REREADING SHAKESPEARE'S *THE MERCHANT OF VENICE* AND *RICHARD II*: WESKER'S *THE MERCHANT* AND IONESCO'S *EXIT THE KING*

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I certify that this thesis satisfies all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

REREADING SHAKESPEARE'S *THE MERCHANT OF VENICE* AND *RICHARD II*: WESKER'S *THE MERCHANT* AND IONESCO'S *EXIT THE KING*

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This thesis is a comparative study of how Shakespeare's ideas transcend the boundaries of his own time and still remain as the major sources of inspiration for modern dramatists. Arnold Wesker and Eugéne Ionesco explore the concept of the "other" leading to loss of identity and awareness of non-being embedded in Shakespeare's works. The main argument is that the contemporary playwrights reinterpret Shakespeare's works in the light of some modern issues and ideas to reveal the entrapment of the individual.

Keywords: **the other, loss of identity, non-being**

ÖZ

SHAKESPEARE'İN *THE MERCHANT OF VENICE* VE *RICHARD II* ADLI YAPITLARININ TEKRAR YORUMLANMASI: WESKER'IN *THE MERCHANT*'I VE IONESCO'NUN *EXIT THE KING*'İ

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Bu tez Shakespeare'in yaşadığı yüzyılın sınırlarını aşıp, modern oyun yazarlarına bir esin kaynağı oluşunu karşılaştırmalı olarak incelemektedir. Modern oyun yazarlarından Arnold Wesker ve Eugéne Ionesco Shakespeare'in oyunlarındaki "öteki" kavramını ele almış ve bu kavramın nasıl kimlik yitirme korkusuna ve var olmama bilincine dönüştüğünü incelemişlerdir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: öteki, kimlik yitirme, var olmama

to *Hakan*

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to assert how two modern dramatists, Arnold Wesker and Eugéne Ionesco, reinterpreted *The Merchant of Venice* and *Richard II* in their works by analysing the process of "the otherness," leading to loss of identity and "non-being". To this end, Wesker based his *The Merchant* on Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. Similarly, Ionesco made use of *Richard II* for his *Exit the King (Le Roi se meurt)*. The plays will be referred as *M*, *MV*, *RII*, and *EK* respectively in this study.

This thesis analyses how Wesker elaborates on Shakespeare's depiction of Shylock, a Jewish usurer, as the other in his reinterpretation of *The Merchant of Venice.* Shakespeare's portrayal of the state of Jews in Venice is parallel to Mikhail Bakhtin's idea that "individual consciousness" can only be gained through the way an outsider perceives its existence (in Todorov 95). Whereas, in *The Merchant*, major characters like Bassanio and especially Lorenzo regard Jews as the minority and tend to humiliate them because of their otherness. Wesker's Shylock wants to shatter the boundaries of his otherness and become part of the society and form good relationships with its members. The reason why Wesker chooses to make Shylock Antonio's best friend is also parallel to Bakhtin's idea that "I cannot do without the other; I cannot become myself without the other; I must find myself in the other" (in Todorov 96). Both the Jew and the merchant enjoy their friendship,

which enables them to share ideas about their vision of life. They construct their friendship on each other's perception in the other.

This thesis also explores the way Ionesco is inspired by Shakespeare's *Richard II* in writing his *Exit the King*. Ionesco bases his characterisation of King Berenger on Richard's portrayal as the ultimate power. Bakhtin's idea of the other (in Todorov) aims to identify "the role of the other in the accomplishment of individual consciousness" (in Todorov 95). Richard ignores the contribution of the others to his self-consciousness and relies so much on his sovereignty. Ionesco makes use of this idea and creates Berenger as a king entrapped in the same flaw.

This study analyses how Wesker and Ionesco make use of the elements contributing to the otherness in Shakespeare's plays. Wesker's *The Merchant* mainly focuses on the usury, the Venetian law and anti-semitism to indicate how these affect Shylock's otherness. Wesker also brings some new insights into the life of Jews in 16th century Venice by setting *The Merchant* in the Ghetto Nuovo. Ionesco refers to Shakespeare's play as he chooses the elements that contribute to Berenger's othering process. Richard is disillusioned about his identity as he recognises the others' perception of him, loss of his power, and the destructive nature of time. Berenger undergoes a similar disillusionment. As he loses his power to command his subjects, he acknowledges their contribution to his self-consciousness. The flow of time for Ionesco's king is as destructive as it is for Richard. Ionesco borrows Shakespeare's idea that the land and the king are one to disillusion Berenger about his status as the supreme king. While poetic language is a resort for Richard to cope with his loss of power and identity, it fails Berenger in his attempts to communicate his fear of death.

This study also focuses on the fear of loss of identity in the protagonists of *The Merchant* and *Exit the King*. Both Shakespeare's and Wesker's Jews are involved in a bond. However, while the bond makes Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* feel victorious over his rival Antonio, it becomes a threat to the identity of Wesker's Jew. In *Exit the King*, Ionesco uses of Shakespeare's idea that death abolishes all class distinction to present Berenger's fear of loss of identity. The threat of death forces Richard to admit that his status as a king is a sheer lie. Accepting his mortality is also a big challenge for Berenger, which involves a futile fight against death.

The final point that this thesis concentrates on is the concept of non-being in Wesker's and Ionesco's plays. Both dramatists discuss how the relationship among their characters disintegrate as their otherness become more and more pronounced. Shylock's otherness encourages some characters like Antonio and Jessica to be critical of their interaction with the people who are close to them. In addition, Wesker shows the friendship between Shylock and Antonio cannot stand the social pressure and ultimately collapses. Berenger understands that he is all alone in his fight against death. Gradually Shylock and Berenger acknowledge their non-being, which is caused by the conflict between the roles they are assigned by the others and these characters' expectations of life. Ionesco's play, being an example of absurd drama also reflects on the absurdity of life as Berenger is incapable of proving his existence.

Thus, Wesker and Ionesco elaborate on the concept of the other, the elements contributing to the otherness which motivate their protagonists to question who they are and consequently realise their non-being.

1.2. Shakespeare and the modern dramatists: Wesker and Ionesco

Shakespeare is among the literary figures, who is referred as a man of all times. Jan Kott, one of the most prominent contemporary critics, in his *Shakespeare, Our Contemporary*, even sees him as "life itself" (5). What makes him so popular despite having lived in 16th century, is his ability to capture the universal aspects of human nature in his portrayal of characters. Shakespeare's works have maintained their appeal to the audiences and readers of different periods because every historical period finds in him what it is looking for and what it wants to see," (Kott 5). Shakespeare's works exceed the boundaries of the time they were written. When watching a Shakespearean play performed on the stage, the modern audience is exposed to problems that are relevant to his own time, which allows him the freedom to interpret what is displayed on the stage through his own experience (Kott 5). In addition to this, for centuries Shakespeare has been addressing people not only through his own plays, but also through the reinterpretation of many of his works. In his plays, modern dramatists find issues which have endured time for four

hundred years, therefore, are still relevant for exploring in their drama. Jon Kott suggests that the contemporary playwrights need to challenge Shakespeare (in Marowitz 109). In order to find new answers to the questions that Shakespeare poses in his plays, Kott argues that the modern playwrights and the audiences have to bombard Shakespeare's works with new questions. Arnold Wesker and Eugéne Ionesco are two of the contemporary dramatists who reveal some new aspects of the questions Shakespeare poses in his plays *The Merchant of Venice* and *Richard II*.

Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* is regarded as one of the most problematic Shakespearean figures with his disputable character, nationality, the motives behind his insistence on the bond and constant pre-occupation with money. Whether Shakespeare meant to create a villain who at the end is considered to get his due punishment is not very clear. According to John Palmer, Shakespeare's aim was to write a comedy without "pleading for toleration or indicating Christian hypocrisy, exalting equity above the law or divine mercy above human justice" (130). He argues that Shakespeare's major intention was to create a context for himself in which he presents how his charters are affected by such issues to entertain and amuse people. However, within the modern historical context it is not very possible for Wesker only to regard *The Merchant of Venice* as a comedy. Michael Scott views Wesker as one of the modern dramatists who "felt independently that this Shakespearean drama of the 1598 in its prevailing anti-semitism is intensely objectionable in the twentieth century" (44). Being rather dissatisfied with Shakespeare's representation of a Jewish moneylender, Wesker in his play, *The Merchant,* rewrites it in order to have a better insight into Shylock. Wesker, in the Preface to *The Merchant*, expresses his admiration for Shakespeare's genius, sating that he reveres Shakespeare, and feels "proud to write in his shadow;" he thinks that the world is inconceivable without him (*M* XLIX). Moreover, he adds that he is ready "to defend the right of anyone anywhere to present and teach" *The Merchant of Venice* (*M* XLIX). However, he finds it difficult to admit that Shylock in this play is one of the numerous Shakespearean characters, through which the playwright explores some of the universal features of human nature. Therefore, he resents Shakespeare's choice of a Jew as a wicked figure to personify the characteristics which he "wishes to set in opposition to other characteristics" (*M* XLIX).

Being himself a Jew, Wesker finds, Shakespeare's portrayal of Shylock as the embodiment of "what he wishes to despise" incomprehensible (*M* XLIX). Although in no other play Shakespeare implies anti-Jewish feeling, Wesker feels offended, because Shylock's representation in the play is "a lie about the Jewish character" (*M* L). Moreover, he points out that as a Jew, he is not after a pound of flesh, yet he regrets the fact that *The Merchant of Venice* contributed to the world's antagonism and loathing for the Jew. It was easy for the 16th century audience to condemn Shylock as a villainous usurer. Yet, the modern theatregoer looks for some reasons in Shakespeare's play which make Shylock so revengeful. Today, the Jew in *The Merchant of Venice* is regarded as a person who has valid reasons to behave in the way he does.

Wesker presents a much more realistic account of the events concerning the life of Jews and their relationship with the Venetians in the 16th century. After doing some research on Venetian history and the state of Renaissance Jews, he has decided that his "play would not be about bonds of usury but about bonds of friendship and the state laws which could threaten that friendship" (*M* LIII). Wesker admits that the poet in Shakespeare is admirable, however, the modern dramatist's knowledge about the Jewish life style and Venetian history encourages him to reinterpret the events in the play. All Wesker aims to do is to offer "a new set of evidence from which a theatre public may choose" (*M* LIV). What Wesker objects to is "not the original dramatic concept of the work but the play as it has evolved in its intertextual life and now linked to the sensitive issue of anti-semitism in Western culture" (Scott 48). In writing *The Merchant*, Wesker does not aim to abolish the respect that people have for Shakespeare, instead he wants to offer a more realistic account of the state of Jews and their relationship with the Christians at the time.

Unlike Shakespeare's image of Shylock as a materialistic moneylender, whose relationships are defined in monetary terms, Wesker offers a person who is highly intellectual, concerned with more sophisticated issues and has devoted his entire life to intellectual enlightenment. Religion no longer plays a significant role in defining the relationship between Shylock and Antonio. In order to offer a clear comparison between *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Merchant*, in addition to elaborating on the same characters the play originally has, Wesker chooses to add some new personages like Simon Usque, Roderigues de Cunha or Moses of Castelazzo. These

characters contribute to the realism of the play as they are people who actually lived in Venice in 16th century. By playing with the relationship between these characters, Wesker is able to construct a new web of relationships which gives the audience a much different perspective of everyday life, interests and concerns of Jews from different walks of life to reinterpret the play. Wesker presents a wider spectrum of Jewish people. That is why Scott regards Wesker as one of the major dramatists who attempts "to demythologise the Shylock tradition" in order to shift the moral boundaries concerning Shylock' portrayal as a wicked figure and change the audience's approach to him (48). As a result, Wesker's depiction of the major characters greatly differs from what Shakespeare originally presents.

Wesker borrows the concept of law, usury and anti-semitism from *The Merchant of Venice* as the major elements contributing to Shylock's otherness. Wesker approaches these elements in the light of historical data and offers a realistic picture of how it felt to be a Jew in the Renaissance Venice. In addition to disclosing the humiliation and abuse Jews were exposed to, Wesker accentuates the hypocrisy of the Venetian society. The fact that Shylock is severely punished at the end in both plays proves that whether the Jew has wicked intentions or good ones, according to the law, he is doomed to failure. Wesker stresses that despite being severely condemned for their sinful practice of usury, Jews were actually given no right to be engaged in more prestigious occupations. Moreover, he points out that Jews were allowed to live in Venice on condition that they pay various taxes. Wesker sets out to write *The Merchant* to react to the growth of anti-Semitism that he believes Shakespeare's play has contributed since the time it was first written. In order to achieve his aim, he tries to portray Shylock as a human being with both his positive and negative personality traits. Wesker's Shylock stresses that actually he has no other option but being a Jew as he was born into this religion. He has to encounter the prejudices that the Christians bear towards him. Although Antonio is his best friend, most of the other non-Jewish characters humiliate and mistrust him at first sight because their prejudice is motivated by the "anti-semitic theory" that "the Jews deserve no trust" (Leeming 74-75).

Just like Wesker, Ionesco is another modern dramatist, who tries to bring insight to man's existence in the world by questioning Shakespeare's plays. In his *Exit the King*, he elaborates on the absurd aspects that Shakespeare presents in his

play, *Richard II*. Shakespeare's characterisation of Richard reminds Ionesco of the state of his existence as a modern man, which is reflected in his works:

> Two fundamental states of consciousness are at the root of all my plays … These two basic feelings are those of evanescence on the one hand, and heaviness on the other hand; of emptiness and of an over-abundance of presence; the unreal transparency of the world, and its opaqueness … The sensation of evanescence results in a feeling of anguish, a sort of dizziness. … I am most often under the dominion of the opposite feeling: the lightness changes to heaviness, transparence to thickness; the world weighs heavily, the universe crushes me. (in Esslin 158)

What appeals to Ionesco in *Richard II*, is the parallelism between Ionesco's state of mind and the things that Richard experiences as a king. While initially Shakespeare introduces him at the height of his status as a figure possessing ultimate power, towards the end of the play he is reduced to nobody. Just like Ionesco suggests, Richard enjoys the feeling of "lightness" because of his high status. However, this lightness changes into "heaviness" of trying to understand his existence after having been abdicated. When he is a king, everything appears transparent to Richard, yet this also turns into "thickness." As Ionesco points out "the world, the universe crushes" Richard as well as it crushes the absurd dramatist.

History for Shakespeare proves to be one of his indispensable sources to reveal the different aspects of human nature. The great playwright is not concerned with the accuracy of the source information. Instead, he handles it in an original and distinctive way so that it will serve his purposes. Similarly, Ionesco borrows elements from *Richard II* to provide the modern audiences with new answers to the questions Shakespeare raises in his play. Ionesco is moved by Shakespeare's portrayal of Richard's tragedy. What Shakespeare tells him is that "all men die in solitude; all values are degraded in a state of misery" (in Esslin 417). Ionesco argues that despite being a historical figure, Richard's character gives some insights to human nature. According to Ionesco, what makes Shakespeare modern is the fact that "Richard II's prison is not a truth that has been overtaken by the flow of the history" because the modern man suffers from a similar entrapment (in Esslin 417).

Ionesco attaches Shakespeare great importance and values him above any philosophy and ideology because he thinks that the prison's "invisible walls still stand, while so many philosophies, so many ideologies have crumbled forever" (in Esslin 417).

In *Richard II*, in addition to being a tragic figure, he is also a character who illuminates the universal aspects of human disposition. Shakespeare moves from what Richard experiences as an individual to shed light on the universal characteristics of human beings. Shakespeare's discussion of the universal through the individual is another aspect of his drama that appeals to Ionesco, because he is in a similar pursuit in his own plays. While aiming to reach the universal and "to discover the fundamental problem common to all mankind," the absurd dramatist first questions "what *my* [his] fundamental problem is, what *my* [his] most ineradicable fear is" (in Esslin 130). He believes that such self-questioning will reveal "the problems and fears of literary everyone" (in Esslin 130).

In addition to his ability to capture the universal through the experiences of individual characters, another unique characteristic of Shakespeare's works is their openness to reinterpretation through some modern ideas. Ionesco's portrayal of Berenger in *Exit the King* is modelled after many of the features of King Richard in Shakespeare's play. Richard is depicted as a king who relies too much on his power and status and falls into one of the entrapments that according to Bakhtin impede self-consciousness. Bakhtin states "cutting oneself off, isolating oneself, closing oneself off, are the basic reasons for the loss of self" (in Todorov 96). Thus, both Richard and Berenger indulge in the privileges their status offers them and ignore people's perception of them. Neither Richard nor Berenger takes into consideration the warnings of the characters whom they dislike; but those turn out to be their true friends. They are unaware of the idea that a better understanding of the self can be gained by looking "*in the eyes of the other or through the eyes of the other*" (Bakhtin in Todorov 96). Thus, they go through an othering process during which they lose their power and are disillusioned about their identities. When finally they turn to themselves to understand who they are, Richard and Berenger are frustrated to see their non-beings because of having wasted time by trying to fit into their assigned roles.

In conclusion, the analysis of the reinterpretation of Shakespeare's works in the twentieth century indicates that his plays are indispensable sources for modern dramatists to explore the human nature and the human predicament. Motivated by the issues that Shakespeare was concerned with, Wesker and Ionesco tried to reread Shakespeare's ideas using their individual experiences and visions of life. In addition to emphasising the universality of Shakespearean works, such a practice, also offers the audience a new scope for understanding the great playwright.

CHAPTER 2

THE OTHER

2.1. The other in *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Merchant*

2.1.1. Shylock as the other

In both *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Merchant* the character, Shylock is highly conscious of his otherness. The concept of the otherness in Shakespeare's play is mostly manifested in the isolation his Shylock suffers because of being a Jew and a usurer. The Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* is reluctant to integrate with the Christian community he lives in. Wesker deals with the question of the other on a larger scale. He emphasises that Shylock is willing to integrate with the community he lives in but his attempts to do so are rejected by the Venetian law due to the deeply rooted prejudice against his race.

In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock is the other who is isolated and humiliated, but he dominates the stage from the moment he is first introduced. John Palmer states that it is Shakespeare's art in portraying Shylock as a real man with flesh and blood that makes the Jew such a dominant figure. Shakespeare aimed to make people laugh by writing "a comedy about a strange Jew involved in a grotesque story about a pound of flesh" (114). However, through his representation of his antagonist "Shakespeare has *humanised* him to such good purpose that this comic Jew has become, for many brilliant and sensitive critics, a moving, almost tragic, figure" (114). Despite the initial impression of a malicious moneylender, a

closer analysis of Shylock's nature reveals that he is a human being who is most of the time humiliated by the gentiles of Venice.

