviour which, for appearances' sake, must be given a minimal, suspended sentence. To a society where, it is obvious, the Black is held in terror, and where apartheid is common sense, one less black is a blessing. At this juncture, on the demand for a complete and unconditional acquittal, Johnnie realises that the whites too might be willing him harm, and just might be proliferating, waiting to be forced into his gullet. His declaration that white men will not be spared by his gun brings a long-term asylum sentence. Yet Johnnie's psychosis is more consistent than that of his society. It can only see the uniquely oppressive aspect of Johnnie's illness, yet the mad ravings of his fear are matched by those of society against the objects of its fear.

Le Printemps 71 saw a quieter version of the ethic. If the

Commune failed, it failed precisely because of that which endeared it so much to Adamov and to other observers : it had too many human individuals and no concrete plan to follow unswervingly. Oudet's humane squeamishness prevented him from killing the priest who was to denounce him. His loyalty to his people was to prevent him from letting people man other barricades than their own, even when these were breached and others could have been held with assistance, and thus to allow the whole city to fall without his knowledge of it. Sofia's Internationalist ideals took her to all parts of France without being able to offer real assistance anywhere. Each character has his personal obsession, and it clouds his judgement, causing events to take a turn which they might otherwise not have done. It has been noted that:

'Aucun des héros adamoviens n'est pleinement positif. A un moment ou à un autre, l'un d'eux ne comprend plus. Il se trompe. Son action s'en trouve infléchie, faussée. Les fautes individuelles deviennent alors des erreurs historiques'(1).

History, then, is an admirable casing for this theory of Adamov's, as it provides a valid point of reference against which to measure the personal lives of the characters, who are also largely authenticated (2). Adamov had a particular penchant for historical reality:

'Je crois qu'il y a dans la réalité historique même, la réalité précise, la réalité datée, une poésie si effarante que toute invention strictement personnelle paraît malingre en comparaison'(3).

Herein lies another reason for his failure to provide an historical account of the Algerian situation. Also, Adamov felt the need for a certain amount of recul from his material. What must be presented was

(1) Bernard Dort, 'La Commune au passé et au présent', Les Temps Modernes, June 1962, p.1949. (2) Margaret Quinn Dietemann (op. cit.) provides an extensive note (pp.198-200) concerning the historical background to the characters of P. 71. (3) Ici et Maintenant, p.66.

not histoire vécue but histoire jugée, which could be considered as stable, a constant against which to measure other factors, whilst new history had not been able to settle into that respectability.

In the case of Off Limits, the frenzy of action in the play reflects a here-and-now which is America today - or was so at the time of the play's composition. It is the most explicit and shocking example of the private neurosis-social system theme, in that, although it depicts a minute fraction of American society, it is precisely that fraction of it which we consider as indicative of the problems of the day in America. The problems of affluence, of how to fill leisure time, of the Vietnam War; those induced by new medical propaganda concerning age, sexuality, desirability, longevity; the disillusion of the society which has outgrown itself too quickly and before its members have become psychically adjusted, are all apparent in Off Limits in various characters. Humphrey, the megalomaniac, needs to give parties to hold his visitors captive with the appeal of his affluence, yet he needs walls of television sets so that he can watch himself and prove his existence. Bob, Jim and Peter act out war games to exorcise their fear of the Draft, and they become animals in their games. Jim's and Sally's relationship is as nothing when it comes to procuring a 'fix', and they too behave as animals towards each other when they cannot acquire what they need. The entire sick society is summed up in these tortured individuals, whose motivations are identical with those of the nation. No time-lag is necessary on this occasion, for the two coincide so exactly that they are inseparable, a frenzied whirlpool of sickness. It is as if the words of Sainte Europe had been prepared in readiness for Off Limits:

'[...] la Culture est, en quelque sorte, l'ensemble des raisons mystérieuses qui font que l'Homme, lorsqu'il se regarde dans un miroir, sait déjà ce que sera

son Visage de Mort'(1).

History was one of the issues on which Adamov disagreed with Brecht, as we have seen. He reproached Brecht's Jours de la Commune for paying too much attention to history as a sequence of logically progressive and interrelated events (the Marxist theory of History), and insufficient attention to the individuals who, to Adamov's mind, made up the Commune. Guicharnaud makes an interesting comment upon Adamov, realism-neurosis and Brecht:

'Neurosis, then, has a double value in Adamov's theatre. Being real, it can be presented in terms that are used for other realities, but it is at the same time a reflection, or, as it were, a way of living parallel to what is usually considered the normal world. Scenically, it legitimately represents that world, and by transposing a mental image into outer reality, the playwright both remains faithful to reality and presents it with a theatrical distance. Adamov was Brechtian before ever meditating on Brecht'(2).

This chapter has shown how in Adamov's theatre the Curable is everywhere circumscribed by the Incurable. Political and historical facts are abundant, and in particular in the later plays, revealing Adamov's profound concern for events in the political world. In Gaullism, the single largest political fact to which he reacted vehemently, he saw a depoliticisation of all things in life, and in particular of the Arts. He saw only conformist theatre performed in Paris, his own works being given outrageously bad press by Gaullist papers and critics. His Théâtre de Société was designed to bring back politics to the theatre, although he admitted the impossibility of its production except in underground groups. Nevertheless, he urged in his preface to the work that other writers follow his example,

(1) Théâtre III, p.269. (2) Jacques Guicharnaud, Modern French Theatre, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1967, p.200.

because the very idea that men should not feel free to write as their art directed them was abhorrent to him. It is this humanity which emanates from all his plays, whether his early trial efforts, or during that period of his career when considerations of realism and social validity seemed best to suit his purpose, or again during his last plays, which provided a synthesis of both the earlier tendencies. Political reality for Adamov lies at the crossroads of all the elements which constitute human existence. Whether he presents a symbolised Marpeaux or a flesh and blood working class, a voice from the dark or an exploiter-boss, the elements are essentially present as part of the make-up of humanity.

The plays are expositional; Adamov does not offer solutions which are external to the action of the play. The spectator is left to meditate on what he has seen, and to draw whatever conclusions his own particular neuroses allow. From Le Printemps 71 or La Politique des restes, we can take a political lesson and know that it is valid, because Adamov has not merely politicised an imaginary situation. Nor has he taken a subject for purely didactic purposes. For Adamov there were no solutions, so there would be no point in doing so. True to mankind, he had always to present both sides of an argument. As such, all he can hope to present is a demystification of the systems which operate within society, to show that man's enemy on earth is man. In L'Heure Nouvelle he had claimed that by greater knowledge of society, collective psychoses, nurtured by the Consortium - like powers, such as religion, morals, patriotism - could be conquered, and mankind brought together in humility. He makes a harsh distinction between the divisions of society as it stands:

'Avec Paolo Paoli j'ai voulu nommer ceux
qui paient de leur personne et ceux qui

paient de leur argent'(1).

Political indictments may be frequent in Adamov's plays, but they are always tempered with that concern for man. In real terms, his middle-period plays provide us with characters who assert a meaningful identity of some description, generally on a personal level. Perhaps when all else is doomed to fail, this is the most a man can expect. In any event, a conscious effort on the part of Adamov to situate his plays in a recognisable world, and to make them appealing to his audiences, gained him a label as a political writer, which, one is afraid to say, largely spoiled his chances of the success which he craved during his lifetime:

'[...] est-il possible d'aborder au théâtre des problèmes d'actualité sans tomber dans l'engrenage des propagandes et des contre-propagandes?'(2).

On the evidence of the plays themselves, Adamov appears to have fulfilled this task successfully, but he was never allowed to reap the benefits of his success, because of the insensitive categorisation to which he was subjected by most of his critics. Perhaps, then, in the actual writing of plays one can be successful in this respect, but not in the presenting of one's work for public scrutiny.

(1) See note 1, p.158. (2) Ici et Maintenant, p.65.

CHAPTER SIXConsistency of Structure and Technique.

