



## FUTILITY OF THE HUMAN STRUGGLE IN ARTHUR ADAMOV'S *LE PING-PONG*

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### Abstract

Albert Camus in his *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1943) has avowed his evaluation of a man in the world of fragmented traditions, beliefs, and circumstances. So, he has psychologically noted that due to absurdness, one can be obliged to commit a suicide as the way to get rid of the surrounded frustrated life and the unbearable quandaries. Though Adamov adopted patently Camus' approach but in compensation he leads to feel the reader that the absurdness is more than truth or beyond the truth, as one can significantly experience the inner reality of life; may be due to the spiritual realization or depth of understanding the supreme truth of human kind. So, after the WWII, a large number of people in USA, Russia, Europe, and Japan undeniably felt their life is futile and pessimistic. Therefore, a lot of playwrights aimed to depict such futility of human struggles in non-conventional dramaturgical method. Adamov seems of multi-geographical culture that he is from Arminian origin, born in Russia, studied in Germany, and settled in France. So, such cultural diversity surely could affect the intuitive ideology of Adamov. Thus, as a splendid playwright in the field of absurd drama, Martin Esslin has included him among the other four exponent playwrights of the absurd in his fabulous book *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1963).

**Keywords:** Futility, Human Struggle, Modern Ideology, Absurd Theatre, *Le Ping-Pong*.

### Introduction

It is indeed a hard-pressed act to dig behind the autobiographical and critical analysis of Arthur Adamov and his dramatic feats because of his neurosis and commitment. His neurosis is displayed in his plays and it is clear for the spectators of his spectacles. The oscillation of the Adamovs' life between luxury and poverty had govern the artistic attitudes of their son Arthur. The harsh factors under which Adamov was living such as the oppressive nature of his mother, the poorness at one phase of his life, his financial failure, the Spanish

civil war, the feeling of being puppet in the hands of unseen or invisible forces, and his failure to join the French resistance against the Nazi Germans had shaped the psychological and individual image of his life particularly during the first two decades of his age and the outcome was normally the futility of his tries to establish a favorite, safe, successful, and accepted life. He was influenced by Kafka, Artaud, and Strindberg. Therefore, a nature of pessimism was born on him. *Le Ping-Pong* (1955) is a marvelous absurd play written by Arthur Adamov in which he refers to the endless, objectiveless, and futile game of chance. Moreover, it proves the tyranny of the

machine as an ideological instrument against the human efforts in the modern era and how an individual becomes mere a doll for the invisible pillars of his community. Also, *Le Ping-Pong* depicts explicitly the individual commitment to unnecessary intensions. Thus, this article will attempt to tackle the futility of human endeavors among the ideological aimless policies in the post-war societies.

Arthur Adamov (1908-1970) is regarded as one of those famous dramatists who added new concepts to the theatre of the absurd, rejecting of the realism on the stage, and displaying or unveiling the human ordeal in absurd representation. Arthur Adamov is highly obsessed with gathering of the elusive self-fragments. He is suffering from both the shattered familial relationships as represented by the barbarianism of his mother in addition to his isolated nature as well as from his communal barriers which impose certain political ideologies to be mandatorily converted. Susan Lesely Moss posits that,

Adamov's metaphysic of absence and separation is suspect at numerous points, but it remains a vast rationalization of human motivation as stemming from fear and solitude. Man endless humiliation of himself projects from his inner sense of guilt. In Adamov's case that guilt is personal, but, just like his fellows, he feels a need of 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 difficult problem to find a true sense of being. (54)

In the abovementioned quoted speech, Moss refers to the isolated psyche of Arthur Adamov that cultivates the feeling of fear and fury. He avows that an individual is humiliating and oppressing himself because he always sees himself as guilty. In other words, a man is afraid from the reality that he is oppressed by his social and political authorities but he is too weak to confess such and the otherwise is accusing himself with the sin. Therefore, he is often found searching to forgive himself to get rid of his neurosis. Thus, a man explicitly is unable to find the

correct position of his hopes and dreams and that is why he still looks for a suitable meaning of his life. Thereof, Adamov is an absurd playwright who deals with the life as meaningless and free from any meaningful circumstances and factors.