Palmer points out that Shakespeare borrowed the story of *The Merchant of Venice* from various sources in which Shylock appear as a villain; yet as a poetic genius, "taking Shylock's merry bond for a theme and accepting all the restrictions of the Elizabethan theatre, he expressed himself as freely and profoundly as" possible (115). Being an antagonist in a play already familiar to the Elizabethan audience restricts the actions of Shylock making his "behaviour in the play settled in advance" (Palmer 114). However, Shylock presented in Shakespeare's play is more like a human being than a villain condemned for his wrongdoing in the earlier versions. Although the play is constructed as a comedy, the way Shakespeare depicts Shylock makes him "cease to be a comic character" (114). Beneath the comic representation of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare reveals the kind of place the Jews occupied in Venice and how they were treated by the society in general. As it is suggested by Graham Midgley, being a Jew and the consciousness of being the other have destructive effects on his personality since all he is and all he regards dear is alien to the society in which he has to live (196). All the time he has to live with the reality that he is an outsider, only tolerated but never accepted (Midgley 196). Moreover, Midgley raises the point that "his being a Jew is not important itself: what is important is what being a Jew has done to his personality" (196). Shylock's Jewish nature makes him the other in Venice, which means constant disgrace and humiliation that he has to suffer. He is so sensitive to his otherness that he becomes rather repulsive and aggressive towards people who remind him of it.

In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock's otherness is highlighted by the clear division of characters into two major distinctive and conflicting groups; the Jewish and the Christian circles. The former group consist of Shylock and the people who are closely related to him either by blood, like his daughter Jessica, or by status, like his servant Lancelot Gobbo, while the latter includes Antonio's acquaintances who are Solanio, Salarino, Lorenzo and more importantly Bassanio. Through Shylock's interaction with Antonio, his otherness as a moneylender and a Jew is revealed. The relationship between Shylock and Jessica, on the other hand, reflects Shylock's otherness in his domestic life.

The way Shakespeare introduces Shylock in the play indicates the function he fulfils in the society as the source of money. It also reflects the mutual hatred that dominates the relationship between the Jew and the Christian gentry. Because he does not have any financial means to support his friend Bassanio, Antonio has no alternative but to ask Shylock, the usurer, to lend him "three thousand ducats," which is the amount Bassanio needs to woo Portia (*MV* 1.3.1). Being a usurer, quite naturally Shylock is very money oriented so he questions Antonio's reliability to sign the bond as he does not want to waste his money. Until the moment he faces Antonio, the discussion about the bond remains only as a business deal. However, as soon as the Jew meets Antonio, Shylock becomes arrogant because Antonio had mistreated him several times in the past: "many a time and oft / In the Rialto you rated me / About my monies and my usances" (*MV* 1.3.98-100). One reason why he hates Antonio is his being a Christian, but the real source of his hatred is the fact that Antonio spoiled Shylock's business by lending money without charging any interest. Because Antonio, "neither lend[s] nor borrow[s] by taking nor by giving of excess," Shylock is filled with the desire of taking revenge (*MV* 1.3.53-54). He lends the money to the merchant on condition that Shylock will have "an equal pound / of your [Antonio's] fair flesh" if he is not able to repay the money in three months (*MV* 1.3.142-143). Rather than charging any interest, Shylock demands the merchant to risk his life.

Before Shylock learns about Jessica's elopement, his hatred for Antonio is based on business and the humiliation he received because of being a Jew and usurer. However, what strengthens his disgust towards Antonio is his only daughter's flight with Lorenzo. As Alexia Firenze points out Shylock rejoices when he learns about the loss of Antonio's ships once he overcomes his anger about his daughter's elopement. The Jew is angry not only because Jessica has stolen very valuable possessions from him like the ring he received from his wife, but also because she has chosen a Christian as a husband. Shylock inevitably directs all his anger to Antonio. In addition to being a business rival who has been offending him, Antonio functions as the symbol of all prejudice against Jews and the degradation they undergo. Shylock expresses his fury by saying "he hath disgraced me, and hindered me half a million, laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies – and what's

his reason? I am a Jew" (*MV* 3.1.43-46). Shylock blames Antonio for all the misfortunes and hardships he encounters. That is why he chooses the most merciless way of taking his revenge. No one else, but Antonio can be a better object of revenge. Now that he has all the means in his hand, Shylock is determined to treat the Christian Antonio in the way he has always treated the Jew. Alan Cooper argues that Shylock's motives are quite normal. These are the motives of an individual who has been wronged and therefore, seeks revenge. Thus, the bond will compensate for his degraded self.

In *The Merchant of Venice* Shylock and Antonio are both outsiders. Midgley regards Shakespeare's portrayal of the Jew and the merchant as "a twin study in loneliness" (195). He views Shylock as the other and a solitary figure because he is rejected by the society as a Jew and a usurer. According to the critic, Antonio is also the other and lonely because of his attachment to Bassanio. Wesker chooses to elaborate on the "kinship of loneliness" and makes their otherness more pronounced (Midgley 204). Wesker depicts Shylock and Antonio as close friends but their friendship is undermined with the fact that Shylock is the other in Venice while Antonio is the other in the Ghetto Nuovo.

Wesker's very first stage directions reveal one major distinction between *the Merchant of Venice* and *The Merchant.* Shylock and Antonio are "old friends" who "are leisurely cataloguing" books in Shylock's study room in The Ghetto Nuovo (*M* 1). Therefore, it is obvious that from the very beginning "Wesker shifts the boundaries of the play" (Scott 53). Wesker makes them close friends so they cease to be the antagonist and the protagonist. However, their friendship is threatened by the way they are perceived by the Venetian public. Shylock is the Jew entrapped in the Ghetto, where Antonio, being a respected Christian can only be a temporary visitor. Thus, from the very beginning Wesker highlights that Antonio is "the outsider in the Jewish Ghetto, which in turn is an outsider's community within Venice" (Scott 53). Both characters on the other hand try to ignore their otherness and enjoy their friendship. Being a Jew, Shylock is the other but Antonio is not concerned with the religious and racial aspects of his friend's character. Wesker portrays how Shylock strives to shatter the boundaries of his otherness to integrate with the society and his love for Antonio is the most important proof of his wish.

In reshaping the personalities of Shylock and Antonio Wesker foregrounds their humanity, however, such an attempt turns out to be a mere deception for these characters. Although they are very much aware of their religious backgrounds, what forms the basis of their friendship is the fact that they are people with similar interests and aspirations. They both enjoy the satisfaction and the pleasure of being in touch with the accumulated knowledge of the history of mankind as they talk about the Jew's books which have been "hidden for ten years" (*M* 2). They are the books that Shylock hid so that they would not be burned on "August 12th, 1553" which the Jew calls "the day of the burning of the books" (*M* 2). The friends enjoy the company of each other so immensely that Shylock says "I have a saint for a friend" (*M* 1). Antonio expresses a similar idea in his words: "And what does the poor saint have?" (*M* 1). This scene shows that love, which is regarded as a Christian attribute in *The Merchant of Venice*, is what Shylock "possesses par excellence for his friend" (Scott 55).

Similar to Shakespeare's play, Shylock's otherness in *The Merchant* is closely linked to his being a usurer. However, he develops different ways of freeing himself of his otherness. Though being the moneylender, his sole interest is not accumulating money anymore for he comments "money lending was never a full-time occupation" (*M* 3). He is a sophisticated man who has devoted his life to the preservation of a lot of books and manuscripts. As pointed out by Scott, Wesker "gives Shylock the dignity of being a learned spokesman for the oppressed community" (53). The play opens on a special day when ten years of prohibition on books is removed, which is a great joy for Shylock.

Shylock is willing to disregard his otherness but the bond is the reminder of who he is as a Venetian Jew. Shylock, who again appears to be the source of money for Bassanio's union with Portia, is ready to lend the money to Antonio without even feeling the need for a legal contract. Through such a change Wesker, "negates the possibility of Shylock maliciously wishing to kill Antonio" (Scott 53). When Antonio tells Shylock the amount of money he needs to borrow, the Jew's reaction is very interesting. Rather than inquiring whether Antonio's financial state is convenient, he is happy that his friend asks a favour of him, "At last! A favour! Antonio of Shylock!" (*M* 22). However, Antonio reminds him of the commandment of the Venetian law that "no dealings may be made with Jews unless covered by a

legal bond" (*M* Liii). Wesker's Shylock, on the other hand emphasises something that the law disregards "law was made for enemies, not friends" (*M* 23). Despite the Jew's refusal, the merchant eventually convinces his friend to sing a legal contract. Antonio is mainly motivated by the fear that if it is revealed that Shylock lends him the money without signing a legal contract, the person to be punished will be no one, but Shylock himself. Thinking that Bassanio has already learned that Antonio will borrow money from the Jew, Shylock has no other choice but to agree to have a bond, only on condition that it will be a nonsense one. Contrary to what happens in *The Merchant of Venice*, the bond does not bind two enemies but two friends who are expected to be foes in the eyes of the law. Consequently, they decide to sign a bond which aims at mocking the regulations which ignore any humanitarian interaction between people from the minority and the majority and "mock their friendship" (*M* 26). In order to make fun of the laws, their nonsense bond asks for a pound of flesh of Antonio's body. If the merchant fails to repay the loan by the specified date, Shylock has the right to cut Antonio's flesh.

Being engaged in a bond ridiculing the Venetian laws momentarily allows Shylock to escape his otherness. But as he learns the news that Antonio will not be able to pay his loan he is forced to accept that he is an outcast in Venice. When Shylock is informed that Antonio's ships are captured by pirates and only twenty four hours are left for repayment, rather than being filled with joy for revenge, Wesker's protagonist is desperately in search of the money so that Antonio can pay his debt, which will consequently prevent them from being taken to the court. Despite all his attempts, Shylock fails to do so since the last tax paid to the Venetian state by the Jews living in the Ghetto has taken away all their money. At the same time, as the merchant's future is full of financial uncertainty, none of Antonio's Christian friends offers to lend him any ducats.

Shylock is very much aware of the implications of the bond, but the moment he meets Antonio, he tries to be optimistic. He wants to soothe both his friend and himself: "It will be all right. Your ships will find their harbour" (*M* 59). In spite of Antonio's insistence that "the implications [of the bond] must be faced and talked about," Shylock wishes to avoid being realistic as he says "the bond will not be called upon … the storm will drop … the maritime office's fleet will sail" or "perhaps the days have been miscounted"(*M* 60). Yet, Wesker's Jew is unrealistic

in his reaction because he is soon faced with the dilemma whether to sacrifice Antonio or the other Jews living in Venice.

Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* is not viewed as the other only by the Christian characters but also by his own daughter. He is doomed to social otherness because of his religion and job. His daughter's betrayal of running away with a Christian and theft of her father's properties reveal Shylock's otherness at home. Shakespeare suggests that there is a problem between the father and daughter but does not developed it wholly. In *The Merchant* the conflict between the father and the daughter is also obvious. However, to offer a better insight into their relationship, Wesker gives enough evidence to reveal the real nature of the interaction between them. Unlike Shakespeare, he explicitly discuses the causes of Jessica's elopement and Shylock's reaction to this event. Wesker's Shylock does not undergo isolation at his home, yet the way he treats Jessica makes her feel entrapped in her father's house. Jessica is the other in Shylock's house, who challenges her father and disagrees with him. Similar to Shakespeare's Jessica, Wesker's Jewess views her marriage to Lorenzo as an opportunity to escape her otherness and become socially accepted.

Shakespeare suggests that rejection of a person is a social as well as a domestic issue. Without initially letting Shylock comment on his relationship with his daughter, Shakespeare introduces Jessica and how she views her father and his life style. In Act 2 Scene 3, she refers to her father's house as hell, where she is imprisoned. Though they are her very first words, they are of great significance to reveal the conflict between her and the Jew. Unlike Shylock, who views the house as a shelter, which is closed to any external intrusion, Jessica feels entrapped within it. Music, for instance, functions as an important intruder to Shylock's private life. Upon learning that there will be a masque the night he is invited to dinner in Antonio's house, he wants Jessica to "look up my [his] doors" (*MV* 2. 5. 28). Moreover, when Jessica hears "the drum and the vile squealing of the wry-necked fife" (*MV* 2.5.28-29), the Jew forbids her to thrust her "head into the public street to gaze on Christian fools with varnished faces" (*MV* 2.5.31-32). Thinking that masque is evil, he also wants her to close all the windows so that no "sound of shallow foppery" can enter his "sober house" (*MV* 2.5.34-35). Quite ironically, however, Shakespeare makes him realise that what he regards as evil actually

resides in his sacred home. Shylock seems well-equipped against the vices of the Christian world, yet ignores the evil nature of his daughter. Thus, contrary to his expectations, he is wronged by Jessica, the person he holds very dear and who regrets being his child: "Alack, what heinous sin is it in me / To be ashamed to be my father's child!" (*MV* 2.3.14-15). In addition, her words: "But though I am a daughter to his blood / I am not to his manners" indicate that for her Shylock is not a father but the other from whose oppression she wants to be saved (*MV* 2.3.16-17). While Shylock views the external world as a serious threat, Jessica is willing to integrate with it. She is determined to change her fate through her marriage to Lorenzo: "O Lorenzo, /If thou keep promise, I shall end this strife, / Become a Christian and thy loving wife." (*MV* 2.3. 17-20). She views her union with Lorenzo, as a way of being saved from her father's oppression and. Therefore, she is ready not only to desert Shylock, but also convert to Christianity so that she can overcome her otherness.

What distresses the Jew very much concerning Jessica's flight is her elopement with a Christian. He finds it difficult to understand how his daughter, his "own flesh and blood" can "rebel" against his wishes (*MV* 3.1.28). Lorenzo is not the kind of husband that Shylock will ever approve of because of his religious beliefs. According to Firenze, Jessica's flight would normally be regarded as "a daughter's wrong" towards the father; however, in *The Merchant of Venice* such a rebellion "leads to the Jewess's eternal salvation" (108). When Jessica robs Shylock, she is not criticised for her wrongdoing because nobody in the play considers her as a thief. Although she robs her father of gold and some pieces of jewellery, her theft is described as a kind of compensation for her imprisonment in Shylock's home and as a punishment for the Jew.

Act 3 Scene 1 shows how Shylock responds to his daughter's treachery. What he says at first seems to contribute to the prevailing image of Shylock as a greedy moneylender who is only interested in monetary gain:

> SHYLOCK. Two thousand ducats in that, and other precious, precious jewels! I would my daughter were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear: would she were hearse at my foot and the ducats in her coffin. (*MV* 3.1.68- 71)

It is obvious that the amount of money Jessica has stolen and the jewels are very important for him. He is so frustrated that he wishes his daughter were dead to avoid losing his precious jewels. Shylock above all is tortured by the news that Jessica bought a monkey with the ring given to him by his wife, Leah. The Jew's following words indicate his rage: "it was my turquoise, I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor. I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys" (*MV* 3.1.95-97). The Jew's words give insight into Jessica's personality as they prove how inconsiderately she has spent her father's money. Shylock's actions may be motivated by financial concerns, yet here Shakespeare makes him appear as a human being who also has emotions and is attached to something except for material objects. Auden argues that the way Jessica has spent Shylock's money, cannot be taken "as a comic punishment for Shylock's sin of avarice," on the contrary her "behaviour seems rather an example of the opposite sin of conspicuous waste" (89). At this point, it is revealed that beneath Shylock's materialism that has been foregrounded so far lies an affectionate human being who is capable of love. No matter how peculiar Shylock's way of expressing his feelings may be, he is fond of Jessica in "his own strange harsh way" (Firenze 125). Shylock's behaviour in this scene reveals his attachment to his family, as what he says indicates that he does not seem to be interested in "the material value of the present" that his wife gave him, instead he is "sentimentally attached to it" (Firenze 125). Shylock's aim to save Jessica from any kind of insult in a Christian society is contrasted with Jessica's abuse of him.

Jessica's role in *The Merchant of Venice* is of great importance as it triggers Shylock's hatred for Antonio. Shakespeare's Shylock after learning about his daughter's betrayal can only think of his revenge and make the merchant pay for the disgrace he has been exposed to. However, in the modern play, Wesker approaches the conflict between the Jew and his daughter from quite a different angle. The way Shylock treats Jessica makes her feel herself as the other in the house. Shylock is the other in the Venetian society, whereas Jessica due to her father's treatment of her is the other at home.

Unlike Shakespeare, Wesker describes the atmosphere in Shylock's house and how Jessica feels about being a part of it in detail. One parallelism between *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Merchant* is that in both plays, what Shylock regards

as his home is a kind of prison for the daughter. While Shakespeare implies that Jessica is tired of her father's overprotective and domineering attitude, Wesker explores the underlying reasons for the disagreement between them and how Jessica's image as the other in the house is developed.

Different form Shakespeare's heroine, Jessica in Wesker's play, "is a fully realized major character," whose personality is depicted in detail (Leeming 76). Being the daughter of a highly respected intellectual man, she feels worn-out of hosting "every passing scholar or Rabbi, or eminent physician" who is invited by Shylock "to dine at his table" (*M* 8). The Jew is content with the number of people visiting his house and is ready to help and listen to everybody, but ignores Jessica's perspective of looking at the events. She has a very negative image of him, "My father is an intellectual snob … Some men fawn before crowns, he before degrees"(*M* 8). She is complaining about Shylock's excessive interest in books and scholars as she says: "I respect, scholarship, but there is a world outside the covers of a book" (*M* 9). In her view, her father is so much obsessed with books that he is ignorant about the world outside.