It has been a major contention of the preceding chapters of this thesis that Arthur Adamov's theatre is expositional rather than systematically didactic, that it aims to illustrate rather than to interpret facts of human existence as experienced by the author. Despite a marked development in the complexity and sophistication of his plays throughout his career, there is an undeniable consistency in his fundamental approach to their construction and execution, and it is in this area of technique that the unity of Adamov's entire work in the theatre is most easily discernible. Such theoretical and critical work on the theatre as the author committed to print is largely represented in Ici et Maintenant and in his commentary on Strindberg (1), with fragmentary remarks, generally repetitive, in interviews and articles for literary journals. His comments are principally concerned with particular plays of his own authorship, and with those of other dramatists in whose work he recognised aims and techniques similar to those envisaged by himself, or whom he admired for their approach to matters which preoccupied him. On the rare occasions when Adamov does make generalised statements about his conception of the nature of theatre, it is noticeable that they conform to an analysis made by him as early as 1947:

'Lorsqu'on pressentira la synthèse difficile de l'espace, du temps, du mouvement et du verbe retrouvés, on ne pourra plus ni enseigner ni affirmer, mais seulement traduire dans un langage complexe et inconnu les états les plus aigus et les plus vrais de la vie'(2).

Concerned to restore to the theatre its traditional ritualistic,

(1) See note 3, p.58. (2) Arthur Adamov, 'Sur la scène la révolution est encore à faire', Combat, 25th. Oct. 1947.

mythical and sacred qualities, Adamov deplored the way in which dramatists such as Camus betrayed these by subjugating them and perverting them to the ends of their personal philosophies. His neurosis had provided him with an insight into the hidden realms which he considered essential to the salvation of man. Throughout his work he maintained a conscious effort to project them on to the stage by various means, a consistency which David Bradby has noted:

'In all of Adamov's work [...], he was searching for the dramatic image and situation which effectively placed themselves at a cross-roads of meaning'(1).

The principal methods which he adopted to achieve this aim furnish the material for discussion in this final chapter.

The Universe of the Tragic Circle

The most noticeable feature of Adamov's plays in terms of structure is their circular movement. Maurice Regnaut's enlightened article on the subject (2) draws attention to the fact as an expression of Adamov's world-picture, but sees a metaphysical circle of Being broken by Le Professeur Taranne, and being replaced in Le Ping Pong and Paolo Paoli by the functions of the real world. Joseph McCann, however, has detected a technical mechanism consistent throughout Adamov's entire dramatic work by means of which:

'Man's fate is depicted literally and intensified by repetition until it reaches a tragic pitch'(3).

Both critics have made a valuable contribution to the understanding of Adamov's theatre, with McCann's work embracing the narrower field of Regnaut's. The tragic circle in which characters appear to be

(1) Bradby, op. cit., p.263. (2) See note 1, p.21. (3) McCann, op. cit., p.8.

moving, although they are merely running on the spot, is inherent not only in their situation, but in the structure of the plays. This is achieved by a process of repetition and intensification, the importance of which Adamov stresses in his introductory note to Théâtre II. This has the effect of distancing an audience, and of creating an atmosphere of ritual about the plays which presents the spectator with a point over and over until he assimilates the experience through exposure to it, and not through temporary emotional identification with it. From the earliest to the last of Adamov's plays, this process is clearly visible. It often involves a static situation as viewed from the different angles of several of the protagonists. Such is the case in Off Limits, Si l'été revenait, Le Ping Pong and La Parodie, for example. The parties of Off Limits differ only in that they present the reactions of varying groups of characters to the stylised games played and the familiar personal revelations made by the participants. Yet with each party the activities become more frenzied, the fears more pronounced and more extravagantly expressed, the violence more acute, so that mere verbal battles against orthodoxy and the impositions of the system develop into a full-scale, physical assault on Bob's new wife who, with her wedding gown and the self-satisfied complacency of the newly-weds, represents a physical manifestation of the offensive concepts. Events occur pêle-mêle on top of each other in the play : a moment of lucidity when Frankie must be slapped into consciousness if he is to recover from an overdose, a moment of horror and panic when a Negro appears off the street and collapses on Jim's floor. These are accepted as normal incidents in the mad world of drugs and Happenings, where escape into hallucinatory worlds is turning into unbearable nightmare. As each party becomes more violent, Dorothy more wild in her ravings,

Jim more angry against the war and the society which forces and allows them to be in such a situation, the movement of the play appears to speed up. Speeches are louder, syncopated, actions more abrupt, until the atmosphere is shattered by the departure and death of Jim and Sally. That the play does not end at this point but continues in an Epilogue bears witness to the same thinking which had led Adamov to end Les Ames mortes fictitiously in the absence of any termination of Gogol's novel, with Tchitchikov setting off once more across the wastes of Russia, about to begin again his dealings at the point where we first joined him. As Les Ames mortes ends by preparing the way for the first page, so Off Limits ends by devising for Dorothy a new posture : that of the Statue of Liberty, which will be no more than her prescribed role in the next series of events to which she is detined. Her 'comprehension' of Sally is no release, but simply a new skin for the old ceremony.

Si l'été revenait achieves by means of four successive dreams whose basic material is identical - the identity of Lars and the relationships which bind together Lars, Thea, Alma and Brit - the destruction of all but two of the characters : the husband and wife unit of Lars and Brit. A recurrent image in the play is that of varying combinations of characters being pushed on a garden swing. This appears to be representative for the person dreaming of the relationship of the others to himself. So, Alma dreams that she pushes Lars, Brit and Thea so hard that Thea falls from the swing, and that she herself falls, leaving the couple whom she has sought to bring together. That Alma's dream is situated last in the play, when she is supposed by earlier dreams to have been lost on a Missionary trip to South America, together with the final image of the swing, makes of the play a kind of vicious circle within infinity, which is

Adamov's ultimate statement about the reality of Being.

The circularity of Le Ping Pong is rather less bewildering, but still constructed by presenting the reactions to the machine of Arthur, Victor, Sutter, Annette and Madame Duranty in turn. Although there is a movement through time in the play, it seems only to bring Arthur and Victor, despite their efforts for and against the Consortium, to the same point at which they began the play : two old friends indulging in and arguing about a simple game, and trying to suggest ways of improving it. The difference here is that their particular circle ends with the death of Victor, in the same way that La Parodie ends with the death of N. and the incarceration and blindness of L'Employé. In that play, the action is minimal, restricted solely to the respective, abortive attempts of the two central protagonists to meet Lili. Their round of running on the spot or lying on the ground has the same result, and the play, which began in a void, ends in the glaring void of painful light which is all that remains at the curtain.

It is easy to see this circularity in all the plays, whether it be in the repeated and intensified situations of Le Sens de la marche, where each of Henri's experiences is a reconstruction in more frenzied tone of his last, or the ascending spiral of Paolo Paoli as described by Jean-Paul Sartre:

'On commence par échanger des valeurs, des papillons, et on finit par échanger des hommes, et on les échange dans la guerre. Il y a, comme l'a dit Dort, une circulation en spirale qui finit par se bloquer en haut en devenant tragique'(1).

The physical construction of the plays is instrumental in their

(1) Ici et Maintenant, p.70.

circularity, reflecting the nature of the subject matter and Adamov's approach to it. It is fair to say that in none of his plays does he give plot a major role. His material does not move along a horizontal line from one particular point to another, as has been demonstrated. His characters are depicted as members of a society which represents a continuum stretching beyond the play in both directions, whilst the play itself makes a circular loop on the line. As Jean Duvignaud suggests:

'Chez Adamov, en effet, le personnage principal dépend moins de sa place dans une intrigue que de la conscience qu'il prend de sa dégradation'(1).