Arthur Adamov visualizes the Marxist perspective regarding the inevitable contact with the instrumental and industrial world. The characters of *Le Ping-Pong* seem preoccupied keenly with existence not because of its decisiveness but rather because of its modernity and hence they engage themselves in very thorough discussion about the mechanical ideology and its role in the development of community. Margaret Dietemann confirms that,

*Le Ping-Pong* is the first of a series of plays with an essentially political slant. The machine generates around itself a sort of miniature social structure. From a Marxian viewpoint it contains its own antithesis, in that it destroys the strength and enthusiasm of those who might perpetuate it. More importantly, it permits the characters in the play to interact socially, and allows them an existence which is more than a mirror of the psychological struggles within the author. (50)

In the plays of Adamov, the readers and the theatre-goers can't find any remedy for the absurd ordeals that bother the human psychic being and upset the human dream. So, it is indeed the nature of all the absurd playwrights to let the door open for any external solutions so as to remove the futility which encapsulates all the human struggles. *Le Ping-Pong* proves the hesitation of the human will and the paralysis of mentality. Arthur, the bohemian artist, seems arrested by the pinball machine game. He can't create his own will but rather he is caged by the ideological machine just as the rest of his friends as Victor, the doctor, and the decent chap who have been consumed by the industrial world. Therefore, Arthur was refusing to achieve any advancement for changing the deleterious stream of his life. Thus, a man in the modern era has been enslaved by the ideological capitalism of the machine which has obscured all his individual endeavors.

Adamov often intends to attract the spectator to judge, evaluate, and criticize both the dramaturgical technique and the portrayed issue. He is highly influenced by Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre in such case. So that, he refutes all the confession ways on the stage utilizing from it himself and sharing the others at creating of their own remedies for such human predicaments. The capitalistic protest of Adamov is very clear in many plays. He is patently concerned with the shattered and thwarted familial relationships and the functioning of an individual on basis of his liberty particularly in his job, family, and society. Arthur's ideas in *Le Ping-Pong* has been economically exploited as he is too intelligent in such stream. Besides, Annette has been exploited sexually due to the consortium hierarchy. Madam Duranty, also, is famous for her dancing. Consequently, the earned money has been exploited by the despotic representatives of supremacy. Thus, an individual, due to Adamov, is mere a weak puppet exploited by machine and the other external powers.

Lesley Moss focuses attention in both the psychological and social involvements of Adamov's plays. Lesley asserts that the suing of the machine by Adamov is splendidly erecting new approach through which his readers can identify the nature of oppression which his characters are suffering from. Moreover, Lesley addresses that the blending of psyche and machine in Adamov's plays can confirm the flux of revolutionary endeavors through which an individual finds himself so forced to search for the appropriate solutions that enable him the subdue the absurdness. Lesley states,

For Adamov, the social is more 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 exceptional. 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 the society. (208)

As long as there is an automatic machine, the people should speak about it, its components, works, beauty, help, and price. So, in the Admovian dramaturgical nature, the characters go more to speak of it sexually and such can assert their social desires. The characters on the stage have very limited vocabulary just same that of the watching spectators of the spectacle. They don't have the complete freedom to declare their hopes and desires as governed by certain rules that must be followed. The characters as Arthur and Victor were dominated by monstrous and cosmic forces, there actions were shown as of melodramatic and furious ranges. Therefore, Adamov felt with need to include some protagonists in his later plays. Thus, he decided to violate the principal principles of the absurd theatre in his later dramaturgic oeuvres. So that, Arthur Adamov has upended against de-centering of the characters, their propagation, and the declaration of the inner notion of the spectacle. The man in *Le Ping-Pong* is a stranger, alien, and exile. He doesn't know his root and social hierarchy. In this case, Adamov aims to create the social position of his central characters and to prove their true identity. Therefore, the Adamovian character rejects being a puppet led by invisible forces but fights to be a real hero. The subjects can be easily led by any power but only the protagonists can resist even the visible authorities to get their rights, privileges, honors, and hopes.

Arthur Adamov has borrowed the method of alienation from Brecht's epic theatre. He has aimed to increase the futility of human endeavors on the stage. Nicholas Maurer tackles such issue in his article asserting the Brechtian theatrical role at creating of the Admovian absurd ordeals so as to augment the dramaturgic conflict. *Le Ping-Pong* leads to remove the characters from their original society in which they inhabit. Maurer views,

At first thought, alienation and absurdism should conflict, since absurdism is dependent on the lack of meaning. Without the possibility of a didactic production, Brecht's alienation effect is rendered useless. Yet Adamov draws upon alienation techniques in order to augment the absurdism of the situation for his audience. For the characters

in these plays, butterfly hunting and conquering pinball machines have progressed to life or death situations; therefore, the alienation effect is necessary in order to rid the audience of any empathetic feelings for the ridiculous dilemmas of the characters, thus producing humor. (79-80)