Shylock's philosophy of life creates another conflict between them. The old man believes that there is "the scheme of things" which means that everything in this world is planned and follows the pattern designed earlier (*M* 5). Jessica, on the other hand, is more realistic as she strictly rejects such an approach to life: "I do not believe there is a scheme of things, only chaos and misery" (*M* 9). Earlier in the play, Wesker shows how much importance Shylock attaches to his books. However, with what the daughter thinks about the father, the modern dramatist offers different aspects of his protagonist to be analysed. Wesker suggests that being highly educated also makes Shylock an outcast. While the Jew has devoted his life to collecting books from all over the world and protecting them against any destruction, Jessica believes that they are nothing but entrapment for men:

> JESSICA. We have no choice. There are mad men at large in the world. All writing books! Men fired by this ideal, that passion, full of dogma about the way other men should live, assuming moralities for us, deciding the limits of our pleasure, our endeavour, our abilities, our pain. Decided by whom? By what right? (*M* 9)

Jessica, as the daughter of a father whose life is mostly shaped by books, expresses her rejection of accepting the ideas put forward by famous writers. Thinking that leading a life described in books, denies her any freedom, she is very much critical of the ideas preached in what Shylock reads. Wesker points out that being critical is one of the positive attributes of Jessica. But, the dramatist also reveals her ignorance about the fact that thanks to having a father who is very fond of books, she is able to be so critical and become an interrogator. Thus, similar to Shakespeare, Wesker presents Jessica as a thankless child.

The way Shylock has brought Jessica up enhances her otherness. There is an obvious clash between what Shylock thinks is good for her and what she desires. The Jew has raised Jessica with "sayings and warnings of sages" ringing in her "ears so loudly that music" she loves "above all things, can hardly make sense in my [her] ears any more" (*M* 9). She feels frustrated to realise the dominant role Shylock plays in her life. She also regrets her incapability to shape it according to her own wishes. Shylock educates her like a boy but such an act makes her the other as she becomes discontent with her education. The major reason why Shylock bombards Jessica with books and introduces her to scholars is "to prove that daughters could achieve the intellectual stature of sons" (*M* 9-10). Living in an age when it is mostly boys who receive proper education, Shylock wants to free his daughter from the conventional responsibilities attributed to women. Yet, what he regards as intellectual freedom is perceived as manipulation and domination by Jessica, who is "oppressed by study" (*M* 36). Shylock risks losing his daughter's respect because he insists on offering her the ideal education. They frequently quarrel and they can hardly communicate and understand each other because Shylock "confuses her frustrations for her originality" (*M* 9). While Shylock cannot see the individuality of his daughter, Jessica fails to conceive her father's modernity.

Shylock is a sophisticated man with a wide vision of evaluating problems. However, he is incapable of making use of his knowledge and experience as he tries to solve his conflict with Jessica. One mistake that he falls into is to believe that parental authority can resolve their disagreement. Therefore, whenever he is faced with disobedience on Jessica's part, he assumes the role of an authoritarian father. He reminds his daughter that she still lives in his house and has to be careful

about her manners. Although Shylock argues that under his roof she is "deprived of nothing," her response is quite the opposite. Jessica believes that she lives in a house where she is deprived of "the sweetness of the feeling that it is *my* [her] house and *my* [her] roof also" (*M* 35-36). She feels she does not belong to the house. Having difficulty in defining her status at home she asks, "to whom does a house belong" (*M* 36). If the father is the only owner, how the position of the mother and the children can be defined. She questions whether they are "temporary occupants" or "long standing visitors?" (*M* 36). In addition, she points out another very significant issue concerning the status of a woman in the society by posing the question if a woman becomes a "whole when taken from the possession of her father to the possession of her husband" (*M* 36). The daughter can be considered as the spokesperson for the emancipation of women. Jessica seems to come up with a very realistic analysis of how women are generally treated in the society. Marriage, for women is an escape from their father's domination. Nevertheless, marriage also introduces a new form of domination, which is imposed by their husbands.

Through his depiction of Shylock's home, Wesker provides enough evidence concerning the causes of Jessica's elopement. Leeming points out that because Wesker portrays Shylock as a humane character, he "has to re-motivate Jessica's elopement with a gentile" (76). The critic states that in *The Merchant of Venice* what the young girl does can be to some extend considered as "an understandable escape from a miserly and obviously repulsive, if affectionate tyrant" (Leeming 76). In the modern version of the play "Shylock's very pride and love make him, too an affectionate tyrant" (Leeming 76). Though Shylock is a very favourable character, in *The Merchant* his ideas and behaviour are "intolerable to the similarly proud and self-willed Jessica" (Leeming 76). As Signor Usque, one of the characters in *The Merchant* who witness their quarrels, suggests the way Shylock treats his daughter eventually drives "her into a hasty marriage" (*M* 37). Seeing marriage as an escape from her father's control and domination, Jessica soon elopes with Lorenzo with the hope of finding happiness and freedom.

In *The Merchant of Venice*, Jessica's elopement is mostly viewed as a well-deserved punishment for Shylock, whereas in *The Merchant* it is not so. Wesker's introduction of the letter Jessica has left before eloping reveals the misunderstandings between the father and the daughter. While one reason for her

flight is her arguments with Shylock, the other is the father's highly demanding expectations of her as she says: "I am not what you would like me to be … Reflect on our quarrels. They have said all" (*M* 56). For Shylock, on the other hand, what the young woman calls quarrels are actually nice occasions proving her unique originality and intellect. Therefore, it is really hard for him to accept the problem: "What quarrels? How could she have called them quarrels? *Enemies* quarrel" (*M* 59). He is tormented with the realisation that he has been no different from an enemy in the eyes of his daughter. As for the expectations of her, he could only say "*What* did I want you to be Jessica? My prop, my friend, my love, my pride? Not painful things, those. Are they?" (59). Only now he utters how important the girl is for him and how little he has shared this with her. While aiming to encourage and motivate her, he ends up losing her. Contrary to Jessica's perceptions of things, Shylock's words make it explicit that his expectations of her bear no sings of domination. However, it obvious that Jessica's flight from home is a flight for freedom and a way for her to cope with her otherness. The fact that she chooses Lorenzo, a Christian to overcome being an outcast is a proof of her desire to belong to the Venetian society so that she can be one of them.

As Shylock reads her letter, he is able to conceive how lonely and helpless his daughter has been. Filled with bitter regret, he cannot help accusing himself as he reflects on the letter:

> SHYLOCK. Oh, Jessica. And where are you now? What wretched, alien philosophy has taken up your mind, muddied it with strange fervours? … Oh vulnerable youth. You must be so lonely. So lost and lonely. So amazed and lost and lonely. Oh daughter, daughter, daughter. (*M* 59)

Though in Shakespeare's play it is difficult to decide whether the Jew is sorry for Jessica's elopement or for the money she has stolen from him, Wesker makes it clear that Shylock's sole concern is his daughter. The moment Shylock learns about Jessica's act, he is also threatened by the law because of the mockery bond. All he cares about is Jessica, though. The Jew realises his mistakes about the way he has treated her but it is too late to amend what has been done. Shylock's partner Tubal suggests that "one can't discuss children with parents, because one offends them

where they've placed their most cherished endeavour," so both Shylock and Jessica have to undergo rather unpleasant experiences so that they can realise how much they mean to each other.

In *The Merchant of Venice*, because of being a comedy, Shylock's role as the other is not very much recognised by the characters around him. Shakespeare does not allow the audiences to peep through Shylock's house so Jessica's flight seems a flight for freedom. Wesker, on the other hand, through his in depth characterisation of his Shylock and Jessica explores the important aspects of their relationship which lead to conflicts. Wesker presents an interesting household where a lot of intellectual games are played. Jessica is brought up as an intellectual too, but what is missing is that she cannot understand its value and in her flight from the house it is not certain that she will get her freedom. Shakespeare's Jessica may enjoy this freedom in the Christian world although she feels a little lonely in this new world. Wesker's Jessica seeks freedom but her intellectuality imprisons her and she feels not so free in the Christian world.

2.3.The other in *Richard II* and *Exit the King*

2.3.1. Berenger as the sovereign

Richard II and Berenger are the kings that try to fulfil the responsibilities of their assigned roles and indulge in the privileges that kingship offers. However, while this status provides them with ultimate power to command everybody and to do everything they wish, they are blind to see the fact that their prestigious position in fact prevents them from achieving self-consciousness and understanding their true nature. Though initially emerging as characters who are the embodiments of infinite power and authority, what they experience throughout the plays gradually forces them to admit that the crowns and the titles they possess are mere illusions. It is only after losing their assigned roles, and being reduced to ordinary people, that they can be aware of their non-being. Shakespeare's Richard becomes an eloquent poet to compensate for his loss of status, yet Ionesco's Berenger is even more

vulnerable since he is incapable of expressing himself in words, For this reason, Berenger's disillusionment is much more intense than that of Richard's.

In his portrayal of Richard, Shakespeare makes use of the conventional idea that the king is the supreme authority personifying extraordinary and divine power. During Shakespeare's time the idea that there is a hierarchy among the beings that God created was a widespread vision of life. As it is suggested by Jan Kott people thought "The sun circles around the earth, and there was a hierarchic order among the spheres, planets and stars'' (32). Moreover, they believed that this perfect design of universe with its "order of the elements," and "order of angelic choirs," should be also prevalent among earthly beings (Kott 32). Thus, they never questioned the existence of "superiors and vassals of the vassals" that is the supremacy of the kings (Kott 32). It never occurred to them to doubt that "royal power comes from God, and all power on earth is merely a reflection of the power wielded by the King" (Kott 32).

Shakespeare from the very beginning of his play gives enough evidence to prove how dominant the king is along with its effects on his consciousness. The play opens with the Richard's image described by Becker as "an animated icon, a resplendent figure frozen in ritual and formality" (19). This scene depicts how he deals with making a judicial decision about the murder of Duke Gloucester. Bullingbrook, who is the son of the king's uncle Gaunt, accuses Mowbray of killing the duke. Mowbray refuses the charge arguing that "For Gloucester's death, / I [he] slew him not, but to my [his] own disgrace / Neglected my [his] sworn duty in that case" (*RII* 1.1.131-133). Mowbray's words imply that killing the duke was only a duty he was to perform, which suggests Richard's involvement in the murder. Shakespeare further highlights the same idea when the Duchess of the late Gloucester begs Richard's uncle Gaunt to avenge her husband's death. Gaunt's reply to such a plea reflects how people viewed their king and how they respected it:

> GAUNT God's is the quarrel, for God's substitute,
> His deputy anointed in His sight,
> Hath caused his death, the which if wrongfully
> Let heaven revenge, for I may never lift
> An angry arm against His minister. (*RII* 1.2. 37-41)

John of Gaunt states that Richard is the God's earthly representative, whose decisions can only be questioned or negated by God. Therefore, the king cannot be opposed and whatever he does should be accepted with patience.

Shakespeare depicts several scenes through which he illustrates in what other ways Richard abuses the power he possesses. Although it was Richard who has played an important role in death of Gloucester, he clears himself off the crime and sends Mowbray for a life long exile as the king commands: "The sly slow hours shall not determine / The dateless limit of thy dear exile" (*RII* 1.3.150-151). Bullingbrook, on the other hand, initially is told not to return to England "Till twice five summers have enriched our fields" (*RII* 1.3.141); upon seeing his uncle's frustration Richard suddenly changes his mind and commands Bullingbrook to spend "Six frozen winters" and "Return with welcome home from banishment" (*RII* 1.3.209-211). This shows Richard's inconsistency and that he has no clear idea about justice.

Charles Barber views Richard's decision of sending both of them to exile as a very skilful political move thanks to which he resumes his authority since "a victory for Bullingbrook would have been generally interpreted as a judgement by God" (19). His decision enables him to be free from both "a powerful and ambitious political opponent," and "a potentially inconvenient ally" (Barber 19).

Despite the fact that Bullingbrook very much resents Richard's decision, he is incapable of reacting against it. All he could do is expressing his annoyance: "How long a time lies in one little word. / Four lagging winters and four wanton springs / End in a word, such is the breath of kings" (*RII* 1.3.212-214). Even a single word that Richard pronounces bears the implications of an order that nobody can dare to disobey.

Another event that ruins Richard's image as the perfect ruler is his attitude towards his uncle Gaunt's death. After Bullingbrook's banishment, the old man falls irrecoverably ill. Upon his death Richard claims the lands and all his properties to finance his march to Ireland to fight against the rebels. The scene displays his audacious, amoral and heartless character. Many times he is warned by York, who initially appears to be one of his most reliable men. He draws Richard's attention to the threat he may face when Bullingbrook wishes to claim back his properties. Richard fails to grasp the fact that if he "wrongfully seize[s] Herford's rights," (*RII*

2.1.201) it is likely for him to "pluck a thousand dangers on" his head, (*RII 2.1.*205) as well as losing "a thousand well-disposed hearts" (*RII* 2.1.206). In addition, Richard is deaf to all the warnings as he comments: "Think what you will, we seize into our hands / His plate, his goods, his money and his lands" (*RII* 2.1. 209-210). He seems to be impervious to any rational advice. Shakespeare reflects the king's inability to judge properly and foresee the consequences of his actions, which is the start of the disintegration of the king.

Ionesco borrows from Shakespeare the idea of the assigned role and ultimate power to emphasise its destructive effects on self-awareness. Just like Shakespeare's play, *Exit the* King portrays the downfall of a royal figure that regards himself as the possessor of divine and omnipotent power. However, unlike Richard, the first time Berenger appears on the stage, he is not at the height of his power. Ionesco chooses to start his play by suggesting that Berenger's downfall has already started. What the modern playwright offers in his reinterpretation of *Richard II* is an elaboration on the final stages of a king's descend. Berenger is unaware of his already initiated descend so he is reluctant to accept the disintegration in him and his country. Different from Shakespeare's play, where Richard is dethroned by an ambitious rival, Bullingbrook, Berenger is defeated by death. His power is undermined by the fact that death claims him and he is left with very limited time to get ready for his end. Thus, Ionesco in *Exit the King* offers the transformation of a person's character, his position and relationships with others when he is confronted with death that is ever-present yet, constantly ignored.

At the end of *Richard II*, after his abdication, Richard is left with very few people who still desire to serve him. Similarly, Berenger's court is limited to few subjects, most of whom try to fulfil numerous responsibilities. There are six people in Berenger's court, including himself, Queen Marguerite and Queen Marie. The guard represents the army. There is also Juliette, who is the "domestic help and Registered Nurse" to the king and both queens (*EK* 7). The last character that is introduced is the doctor whose duties range from "Gentleman Court Surgeon, Bacteriologist, Executioner and Astrologist" (*EK* 8). Thanks to the existence of these minor characters, the modern dramatist lets the king enjoy his superior position.

The play starts with the guard's announcement, "His majesty the King. Berenger the First. Long live the King!" (*EK* 7). With the very first words of the play, the king is presented as a privileged figure whose arrival to the stage requires special attention. However, when Berenger appears on the stage his image as a king is rather disappointing. Instead of a glorious and magnificent figure, he is a person who immediately starts complaining about his bad health: "I feel awful! I don't know quite what's wrong with me. My legs are a bit stiff" (*EK* 19). Despite the promising and ceremonious introduction, Ionesco's king is a weak and powerless personage.

From the very beginning, Ionesco implies that this not a conventional court inhabited by traditional residents. Soon after being introduced, the king silently goes off the stage. Moreover, the characters who are told to be at king's service fail to carry out their duties. The guard is incapable of activating the heating system because "the radiators won't co-operate" and that "the sky is overcast and the clouds don't seem to want to break up" (*EK* 9). All these foreshadow the disintegration in the country (*EK* 8). By making the guard say that "the sun is late" despite the fact that he has "heard the King order him to come out," Ionesco not only refers to the king's supreme power to command nature but also to its disappearance.

Richard's breakdown is mainly in words, whereas Berenger's breakdown is pronouncedly reflected in his physical being. Through the exchange of ideas between Queen Marguerite and Queen Marie it is revealed that the problem with the country is that it is falling into pieces just like its king. Despite being presented as the supreme ruler, Berenger's posture on stage defy him and his status. When he enters the stage he has bare feet. Juliette puts his slippers on. He is also unable to walk properly as he is limping. His reign is about to end thus, the idea of king as the ultimate power is presented through the recollection of the glorious past. As the other characters comment on Berenger's past achievements, the audience is given some evidence about his powerful sovereignty.

In *Richard II* through the comments of several characters it is emphasised that Richard's being the king is the god's will and nobody has the right to upset this holy order. In *Exit the King*, on the other hand, because the existence of God is highly questionable, it is not clear how Berenger became the king. His words:

"They promised me *I* could choose the time when I would die," indicates that he believes he was appointed as a king by some kind of a superior force but Ionesco avoids referring to it as the supreme creator (*EK* 36). Juliette comments that Berenger was his country's "Prince, its First Gentleman," along with being "its father and its son" (*EK* 79). Being "crowned King at the very moment of his birth," he has been the "heart and centre … of a kingdom that stretched for thousands of miles around," the boundaries of which were difficult to glimpse (*EK* 78). Though such glorifications aim to point out the bond between the country and its king, who chose him as the ruler and who gave him this right is questionable.

Richard's overconfidence about his ultimate power is highly encouraged by his flatters and he "depends on it [flattery] and is helpless without it" (Becker 19). Ionesco creates Marie as his major character whose role is similar to the Richard's admirers. In both plays these characters hinder the self-consciousness of the protagonists by making them rely too much on their superior status and feel highly content. Berenger's glorious past is recovered through the memories of Marie, who is the "Second Wife to the King, but first in affection" (*EK* 7). What makes her Berenger's favourite is her highly sensitive and emotional nature. Her keenness on worldly things like going to parties and celebrating their wedding anniversaries have encouraged Berenger to enjoy the pleasures of the world by offering him "warm sensuality and tenderness, a view of life …in which all is sunshine and joy" (Knowlson 183). Together they have attended several charity balls, dances "for children, and old folks and newlyweds" (*EK* 12). Having glorified Berenger's image in her mind and put him up on a pedestal, accepting him as an ordinary mortal being facing his death is rather difficult for her. Consequently, she "can neither help nor reach" Berenger when he tries to fight death (Knowlson 183).