In fact, Adamov's plays work on the principle of a series of images being juxtaposed, which allows adequately for a theme to be highlighted in different ways, and which obviates the possibility of a blurring of the image by superfluous 'padding' such as would be necessary in the case of a logical, coherent plot. With the exception of La Politique des restes and Les Retrouvailles which, with Théâtre de Société, Comme nous avons été and Les Apolitiques, are plays in one short Act, of Off Limits and Si l'été revenait, which are divided into parties and dreams respectively, and of Le Sens de la marche and L'Invasion, in which Adamov has retained the formal designation of the plays' divisions as Acts, all the plays are nominally split into Tableaux, a nomination which, in effect, describes all the scenes in all the plays. They are independent units, often with no linking material, and they frequently appear to follow one another with superficial incongruity, as, for example, between the two sections of Le Professeur Taranne, where there is no possible connection between

(1) Jean Duvignaud, 'Un Théâtre de la persécution', Critique, no.68, 1953, p.21.

the two arrests of Taranne on logical grounds, but where the close resemblance between the second and first arrests, the parallelism of the arguments between Taranne and the police, and the repetition of the denial of his identity, first by the woman journalist and secondly by the Belgian letter, serve to intensify Taranne's struggle and to impress his situation upon the audience more effectively than could a fully-expanded account of his psychic disintegration. By virtue of having chosen a particular neurosis as the subject of his play, Adamov treats that neurosis in its own manner, that of repetitive, disjointed ideas flooding into the brain and on to the stage. This tendency is to be found in all Adamov's plays, and is reminiscent of Expressionist technique. In his work on Strindberg already mentioned in this chapter, he remarks that, like the Swedish playwright, he seeks one scene, one image which will contain the essence of his play (1). In Le Ping Pong, it is the final scene between Arthur and Victor, superficially incongruous with what has preceded it, but in fact embodying the whole spirit of the play. In La Parodie, it is the empty, glaring light when N.'s body has been swept away by the street cleaners, and in La Grande et la petite manoeuvre it is the sight of Le Mutilé having his crutches kicked away by Erna in whom he had placed all his trust and dreams for future happiness.

Adamov is concerned with that which confronts the spectator and with the way in which it acts upon his deepest senses. Thus, a rapid succession of Tableaux, juxtaposed so as to create the impression of incongruity, such as occurs in M. le Modéré, where a coquettish interview between Mado and Ernest can be followed immediately by her

(1) p.7 of that work.

delighted announcement that their liaison is at an end, constitutes a series of shocks to the spectator's consciousness, and provokes an appreciation of the bare facts of what he has before him on a more profound level than if it were buried beneath the ramifications of a developing plot as such. This cinematographic effect was first consciously attempted by Adamov in La Grande et la petite manoeuvre, where the juxtaposition of, for example, the first and second Tableaux, in which Le Mutilé is represented with Le Militant as brutalised by the militia in the street, and immediately afterwards in the home of his sister and Le Militant, where their child suffers and where Le Mutilé is finally beaten into submission by invisible voices, is as important as the action itself. The interrelation of the two situations is only implied by the technique, but it is highly effective in its direct appeal to the physical senses of the audience, and in its repetitive structure of physical and psychic brutality. This constant flow of sense impressions must be maintained in any production of Adamov's plays. As Gaston Renaud has remarked (1), the overall effect of the method is to produce plays whose structure resembles that of dreams, where a recurring constant forms the basic image. This is precisely the format followed by Adamov's view of life. As all else in his life emanates from his neurosis, so all else in a given play emanates from a focal point, providing the radiations from it which reach out towards the periphery of the circle. As this scene is central to the play as a whole, so there is a central object or character who represents the focus of attention for the other characters, as described in Chapter Three of this thesis. These two mechanisms interact in the same way as the private neurosis-public

(1) Renaud, op. cit., p.365.

life concept discussed in Chapter Five, and contribute to the circularity of movement within the plays. By his fascination with Erna, *Le Mutilé* constantly lays himself open to a series of mutilations, trapped in a vicious circle of which she, the supposed redemptive factor, emerges as the radius. Similarly, the Communards, fixed in their adherence to an immutable and inflexible ideal, describe their inevitable circle of tragedy.

Whether it be for the purposes of satire or of universality, the use of character types is very widespread in Adamov's plays. In the earlier ones it is simply visible by the names given to characters : *L'Employé*, *La Soeur*, *La Mère*, *La Plus Heureuse des Femmes*, *Le Directeur* and *Le Vieux* are all highly indicative of the type so designated. The impersonality of circularity of movement is enhanced by such vague nomenclature, as it enables characters to slip effortlessly into their ascribed positions in the recognisable mechanism of the play. With the advent of personalised characters, however, these are but shallowly-disguised cyphers, for Paolo Paoli is clearly recognisable as the self-important small businessman unable to move with the times, and faced with the daunting success of the ruthless tycoon, whose name happens to be Hulot-Vasseur. These two display a certain degree of private life, but only insofar as it bears upon their business transactions, and, as such, it could be the private life of any member of the type represented by them. Rose Marpeaux's status is cast in little doubt as Paolo rebukes her for her small-mindedness: ' [...]ouvrière toujours!' (1). The figures of Sainte Europe, by virtue of their allegorical nature, are similarly transparent. Karl, whom Adamov acknowledges to represent Charlemagne, Charles Quint, de Gaulle

(1) Théâtre III, p.95.

all rolled into one, is but one of a splendid array of characters determined less by their names and speeches than by the descriptions of them given by Adamov in the Dramatis Personae. It is always his habit to provide extensive information about his characters in this way, so as to make plain the type of person required. The exceptions to this are those plays such as En Fiacre and La Politique des restes, where clinical fact takes precedence over theatrical invention, and where the characters are defined solely in relation to each other, and in particular to the central character or characters.

The characteristics described so far in this chapter, as well as providing a circular structure for the plays, create a universe for each one, giving each its own bounds, its own values and morals determined by particular objects of fascination and the reactions to these of the various characters. The technique is then to bring about the destruction of that universe by means of the repetition and intensification mentioned by McCann. This obtains whether the created universe is metaphysical, as in the case of the identity of Taranne, or economic, as in the case of Paolo's economic stability. In either case, the circle closes on the protagonist and swallows him. It is this consistency which has eluded the awareness of those critics who see Adamov's work as divided into two distinct periods, the one utterly divorced from the other.

The disintegration of a play's universe is a gradual process which, like death, attacks its prey slowly from its very inception, and speeds up in its attack until the final paroxysm. So, Arthur and Victor and the other characters of Le Ping Pong age at different rates according to the nature and intensity of their involvement with the Consortium, and not according to any normal time-scale. The universe of the machine having slowly devoured Sutter, whose slide

into poverty and filth is remarkably speedy, having demolished Le Vieux in a fit of lust, and having been superseded after involving Arthur and Victor - free youth - in its society, Victor dies in a fruitless pursuit and Arthur, an old man now, is left with nothing to grasp. This problem is encountered also by Pierre in L'Invasion, a character whose world is the search for truth in the message of his friend's manuscript. The departure of his wife and of his friend Tradel, whose differences of opinion with him over the degree of absolute fidelity to the text required have led to this departure, renders Pierre increasingly unable to decipher the message. In his quest to become closer to his dead friend, he withdraws to an irrevocable degree from those close to him in real life; the one is inversely proportionate to the other, so that Pierre, as it were, falls down the hole in the centre of the record which has appeared as the two sides to his life have destroyed one another. He returns to the darkness which opened the play.

Time and space shrink in La Parodie as the play grinds ever more rapidly towards its disintegration. The dance-hall of Tableau III returns in Tableau XI with its walls drawn in so that it now only occupies the central portion of the stage. The couples who occupy other tables are now white-haired, where previously they were the very flower of youth. The impression is created that all these characters have continued in the same pastimes at the same places as we first saw them, for an indefinite period of time, and that now is the moment for the disintegration of the scene. Between the two parts to the play, L'Employé's hair has turned white, and the tree in the village square now has yellow leaves, where earlier they were green. Metaphorical Spring has turned to metaphorical Autumn, with the implication that everything has continued in the same way during the

interim period, and that the structure of the action, its repetition, has worn it out until it decays from the inside. N. no longer savours the moment of imminent death but dies outright, L'Employé loses his faith in the future, and Lili is no longer in such great demand. All this occurs with lightning speed in the second half of the play.