*Le Ping-Pong* has very intuitive plot order through which the central characters depict the futility of their exertion and their intellectual weakness. Both Arthur and Victor are conversing about the essential items that form the pinball machine. So, the life of people, due to Adamov, is related to the principles of their organization which is represented by the pinball machine in the play. Thereafter, all the human efforts are associated with how to be loyal to the machine which incarnates the ideological authority. Adamov is highlighting very naïve matter meanwhile he is alienating the spectators who should be worthy of attention. Such destructive pursuit for the machine and its issues creates a kind of humor which includes the futile rift between an individual and his organization. Hence, the empathetic stream can defeat the ridiculous depiction in the play. Thus, *Le Ping-Pong* designs the entire chance and delineation for characters to destroy their own choice and freedom because of their sightless loyalty to the machine. All the human relationships, therefore, become useless, futile, and null.

The western contemporary community is very clear through the pinball and the café in which it is used. Adamov tries his best to direct and shift the attention of the people from the human side into the social one to assert the tyranny of the created organizational ideologies in the post-war society. Therefore, he strives to manifest the complex duality between man and machine. Martin Esslin refers to the intended domination of the mechanical and foundational ideology over all the human potentials. He states that, a man is entirely shattered among the industrial advancement that is invisibly governed through the political pillars. Esslin tackles,

The pinball machine in *Le Ping-Pong* is more than just a machine; it is the center-piece of

an organization and of a body of thought. The moment the objective—the improvement of pinball machines—becomes an ideal, it embodies itself in an organization with its own struggle for power, its own intrigues and politics, its own tactics and strategies. As such, it becomes a matter of life and death for all who serve the ideal. A number of the characters in the play are destroyed in the service of an organization, or in its struggle for power. All this conducted with the utmost fervor, seriousness and intensity. (85)

The vague description for the Adamovian dramaturgical narration is asserting the nature and version of plays which have been taken down by Arthur Adamov. He behaves literally like Brecht and Kafka in many of his feats. His plays, like *Le Ping-Pong*, can be described as political, economic, capitalistic, and religious ones. The principal characters in this play resemble Vladimir and Estragon in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Victor and Arthur are extremely obsessed with many inquiries like what is the pinball machine, how does it work, what are its fundamental parts, how much it costs, can it reduce the traditional jobs of the common masses, and for whom it belongs. Thus, Adamov is apparently evaluating and highlighting it from a political and social perspectives.

The absurd drama indeed intends to clarify the confidential ordeals of the society on the stage. The moral deeds, due to the absurd philosophy of Albert Camus, are with later consequences whether positively or negatively. Camus argues,

All systems of morality are based on the idea that an action has consequences that legitimize or cancel it. A mind imbued with the absurd merely judges that those consequences must be considered calmly. It is ready to pay up. In other words, there may be responsible persons, but there are no guilty ones, in its opinion. At very most, such a mind will consent to use past experience as a basis for its future actions. Time will prolong time, and life will serve life. In this field that is both limited and bulging with possibilities, everything in himself, except his lucidity,

seems unforeseeable to him. What rule, then, could emanate from that unreasonable order? The only truth that might seem instructive to him is not formal: it comes to life and unfolds in men. The absurd mind cannot so much expect ethical rules at the end of its reasoning as, rather, illustrations and the breath of human lives. (50)

### Conclusion

To conclude, Arthur Adamov is not that common writer to get a sufficient knowledge about his literary works because of both his multi-cultural literary career and his isolation which he had inherited as influenced by Franz Kafka and Bertolt Brecht as well as the arbitrary conducts of his mother. In *Le Ping-Pong*, Adamov argued a lot to avow the futility of human struggle and how an individual is vehemently governed by the tyrant industrial ideology and the culture of consumerism. The commitment and neurosis of Adamov represented decisive factors which cultivated that futility in a lot of his feats.

At summation, due to Adamov, an individual is not only enslaved by the political ideology but by the political machine which had been designed and created to remove the dreams and hopes of common people. Arthur and Victor, the central characters in the play, are arguing more about the nature of the machine without any concern about its demerits. They have only one choice in their futile life that is only to accept the political ideology as a means of industrial improvement. Moreover, the familial ties between people seem very shattered and all the human endeavors to reconstruct such seem futile. The play proves the continuous conflict between man and ideology, man and organization, and yet between man and systematic dominative approach. Thus, all the human struggles to establish a fair and pure life are with no avail. They are futile and such depiction is launching out based on the ideology of the absurd.

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