2.3. Elements contributing to the otherness

2.3.1. In *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Merchant*

2.3.1.1. Usury

According to Walter Cohen, during the 16th century English people considered Venice to be enjoying "a more advanced stage of the commercial development they themselves were experiencing" (770). Venice proved to be a nice setting for Shakespeare to discuss the changing nature of the world's structure as trade started to occupy an increasingly dominant place in the country's economy. In his representation of the Venetian society Shakespeare touches upon usury which was one of the most controversial issues of the time. Jews were the major practitioners of lending money and charging some interest. However, as the portrayal of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* suggests, they were isolated and humiliated most of the time. As Girard puts it "Shylock is the representative of both money, because he himself is a moneylender, and of exclusion, because he is the excluded thing" (96). Wesker uses usury as one of the major elements making Shylock the other in *The Merchant*. Despite some parallel points, Shakespeare's and Wesker's treatment of usury in their plays differs. While Shakespeare presents it as a profitable means of making a living, Wesker mostly focuses on the legal rules and regulations of the Renaissance Venice as far as moneylending is concerned.

W. H. Auden points out that as a 16th century state Venice is a place whose economy depends on trade as it "does not produce anything itself, either raw materials or manufactured goods" (Auden 71). Instead, it is a centre where products from different parts of the world are brought in. The welfare of the city is dependent on the income brought by international trade, which demanded cooperation between different nations and communities. That is why Venice as an international trade centre fears any discrimination against its non-Venetian citizens. As Auden points out such an approach abolishes any religious and racial distinctions and makes the "customers brothers" and "trade rivals others" (Auden 72).

In *The Merchant of Venice* it is obvious that Jews as moneylenders occupy an important place in the Venetian society. However, the way Shakespeare depicts the

relationship of the Venetians with the Jew reveals that Venice is not quite able to apply the rules necessary for the prosperity of the state's trade. While Jews are indispensable for providing money, which they can raise any time, they are continuously scorned for practising usury. Ironically, despite the fact that Antonio "even rails / Even there where merchants most do congregate" (*MV* 1.3.40-41) on Shylock, on his bargains and his "well-won-thrift" the merchant is left with no other choice but approach the Jew for the money (*MV* 1.3.42). Being engaged in lending and borrowing money would normally make Shylock and Antonio customers, that is to say brothers. Yet, Antonio is told to have humiliated the Jew several times as Shylock recalls: "Fair sir, you spat on me on Wednesday last, / You spurned me such a day, another time / You called me dog" (*MV* 1.3.118-120). This abuse encourages the Jew to plan for his revenge, "Cursed be my tribe / If I forgive him!" (*MV* 1.3.43-44) as he is well aware that he can manipulate Antonio**:** "it now appears you need my help" (*MV* 1.3.106).

Auden states that because the wealth of the city "lies in its accumulated money capital, trade altered people's attitude to money" (72). Previously money was "solely a means of exchange," whereas with the growth of trade it becomes a "social power which can be gained or lost"(Auden 72). Shylock is the other because he has the money. One reason for Antonio's scorn for Shylock may be his sensitivity to the fact that though the Jew belongs to the minority, due to his wealth, he is superior to most of the Venetian gentlemen. Acknowledging such a reality is painful for the Christians, so they try overcoming their financially inferior positions by humiliating the Jews. Thus, as Auden puts it, the Venetian gentry and the Jews do not regard themselves as brothers; but, they must tolerate each other's existence because they must put up with one another's presence since they must coexist for survival (Auden 72). Through legal enforcement, the Venetian state tries to guarantee that no conflicts between the minority and majority groups will arise.

Another source of aversion between the Jew and the merchant is that Antonio "lends out money gratis, and brings down / The rate of usance" (*MV* 1.3.36-37). Antonio is the symbol of a virtuous Christian who lends money without any interest, which, however, spoils Shylock's business. Therefore, Shylock takes his revenge from Antonio by mocking his charitable character, that is by preparing a bond which does not ask for interest. Shylock agrees to lend "there thousand ducats

for three months" (*MV* 1.3.8) but if Antonio is not able to pay the money back, the Jew has the right to claim "an equal pound" of Antonio's flesh "to be cut off and taken / In what part of your [Antonio's] body plaeseth" Shylock (*MV* 1.3.142-144).

Walter Cohen argues that "the crisis of the play arises not from" Shylock's "insistence on usury, but from his refusal of it" (769). Antonio is quite confident that he can raise the money in three months, but according to Auden, he ignores that the future in a mercantile community the future can never be predicted and it abounds in changes. The merchant's every move involves taking risks "if he is lucky, he may make a fortune, if he is unlucky, he may lose everything" (Auden 72-73). Similarly, Antonio risks everything he has, but his fate turns out to be an unfortunate one. He cannot pay back the loan because his ships are captured by pirates.

Shylock takes the case to the court but to his frustration in addition to being denied his pound of flesh, he is convicted for plotting against the life of a Venetian gentleman. Girard points out that the Venetians make Shylock "their scapegoat" as "they project on him what they have dismissed from their own consciousness as too disturbing" (Girard 97). The reason for the antagonism towards Shylock when he proves to be so useful, is the idea that some theologians argued that "simply the lending of money to be paid back with additional sum as interest … was sinful and forbidden by the Bible"(*M* XIV) The way Shylock earns his living is in conflict with religious beliefs and Christian charity. He is not producing anything but lends his money by charging interest. Shylock is also the figure who "reminds them of their own unconfessed evil qualities" (Girard 97). Antonio, seems to be cleared of any sin of usury, yet his conscience is still disturbed as some medieval thinkers regarded all retail trading also sinful (*M* XIV). Though merchants are respected in *The Merchant of Venice*, the growth of trade and capital generally caused some uneasiness because the merchants are making profit as middleman rather than producing goods (*M* XV).

Cohen observes that Shakespeare's representation of the Venetian life style most of the time contradicts what actually took place in Venice during 16th century. However, *The Merchant of Venice* offers plenty of references regarding the humiliation Jews experienced for being usurers. Wesker, on the other hand, makes use of historical data to portray the state of Jewish existence in Venice at the time

when Shakespeare wrote his play.

Different from its representation in *The Merchant of Venice*, Wesker's Venice is not a place where Jews can freely practice usury. On the contrary, the Venetian government compelled the Jewish community to financially support "low-interest, nonprofit lending institutions" which were at the service of the Christian poor (Cohen 770). Shakespeare portrays his Shylock as a usurer, whose only concerns is money. Wesker's Shylock is not socially accepted either because he is a moneylender. Yet, Wesker clearly states that usury for his Jewish characters has never been their choice because Jews in 16th century Venice were legally not allowed to be engaged in any other occupation. The laws command that "no free trust, or any other relationship, is allowed between the Jews and Gentiles in Renaissance Venice" because of the "anti-semitic theory – the Jews deserve no trust" (Leeming 74). Because of lack of trust, they were "exempt from the common duties of humanity" (Leeming 74). Jews can only live in Venice at the cost of being usurers, thus, becoming the other. Nevertheless, the Jews contributed to the Venetian Republic by being reliable sources of taxes, and also by bringing down interest rates for private citizens, rich and poor.

In Wesker's play Shylock is willing to give the money to Antonio without signing a legal contract. His main aim in agreeing to have a bond which also asks for a pound of Antonio's flesh is to mock the state laws forbidding any kind of deal between a Jew and a Venetian. As Scott puts it "Wesker thereby foregrounds prejudice rather than usury as the concern of the play that is to interact with the Venetian law, and he adds to this the complexity of friendship" (54). Rather than discussing usury as a practice of making money, the modern dramatist is mostly concerned with "cold law against the humanity of friendship" (Scott 54). Shylock expresses his frustration of being forced to fit into the legal boundaries of the state when he can see the fallacies in them:

> SHYLOCK. I follow my heart, *my* laws … The Deuteronic Code says 'Thou shalt not lend upon usury to the brother. Unto a foreigner thou mayest lend upon usury, but unto thy brother not'… I love you, therefore you are my brother. And since you are my brother, my laws say I may not lend upon usury to you, but uphold you. (*M* 24)

Shylock despises any legal restrictions ignoring the fact that he considers Antonio as his brother. He expresses the incompatibility between what his heart requires him to do as a person ready to ease his friend's distress and what the laws require them to be as aliens. Shylock's conscience urges him to lend the money to Antonio, whom he considers as a brother, without a bond. Hence, they get involved in a bond that mocks the laws.

Similar to *The Merchant of Venice*, during the trial scene Shylock claims his bond. He remains silent and avoids explaining the reason, which triggers the Venetians' antagonism towards him. Wesker reveals people's prejudice against Shylock through Graziano's words, that "when a man says nothing you can be sure he hides evil and guilt" (*M*71). Lorenzo in Shakespeare's play is introduced as Jessica's lover who saves her from Shylock's tyranny, whereas Wesker makes him one of the leading characters whose condemnation reveals "the prevailing prejudice of the Christians" against Jews (Scott 56). The young man tries to justify his rejection of usury by referring to Aristotle's idea that "money is a dead thing, with no seeds, it's not fit to engender" (*M* 27). Because in a mercantile society money determines who is the power, Lorenzo cannot stand the idea that usury makes Shylock powerful: "Shylock dares to play God with a dead thing, and Venice has only a dead language to answer him with" (*M* 27). Lorenzo refers to the money that Shylock lends as a "dead thing," which gives the Jew godlike power to feel superior to his debtors**.** Thus, during the trial scene the young man is the fieriest criticiser of Shylock's practice of usury by claiming that it is against God's will: "When God had finished his creation he said unto man and unto beasts, and unto fishes: increase and multiply, but did he ever say increase and multiply unto money?" (*M* 71). Moreover, he objects to usury because it is "a sin against charity"(*M* 72) People suffer from this sin for it hinders charitable act and involves exploitation of the people who have to borrow money.

Shakespeare's Shylock is a lonely figure fighting against the Venetian law. However, in *The Merchant* Antonio "asserts his commitment to Shylock's creed of knowledge and curiosity against Lorenzo's narrow opinion" (Wilcher 117). He rejects Lorenzo's accusations of usury by saying that "profit is the fruit of skill" (*M* 71). With Antonio's participation, Lorenzo's narrow and dogmatic approach to the problem of usury soon turns into discussion where curiosity is judged against

simple wisdom. Lorenzo as the defender of simplicity argues, "a man can be strong and happy with no knowledge," or "no art" (*M* 72). He believes that knowing the vices of usury and avoiding it is enough to make people happy and content, which is why shepherds, tillers or sailors lead a blissful life. Having witnessed Shylock's life style and learned his thirst for learning, Antonio defends the desire to gain more knowledge against ignorance. By questioning, "How alive is man with muscles but no curiosity?", the merchant declares it is the aspiration for seeking knowledge that makes one a real man (*M* 72). Moreover, he adds that the simple men Lorenzo praises do not consciously choose ignorance as opposed to knowledge. They are doomed to be ignorant, and they deceive themselves with "their simple wisdom" because their ignorance is the prison the society puts them in (*M* 73). Their unawareness of the realities of life is caused by being deprived of any form of education or exposure to any form of art.

In Shakespeare's play when Shylock is accused of usury, he defends himself by revealing that the Christians, who preach charity, are also sinners. Shylock's speech on slaves exposes that the Christian gentlemen are no different from him because they are all slave drivers. Since the Venetians have paid for their slaves, they think that they have the right to mistreat and abuse them: "You have among you many a purchased slave, which like your asses and your dogs and mules, you use in abject and in slavish parts because you bought them" (*MV* 4.1.90-93).

As Wilcher expresses, in *The Merchant* it is Antonio's role to expose the hypocrisy of the Venetians regarding the role of the Jewish loan-bankers. When Shylock cannot assert his rights, the merchant becomes his spokesperson. At the end of the play, the Doge's speech also clearly reflects mere the hypocrisy that the Venetian laws must be observed and that they "cannot be twisted this way or that for political significance or gain, nor denied to foreigners" (*M* 75):

> ANTONIO (*finally angry*). Usury *must* exist in our city, for we have many poor and our economy can't turn without it. Do we condemn the Jew for doing what our system has required him to do? Then if we do, let's swear, upon the cross, that among us we know of no Christian, no patrician, no duke, bishop or merchant who, in his secret chambers, does not lend at interest, for that is what usury is. (*M* 75)

Antonio declares that Christians are innocent and virtuous only because they lend money secretly and find it easy to put the blame on the Jews who have to be usurers for their survival. W.H. Auden explains this double standard in the society when he states that "usury, like prostitution may corrupt the character, but those who borrow upon usury, like those who visit brothels have their share of responsibility for this corruption and aggravate their guilt by showing contempt for those whose services they make use of" (82). He resembles prostitution to usury, and explains how the individuals' characters are corrupted when they are involved in each practice. Usury is despised, but the Jews are not the only ones to be condemned as they address a very significant need in a mercantile society by lending money. In fact, Venice can prosper due to usury and the Jews are the major contributors to the city's wealth.

Both Shylocks are unjustly punished. Despite the different representations of usurers, *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Merchant* end in the same way that is disillusionment and frustration for the Jew. The final decision proves that no matter what the reason for practising usury is as Girard states the Christians will always end up destroying the Shylock figures.

2.3.1.2. The Venetian Law

Shakespeare presents the law as a system working for the Christians and it regards Jews as the others. Shakespeare's Shylock claims his bond because he is convinced that "justice and law will do him right, repaying him justly for all the wrongs received" (Firenze 126). He wants to be triumphant over Antonio and all others so that he can receive a compensation for the humiliation he has been exposed to. Wesker primarily presents the Venetian law as a system that works exclusively for the Christians but he also shows how the law is decadent and not open to changes. While in *The Merchant of Venice* the Jew expects to be rewarded by the law, in *The Merchant*, Shylock does his best to prevent the interference of law with his relationships with Antonio. Shakespeare's Shylock wishes that the legal authorities would abolish his otherness. Wesker's protagonist, on the other hand, is aware that the laws will generate more prejudice against him and his race.

In *The Merchant of Venice* Shylock knows that when he says that "I have sworn an oath that I'll have my bond," this is actually a claim upon Antonio's life and is not humane in any sense (*MV* 3.3.5). The Jew's mind is so preoccupied with taking revenge that he even fails to recognise that the previously aggressive and scornful merchant now begs for mercy. Antonio being aware of his fault admits what has he done: "I oft delivered him of his forfeitures many that have at times moan to me; therefore he hates me" (*MV* 3.3.22-24). All the merchant's pleas for forgiveness, such as "Hear me yet, good Shylock … I pray thee hear me speak" are left unanswered (*MV* 3.3.3-9). Antonio resents that the Duke as the representative of justice, "cannot deny the course of law" (*MV* 3.3.26). Any denial of Shylock's bond will upset "the justice of the state," as well as threatening its prosperity of the state since "trade and profit of the city consisteth of all nations" (*MV* 3.3.30-31). Contrary to Shylock's expectations, rather than administering justice, the Duke is as one of the characters, who begs Shylock to have mercy on the merchant. The Jew is exposed to discrimination at the court as the Duke's first words reveal what he thinks of the Jew: "a stony adversary, an inhuman wretch, uncapable of pity, void and empty from any dram of mercy" (*MV* 4.1.4-6).

When asked, the moneylender admits that he has no exact reason for his cruel intentions apart from his "humour" (*MV* 4.1.43) and "a lodged hate and a certain loathing" he bears towards Antonio (*MV* 4.1.60). However, this hatred gradually turns into such an excessive and uncontrollable feeling that Shylock even rejects Bassanio's offer of six thousand ducats instead of three. Shylock's refusal to have twice the amount he originally lent shows that he is not concerned with money: "If very ducat in six thousand ducats / Were in six parts, and every part a ducat, / I would not draw them; I would have my bond" (*MV* 4.1.85-87).

Shylock reveals that the Venetians, concealed by the mask of charity are actually slave drivers. As they will not allow their slaves to go up in the social scale, Shylock will not allow Antonio to have his own way. "The pound of flesh" is his and he will have it, which makes him the rightful owner of Antonio (*MV* 1.3.158). He regards himself as the possessor of the merchant, and will decide what will happen to him. The way Shylock evaluates the situation is very direct and simple. Nevertheless, according to Girard, Shylock ignores the fact that the Venetian law, which allows Venetians to be slave owners "does not give slaves the right to own

Venetians" (102). Thus, such a legal system only works for the Venetians so it cannot "be based on mercy" (Girard 102).

As Cooper states Venice is a trading city, which ''must keep sacred the law of contracts, even at the cost of human life, or suffer financial loss" (122). Therefore, the law of contracts are above the value of human life. Knowing that the case "will be recorded for a precedent," Shylock thinks that no one has the right to alter the law for the benefit of a gentile Venetian, which motivates him to regard himself superior to everybody present in the court (*MV* 4.1.216). Now, he not only has the power to command Antonio but also the Duke, that is the law: "I stand for judgement. Answer: shall I have it?" (*MV* 4.1.103). However, the Jew soon has to admit that his act of pushing the law "to inhuman limits … is turned on him by adversaries to crush him inhumanely" (Firenze 117). He is defeated by "the letter of law, the exact phraseology of the bond, his own weapons, and his very own words" since they all turn against him with the arrival of doctor Bellario's assistant, Balthazar, who is actually Portia in disguise (Firenze 117). Due to the way Portia handles the problem, both Shylock and Antonio undergo a reversal of fortune, which reduces the Jew to an alien once more and restores the merchant to his previous well-respected status. Although Portia's initial words, "this bond is forfeit, / and lawfully by this the Jew may claim / a pound of flesh, to be cut off / nearest the merchant's heart," clearly state that Shylock is triumphant, the case proceeds in the opposite direction (*MV* 4.1.226-229). The law grants Shylock what is rightfully his and allows him to have his bond on condition that he must not "shed / one drop of Christian blood," (*MV* 4.1.305-306). Otherwise all Shylock possesses such as "lands and goods" will be confiscated by the Venetian state (*MV* 4.1.306)

Firenze views that "thanks to her quibble, she [Portia] saves Antonio by the loophole," yet disagrees with the means Portia does so (140). What the critic puts forward is that "the device she used could only work in a comedy, which asks for a happy ending" because in real life "it is impossible to separate the fact of cutting a piece of flesh without the inevitable consequence of shedding blood," which she regards as "a fact of nature, of physiology" (Firenze 140). Therefore, the second condition that Portia puts forward appears more convincing and discourages Shylock from having his bond. If the Jew fails to cut "just a pound of flesh" in other words neither less nor more, he himself will be put to death (*MV* 1.3.158). In

addition, all his properties will be confiscated. Such a resolution proves that Shylock as the other is totally ignored. The life of a Venetian is so precious that Portia does not have to look for a convincing and logical explanation to give the Jew what is his. Girard observes that Shylock is the scapegoat; "as long as there is Shylock to do the suffering for them," no Venetian will "even suffer in the slightest" let alone facing death (102). For the rest of his life Shylock has to live with the fact that "in the city of Venice, no Antonio or Bassanio will ever suffer" for it is easy for them to get away with the ill they do (Girard 102).