The same is admirably true of La Politique des restes, where up until the last two pages of the play, all efforts are centred upon substantiating Johnnie Brown's plea of innocence in the court. A wealth of argument is put forward to demonstrate his guiltlessness and to reveal a world based on fallacy and terror, which is sowing the seeds of its own destruction. For every argument heaped up to support Johnnie is a further indictment of society, and is also laying it open to the logical conclusion reached by the defendant : that society itself constitutes a threat which must be thwarted. Thus, the situation at the end of the play portends for society, sick with the same disease as afflicts its aberrant son, the same pathological anarchy displayed by Johnnie, and which was the trigger for the play in the first place. The progression of the dialogue, itself perfectly logical, leads to the destruction of the internal universe created by the play.

The pattern of Adamov's plays describes a gentle upward curve followed immediately, just as the pinnacle is reached with considerable difficulty, by an abrupt descent to the depths whence it originated. A. in Comme nous avons été is allowed to play his game of pretended maturity for so long, and to the point where he almost believes he can escape the maternal clutches, just until the mother brings the conversation around to his father. At this juncture there is no hope of his escape, and he is quickly implicated in the destruction of his

hopes by his fascinated interventions concerning his father. The cyclic structure of the movement is guaranteed. In like manner, Arthur is led, through a long and painful process, to believe that artistic fulfillment, social standing and romantic love can be consummated in the world of the machine, yet, with the rejection by Annette of the Consortium and of him, it must be presumed that a large part of that belief crumbles beneath him. At any rate, it heralds the final scene of the play where, suddenly, Arthur is old - the very image of his youthful nightmare of old age.

M. le Modéré presents a good example, albeit caricatural, of the principle. At the end of the first part of the play, M., an ordinary pervert whose incredible world is governed by utterly incredible laws, such as that which deems it normal that, as today is Wednesday, his wife should be throwing a fit, since she does this every Wednesday, has his dearest wish gratified by M. Havas, who declares him to be the new Head of State of his native land, the Jura. His 'Le Jura, c'est moi!' (1) is more than reminiscent of La Cause Incarnée's fixation that he is France in Intimité, and his failure during the second part of the play to mention his Europeanism, or to demonstrate this sufficiently, effectively results in his downfall. His period in power, which constitutes the shortest section of the play, is terminated not by M. Havas, but by internal forces such as defeated de Gaulle. On the other hand, M.'s psychic destruction is brought about by the American, leaving him to reap incomprehensibly that which he failed to understand as he sowed it.

From the parallel destinies of the tragic circle of La Parodie and La Grande et la petite manoeuvre to the tragic failure in those

(1) Théâtre IV, p.42.

few short Tableaux of the Paris Commune, and the farcical destruction of that even more farcical world of Sainte Europe, the circular mechanism dictates the direction of events towards the void of destruction, whether those events are man-made or cosmic in origin. It is arguable on these grounds that Adamov did not require for his purposes in the theatre any political affiliation.

Language

The second area of importance in the technical achievement of Adamovian theatre is language. Adamov, like his friend Artaud, did not envisage simply a verbal language for the stage, but, in order to serve his needs for sacred ritual and myth, a return to theatrical language itself, the language of light, of sound and of gesture. Artaud had developed a theory for this in his Le Théâtre et son double, in which he outlined a 'sens littéral'(1) for the theatre which evoked in him:

'[...]la notion d'une sorte de langage unique à mi-chemin entre le geste et la pensée'(2).

For Adamov, there was no theatre without this sens littéral, and his main consideration he declared to be:

'[...]traduire au théâtre - physiquement, littéralement et concrètement - des données psychiques'(3).

The stage was a space to be filled effectively, and every object which appeared upon it, every gesture performed upon it, must be charged with a profound significance beyond its apparent limitations. As Leonard Pronko has pointed out, the spectators must be as affected by what they see as the characters are by the forces which work upon

(1) See Carlos Lynes Jnr., op. cit. (2) Antonin Artaud, op. cit., p.136. (3) Arthur Adamov, 'Avec La Grande et la petite manoeuvre, Arthur Adamov veut éclairer le "ils" de "ils ne m'auront pas" ', Interview with J.-F. Devay, Combat, 1st. Nov. 1950.

them (1). Artaud's theory of Cruelty as the foundation for all theatre is implemented by Adamov. In the present state of degeneration of society, only by means of the flesh can men receive universal messages, and it is for this reason that Adamov's is a particularly physical theatre. Exteriorisation of neurosis is one of the chief ways in which theatrical language is expressed. The progressive mutilation of *Le Mutilé* is an obvious example of this. His internal dispossession is manifest in his loss of limbs, as is Taranne's in his empty seating plan and his public undressing. The refugees' limp in Tous Contre tous is less an indication of their status as refugees (some non-refugees limp, and there are refugees who do not limp) than a pointer to their lack of authenticity. It is the sign by which the ordinary folk can be recognised as undesirable, but which can still allow in the case of a special individual for a large degree of preferential treatment (Zenno illustrates the point), and in the case of those, such as Jean's mother, who try to capitalise on it, it can prove condemnatory in human terms as a lever by means of which to operate a vile hypocrisy. L'Employé's and N.'s respective internal states are reflected in their approach to life : the one constantly in motion, the other stationary.

Décors have a statutory theatrical role to play, for example, in Paolo Paoli, where the decorations of Paolo's study reflect his current business venture. A paperweight containing a butterfly body is indicative of his prostitution of what he fondly terms Art, is revelatory of his business interests, and is intended as a thorn with which to spur the professional jealousy of Hulot-Vasseur. It is certainly not a mere drawing-room frivolity. Similarly, Adamov insists

(1) Leonard Pronko, op. cit., in the chapter entitled 'Theatre and Antitheatre'.

in Ici et Maintenant (1) that the most important part of stage décor for Le Printemps 71 must be the accessories : the jug of wine in the café, the collecting boxes for the families of those soldiers who gave their lives turning to the cause of the Commune, the regimental badges on the caps of the soldiers. These items are of profound importance in the lives of his characters. They represent their morality, their political beliefs, and above all, are indicative of their humanity. Their internal nature, and hence the course of history as affected by their actions, is contained within external matter. In La Parodie, only Lili changes her clothes, for she is different things to different people.

With Off Limits, the exteriorisation takes rather a different form. The characters actually act out their deepest thoughts and inhibitions in Happenings, organised truth-games or war-games such as those invented by Bob, Peter and Jim. Here their inner neuroses are concretised into violent and horrific scenes with which the spectator is faced, and which are designed to have upon him a similar effect to the sirens, whistles and bright lights of La Parodie, L'Invasion and La Grande et la petite manoeuvre. L'Invasion is a particularly good example of light being used to literal effect. At the start of the play, all is in darkness and Pierre can see nothing. With Agnès comes the light. She alone can provide the help which Pierre needs in his task. As she is forced by the mother and by Pierre's attitude to leave, a crude, unbearable light falls on her and on her lover, with whom she is eloping. This is an unnatural state of affairs, and one which she has not chosen. In her absence, the light fades considerably, until Pierre can no longer see to work,

(1) Ici et Maintenant, p.136.

and cannot either see any way through the impenetrable mass of Jean's writings. With the departure of Agnès has gone all hope of light.

If the concrete language of the theatre is so important for Adamov, it is because verbal language, as he stressed in L'Aveu, is inadequate to express the more profound sentiments of humanity. Arthur is unable to express his feelings towards Annette in any other form than through the medium of the pinball machine. His idea for a new machine with two rockets, one of which will remain static, the other making its way towards a moon, which it will join, is simply a representation in terms of the machine of his desire for Annette, and his jealousy of any other who may seek her favour. Thus, the machine becomes a literal object, determining and controlling the behaviour of Adamov's characters, and monitoring also their languages:

'Or le billard électrique du Ping Pong ne symbolise rien du tout; il n'exprime pas, il produit; c'est un objet littéral, dont la fonction est d'engendrer, par son objectivité même, des situations'(1).