After this bitter recognition, with one final move Shylock strives to save "barely my [his] principle" and claim the three thousand ducats that he lent Antonio (*MV* 4.1.338). However, he is introduced to another aspect of the law which urges him to abandon half of his possessions to Antonio and the other half to the state. As an alien he is guilty of preparing a bond which involves plotting against the life of a Venetian citizen. Furthermore, his life is left to the mercy of the Duke, who immediately renders it as a symbol of Christian charity. It is unbearable for Shylock to admit defeat when he has almost been victorious. Portia gives the final word to Antonio who brings in three conditions to offer mercy. While the first one asks for half of Shylock's properties to be given to Lorenzo, the other two include his conversion to Christianity and all his belongings to pass to his daughter and son-in-law upon the Jew's death. According to Firenze, Shylock who has been wronged once, is "punished too harshly and is accorded no understanding or clemency" (126). Moreover, Firenze argues that being the other, "Shylock is punished more severely than the worst of criminals" and is totally destroyed (126). The just punishment that Shylock actually deserves is "to lose part of his goods as a warning never to nourish awful sentiments of hate" (Firenze 126).

Girard believes that rather than being a criminal, Shylock "has done no actual harm to anyone" and if it were not for him and his money "the two marriages, the two happy events in the play, could not have come to pass"(Girard 97). Although previously all Christians have been preaching mercy, "the trial scene clearly reveals how implacable and skilful they can be when they take revenge" (Girard 97). Ironically, Shylock's wish to avenge the Christians better in his words: "The villainy you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard but will better the instructions" does not materialise (*MV* 3.1.56-57). At the initial stages of the trial

scene "Antonio begins as the defendant and Shylock as the plaintiff" (Girard 97). Due to the nature of the Venetian laws, "at the end of one single meeting the roles are reversed and Shylock is a convicted criminal"(Girard 97). Not having any power to fight against the laws and the community Shylock submits and agrees to sign the deed which is no different than a suicidal document for him. Even if in *The Merchant of Venice* Shylock appears as an unfavourable character, one cannot help feeling that the way he is punished is too much for him. Since he is the sole person fighting against the Christian justice system he has nobody to defend him. "Shylock has had no defender for his cause. He stands alone against numerous Christians, whose strength is in their number and in their intrinsic value" (Firenze 126).

The way Shakespeare ends *The Merchant of Venice* may offer some relief in the sense that Antonio is rescued from death. However, it is not a very rewarding ending when Shylock's situation is taken into consideration. One can understand his handing half of his properties to Antonio as a compensation for the threat to his life, but his conversion to Christianity, which damages his identity, is rather cruel.

As it is put forward by Palmer, the last scene in Shakespeare's play is of great importance revealing that "inhumanity … is common to both parties" as neither the Jew nor the Christian can free themselves of the power they get from feeling superior to each other (130). Despite the fact that throughout the play Christian charity is praised as opposed to Jewish ferocity, the way the play ends indicates that it is mere hypocrisy. Shakespeare proves that there are no preconceived villains and heroes by showing that all men are the same especially when faced with threat or filled with the desire to take revenge.

What Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, presents at the end of the trial encourages one to question whether Shylock would still have been so severely punished if he had been more merciful and humane. However, Wesker's play suggests that the ending of the play does not differ even if the two conflicting characters are close friends. The way Wesker handles the concept of law proves that it is not Shylock's personal trait such as cruelty and malice that make him receive such an inhuman punishment. What Wesker offers in his play is not limited to the personality of a single Jew, but he chooses to elaborate on the state of Jews living in Venice during the Renaissance. According to Scott, "it is the ubiquity of Christian

law, reflecting a cultural dominance" which constitute the core of his play (52). Moreover, the critic adds that different from Shakespeare's play, the modern interpretation "draws an accurate historical picture of Jewish existence in the Venetian Ghetto Nuovo" (Scott 52). *The Merchant* indicates that if Shylock is not punished for any other crime, he is bound to be punished because of being the other in a Christian society.

Unlike Shakespeare's Shylock, Wesker's protagonist is ready to give the money not to his enemy but to his best friend without any contract. Yet, because of Venice's popularity for its adherence to its laws, Shylock and Antonio are left with no other choice but prepare a foolish bond which ridicules the law. Similar to the one in Shakespeare's comedy, the bond in Wesker's play demands one pound of the merchant's flesh if he is unable to pay the loan on the day specified. In his Preface, Wesker explains that the reason why such friends like Shylock and Antonio become involved in a bond for a pound of flesh is that "no dealings could be entered into with a Jew without a contract" (*M* LIII). It is generally believed that the major aim of laws is ensuring security and welfare of each citizen. However, what is presented in Wesker's play reveals that "the total blind reliance on law and justice makes life more unstable and weak because law and justice, however, important they may be, do not constitute either the full value of love or the whole truth" (Firenze109). Thus, when deciding whether one is guilty of a certain crime, they disregard the possible reasons leading to that particular criminal act.

Shakespeare, deprives his character of giving any logical reason apart from his deeply rooted hatred for his desire to cut Antonio's flesh. Whereas in Wesker's play, Shylock unfolds the underlying causes of his insistence on the bond and his silence during the trial. Not wanting to "set a precedent," Shylock is against the idea that the law should be bent (*M* 62). Antonio, is also reluctant to bend the law to save his life since he knows the implications of such a solution to this problem. As Wesker puts it, Shylock has "no alternative but to safeguard his community and sacrifice his friend and, consequently, himself" (*M* LIV). They both agree to remain silent during the trial not only to protect the Ghetto people but also Shylock's pride. Because of the unwanted intrusion of the law with their friendship, "Shylock cannot even state his reasons for the bound since proclamation would negate the protection which he requires for his own people" (Scott 56).

Shylock is doomed to destruction whether he is Antonio's foe or friend because he is a Jew living in 16th century Venice, where prejudice against his race is prevailing. Similar to what happens in *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia plays a key role at the court as her interference defines the ultimate decision. One of the points that is difficult to understand in Shakespeare's comedy is how Portia suddenly appears as a person knowing the Venetian laws and is able to save Antonio. Wesker, on the other hand, chooses a more convincing way of dealing with Portia's presence at the court. Different from *The Merchant of Venice*, in the modern interpretation, Portia attends the court not deliberately to save the merchant and the Jew, but to see how deviance from the established system is punished. Although she trusts her ability that is she has "faith in that 'untried intellect'," she admits that she has no knowledge of law (*M* 69) She is motivated to attend the trial by the possibility of interpreting law with common sense and the idea that "the law may not be just when it demands strict adherence to an agreement which may cause misery" (*M* 69). She wishes to rescue not only Antonio, but also the Jew. Contrary to what happens in Shakespeare's play, it is not Portia in disguise but, Portia, who is proud of her feminine identity and intellect, that realises a flaw in the bond.

What Portia witnesses, nevertheless, is the bias and rigor of the ruing people. Wesker draws the attention to the power the military people have over the legal system, which is verbalised in Portia's words: "Is sword held high to defend the justice my left hand weighs? Or is it poised threateningly to enforce my left hand's obduracy?" (*M* 81). The Doge is not only the person who is in charge of the security of the town but also of the proper functioning of the law. His military power makes the reliability of the law questionable. Moreover, the fact that the legal system is under the control of the Doge symbolizes its masculine nature which resists any innovation. With the portrayal of Portia, Wesker emphasises that unlike men, women are more willing and open to welcome change and innovations:

> PORTIA. What I thought yesterday might be wrong today. What should I do? Stand by my yesterday because *I* have made them? I made today as well! And tomorrow, that I'll make it too, and all my days, as my intelligence demands. (*M* 81)

Portia is capable of reason and she can see that the present state of the law is static. She has difficulty in understanding why Shylock is judged according to a very old Venetian law, which says that if an alien "plots against the life of a citizen of Venice," he is condemned "to death and the confiscation of his goods" (*M* 79). The strict adherence to the law and reluctance to update them reveal that Venetians ceased to regard laws as means of ensuring justice but as holly transcripts to be followed at any cost. What Portia emphasises is the need to stop living bound to the past and what it commands, and try to reshape the future based on what one's intellect requires. Venice is respected for its laws but they merely stand to dominate and protect the existing control of the Christian community.

At the end of the trial what Wesker's protagonist gets as a punishment is almost the same as that of Shakespeare's. However, different from the Jew in *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock in *The Merchant*, is not alone fighting against injustice. Instead, he is surrounded by both Jewish and Christian people who are aware of the shortcomings and absurdity of the law. In spite of having no legal rights, in the Renaissance version of the play, it is Antonio, who is given the right to decide what should happen to Shylock. In the modern play however it is the Doge's responsibility to give the ultimate decision, which gives Wesker another point to criticise concerning the way the legal system operates. Although the Doge grants Shylock his life, he commands that Shylock should submit all his possessions because he is concerned with what the public will think: "The people of Venice would not understand it if the law exacted no punishment at all for such a bond" (*M* 80). The influence is that it is not Shylock, but the people who are out to get their "pound of flesh" (*MV* 1.3.158).

The way Shakespeare deals with the concept of justice in *The Merchant of Venice* at times undermines the way law operates in Venice, which encourages the audience to question the punishment Shylock eventually gets. However, *The Merchant* offers some very significant shortcomings of what is considered as a perfect legal system. It is not only biased against the minorities but also outdated, which makes it ignore the possible emergence of new ideas and situations. Though in the face of law nobody can be proclaimed guilty without being proved so, it is really ironic that what Shylock undergoes in both plays indicates that he is defeated from the very beginning because of his otherness.

2.3.1.3. Christianity versus Anti-Semitism

The reason why Shakespeare chooses a Jew to embody the wicked characteristics of a villain does not have a clear answer. While some critics argue that he just elaborated on the character in Marlow's *The Jew of Malta*, some others like Wright think that "Shakespeare was not consciously contributing to the anti-Semitism, but he was reflecting a cruelty that persisted from past ages of persecution" (in Firenze 133). Michael Scott observes that "twentieth-century notions of the anti-semitic and contemporary attitudes towards Jews are a moral phenomenon entirely outside Shakespeare's sixteenth-century experience" (45). However, it is also important to note that *The Merchant of Venice* "cannot be seen outside our own historical period which necessarily implies that it cannot be divorced from the anti-semitism of the first century" (45). While Shakespeare lays great emphasis on the theme of usury, Wesker, by stating that the Jews had no chance but being usurers, focuses more on anti-semitism**.** The modern dramatist with the changes in his portrayal of Shylock and Antonio proclaims that religious dogmas can be eliminated. However, it is difficult to change the deeply rooted prejudice of the other characters who are so blindly stuck in their dogmas.

The Merchant of Venice offers a representation of a Shylock as the other living "in a predominantly Christian society" (Auden 80). Being constantly reminded of his otherness he "rejects the Christian community as firmly as it rejects him" (Auden 80). That is why he is an isolated character whose interaction with the world around him is limited to some business deals: "I will buy with you, sell with you, talk with you, walk with you, and so the following; but I will not eat with you, drink with you, nor pray with you" (*MV* 1.3.28-29). Living in a community where he has always been associated with material things, Shylock is treated as an insignificant figure who serves the function of money lending and whose humanity is constantly ignored. He is finally involved in an outburst through which he asserts his humanity and the fact that he is no different from them. At this stage of the play Shakespeare permits Shylock to appeal to the sense of human brotherhood" (Auden 81-82):

> SHYLOCK Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subjects to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? (*MV* 3.1.46-52)

Emphasizing that both Christians and Jews have common physiological features, need affection and are subjected to similar threats, Shylock stresses that they are human beings who share the same world, which offers them the same means of survival. Cooper views this speech as a desire to express "the hostility of this society to the unassimilated" (123). Shakespeare's portrayal of "Shylock is not merely a comic villain, but a character to be taken seriously" in his attempt to express his humanity (Cooper 123). Though his act of "seeking revenge against Antonio, is not justified, the Jew is merely acting as fallen human beings tend to act" (Cooper 120). He proves his humanity through a reaction that normally anybody who has been wronged can display.

The final decision of the court that Shylock should be converted to Christianity aims to abolish his otherness and make him appear as one of the Venetians. The reason why a Jew has to become a Christian only because he has wronged one is rather questionable and inhuman. Throughout the play Christian characters preach charity but in the end they are incapable of actually living "according to the principles they preach" as they show no ''charitable behaviour to the Jew" (Firenze 150). It is only when they wish to "oppose Shylock and his whole race" that they "remember their religion" (Firenze 150). Otherwise, these characters never discuss "why it is they really consider themselves to be perfect Christians" (Firenze 151).

In *The Merchant of Venice* "by the end of the trial scene most of the Christian characters have fairly settled accounts with Shylock" (Cooper 773). Being forced to continue his life as a Christian has a more devastating effect on Shylock than death itself. Having heard the decision, he is so ruined and desperate that all he can say is "I am not well" (*MV* 4.1.392) before he silently walks away, which indicates "his deeper anger and his inevitable hatred toward his accusers" (Firenze 127). Although witnessing Shylock's defeat is gratifying and rewarding for the other characters in

the play, Shylock for the rest of his life he has to cope with much serious humiliation and has to reorganize his life around the pretence of being a Christian. At the beginning of the play, he was an outcast and the other with money and in the end he is placed in an even worse position in which it is difficult for him to define who he is. Now he neither has the money to be a usurer nor he can freely assert his identity as a Jew.

Apart from the religious motives Shakespeare avoids giving any other reason for the hostility between the Venetians and the alien inhabitants, yet Wesker explores the topic in a much more detailed way. In fact, Shakespeare's representation of Jews is what initially encouraged Wesker to come up a new interpretation of *The Merchant of Venice*. Wesker set out to write *The Merchant* to react to the growth of anti-Semitism that he believes Shakespeare's play has contributed since the day it was first written.

As opposed to the Christian virtues, which are highly emphasised in *The Merchant of Venice*, in Wesker's play there is mutual tolerance concerning the characters' religious beliefs. Shylock and Antonio feel free to discuss and question their religions along with what being religious involves. Shylock states that he cannot help being religious since it is "the condition of being Jewish, like pimples with adolescence" (*M* 5). He has no personal discontent concerning Judaism, as he says that he belongs to a nation chosen by God. However, he stresses the difficulty of being a Jew because "all other nations found them unbearable to live with" (*M* 5-6). Unlike the notion of being religious in *The Merchant of Venice*, it does not involve being prejudiced and dogmatic. As Antonio expresses it, Shylock is "religious for all your [his] freethinking" and he is "a devout man" whom the merchant loves and admires (*M* 5). Antonio is no longer the man who believes in the superiority of Christian virtues and who claims that everybody should convert to Christianity to be saved from being doomed. In addition, he rejects being religious and any kind of responsibilities it asks for like being a source of wisdom for his godson, Bassanio.

Wesker portrays Shylock as a human being with both his positive and negative personality traits. Similar to Shakespeare's character Wesker's Shylock encounters excessive prejudice that the Christians are armed with. Although Shylock chooses a Christian, Antonio, to be his best friend, most of the other non-

Jewish characters humiliate and distrust him at first sight. When Bassanio, for instance, is first introduced to Shylock and his life in the Ghetto, he is highly prejudiced, despite the fact that Shylock is the first Jew he has ever met:

> BASSANIO. And that is a Jew?
> ANTONIO (*reprimanding*). He is a Jew.
> BASSANIO. I don't think I know what to say.
> ANTONIO. Have you never met one before?
> BASSANIO. Talked of, described, imagined, but –
> ANTONIO. Shylock is my special friend.
> BASSANIO. Then, sir, he must be a special man. (*M* 17-18)

In spite of his positive remark about Shylock, Bassanio is far from concealing his contempt against the aliens about whom he has heard so much. As soon as he is informed that Antonio plans to borrow the money from Shylock, his comments reveal his perception of Jews, "The Jew? … But the interest rate, the conditions" (*M* 21). Bassanio is under the influence of the preconceived ideas that Jews are not to be trusted. His real ideas are further displayed in his talk to his friends Graziano and Lorenzo who function as intensifiers of Bassanio's anti-semitic feelings. In addition to the fact that Antonio's friends were all Jews, what disturbed him very much is the way the aliens discussed "as though the city cared for their voice, existed for their judgement" (*M* 26).

Lorenzo in *The Merchant* is characterised as "a more complex and perhaps more dangerous figure" (*M* xxviii). He can easily get repulsive and fanatical because he cannot tolerate the Jewish existence in Venice. Thus, he regards the city as the "brothel of the Mediterranean," where "corruption" is encouraged by the state laws and the understanding of freedom (*M* 29). Lorenzo objects to Jewish population in the city for "usury flourishes" and the Venetians have turned into "a nation that confuses timidity for tolerance" thus, into "a nation without principle" (*M* 27). His desire for the revival of simplicity "implies the destruction of many aspects of Venetian civilisation"(*M* xxviii). One way of doing so is through purifying the city from usury and Jews.

The dinner party in Antonio's house where Bassanio, Graziano and Lorenzo are present "provides the occasion for the various antagonisms of the play to

emerge in open conflict" (Wilcher 115). Especially Lorenzo's disrespectful and arrogant attitude towards the Jew creates tension: "On several occasions this evening I've attempted to engage Signor Shylock in a theological discussion. He's turned away" (*M* 39). Unlike Shakespeare's Shylock, the Jew in the modern play "constantly attempts to offer friendship to the Christians" (Scott 53). Therefore, his answer to Lorenzo's challenge is quite positive:

> SHYLOCK. You want theological disputation? Listen. You have us for life, gentlemen, for life. Learn to live with us. The Jew is the Christian's parent. Difficult, I know. Parent-children relationships, always difficult, and even worse when murder is involved within the family. But what can we do? It *is* the family! Not only *would* I be your friend but I *have* to be your friend. (*M* 39)

Shylock by likening the conflict between the Jews and the Christians to a family issue displays his readiness to integrate with the opposing party. He highlights the fact that they are all human beings which are born to live together. Though Lorenzo and his companions fail to recognise it, Shylock has "an idealism above the social strictures of the community" (Scott 55). He is ready to be united with the Christians under the same roof of humanity.

Lorenzo is deaf to all Shylock's pleas for brotherhood as he fiercely accuses him of malice at the court. Despite the fact that at the end of the trial scene in *The Merchant* Shylock is not required to convert to Christianity, his punishment is still very frustrating and ruinous for the Jew. Wesker alludes to Shylock's famous speech on his humanity. However, it is Lorenzo, who delivers it, but only to accuse Shylock of exploiting people's feelings. The young man argues that Shylock is not guilty because he is a Jew, yet should be punished because of being a usurer:

> LORENZO. The bond is inhuman, not the man. No one doubts the Jew is human. After all, has not a Jew eyes? … Has not a Jew organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? … Is not the Jew fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subjected to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is? (*M* 76)

Lorenzo claims to declare the Jew's humanity; however, he is just pouring out his deeply rooted hatred towards Shylock and his race. Lorenzo mocks the usurer's humanity only to show that his humanity will not prevent him from getting his due punishment. In addition, he claims that Shylock's silence is another scheme to deceive the Doge and influence his final decision. He argues that Shylock wishes to be forgiven and arouse sympathy for being a Jew. Thus Wesker has given Lorenzo the role of further emphasising Shylock's otherness.

Shylock is ready to endure any charges against himself yet, he cannot bear the accusations against his race. He initially wishes to be silent so that he can protect the rights of his people and preserve his dignity. Yet, he realises that there is no way of eliminating the prejudice against the Jew. He accepts that "there is nothing we [the Jews] can do is right" (*M* 77).

Shakespeare did not have any intention of activating people's antagonism towards the Jews. It is also important to point out that "Shakespeare by no means considers Shylock a model Jew" and what he offers with his portrayal of Shylock is a human being placed in very difficult circumstances (Yaffe 47). What is important for Shakespeare is the way the Jew is treated in a Christian society, where he is the other. Due to the tragic events that took place in last century, today it is not very possible to regard Shakespeare's Shylock as an only man who is ruined because of his own faults without taking into consideration the humiliation his race has been exposed to. Wesker's play indicates that the real reason for Shylock's isolation from the society is not because of his being a usurer but because of the deeply rooted hatred against his race. Shylock's predicament in the modern play shows that as long as people depend on the dogmatic attitude to evaluate his actions there is no hope for the future union between the Jews and the Christians.

2.3.1.4. The Ghetto Nuovo

In *The Merchant of Venice* Shakespeare suggests that despite being humiliated and discriminated as a Jew, Shylock lives in his own house which is close to the Rialto, which is the business centre of Venice. As his house is situated among the Venetian houses, he is part of the community. However, Shylock's antagonism for

the Christians is so intense that he chooses to segregate himself from the society by not allowing any intrusion to his home, and his private life. In the modern interpretation, on the other hand, Wesker depicts the social as well as the physical isolation of his Jewish characters. Rather than enjoying a life in luxury in the city centre, Shylock in *The Merchant* along with other Jews reside in a place called the Ghetto Nuovo. In spite of Shylock's willingness to integrate with the Venetian society he lives in, he is entrapped in both social and physical isolation, which adds to his otherness.

The fact that Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* can lend tree thousand ducats without getting into any financial trouble and his owning a house indicate that he is a rich man. As a moneylender it is true that he is money-oriented. However, he is also very cautious about his house. Act 2 Scene 5 provides evidence about the value he attaches to his house, to the extent that he is disturbed by the music of the Venetians who are enjoying themselves during the masques. He defines his place as a "sober house" (*MV* 2.5.35) and wants his daughter to "stop my [his] house's ears" to the intrusion of Christian entertainment (*MV* 2.3.33). Rather than simply being a place for him to live in, his house is a symbolic shelter where he can avoid the humiliation of being a Jew in Venice. That is why he is ruined when he loses his properties. At the end of the play half of what he posses is confiscated by the government, and the other half is given to Antonio. This, nevertheless, is not only a material loss for him but also emotional one. For him his possessions are of great importance because they are what makes a house a place to live in: "You take / my house when you do take the prop / That sustain my house" (*MV* 4.1.371-372). His attachment to his house is very deep as he says losing his house for him is equal to death: "you take my life / When you do take the means whereby I live" (*MV* 4.1.372-373).

Shylock in the Renaissance comedy rejects Venetian life style and culture, whereas Wesker's protagonist admires Venice and its traditions. Shylock, in the modern play, sees Venice as a special place and he loves it "because it's a city full of men living, and passing through, and free to do both as a their right, not as a favour" (*M* 38). Antonio, on the other hand, is highly critical of Venice as a trade centre and views Venetians as dishonest industrialists because they are "simply importers and exporters, rich because the commerce of other people flows through"

them, not because they produce anything (*M* 40). Shylock, however, is more concerned with the contribution of Venice to the enlightenment of man and evaluates the situation in the light of his philosophy of life that "there is a scheme of things" (*M* 41). In his dinner speech in Antonio's house Shylock tries to justify his love for Venice as he is engrossed in talking about the "three distinct developments affecting the history of this extraordinary land" (*M* 41).

The first development that Shylock cites is the contributions of Cassiodorus, who was "the last and lovely link between Imperial Rome and Gothic Italy" by devoting his life for the preservation of "a great collection of Greek and Roman classic manuscripts" (*M* 42). Shylock regards the collapse of the Roman Empire as the second significant event, which resulted in the emergence of independent city states where trade flourished. As Shylock explains it "more business meant more complex agreements, which meant more law" (*M* 43). To be able to meet this demand, people needed to have "a *new* kind of education, more practical," and more "worldly" (*M* 43). Therefore, they turned to Cassiodurus' books to reshape their legal system. In the final stage of his existing and thrilling history lesson, the Jew mentions the invention of the printing machine by a German called Gutenberg in 1450. The last chain of the developments during Renaissance is completed with a Venetian's, Aldus Manutius's setting up his press in Venice. Shylock highlights the importance of this event by counting various writers who could be read by a larger population of readers: "Suddenly – everybody can posses a book! And what books! The works of – Plato, Homer, Pindar and Aristophanes, Xenophon, Seneca, Plutarch and Sophocles, Aristotle" (*M* 44). Shylock admires and loves Venice for its contribution to the revival of knowledge and curiosity during the Italian Renaissance. Momentarily, he becomes part of that community, which is a delusion.

What interrupts Shylock's refined and enlightening talk on Venice is a ringing bell which reminds Shylock of the real Venice he lives in. Wesker's stage directions: "*Time to return to the Ghetto*. ANTONIO *rises to give* SHYLOCK *his yellow hat. He looks at* ANTONIO *and shrugs sadly, as though the hat is the evidence to refute all he's said*" are in conflict with the Jew's perfect representation of the city (*M* 44). Shylock feels proud and is rejoiced by the significant role that Venice played in the history of mankind. However, the yellow hat reminds him of his otherness in the Venetian society. Different from Shakespeare's comedy, Jews

in the modern play are the others whose discrimination and isolation is concretised with their entrapment in the Ghetto Nuovo.

In his Preface to the play Wesker explains that while rewriting *The Merchant of Venice*, he carried out extensive research about the lives of Jews in Venice during Renaissance and found out that the only place where Jews were allowed to reside in city is the Ghetto Nouvo. Wesker makes use of this historical data and chooses to set his play in the Jewish Ghetto, "where the Jews – needed but not wanted – were pushed aside to live on the outskirts" (*M* Liii). Mary McCarthy's observations regarding the Jewish existence in Venice confirms what takes place in *The Merchant* as she reflects: "The Venetians were tolerant, but the Ghetto was a Venetian invention, a typical piece of Venetian machinery, designed to 'contain' the Jews while profiting them" (in Wesker xv). Tubal, as one of the Jewish characters in the play, offers evidence about how Jews benefit the Venetian state. They are not only supposed to pay "an annual tribute of twenty thousand ducats" but also "fifteen thousand more to the Navy Board" (*M* 16). In addition, to finance the "upkeep of the canals which stink," military forces, "the local church" and the police are among the major requirements of the Jewish population. They are burdened with so many financial responsibilities towards the state that when Antonio fails to pay the loan, Shylock is not able to offer him an additional sum so that the bond will not be called upon as "the Ghetto is drained" due to the fact that "the last tax emptied every purse" (*M* 58).

McCarthy also explains that the word Ghetto "comes from the Venetian word, foundry" (in Wesker xv). Due to the Venetian geography, segregation of the Jews was easy as "the area of the New Foundry was an island, on which the Jews, were shut up every day at nightfall" (McCarthy in Wesker xvi). Wesker exemplifies this at the very beginning of the play. Antonio gets drunk as he and Shylock are cataloguing books. Shylock warns him that it is late and "in ten minutes" the gates of the Ghetto will be locked so "all good Christians should be outside" (*M* 6). Such an introduction to the play allows Wesker "to sketch his picture of society which controls its affairs through oppressive laws" (Scott 53). Moreover, Shylock's concern for "the gatekeepers" who may "remember and come looking" for Antonio is a reference to **"**the three gates" which "were closed and locked" (McCarthy in Wesker xvi). There were "Christian guards" who were "paid by the Jews, and were

posted, at first in boats on the canal" (McCarthy in Wesker xvi). Jews were forced to live in the boundaries of the Ghetto, but ironically they were made to pay for their enforced imprisonment as well. Despite being denied freedom, they have to pay "twenty thousand for renting" their houses in the Ghetto which are defined as "squalid walls" (*M* 16). They are regarded as "only fourteen hundred souls" who "are trapped in an oppressive circus with three water wells and a proclivity for fires" (*M* 16). The fact that in the Ghetto all "house windows facing outwards were blocked up … so that the Ghetto turned a blind face to the city" reveals the Venetians' willingness to ignore them (McCarthy in Wesker xvi).

The living conditions in the Ghetto are hard to bear**,** however, the Jews need official approval of their residence as **"**no Jew, including a native, could stay in Venice without a permit" (McCarthy in Wesker xvi). As Tubal suggests the Jews "survive from contract to contract, not knowing if after five years it will be renewed" (*M* 16). In addition to causing insecurity and uncertainty, the renewal of contract also implied another financial burden for it will ask for "a considerable sum of money" (McCarthy in Wesker xvi). Each time they wanted to renew their residence permit every five, seven, or ten years, they have to pay an additional fee for it. They are not only made to pay for the regular taxes, but also pay more taxes for "special demands in times of 'special distress" (*M* 16).

Despite their physical segregation, the Jews try to make their lives colourful in the Ghetto as much as possible. The lively and dynamic atmosphere of the Ghetto is set in opposition with the sterility and aloofness of Venice. Wesker refers to the Ghetto as an "exciting, lively place" (*M* liii), which is "constantly filled with visitors" (*M* 7) such as a writer Solomon Usque, who is accompanied by Rebecca da Mendes, "daughter of the late Francisco Mendes, banker of Lisbon" (*M* 11). Shylock also mentions the sermon of a well-known rabbi from Florence "preaching on the importance of the Talmudic laws on cleanliness, with special reference to Aristotle" (*M* 7). Unlike Shakespeare's play in which the Jews are only referred to as moneylenders, in the modern one different aspects of the Jewish character are displayed. Roderigues, who is an architect working on building a new synagogue, and the portrait painter Moses of Castelazzo are among the other Jewish characters who reflect the wide range of interest among the minority community.

Different from Shakespeare's play, which offers very little evidence about the Jewish life style, Wesker's realistic representation of Venice shows that Jews had some rights but these rights did not "imply any doctrine of equality" because "the Jews had *specific* rights, the rights he paid to enjoy" (McCarthy in Wesker xvi).

2.3.2.In *Richard II* and *Exit the King*

2.3.2.1. Over-reliance on status

Richard and Berenger share the common personal flaw of relying too much on their status as the king and regarding themselves as supreme beings immune to any kind of threat. Therefore, the first steps to self-awareness for them involves being freed from these illusions they have been trying to hold on to. During the othering process, they gradually acknowledge the importance of the others' contribution to their self-awareness. Through a closer contact with the people around them, they strive to have a better understanding of the world around them and of their own existence.

Bakhtin stresses the significant contribution of the people surrounding a person to his self-realisation. Therefore, both Shakespeare and Ionesco initiate their protagonists' othering process by making them reveal themselves to "another, through another and with another's help" (in Todorov, 96). Only after understanding the way they are perceived by the others can these characters have a better understanding of their personalities in the eyes of the others.

Richard is previously deaf to the advice that Gaunt in his deathbed tries to give him because he thinks his ultimate power is enough for him to perform his role. The illusion that he is the unquestionable authority makes Richard scorn the people from a lower status and underestimate their discontent with his reign. Despite York's warning that Gaunt should not try advising Richard, "for all in vain comes counsel to his ear" (*RII* 2.1. 4), the old man is willing to talk to the king: "Though Richard my life's counsel would not hear / My death's sad tale may yet undeaf his ear" (*R* 2.1. 15-16). Gaunt's pronouncement, "thou diest, though I the sicker be," (*RII* 2.1. 91) suggests it is Richard, who actually dies and foreshadows

the king's loss of power and approaching deposition. Richard, on the other hand, fails to recognise the deeper meaning in the old man's words and mocks him with his reply: "I am in health, I breathe, and see thee ill" (*RII* 2.1. 92). Gaunt views Richard as a victim who is sick of his ill reputation. Richard seeks the cure in the "physicians that first wounded" him (*RII* 2.1. 100). Richard's illness is not physical yet, it is of more destructive and deceptive nature because it worsens with Richard's failure to realise what has happened. Moreover, it is incurable in the sense that Richard is unaware of the fact that he is constantly poisoned by the sweet words of his flatterers. Gaunt is the first character to proclaim that Richard, despite being the rightful king, is far from being the right one. He now views Richard as "Landlord of England" but "not king" (*RII* 2.1. 213-214). Shakespeare uses Gaunt as a representative of the general public to declare the discontent that Richard's subjects experience. All that Gaunt aims for is to awaken Richard from his delusion and make him realise how detrimental his actions are both for himself and for his precious land. Richard's flaw of relying on his flatterers' counsel ruins not only the country but also his reputation.

Richard has such unshakeable belief in himself that he overlooks the importance of the criticism of someone who is older and experienced, and who cares for him. He misses the opportunity to have a better understanding of his position as a king. He condemns Gaunt for being "A lunatic lean-witted fool," (*RII* 2.1.115). The way he reacts to his uncle's criticism indicates his self-aggrandisement. Furthermore, he is ignorant of the contribution of the others to his self-awareness both as a person and as a monarch. He even threatens Gaunt with death: "Wert thou not brother to great Edward's son / This tongue that runs so roundly in thy head / Should run thy head from thy unreverent shoulders" (*RII* 2.1.121-123). Richard is so much engrossed with the idea of being the unquestionable authority that he is ready to execute his most reverent kinsman.

Richard's excessive reliance on his power is one of the reasons that lead to his abdication and disillusionment. Because he views himself as untouchable, he sees no point in listening to people's criticism about what kind of king he is.

In *Exit the King* Ionesco creates a group of characters who contribute to Berenger's self-consciousness. Parallel to Bakhtin's idea "someone else's gaze can give me [one] the feeling that" he forms "totality," Berenger comes to realise his

true identity only after he starts to come in touch with the others around him (in Todorov 95). Though, few in number, each of these characters plays an indispensable role in completion of the overall meaning of the play. Apart from Marie, who delays his self-realisation, the rest of the characters contribute to the king's othering process in their own ways. By conceiving his image through their eyes, Berenger gains a better understanding of who he really is.

Richard throughout his reign relies on his flatterers who prevent him from being aware of the consequences of his actions and disregard the concern for his true followers. Similarly, Berenger chooses Marie as his beloved wife and tends to ignore Marguerite's guidance on how he should spend his life so that he can get ready for his death. Nevertheless, as the king understands that love can no longer help him to cope with his challenge, he turns to Marguerite. The more the king realises that he cannot escape his ultimate end, the more faith he starts to have in his first wife. Thus, Ionesco makes Marguerite the most significant character who helps Berenger to acknowledge his mortality and accept death as the natural outcome of being born.

Unlike Marie, what makes Marguerite a highly rational person is the fact that she regards her heart merely as an organ which beats to ensure a person's survival. She prefers to be reasonable even at the cost of being condemned as inhuman. Realising the follies in Marie's character, Marguerite no longer sees her as a rival to be jealous of. Moreover, Marguerite has "just realised he [the king] wasn't being very wise" by depending so much on Marie for she witnesses his desperate moves to be saved from death (*EK* 11). In Marguerite's eyes, he seizes to be the mighty king who commands everything. On the contrary, he is "weak enough already" (*EK* 11). She regards Berenger as a mortal being who is now to be pitied for not being prepared for his ultimate end.

In the glorious past, during the times when Berenger enjoyed life with his lively young wife, whenever Marguerite tried to remind them of death as the "ultimate fate," she was accused of being a "pompous bluestocking" (*EK* 13). Therefore, now she is very critical of Marie whom she blames: "it is your [her] fault if he is not prepared" and if death " takes him by surprise" (*EK* 11). She also views Marie as the reason for Berenger's forgetting his responsibilities by encouraging him to be engrossed in worldly things like dances, processions, official dinners, and

several honeymoons. Referring to life as a journey, Marguerite argues that, Berenger has spent his life "like one of the travellers who linger at every inn, forgetting each time that the inn is not the end of the journey" (*EK* 13). His sole aim has been achieving temporary goals and amusing himself with "happy days … high jinks … beanfeasts and …strip tease" (*EK* 13). Although Marguerite knows the human nature has the tendency to disregard death, she claims that being the king Berenger, "must not forget " it (*EK* 11). What she suggests instead is that "he should have his eyes fixed in front of him, know every stage in the journey, know exactly how long the road, is and never lose sight of his destination" (*EK* 11). Marie is the one to draw Berenger back into his deluded self whereas Marguerite is the one to break that delusion.

Berenger's frustration, and anguish in the face of death, forces him to realise that Marie can offer him no comfort. As the king starts to have a better insight into the threat he is confronting, he is motivated to turn to his first wife Marguerite, "who can give him no warmth or joy, but who, having accepted all that death involves, is the only one able to assist him" (Knowlson 183). Different from Marie, Marguerite assumes a more realistic approach to Berenger's death as she considers it as "the normal course of events" (*EK* 10). Knowing that Berenger only has very limited time before his exit, his death, she is willing to make him not only confront the reality of death but also accept himself as the mortal being. In addition to enabling him to cope with the fear of death, she helps him to see through his own identity. To be able to help him, she will "untie every knot and ravel out the tangled skein" that binds him to life (*EK* 66).