Roland Barthes' article on the generative properties of the machine for language purposes is a perspicacious account of the way in which Adamov makes objects and language work for him in revealing the hidden significances in situations, and the motivations behind those situations. Language is an entity for Adamov. In Sainte Europe, the preposterous medieval sententiousness of Karl and of Crépin determines their characters. They behave, dress and think in a way which is directly related to the language they use. Karl's perpetual use of the imperfect subjunctive reveals precisely the self-conscious pomposity which is his principal character trait, and his recourse to

(1) Roland Barthes, 'Adamov et le langage' in Mythologies, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1957, p.88.

such phrases as: 'Peu me chaut!' (1) reflects his stubborn adherence to the cause of perpetuating an outmoded, incomprehensible and inhumane system of hierarchy. His prevarication in making political and economic demands or decisions lies in germ in his tendency to employ phrases like: 'Les Sans-Dieu' - euphemism of the most self-conscious kind. Adamov's plays abound in such characters: Darbon, whose words of public concern serve only to reveal his inner nature as an oppressor and lackey to higher authority; Fränkel, the only character in Adamov's entire work to be actually affiliated to the Communist Party, and who is motivated by the slogans of the Party, but can be of no help to the Communards.

The question arises at this point as to the trustworthiness of language in Adamov's plays. The procedure of imposture has been discussed in Chapter Five of this thesis, and language, as its means of perpetration, falls under suspicion. It is noticeable throughout the plays that those characters who appear to speak with sophistication are precisely the ones for whom language is nothing more than a means of mystifying the masses. Priests in particular are adept at this. L'Abbé Saulnier and the Abbé of Le Printemps 71 are capable of persuading other characters of their good intentions and of their authenticity, whereas, as Sutter points out: 'Oh, les mots! Tous des pièges!' (2). Arthur and Victor are intimidated by the smooth-talking manner of Le Vieux, Humphrey can reduce Dorothy, Luce and Elisabeth to relative states of calm merely by using his charming eloquence. There is a comforting sensation about free-flowing language which lulls characters into a false sense of security, and leaves them prey to imposture.

(1) Théâtre III, p.197. (2) Théâtre II, p.143.

Characters may hide behind the mask of the language they use. A favourite device is to introduce words of English into the dialogue. This is done to ridiculous effect in Le Ping Pong, and in M. le Modéré, where Roger and Mado respectively utter English phrases as if they were magical charms, but which are totally devoid of sense. Thus Mado may shout: 'Hello'(1) as she takes leave of her parents. The comic picture of Arthur and Victor playing table-tennis is rendered tragic by a similar, mystical use of the English language. As a symptom of the system in which they have become involved, the two hurl English phrases at each other, and come upon a block when the distinction between ping-pong and tennis becomes blurred by the English word table-tennis. Arthur understands only the physical facts of the situation, whilst Victor is too immersed in system brainwashing to pass beyond the inhuman conclusion that: 'C'est l'anglais qui te perd!'(2).

In contrast to this mystificatory use of language, which Adamov deplored, he makes considerable use of cliché and of everyday language. The lack of complexity in the language of a play such as L'Invasion is quite astonishing. The order to open the curtains which Agnès delivers to Pierre, for example, is of an extraordinary banality, and the very concept of a play opening with a husband unable to perform that task, which his wife subsequently does for him, almost absurd. For Adamov, it is of essential importance to the success of his theatre:

'Poète est celui qui se sert des mots moins pour dévoiler leur sens immédiat que pour les contraindre à livrer ce que cache leur silence'(3).

(1) For example, Théâtre IV, p.37. (2) Théâtre II, p.180.

(3) L'Aveu, p.15.

The simplicity of the words, their absolute nudity, in situations and décors which themselves are bare of all but that which is essential to the effect of the scene, is calculated to reveal to a spectator the profound truths which they embody, to restore to them their real meanings, generally usurped by sophistication. The emptiness of a cliché such as Sutter's: 'Le cancer, c'est le fléau moderne!' (1) is so blatant as to cause the spectator to think about the actual meaning of the words, and in so doing, he is involved in a ritual act which takes him back to the origins of the theatre.

There may be two levels on which language operates in Adamov's plays. The first is the realism of everyday language, which permits characters to deliver a message, or to convey such information as is necessary for the progression of the play. Instances of this include Saulnier's message from Hulot-Vasseur to Paolo offering to buy the Charaxès, or Georges' to Henri that he must be down in ten minutes if he is to leave for the Front. The second is an internal rather than an external level, where language is utterly opaque, incomprehensible to others. This is the language which is generally used in exchanges between principals, such as L'Employé and Lili when they first meet. He declares his universal love for her, whilst she takes his: 'Je vous ai connue' (2) at face value, and suggests that perhaps they met in a bar once. This is far removed from that side of language which had attracted Adamov to the Commune, and which in his play on the subject was to demonstrate his attitude to language itself, for the Communards are among his rare characters whose word can be taken as authentic:

'[...] ce style rapide, cette syntaxe impatiente
que j'aime tant. Il semble que, pris par les

(1) Théâtre II, p.101. (2) Théâtre I, p.14.

évènements, les mots courent, bondissent,
que la pensée sache que le temps manque'(1).

A final point to be made about Adamov's language, is that it is largely instrumental in distancing the spectator from the play before him. There are various means by which Adamov achieves this. Cliché, formalised style, foreign words, banalities have been mentioned in another context, but must be recognised to perform this function as well as their internal purpose. Adamov's habit of using points de suspension leaves the reader (and, when adequately performed, the spectator) to think for himself upon matters which might otherwise escape his sensibility. They appear frequently when a character is afraid or in trouble, and when he wishes to solicit the aid of another character. Zenno's speech (2) imploring Marie to plead for him with Jean demonstrates the point. Short phrases broken by suspension marks abound in the plays, as in this disjointed speech. On other occasions they may be used to allow a character to terminate a phrase begun by a fellow character, usually to menacing purpose. Such an occasion arises as Taranne is arrested for the second time by two policemen (3). There is also the eventuality where a poignant word is left hanging grimly in the air so that the spectator may grasp its full implications:

'Nous n'allons pas rester ici indéfiniment
(soudain très grave) comme des coupables ...'(4).

Off Limits uses another distancing technique which was used considerably by Brecht, and to similar, though rather more politically-defined purpose. This is the Récitatif, a poetical interlude in the dialogue, where a character takes the fore and delivers in poetical

(1) Ici et Maintenant, p.122. (2) In Théâtre I, p.172.
(3) In Théâtre I, p.226. (4) *ibid.*, p.225.

style his or her deepest thoughts on the situation in the current state of the play. It is by means of Molly's Récitatif that we learn of the intensity of the love between Jim and Sally, which gives some credibility to their suicide within the universe of the play. This was a deliberate technique on the part of Adamov, designed to shock the spectator into objective appraisal:

'Autrement dit, une rupture complète de ton
et un changement de degré, c'est-à-dire la
conscience à un autre degré.

Les gens ne disent plus ce qu'ils feraient
dans la vie, mais ce qu'ils pensent vraiment,
et ils le crient [...] '(1).

The same effect was created by the methods used by Adamov in Le Printemps 71 and Paolo Paoli, which were new departures for him. The former has Tableaux of action interspersed with nine Guignols - allegorical sequences where caricatures of contemporary political figures enact the background to the real action, and are intended to instruct the audience whilst allowing them to set the Commune in perspective. There are also nine Transitions, which represent the Commune, and making a general statement of the kind published by Adamov in his anthology of the Commune (2), in which are reproduced a number of posters. Paolo Paoli uses projected newspaper clippings and photographs of the early years of the century before each scene, as well as strains of contemporary music. The play is designed to be very much of its age, and, once again, these devices serve to inform, to authenticate the material of the play, and to provoke objective thought on the subject. Conscious techniques of this sort are rare in Adamov's work, and are particular to that period of his life when he was perhaps most exposed to Brechtian technique and to social influences.

(1) Arthur Adamov, 'Le Théâtre et l'Amérique', Interview with Marc Rombaut, Clés pour le spectacle, 20th. March 1972, p.13. (2) See note 2, p.124.

Whatever purposes Adamov may ascribe to language in his plays, the importance of it in verbal and physical form is attested from the earliest days of his career:

'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. Une pièce de théâtre doit donc être le lieu où le monde visible et le monde invisible se touchent et se heurtent, autrement dit la mise en évidence, la manifestation du contenu caché, latent, qui recèle les germes du drame'(1).

Humour

From his earliest play, La Parodie, Adamov's work has always involved a degree of bitter comedy, a dramatic superimposition of the comic on the tragic. That play represents a parody of life itself. Whilst caricatural and exaggerated, the aspirations and behaviour of its characters could easily be our own dreams, situations and neuroses. By projecting on to the stage his personal obsessions, and those which he considered to be the principal ones of man in general, Adamov was able to remove himself from directly subjective involvement with them. Their concrete manifestation viewed externally appeared ridiculous to him. For this reason, the humour which increases throughout his work with the increase of objectivity and realism during the middle and late 1950's, arises largely from ridicule of the seriousness with which characters regard issues which are of negligible importance for mankind in the universal sense. Thus, the characters of Le Ping Pong and of Paolo Paoli are ridiculed by Adamov in their excesses of rhetoric on the subject of an ugly, mindless machine, and of feathers and butterflies. Each of these items

(1) Ici et Maintenant, pp.13-14.

is discussed in high-flown terms, as a work of intrinsic artistic beauty, which can bring infinite satisfaction to the esthetic sensibility of the public. The tragedy lies not only in the fact that men are being devoured by the system which uses these objects as camouflage for its real workings, but also in the fact that those making such statements come to believe them, thus exemplifying the degeneration of human society and of artistic values.

L'Employé is funny in the way in which he pursues his courtship of Lili, offering to show her the town, even though he is a stranger there, and pronouncing all the clichés of traditional lovemaking. He is made to appear absurd, but we cannot fail to recognise the formulae as those we ourselves employ in diluted form. Nor can we ignore the fact that, for L'Employé, his relationship with Lili is his life-line to a sane existence.

For Edgar, the loss of his train ticket is a remarkably disturbing event, made ludicrous by the fuss he makes about it, but fundamentally tragic, as it heralds his impending disintegration, and symbolises his internal collapse.

The comedy of situation which is apparent in several of Adamov's plays is pointed out by Roger Blin (1), who reminds us of the absurd situation in La Grande et la petite manoeuvre where Le Mutilé attends a typing course for people with one or no arms. Blin calls this: 'comique grinçant'(2), and it is a form of humour much favoured by Adamov. A.'s aunt playing with his train set, Henri baring his soul before a class of young hooligans, Mado and her friend seducing M. le Modéré, or Teresa swooning in ecstasy over Christ's shoulders are all scenes which demonstrate a black comedy of this kind, and

(1) Blin, op. cit. (2) *ibid.*, p.1000.

which stem from the intensified hyperbole of private neuroses within a social situation. By making them comic, Adamov distances his audience as well as himself from them, and allows for a more objective appreciation of the tragic correlate of every humorous scene. In addition to this, as we have seen, the therapeutic value of laughter was of prime importance to Adamov, in particular towards the end of his life. It is very noticeable that the later plays demonstrate a far greater degree of humour than do the earlier, self-conscious works.

In 1958, Adamov wrote an article in which he stated his belief that in our age there is no possibility of authentic tragic drama:

'[...]ici, dans ce monde où nous vivons, une tragédie, même "optimiste", une pièce qui ne serait pas tragi-comédie, me paraîtrait déplacée, voire dangereuse.
[...]le sérieux que l'on pourrait ici opposer au rire ne serait pas [...]le sérieux véritable
[...]Depuis trop longtemps il n'y a pas eu en Europe occidentale d'acte héroïque massif, pour que l'on puisse s'élever à la hauteur de la tragédie'(1).

In the Aristotelian sense of tragedy this may be true, but the fact remains that underlying the comic surface of some of his plays, Adamov reveals a personal tragedy for his characters. Le Printemps 71 is the only play in which he deals with a particular, potentially tragic event, but of it he makes rather a carnival than a tragic or political issue. The characters are developed with their traits of simple humour along with those which bear upon the political situation of the play. In no way does Adamov attempt to recreate a Racinian tragedy from the event.

Satire is best explored in Sainte Europe, the most allegorical

(1) Ici et Maintenant, p.61. The article is 'A propos de Paolo Paoli'.

of Adamov's plays, and where political forces and even figures, as well as institutions and events, as already mentioned, are clearly visible beneath their dream veneer. The political language of mystification is satirised in Karl's pseudo-medieval parlance, as it is in the language of La Cause Incarnée in Intimité, where a contemporary audience could not fail to recognise the rhetoric of General de Gaulle. Roger Blin has commented on this point also:

'Le comique d'Adamov provient aussi souvent de ce qu'il a su attraper au vol, et Épingler, un langage petit-bourgeois'(1).

In the early plays this is manifest in characters such as L'Amie of L'Invasion, Sutter, L'Employé and Jean Rist's mother, who use clichés in the most absurd fashion. Les Ames mortes demonstrates the fact most decisively, towards the end, when Tchitchikov is in prison, and when the terrified landowners, in all their self-righteous pomposity, begin to speculate as to the villain's true identity. The seriousness with which they propose their theories that he is a Government spy, a crippled highway robber, or Napoleon himself, is matched by their society language, a rhetoric which condemns them rather than Tchitchikov. It is worth noting also, as Ruth Martin-Jones has remarked (2), that none of Adamov's funny characters ever laughs. This is because they live in fear, obsessed, as Adamov had been with L'Aveu. It is arguable that the author's best work is that which he constructed from clinical observation, or at least from concrete evidence, and which afforded him a better platform on which to demonstrate his considerable gift for satire(3). A degree of detachment from his subject certainly seems to heighten his tragi-

(1) Blin, op. cit., p.1000. (2) Ruth Martin-Jones, An Aspect of Adamov's Theatre, M.A. Thesis, Birmingham University, 1972.

(3) John Fletcher argues exactly the opposite case in 'Studies in Variations on the Permitted Lie', Forces in Modern French Drama, University of London Press, 1972.

comedy.

Be it in character, language or situation, Adamovian comedy lies in incongruity. M. is comic because he claims a moderation which makes of him not a regular Head of State, but a raving pervert with no political control whatsoever. The Agha, as a visiting monarch requesting financial support, spends his time roaring drunk and insults his hosts. Yet behind the humour of that incongruity, there always lies a more serious subject, be it for the individual or for society as a whole. Imposture may be superficially amusing, but it is politically destructive and inhumane.

Décalage and the Realism Question

The notion of décalage has been a constant theme in Adamov's thought since L'Aveu. His preoccupation with separation and absence leads to a concentrated use of disparity in his theatre for comic, dramatic or political ends. One of its mechanisms has already been mentioned : that of Le Ping Pong, where characters age at differing rates, according to their personal interior decay as proportionate to their degree of involvement in and dependence upon the Consortium. Far from making the play clumsily unbalanced, this effect heightens the dramatic importance of the relationship between man and the machine.

There is a variation in emphasis of décalage from the metaphysical (La Parodie) through the socio-satirical (Le Ping Pong) to the tragic (Le Printemps 71). In the first case, there is disparity between the aspirations and physical exertions of L'Employé and his ultimate fate, between the poetic nature of his idealisation of Lili and her actual nature as a virtual prostitute. Similarly, in L'Invasion there is a marked gap between that which Pierre strives to achieve

and that which he is actually permitted to achieve. His effort is totally disproportionate to his degree of success. The tragedy of *Le Mutilé* is that he fails to grasp the fact that Erna cannot save him, any more than could any woman, and that the distance between his hopes, his efforts and his chances of salvation from the Moniteurs is impossible to bridge.

In the cases of Le Ping Pong and Paolo Paoli, the disparity lies chiefly between stated justifications of actions and actual motivations, and also between effort expended and the nature of the object on which it is expended. Imposture is the form of décalage which Adamov chooses to use in a social sense, and humorous lack of proportion is his comic technique.