Consequently, it is only after her guidance that Berenger can turn "his death into a triumph rather than a defeat" (Knowlson 183). At the end of he play while all the characters one by one desert the king, it is only the first wife who stays and helps him to unload the burden of his life and agree to submit himself to death.

At the initial stages of *Richard II*, uncle Gaunt implies that Richard is sick of reputation but the king fails to comprehend the core of the message. Being at the height of his power, all Richard can think of is his physical well-being which he claims to be in good condition. Richard's illness, on the other hand, is due to his psychological state which eventually causes the deterioration of his soul and mind. Ionesco elaborates on the issue of health not only on its symbolic level, but also in

its literal sense and adds a different dimension to his play. In addition to presenting the psychological breakdown in Berenger, he also chooses to portray the decay in his protagonist's body. Different from Richard, Berenger's physical appearance matches his psychological decay and atrophy as his end draws closer.

Upon being dethroned Richard desires to see how the calamities he has gone through have been reflected on his face and asks for a mirror: "Give me that glass and there will I read" (*RII* 4.1. 275). However, seeing that there are no "deeper wrinkles" (*RII* 4.1.276) and that sorrow has carved "no deeper wounds" (*RII* 4.1.278) on his complexion he feels betrayed. He questions if this is "the face which faced so many follies, / That was at last outfaced by Bullingbrook," and smashes the mirror thinking that it deceives him just like his flatterers have done (*RII* 4.1.284-284). What makes Richard so frustrated is his inability to see any kind of trace on his face that reflects the torments his soul has been experiencing. Contrary to his expectations, as he fails to recognise any, he thinks the mirror deceives him by not reflecting his distress.

Berenger, on the other hand, is disillusioned with the changes in his physical appearance and health. No matter how much he wants to hold on to life, his body fails him. At the beginning of the play his words "I don't want to die" appear in direct opposition with the fact that "his hair has suddenly gone white" (*EK* 36). His desire to live is undermined with the fact that his body is too weak to meet the king's needs. This sudden change in the king is also intensified by the stage directions: "*The wrinkles are spearing across his forehead, over his face. All at once, he looks fourteen centuries older*" (*EK* 36).

The traces of old age are actually reflected on the king's face. Death for Berenger is not only an emotional turmoil but also a physical disintegration. The existence of the doctor is a strong reminder of Berenger's ill state. With the news that Berenger is going to die there is an obvious shift of roles between the doctor and the ruler. Previously, the doctor was the executioner. He used to be one of the king's men who would kill the people that Berenger wanted to be rid off. Nevertheless, what is presented on the stage now, is quite the opposite. The mighty and majestic king, has been reduced to a medical case for the doctor to study.

All through the play, the doctor comments on the various reactions that Berenger shows in his fight against death such as evaluating Berenger's state as "a

typically critical condition that admits no change" (*EK* 16). As the doctor, he is assigned the role of helping his patient to acknowledge that his illness is beyond any medical treatment. Therefore, his role is to make Berenger realise his mortality and accept the decay in his body. The doctor appears to be familiar with the process of giving up hope for living; when he hears Berenger's cries for life he comments: "The crisis I was expecting. It is perfectly normal. The first breach in his defenses, already" (*EK* 36). He regards Berenger's wish to prove that he has the power to stand upright and his inability to do so, as "just a final effort before his strength gives out" (*EK* 29). In addition, the doctor's remark foreshadows the stages that Berenger will go through as he tries to admit his mortality:

> DOCTOR: However much he moans and groans, he's started to reason things out. He's complaining, protesting, expressing himself. That means he has begun to resign himself. (*EK* 46)

Berenger desperately complains and protests so that he can be saved. But ironically, these are considered as the symptoms of his acceptance of death.

Accepting the decay in his body is one of the major stages of Berenger's othering process. As the king it is quite unlikely for him as the king to accept any physical weaknesses which will spoil his glorious posture as the mighty ruler. Parallel to Martin Esslin's idea that absurd characters are "almost mechanical puppets," the disintegration in his body turns Berenger into a puppet whose physical movements appear rather ridiculous (22). Many times Berenger is reduced to a miserable clown whose actions and words highly contradict each other. Thus, when he first appears on stage, quite oddly, he attributes feeling awful and not knowing "quite what is wrong with" him to "perhaps I've [he has] been growing!" (*EK* 19). Despite denying "Limping? *I'm* [he is] not limping," after having failed to walk properly, he has to confess that there is a problem and admits "limping a little" (*EK* 21). Similarly, he is left with no other choice but to accept that his leg also hurts: "It doesn't hurt. Why should it hurt? Why, yes, it *does* just a little. It's nothing" (*EK* 21).

The doctor strives to prevent Berenger from deceiving himself further by urging him to accept the disintegration in his body. Berenger finds different ways to

avoid confronting his fear of death. He wants to prove that he has the choice to decide when to die as he claims: "I will die when I want to. I'm the king. I'm the one to decide" (*EK* 25). When he is reminded that he has "lost the power to decide" for himself and that he "can't even help falling ill" (*EK* 25), he becomes terribly frustrated. He finds excuses like he "wasn't mentally prepared" or "didn't have time to think" as he was "too engrossed in ruling my [his] kingdom" (*EK* 25).

The doctor's involvement in his othering process makes Berenger realise his body as a fragile case which cannot endure a longer life.

Exit the King portrays the agony of a dying man, but Ionesco disperses the gloomy atmosphere of the play by integrating some comic elements to the play, which brings some relief to the audience. Ruby Cohen declares that, while presenting the "development of tragic intensity at the knowledge of imminent death", Ionesco employs "two main sources of comic nuance: the Palace Guard and the maid Juliette" (167). Apart from functioning as comic figures, these characters also contribute to "the king's anguish" (Cohen 167).

Initially Juliette is presented as the domestic help who is worn out trying to fulfil the tasks she is burdened with. Juliette's role as a member of the lower class is to serve the king and his wives. However, when Berenger is left with "thirty-two minutes and thirty seconds" to live, his sudden interest in Juliette and her life, makes her function in the play more significant. Inquiring about his maid's life is something that the king has "never had time" to do before (*EK* 60). Contrary to his expectations, this clever attempt to gain more time and divert his attention to some other issues leads to more important realisations for Berenger. His conversation with Juliette makes the king acknowledge that being alive does not simply mean giving orders and administering his ultimate power. Ionesco depicts the dilemma in human nature between the two conflicting ideas: the desire to acquire reputation and power on the one hand, and the absurdity of such an ambition with the sudden emergence of death as a threat on the other.

Juliette is ignorant about how precious life is as its beauty is spoiled by having to cater for the people in the king's court. That is why upon being asked what kind of life she has, her reply "a bad life, Sire" abounds in complaints (*EK* 61). However, the king perceives life, as a dying man, that "Life can never be bad. It's a contradiction of terms" (*EK* 61). This comes as a shock for her. However,

their dialogue reveals the different psychological moods of people who face non-existence and who are still granted with more time to live. Berenger wishes to emphasise the beauty of life. The king's words give the impression that instead of complaining the servant should be thankful for the difficulties of life. In fact, this shows how Berenger is filled with jealousy towards Juliette's miserable and hard life. According to Cohen, the reason why he envies "the miseries of his maid," is that "they are miseries of the living" (167). For Juliette life is not good for it involves many hardships and struggle. Whereas Berenger, being at the brisk of death, views these difficulties as proofs of existence. Very ordinary and boring jobs like emptying the chamber pots and making the beds prompts Berenger to make Juliette realise that "every morning one comes into the world" and is reborn (*EK* 61).

Berenger accentuates the maid's every single action and turns them into majestic movements. Simple things such as Juliette's coming down the stairs in the morning or wearing an old dress gain great importance. No matter how dull and monotonous it may appear these things are of unique significance as they are what make people exist:

> KING: It's wonderful to feel bored and *not* to feel bored, too, to lose one's temper, and *not* to lose one's temper, to be *dis*contented and to be content. To practice resignation and to insists on your rights. You get excited, you talk and people talk to you, you touch and they touch you. All this is magical, like some endless celebration. (*EK* 64)

Furthermore, it is only after being threatened by his approaching death that he appreciates how precious a single breath of life is: "Remember! I'm sure it never crosses your mind. It's a miracle" (*EK* 63).

His glorification of boring and routine events that Juliette detests doing, implies that he would rather be a miserable maid than a king in his deathbed. He resembles all the aspects of life to an "endless celebration" to make the servant girl realise the beauties of life (*EK* 64). Juliette seems to be an attentive listener responding to each of his questions, yet she completely misunderstands the message he wants to communicate. What Juliette perceives as "endless" is the never-ending

duties that she has to perform: “There is no end to it! After that, I still have to wait at table” (*EK* 64) Berenger, is not really concerned about her tough ordeal in life; Juliette’s mundane duties just remind him how much he misses the ordinariness of daily life. Juliette’s reference to a meal reminds him of a dish, the stew, he liked so much but he is not allowed to have it now, because as Marguerite reminds the others, “he must detach himself” from life (*EK* 65).

Juliette’s complaints about all the work she has to do. Similarly, upon hearing Juliette’s protest about being responsible for duties such as sweeping, doing the laundry, and digging the garden, Berenger wonders why she has not ever raised this issue before. When he is informed that she had already complained about the problem but was ignored, the king remembers that it was not the only thing he took no notice of: “Such a lot has escaped my notice. [I never got to know everything. I never went everywhere I could. My life could have been so full.]” (*EK* 62). He thinks that he has wasted his life while life has actually offered a lot of opportunities for him to fulfil himself.

At the end what begins as a genuine conversation initiated by the king’s desire to learn about other people’s lives ironically ends with another order for Juliette as the king commands her to rush and “kill the two spiders in my [his] bedroom!” since he does not “want them to survive” him (*EK* 65).

2.3.2.2. Loss of power

Jan Kott in his *Shakespeare our Contemporary*, states that there are two basic types of historical tragedy. The first one originates from the belief that “history has a meaning, fulfils its objective tasks and leads in a definite direction,” whereas the second originates from the idea that “history has no meaning and stands still, or constantly repeats its cruel cycle” (Kott 30). Shakespeare’s history plays present the succession of several kings to the throne, enjoying the privileges of kingship and finally being dethroned by some rivals. Therefore, Kott’s second understanding of historical tragedy reflects Shakespeare’s approach to history. In order to reveal how mighty kings are entrapped in the second concept of a tragedy, Jan Kott gives the example of a mole:

> For a long time it fancied itself the lord of creation, thinking that earth, sky and stars had been created for moles, that there is a mole's God, who had made moles and promised them a mole-like immortality. But suddenly the mole has realized that it is just a mole, that the earth, sky and stars had not been created for it. A mole suffers, feels and thinks, but its suffering, feelings, and thoughts cannot alter its mole's fate. (31)

A parallelism can be drawn between the state of Kott's mole and Richard as both initially deceive themselves and are severely disillusioned later. Just like the mole for quite a long time, Richard deludes himself that he is the God's attorney and that he has command over nature. The same self-deception is evident in Berenger, too. Although Ionesco avoids stating that Berenger's role as the king is assigned by an absolute creator, he portrays Berenger as having enjoyed infinite power, and regarding himself immortal. However, both kings are forced to awaken from this blissful dream like state by recognising that they are not the centre around which the world revolves any longer. Loss of power in both *Richard II* and in *Exit the King* develops along with the characters' disillusionment that they are not the possessors of ultimate power and consequently are not sacred figures protected by God, their land or their subjects**.** According to Scott each play shows how the protagonist "act solely through selfishness" and both Shakespeare and Ionesco "demonstrate the dissipation of power" (79). While Shakespeare makes Richard lose his crown, Ionesco makes Berenger realise his loss of power over his subjects.

Shakespeare presents Richard's reliance on absolute sovereignty to intensify the disillusionment he is to undergo. To that end, prior to the start of his othering process, Richard is depicted as the symbol of supremacy which he abuses. He is deaf to the warnings of wise men like Gaunt and York, who are sincerely concerned with his bad reputation in public and the country's well-being. As the threat of being dethroned by Bullingbrook grows bigger, Richard cannot help but see the danger awaiting him.

Throughout the play, it is emphasised that characters like Bushy, Green, Aumerle and Carlisle impede Richard's self-realisation as they encourage him to believe in his sovereignty. Thus, Richard's ear "is stopped with other flattering sound, / As praises, of whose taste the wise are fond, / Lascivious metres, to whose venom sound / The open ear of youth doth always listen" (*RII* 2.1.17.20). But his

youth and fondness of flattery have prevented him from analysing the danger he is in with a rational mind: "Now comes the sick hour that his surfeit made, / Now shall he try his friends that flattered him" (*RII* 2.2.84-85). While Richard is delighted with his supreme authority he is unaware that at the same time his inconsiderate actions trigger dissatisfaction among his subjects who gradually gather around the abused Bullingbrook to claim Richard's crown.

The way Shakespeare constructs his play indicates that it is Richard's personal flaws that initiate his downfall. Without taking effective measures, he lets "his ineffective and indecisive uncle, the Duke of York" run the country when he is away to deal with the Irish revolt (Becker 17). In the mean time, his rival gathers strength and forces to fight against the injustice he is exposed to. Richard's campaign to Ireland is a shortsighted political error. He "is gone to save far off / whilst others come to make him lose at home" (*RII* 2.2. 80-81).

When Richard returns from Ireland, he is a highly transformed character who has started to doubt his definitive power. Now, he is very a emotional and eloquent poet who is distancing himself from his problems. He dreads his loss of power so much that he needs the reassurance of his flatterers concerning his authority. Consequently, each time Richard appears doubtful of his status as a king he is reminded not to fear as "That power that made you king / Hath power to keep you king in spite of all" (*RII* 3.2. 27-28). Although Richard is the rightful king "in appearance," he is "deficient in the solid virtues of the ruler" (Tillyard 168). Rather than taking effective measures to fight his enemy, he addresses the land and wishes to be protected by it:

> RICHARD Yield stinging nettles to mine [his] enemies,
> And when they from thy bosom pluck a flower
> Guard it, I pray thee, with a lurking adder
> Whose double tongue may with a mortal touch
> Throw death upon thy sovereign's enemies. (*RII* 3.2.18-22)

As God's minister, Richard identifies himself with the English land. In order to emphasise this unification, he reverts to nature metaphors. He resembles himself to a flower which is threatened with being plucked. He prays to his symbolic mother-nature to protect him using her natural powers. Instead of gathering an army

consisting of real soldiers, he views the stones as armed soldiers to fight his enemies as he laments: "these stones /Prove armed soldiers ere her native king / Shall falter under foul rebellion's arms" (*RII* 3.2. 24-26). Scott considers Richard's act of saluting the ground and "instructing nature to kill Bullingbrook" as a "romantic nonsense," into which the king can temporarily escape (76).

When Richard is about to feel some relief, Shakespeare further intensifies his conflict by making him confront the bitter reality that all his subjects "Both young and old rebel" against him, and have joined Bullingbrook's troops (*RII* 3.2.119). He is also informed that his keen supporters and allies against Bullingbrook Bagot, Bushy and Green are killed as "their peace is made / With heads and not with hands" (*RII* 3.2. 137-138). By epitomising Richard as a vulnerable and miserable figure whom neither the land nor his loyal subjects can defend against his enemy, Shakespeare shatters the conventional idea that the king has indisputable protection. Just like Kott's mole, he is deserted by God and is left with no other choice but to admit his powerless state and his imminent mortality. With disillusion comes an awareness of mortality. He reflects on the past and remembers how other royal people faced death. The fact that he remembers the "sad stories of the death of kings, / How some have been deposed, some slain in war, / Some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed, / Some poisoned by their wives, some sleeping killed, / All murdered" (*RII* 3.2.155-160) makes him acknowledge the absurdity of being protected by some supernatural power. This realisation enables him to see himself as a common being. Thus, his symbolic abdication presides his literal dethronement by Bullingbrook, who is not a rival that can be disregarded and simply underestimated.

Kott argues that power for Shakespeare is not "abstract and mythological" or "almost a pure idea," instead, it "has names, eyes, mouth and hands" (7). Similarly, in *Richard II* initially power is personified in Richard's image as the supreme commander. Yet, with his abdication it shifts to Bullingbrook, who is the new epitome of magnificence. The threat that Bullingbrook poses at the beginning of the play grows bigger as Richard fails to deal with it. His inability to cope with the problems makes him into a tragic character. Each action he takes "seems to ensure his safety," yet it "turns out to have the opposite effect" (Barber 24). Having realised his inadequacy and entrapment, he can see no way out but to abdicate. It is

Richard's own follies that lead him to his final heart rendering act. He himself hands over his crown to his cousin.

According to Jan Kott, Shakespeare views the crown as "the image of power" which "can be handled, torn off a dying king's head, and put on one's own" (8). Unlike the other Shakespearean history plays in which there are several men who are ready to grab the crown, in *Richard II*, it is the king himself who hands over his crown with his own will. This is the culminating point in Richard's acceptance of his loss of power. Bullingbrook declares "hither come / Even at his feet to lay my arms and power, / Provided that my banishment repealed / And lands restored again be freely granted" (*RII* 3.3. 38-41). However, because at this stage Richard feels psychologically abdicated, he is ready to admit defeat. If he is abdicated, it has to be with kingly dignity:

> RICHARD With mine own hands I give away my crown;
> With my own tongue deny my sacred state;
> With mine own breath release all duteous oaths.
> (*RII* 4.1. 207-209)

No matter how painful and undignified it is for Richard to accept his loss of power and status, he tries to resume a majestic stance. His inability to approach and evaluate the events realistically and take logical precautions bring him closer to his downfall. At the end he is left all alone, to cope with the idea that he has wasted himself.