Le Printemps 71 illustrates the tragic aspect of décalage, and is essentially involved with the question of time, a concept for which Adamov repeatedly stated his concern, and in particular in an article in Ici et Maintenant entitled 'A propos du Printemps 71', which explains in convincing fashion his aims with regard to time in the play. He saw time as a means to renew the ritual aspect of theatre, and as a dramatic entity in its own right. In his last interview he declared:

' [...] ce qui m'intéresse le plus, c'est un temps et un espace qui seraient réinventés à la mesure de l'auteur'(1),

having previously announced his conviction that: 'Le théâtre moderne, c'est un nouveau temps'(2). He defined the new conception of time as one in which events in time could be condensed into a second, as in dreams, where events over a considerable period of time can be

(1) Arthur Adamov, 'Mon théâtre est une lutte', Interview with Emmanuel Jacquart, Les Nouvelles Littéraires, 20th. Aug. 1971, p.19.
 (2) Arthur Adamov, 'Propos sur le théâtre politique', Pensée, no.154, Dec. 1970, p.74.

crystallised into a single moment of actual time. 'Reinvented time' must also be subdivided time, in which a single action from a given moment can be extended to cover a larger span of actual time, other actions of the same moment being similarly treated at a subsequent point in time. Thus, a minute of 'reinvented time' might be extended to stretch over an hour of actual time, or longer. The Paris Commune presented a perfect image of these principles. Into eighty days were historically crushed the lifetimes of an entire generation. Time was their greatest enemy, working against them even as they celebrated their victories, for as the characters of Adamov's play rejoice, their conquests are being torn from them elsewhere. News travels so slowly that they are unaware of the fact. The time which is required to organise defences and administrative procedures is denied them as the Versaillais forces need no time to begin storming the barricades. Robert Oudet requires time to assimilate the Internationalist ideas of Sofia, but he has a crisis on his hands which requires immediate action, and he is unable to take advantage of her political experience. Moments of celebration are extended, as in the first and fifth Tableaux, whereas moments of death are rapidly swept aside in the tide of events. The tenth Tableau is not dated specifically, as are its predecessors. It takes place simply in the 'Première semaine d'avril'(1). The scene depicts an action which summarises the run of events at that period of the Commune. Oudet makes concessions to a Priest, spares his life, an act which will have grave consequences for the entire Commune. A whole week can be crystallised into that one, small event. The importance of time in the play is as a living entity which moves, taking along with it events which are important

(1) Théâtre IV, p.174.

to the characters. It is their misfortune that they act out of time, either in advance of it, or, more often, at some distance behind it. They are never absolutely abreast of time. They cannot grasp it, as L'Employé could not and was thus alienated from the rest of society. Time is a concept which man must grasp, for if he does not, it can run away with his identity, as well as with his destiny.

Time, language, will and action are the main subjects of décalage in Adamov's plays. Le Mutilé may wish to deny the disembodied voices : he cannot. Nor can Edgar or A. achieve manhood, nor Taranne be what he is not. It is man's permanent lot, it would appear from Adamov's plays, never to be in harmony with the universe. His state is that of the dancers of La Parodie, that play which was intended to treat once and for all of the human condition : they dance out of time with the music, and are oblivious to the fact.

Apart from décalage which is interior to the structure of his plays, Adamov is also aware of a disparity between the everyday reality which is familiar to his audiences, and the reality which he illustrates on the stage. He elucidates the nature of this disparity in an intriguing article published a month before his death:

'[...] 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'(1).

The nature of reality is always difficult to establish in Adamovian theatre. Is he referring to a cosmic reality as described in L'Aveu, or to a superficial, objective reality? Both, it would appear. In any event, there is a constant blurring of the lines between reality and unreality or dream:

(1) Arthur Adamov, 'Presque : le théâtre ou le rêve', Les Lettres Françaises, no.1320, 1970, p.11.

'Je passe volontairement du rêve à ce qu'il est convenu d'appeler réalité, et inversement'(1).

He advocates a: '[...]non-alignement au réel'(2), wherein a hotel, whilst overlooking a station, may appear to be a part of the station, although it is in fact distinctly separate, simply almost the same building. It is almost conceivable that the audience might be able to distinguish the Belgian stamp on Taranne's letter, so that the reality of the fact is nearly established, but not quite. The characters of Sainte Europe or of L'Invasion appear superficially and objectively to act in an almost plausible fashion, yet their situation is not readily conceivable as realistic. The exact reverse is true of Paolo Paoli and Le Ping Pong, where the reality of the situations is not quite matched by unquestionable realism in the behaviour of the characters. Reality operates on different levels, then, and it is never brought into question more than in those plays which are constructed as dreams. Si l'été revenait illustrates the point admirably, by juxtaposing four separate dreams, and in each case placing the dreamer au premier plan. Reality in each case is the conception of the dreamer. Yet on each occasion, as the dreamer changes, so does the interpretation of reality. Is superficial reality, then, merely a figment of man's imagination? Le Professeur Taranne operates on the same principle as Si l'été revenait, and Taranne's conception of reality is altered by what appears to be a majority concept. This would seem to demonstrate Adamov's belief in a cosmic reality which holds good in spite of man, and to which man must be subjected. Dreams are revelatory of the inner truth behind the professed verisimilitude of all men's actions. Whether they appear in his plays

(1) Arthur Adamov, 'Presque : le Théâtre ou le rêve', Les Lettres Françaises, no.1320, 1970, p.11. (2) *ibid.*

as transcribed, ascribed or invented dreams, there is no doubt that they do not represent automatic writing such as the Surrealists produced. In dream sequences, Adamov pays minute attention to detail, for example, the exact positioning of Lars and his friends on the swing, or the Belgian letter received by Taranne. Postures, dress and gestures are vital in the dreams of Karl, Teresa and Honoré de Rubens, as they bear directly on the unity of the play, and are consistent with its aims. There is nothing arbitrary about Adamov's dream sequences. They provide insight into his characters and into their relationships with each other. Ironically, real objects require more attention in dream sequences than in waking life in Adamov's plays, for their hidden significances are only apparent at such times. It is interesting to note that for Le Printemps 71, the only stipulation made by Adamov concerning the realistic dating of the play under production, was that the characters should wear beards of the period. In other respects, attention to detail was to be directed towards highlighting deeper realities. Adamov's aim was to achieve that which Artaud had advocated, but never himself been able to bring to fruition in the theatre:

'[...] fondre toutes les apparences en une expression unique qui devrait être pareille à l'or spiritualisé'(1).

The techniques favoured by Adamov in the construction of his plays, remained remarkably consistent throughout his career. They reflect his neurosis, his predilection for certain, obsessive elements of his own nature as revealed in L'Aveu and L'Homme et l'enfant, by their repetitive, circular structures and their concern for incongruity and paradox in the human condition. As a whole, Adamov's

(1) Antonin Artaud, Le Théâtre et son double, Paris, Gallimard, 1964, p.78.

theatre presents a nightmare world where all of life is a struggle, that struggle faced by the author in his nightmare world. Whether his subject be socio-political or introspective and neurotic, the techniques used to treat it are an integral part of the play:

'Je ne verrai jamais la nécessité d'une contradiction entre la forme et le fond'(1).

For Adamov, as for Artaud, the stage is a space to be filled, and it must be filled in a meaningful way. Every item, every word and every character which appear before the audience must be justified by the performance. The subject and the exposition must become one, and must have the potential to produce in the audience an essentially humane reaction. Le sens littéral, for Adamov, must bring back to the theatre its lost, sacred dimension.

(1) Ici et Maintenant, p.151.

CONCLUSION

Arthur Adamov's work, like his life and his view of mankind, is a tissue of contradictions. From personal neurosis to the social machine, and thence to a combination of the two, Adamov has made repeated, allegedly definitive statements about the nature and destiny of man. In his last interview he glosses over the paradoxes to make a statement which reveals an underlying constant in his work and in his life:

'Elle [his third period] correspond à un besoin, non pas de résoudre les contradictions, car il n'est pas possible de les résoudre, mais au moins de les mettre l'une en face de l'autre et de voir clairement pourquoi, ou plutôt comment (je ne dis pas pourquoi, parce qu'on ne le saura jamais) l'homme est un tissu de contradictions'(1).

The very fact of living and experiencing involves us in change and shift. In Adamov's work and assertions this is transparently obvious, his work proving to be that which his experience has made him at a given moment. This is clearly visible in the close relationship between the content and treatment of the plays, and contemporary events and preoccupations in Adamov's life as revealed in the journals. We have seen how dreams and images from life find their way into plays like La Grande et la petite manoeuvre and Paolo Paoli, and how influences such as the family can be seen throughout the plays, and there is no reason to suppose that the socialism of a Marpeaux or of Le Printemps 71 reflects anything more than another temporary preoccupation. The very themes on which the plays rest are chosen because of their potentially obsessive nature, their roots in the contradictions which make up humanity. Adamov writes to purge himself, to explore the workings of private neurosis and its development on

(1) Arthur Adamov, 'Mon théâtre est une lutte', Interview with Emmanuel Jacquart, Les Nouvelles Littéraires, 20th. Aug. 1971.

a wider scale. Both forms have the same result in the psychic and often physical destruction of a being or of an entity. The subjects are chosen so as to be appropriate to such a demonstration.

It is also dangerous to take Adamov's assertions in isolation, whether he is discussing mankind or his own work, as they too will alter with the occasion. The best one can do is to seek out the constants which are to be found in his plays, and to draw a line of psychic continuity and logical progression which lies beneath the surface.

Oppression in all its forms is one such constant. In La Parodie it takes the form of oppression by incurable forces. In Paolo Paoli oppression appears in the form of the capitalist system, as well as of time and progress, and in Si l'été revenait it manifests itself in the shape of the impressions and the will of other people on a psychic level. Persecution, menace and threat, whether from individuals, a society, or forces beyond our control, are ever-present in Adamov's plays. We see power in evidence, from that which Pierre's mother exercises over him to that which the Agha holds over Karl, we can see man as victimiser and victim from Henri to M. le Modéré.

Whether his characters are pathologically obsessed by inanimate objects like Johnnie Brown, or obsessed in a more readily acceptable way by humanitarian and social ideals, like the Communards, they behave in a familiarly neurotic manner, inventing a universe within which to develop and nurture this obsession, and, as a result, the reality of the universe of Taranne is no less real than that of the more realistically situated plays. Each is merely a contingent reality for Adamov, and his characters all move within their own world, trying to assert themselves, searching for an identity, be it subjective or objective, socially or psychologically oriented. All are aware of

their own contingency, and this leads Paolo, just as much as Le Mutilé, to meditate on his existence. For Adamov's characters are all introspective, egocentric. They are motivated by callings within as well as without themselves, and they all have personal reasons for their behaviour. This is just as true of the Communards and the figures of Sainte Europe as it is of Henri or Taranne. It is because of this self-examination that many of the major characters fail to live up to their responsibilities, to feel guilt, and this leads to a further constant : décalage and imposture. However realistically a play is set, the action always slips away from the characters, as if they are out of time with it. Even in a play like Le Printemps 71, Adamov manages to create this 'other-worldly' atmosphere.

The paradoxical roles of Woman, Order and Disorder, whether social or psychic, appear in each of the plays, and from Man being alienated in La Parodie in the shape of L'Employé, it is but a short step to the alienation of a whole society in Sainte Europe or M. le Modéré. Society, whether in Les Retrouvailles or Paolo Paoli, is, for Adamov, our society. Each of his characters is oppressed by it, and each is provoked into a neurotic or obsessional spasm in response to it. The system affects N. and L'Employé, just as it affects Marpeaux. All are creatures of our time and of universal time.

With such vast areas of common ground, it is hard to see Adamov's work as anything other than an oeuvre - an integrated whole, which develops along a definite line. It is for this reason that this thesis cannot subscribe to the view that there is a distinct change of orientation towards a politically biased theatre in the middle of Adamov's career. The concern for and about humanity and oppression, and the neurotic espousing of projects in hand are far more convincing explanations and more accurate representations of these plays, than

is the theory of a conversion to Marxism. John Fletcher appears grossly to have oversimplified the point in his statement that:

'Adamov's best work is that which arises from his personal fears and obsessions, and his worst from an over-ambitious if well-meant attempt to write plays that would turn away from those fears to the injustices of the social universe'(1).

For Adamov, the social is more important than the political, and the revolt more vital than revolution. The reaction in the face of the social machinery of oppression, and the effects of these upon neurotic souls are far more what Adamov's plays have to offer than any advocacy of revolution in a political cause. Adamovian theatre is expositional. It offers no solutions and espouses no causes. It examines and demystifies both the workings of society and the workings of the psyche, which determine that society. Le Printemps 71 was commissioned by the Communist Party, and as such had to be written to order to a certain extent, and it is this play which has led many critics to argue for a Marxist conversion. Despite its origins, in fact, the play does not offer a socialist solution to Man's problems of oppression; it does not espouse a political cause. It espouses the cause of humanity oppressed by its own neurosis, of which the social system is a physical representation, and one which revolution is powerless to alleviate. Even in his socially-situated work, Adamov is never far from the root of his personal neurosis.

By definition, a work which purports to examine that which preoccupies Man in his universe is open to interpretation on socio-political grounds, but these theories are not necessarily valid in terms of the origination of the work, and certainly in the case of

(1) John Fletcher (ed.), Forces in Modern French Drama, University of London Press, 1972, p.196.

Adamov, there is very little evidence of any political affiliation which might actually have affected the fabric of his plays:

'Le monde angoissant qu'il décrivait il le portait en lui. Mais ce monde est peut-être notre monde. Il a su simplement (mais à quel prix?) le capter mieux que nous autres et le restituer dans sa littéralité, dans sa nudité'(1).

At the beginning of this thesis, Adamov was said to have been in search of a personal identity. Having exposed himself psychically over the years, it is doubtful whether his writing had the cathartic effect he desired, and whether it left him with a clear picture of himself. Paradoxical and contradictory to the end, his plays offer indistinct solutions to the question. The very fact that critics, having discerned divisions in periods of the plays, have failed to reach any convincing demarcations for these divisions, merely points up the difficulty in pinpointing any unshifting ground in Adamov's work. This fact would seem to invalidate the view that such divisions exist clearly.

If the plays seem to move from an abstractly introspective orientation to a more easily recognisably socially-situated basis, it is because the former can be seen to operate beneath the latter, and Inge Pruks may well be correct in her appreciation of Si l'été revenait as the point of no return, where Adamov created a universe of reality in unreality, in which he himself could operate, and face the saut métaphysique for himself, all else having failed. The identity which he had sought is exploded as a myth in that play, and, as it had been his raison d'être, his death, his non-being, was a clearly-proven fact in the play's universe, as was Taranne's in

(1) Roger Planchon in 'Hommage à Arthur Adamov', Les Lettres Françaises, 25th. March 1970, p.5.

the play which bears his name.

However Adamov may have ended his life, as far as his work is concerned, there is little doubt in the present author's mind that the plays constitute one complete unity; they both express a profoundly consistent attitude to human existence, and present that view in an equally consistent, if particular, manner.

When exploring the works of Arthur Adamov, his plays cannot be considered without detailed and constant references to his journals, and without constantly in mind his inherent paradoxes and consistencies. The man is his own best critic:

'Mais le mal que je confesse - ce mal si bien installé au centre de moi-même qu'on ne saurait me juger sans le juger, lui - mon mal - est-il autre chose que parodie?'(1).

Perhaps a detailed analytical study of Si l'été revenait might reveal the answer, and elucidate the enigma. Such a study, if it achieved these aims, might also be regretted, as the question-mark which Adamov declared himself to be is indeed a fascinating one.

(1) L'Aveu, p.85.

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