Similar to Shakespeare's play, the theme of power in *Exit the King* is used to undermine the extent to which Berenger relies on it. As power loses its discriminative value of putting Berenger to the highest social status, accepting the loss of his command over his subjects is a bitter and painful realisation for the king. To reveal the absurdity of such an idea that the king is protected by nature, Ionesco makes several comic references to the way the king's downfall affects the natural phenomenon. The play provides no allusions to a mighty and protective God who has promised to rescue his earthly representative. Berenger, though he wishes more time to explore the world and life, is aware that there will not be anybody to answer his plea to be given more time.

The process of the othering in the modern play can be analysed in two major ways: Berenger's loss of control over the natural phenomenon, and over his subjects around him. One way to indicate this decline is through the comments the doctor makes on how Berenger's impending death upsets the natural balance. He reports the changes in nature, like Mars and Saturn having collided and exploded, which symbolise Berenger's approaching death. From what the doctor comments it is understood that the king's death is something expected, "something that merely confirms the previous symptoms of the king's death" (*EK* 17). Moreover, the doctor informs them "the sun has lost between fifty and seventy-five percent of its strength" and "snow is falling on the North Pole of the sun" (*EK* 17). Just like the worn out king who is regarded as the commander of the universe, the Milky Way also is observed to be upset as it is "exhausted, feeling its age, winding its tail around itself and curling up like a dying dog" (*EK* 17). However, all these "cosmological images" reflecting the decay in the universe "are prevented from allowing Berenger to take refuge in" and to save himself from death (Scott 77).

The changes in nature provided Berenger with enough evidence proving that he is the ruler of he universe. Yet, such a conformation does not sooth his pain as "nature and the universe give no optimism for the man facing death" (Scott 77). By the time the king enters the stage all the characters and the audience are aware that Berenger has only a very limited time to live. As he complains about the clouds, he fails to realise that his power on commanding the nature has already started to vanish. Berenger's remarks "I thought I'd banished the clouds. Clouds! We've had enough rain. Enough, I said! Enough rain, Enough, I said! Oh! Look at that! Off they go again!" are the first hints that urge him accept his drained power (*EK* 19).

According to Norrish, Berenger "has been accustomed to command, directly or by delegation, not only people but objects and even the forces of Nature" (87). Therefore, when he attempts to exert his power, the result is "comically negative" (87):

> KING: I order trees to sprout from the floor. (*Pause*.) I order the roof to disappear. (*Pause*.) What? Nothing? I order rain to fall. (*Pause – still nothing happens*.) I order a thunderbolt, one I can hold in my hand. (*Pause*.) I order leaves to grow again. (*He goes to the window*.) What? Nothing? (*EK* 33)

Shakespeare implies the absurdity of looking for a resort in nature when Richard appeals to the earth and stones. Ionesco through Marguerite's comments underlines the absurdity of this appeal, and also shows that it is futile: "Don't try any more! You are making a fool of yourself … In one hour and twenty minutes, you are going to die" (*EK* 34). Thinking that the nature will protect him is foolish of Richard, similarly Berenger risks becoming absurd in trying to hold on to such an illusion. Both Richard's and Berenger's attempts to find refuge in nature and longing for her protection fail.

One proof of ultimate power for Berenger is giving orders to his subjects. As a king who is used to being obeyed, testing his power over his subjects is as a rewarding opportunity to prove his authority. Berenger argues that Marguerite and the doctor, obsessed by the desire for power, plot against him for his abdication. To overcome the traitors, the king orders the guard to arrest them: "Take them away, and lock them up in the cellar, in the dungeons, or rabbit hutch. Arrest them, all of them! That's an order!" (*EK* 26); but the guard become paralysed and is unable to move and arrest them. Just like nature, the guard, as the sole representative of the army, also fails the king and adds to his frustration. Instead of arresting Marguerite and the doctor, he appears to be "the one who's arrested" (*EK* 26). According to the doctor's diagnosis the reason why the guard is incapable of performing his duty is because "the army is paralyzed. An unknown virus has crept into his brain to sabotage his strong points … he is deaf to you already. It's a characteristic symptom. Very pronounced, medically speaking" (*EK* 27). Similar to the Welsh army, which is supposed to fight for Richard's glory but is dispersed, Berenger's only armed force is unable to arrest the traitors. Richard's role in the dispersal of his men is reflected in Marguerite's comment that it is Berenger's order that paralysed the guard: "Your Majesty, you can see for yourself, it's your own orders that paralysed him (*EK* 27).

In Shakespeare's play, the crown is the object symbolising power. In *Richard II*, the crown preserves its unifying and sacred image of power. It is handed over solemnly and ceremoniously. In Ionesco's absurd play there is no solemnity or majesty attached to the crown. It is just a headgear with no importance to the others. his image is totally shattered. Berenger's crown falls from his head either because of a misunderstood order or because he is too weak to carry it. In both cases the fall

of the crown functions as evidence for loss of power. Nevertheless, because the king finds it difficult to cope with the idea of loss of power, he is given a "*nightcap*" to compensate for the original one. Similarly, since he falls while trying to reach the stairs where his throne is, he is provided with "*an invalid chair on wheels, which has a crown and royal emblems on the back*" (*EK* 42). Ionesco, to underline the absurdity of the situation, undermines the importance attached to the crown and throne by making it replaceable with ordinary objects.

Another symbol of king's power and sovereignty is his scepter. Like the crown it signifies the authority of the king. John of Gaunt in *Richard II* refers to England as "this sceptred isle" as a metaphor for a land ruled by a king (*RII* 2.1.40). In *Exit the King* Berenger is told that he is no longer strong enough to carry his scepter. Yet, he wants to keep it to convince himself that he is still in command. They give it back to him, just to humour him. Marguerite's comment, "After all, I don't see why not" indicates that even if he has the scepter in his hands, it will not change the fact that the symbol has lost its meaning already (*EK* 44).

Richard is overcome by his flaws and the ambitions of another rival who wishes to be the king. Berenger, on the other hand, is defeated mainly by an inexplicable sinister power- so more like with The Theatre of the Absurd.

2.3.2.3. Time

Time is another element that is employed to disillusion the protagonists in both *Richard II* and *Exit the King*. While it constitutes the most important closing remark that Richard utters at the end of Shakespeare's play, time is also one of the prevalent concepts that dominate Ionesco's drama. Shakespeare points out two major aspects of time in his play: one is the subjective flow of time, the other is that time is destructive and it draws people to their ultimate end. Richard, though initially is presented to be very inconsiderate about the passage of time, at the end of the play he is tormented with the realisation that he has wasted his time. Ionesco borrows these concepts to direct the disillusionment of his highly self-assured king. Berenger, just like Richard, has spent his time in vain. By creating Berenger as a very old character, who still begs for more time so that he can compensate for his

wasted life, Ionesco emphasises the tragedy of mankind who indulges in such a waste of time.

In the banishment scene of *Richard II*, Shakespeare illustrates how Richard regards the passage of time at the height of his reign. In order to ensure the safety of the country, the king has the right to order traitors to be sentenced to prison or to spend some time in exile. However, the way Richard administers his authority is erratic. Richard chooses to punish Mowbray to a life long exile, and changes his mind about Bullingbrook's previously give a ten-year banishment by reducing it into six years. Richard's careless decision indicates that for him time is not important. Shakespeare further emphasises this idea through Bullingbrook's discontent about his punishment. For a king flourishing in prosperity six years is quite a short time, which can be filled with joy and happiness. Bullingbrook, on the other hand, resents such a decision because carelessly uttered words for him signify a lot. He protests that the king has no idea about time: "How long a time lies in one little word. / Four lagging winters and four wanton springs / End in a word, such is the breath of kings," (*RII* 1.3.212-214). When the father wants to ease his son's pain by saying "What is six winters? They are quickly gone," (*RII* 1.3.159), Bullingbrook's comment indicates how people's perception of time is easily affected by their psychological mood "To men in joy; but grief makes one hour ten" (*RII* 1.3.260). Although six years is a relatively short time, when it is spent in grief it becomes unbearably longer.

Ionesco makes use of Shakespeare's idea that a person's perception of time is closely linked with his psychological state and his circumstances. What is unique to Ionesco's treatment of time is his employing exaggerated expressions when he refers to the span of time of an event or action. Berenger is a man at the age of two hundred and eighty-three, but he argues that he "came into the world five minutes ago" and "got married three minutes ago" (*EK* 45). Just like Shakespeare, Ionesco also highlights the fact that "as a measurement it [time] is constant" while as "experience it fluctuates" because "time is only flexible in its perception by the individual" (Scott 74). To elaborate on the subjective nature of time, the absurd dramatist employs some exaggerated expressions. Although Berenger has led a long, blissful and happy life, he thinks that death calls on him too early. Berenger's rebellion against death reveals that he has been "cheated by past experiences which

has rushed him through his life before he could begin to enjoy it" (Norrish 86). Thus, the mathematical figures indicating how time is measured do not comfort him. The threat of death is so intense that it erases all the joyful and exciting memories of the past. Berenger can no longer feel self-satisfied with his long life spent in merriment; on the contrary, he behaves as if it has vanished. Thus, his present evaluation of his life differs greatly from what he used to be so proud of. Despite previously claiming that he "had all the time in the world," now he regrets not having had enough by crying out: "I never had the time, I never had the time, I never had the time!" (*EK* 46).

Shakespeare uses time as one of the most influential elements that contribute to Richard's othering process and self-consciousness. Richard's perception of time culminates, at the end of the play, which highlights the changes he has undergone. Shakespeare again refers to time to highlight the changes Richard has experienced. Unlike the self-assured and conceited king who has spent time in welfare, Richard, now entrapped in his prison cell in Pomfret Castle, is tormented with gloom and utter disillusionment regarding the way he has spent his life. Richard renders his views in his soliloquy:

> RICHARD I wasted time and now doth time waste me,
> For now hath time made me his numbering clock.
> My thoughts are minutes, and with sighs they jar
> Their watches on unto mine eyes, the outward watch,
> Whereto my finger like a dial's point
> Is pointing still, in cleansing them from tears.
> Now sir, the sound that tells what hour it is
> Are clamours groans that strike upon my heart ,
> Which is the bell. So sighs and tears and groans
> Show minutes, times and hours. (*RII* 5.5. 42-51)

Richard's isolation has drawn him towards more intense self-questioning and realisation. Now he is conscious about how recklessly he has wasted his time. The idea that he does not have much time to undo his faults is intensified with the parallelism he creates between each movement of a clock and his own actions. While his heart is the bell of the clock, his sighs, tears and groans represent hours and minutes.

At the beginning it is Bullingbrook who laments on the destructive side of time for a man in distress, but Shakespeare chooses Richard as the character who is severely tortured by the realisation of its disastrous effects on a person:

> RICHARD But my time
> Runs posting on in Bullingbrook's proud joy
> While I stand fooling here, his Jack of the clock.
> This music mads me. Let it sound no more,
> For though it have holp madmen to their wits
> In me it seems it will make wise men mad.
> Yet blessing on his heart that gives it me,
> For 'tis a sign of love, and love to Richard
> Is a strange brooch in this all-hating world. (*RII* 5.5. 51-66)

Shakespeare creates Richard and Bullingbrook as foils for each other. One's happiness depends on the calamities of the other. Previously Bullingbrook, was concerned with the devastating nature of time; having overthrown Richard, as the new king it is Bullingbrook's turn to enjoy the opportunities his status offers. What is left for Richard, on the other hand, is to curse himself for failing to realise the importance of time. For Bullingbrook time now passes with joyful rapidity, while Richard passes his time in prison counting the hours away. Richard elaborates his contemplation of loss of time further with a "music" metaphor. Music that keeps time is harmonious, soothing and believed to heal sick and mad men; but sweet music turns sour "When time is broke and no proportion kept. / So is it in the music of men's lives" (*RII* 5.5.43-44). Richard's life has been like a musical instrument that has been playing discordantly. The result is the breakdown in his own affairs and those of the state.

Ionesco reinterprets Richard's soliloquy on how time languishes people to underline that "it is time which proves the enemy of man" (Scott 73). Berenger, like Richard, also have misused the time available for him. His self-deceit of his immortality led him to enjoy a life without ever realising that each passing hour brings him closer to his death. Like most human beings, Berenger falls into the trap that once he is born he is granted with infinite time to live, which encourages him to ignore the ever-present death. Therefore, Berenger's wish for being given some more time is denied by Marguerite, who reminds him that "There is no more time.

Time has melted in his hands"(*EK* 35). Just like an ice cube time when not used efficiently, is wasted. This in return symbolises the failure of man to make proper use of it. Berenger wants to have more time but ironically it is time that has led him to his destruction. Scott asserts that Marguerite's observation concerning time reveals the universal reality that "it is not man that melts time, but time which decays man" (Scott 74). While people deceive themselves by thinking that they have control over their lives, time proves to be their greatest enemy leading them to their end.

Being bitterly disillusioned about his life and his identity, Richard seeks refuge in death so that he can "be eased / With being nothing. (*RII* 5. 5.40-41). To sooth his anguish, death for him is a kind of escape to overcome his conflict. Shakespeare implies that death appears to be the best award for a man who has failed to overcome all the calamities that life challenged him with. Different from Richard, Berenger's realisation that he has wasted his time is activated by the fear of death. When Marguerite informs her husband "Sire, we have to inform you that you are going to die," Berenger's response clearly indicates that the idea of imminent death has never occurred to him (*EK* 21). Feeling quite confident of himself, he says "But I know that, of course I do! We all know it! You can remind me when the time comes. Marguerite, you have a mania for disagreeable conversation early in the morning" (*EK* 21). He claims that its is too early for him. He would die "in forty, fifty, three hundred years. Or even later" when he wants, when he has the time, when he makes up his mind (*EK* 22). Meanwhile, he is ready to be occupied with the "affairs of state," which gives the illusion that he is too busy to die now (*EK* 22).

The sudden claim of death appears as an absurd joke played on Berenger. Seeing that there is no way of escaping it, he questions the meaning of his existence " Why was I born if it wasn't forever? Damn my parents! What a joke, what a farce!" (*EK* 45)**.** The fear of death alarms him so much that his previously dignified and realistic approach to his end now appears rather ridiculous and hypocritical. Viewing death as an experience in distant future makes it more tolerable and endurable. However, feeling the threat very closely changes his attitude to it. Rather than making use of his remaining one hour and twenty-five minutes, Berenger begs "time to turn back in its tracks," with an attempt to bar the enemy (*EK* 35).

Alternately, he and Marie wish to turn back time first to a moment twenty years ago. Having failed to do so, they would be quite content with even more recent past moments in time:

> KING: Let time turn back in tracks.
> MARIE: Let us be as we were twenty years ago.
> KING: Let it be last week.
> MARIE: Let it be yesterday evening. Turn back, time! Turn back! Time, stop! (*EK* 35)

Scott points out that through the portrayal of Berenger's dilemma, Ionesco shows that "if there is one universal truth, it is the inability of man to stop the progress of time, the progress that is towards the inevitable moment of death" (Scott 73). Since Berenger cannot fight his most fearful enemy, death, he desperately begs for more time. The hypocrisy in Berenger's frequent excuse is that he has "never had time to get to know life;" Marguerite reminds him that "he never even tried" (*EK* 45). Berenger was indifferent to death when he "was in such a good health" and was "so young" (*EK* 37). He always thought he would never have to face death. In the doctor's words, "he always lived from day to day, like most people" (*EK* 37). Marguerite summarises how he postponed his death :

> MARGUERITE: At forty: why not wait till you were fifty? At fifty
> KING: I was full of life, wonderfully full of life!
> MARGUERITE: At fifty, you wanted to reach your sixties. An so you went on, from sixty to ninety to a hundred and twenty-five to two hundred, until you were four hundred years old (*EK* 37-38)

Marguerite points out the way Berenger enjoyed the freedom to command time to "speed up or slow down the experience" (Norrish 86). However, now he realises that "the illusion of living in a kind of time which exists in the mind" could not prevent him from being subjected to "the objective regular, measured implacable time of the clock" which has brought about his downfall (Norrish 86). It is obvious that if this were not the hour for Berenger to admit death, he would continue to ignore it and postpone getting ready for it. Contrary to the king's assumption that if he had "a whole century before" him, he would be ready to die, being prepared for

death may require "five minutes" or even "ten fully conscious seconds" (*EK* 38). Although time causes decay, self-awareness is of crucial importance to confront death. Ionesco suggests that what is significant is not the amount of time one is given but how one spends it. The doctor sums up the idea: "A well spent hour's better than whole centuries of neglect and failure" (*EK* 38).

The modern dramatist enriches his interpretation of time by pointing out that time not only decays men but also abolishes their greatest achievements. While trying to persuade Berenger to accept his death, the doctor makes absurd references to the collapse of the country to emphasise that his "world dies with" him (Cohen 145). Berenger's country "several decades or even three days ago" was considered as an "empire" which "was flourishing" (*EK* 30). However, in three days all the previously won wars are lost; the rockets the king wants to fire "can't even get off the ground" (*EK* 30). His "triumphs are all over" (*EK* 30). In addition, time makes people forgotten. By juxtaposing Berenger's past and present, Ionesco remarks that people are forgotten even before they die. Berenger becomes sadly aware of this: "If I am remembered, I wonder for how long?" (*EK* 50). He would likes to be remembered "to the end of time" when "there will be no one left to think of anyone" (*EK* 50). When characters refer to the past, Marie dwells on the only reality as being the present. Ionesco implies the importance of shaping the present and the future by keeping in mind that one day they all will be gone. If one does not make god use of present, his life will turn into the useless past:

> MARGUERITE: Everything is yesterday.
> JULIETTE: Even "today" will be "yesterday."
> DOCTOR: All things pass into the past.
> MARIE: My darling King, There is no past, there is no future. Remember, there is only a present that goes right onto the end, everything is present. Be present, be the present.
> KING: Alas! I'm only present in the past. (50)

The realisation dawns on him that there is a destructive machinery outside his control, and it will end everything one day: "If every universe is going to explode, explode it will. It's all the same whether it's tomorrow or in countless centuries to come" (*EK* 50). He has gained self-awareness that he can in no way avoid his death.

Both Richard and Berenger gain self-consciousness by realising the destructive nature of time. They are "conquered by time," as it is in time that their disillusionment takes place and "death claims man" (Cohen 145).

2.3.2.4. Setting

Shakespeare in his history plays uses English history as "a grand setting, a background against which the characters love, suffer, hate and experience their personal dramas" (Kott 29). To depict Richard's tragic fall, in *Richard II* he makes use of England as the setting of his play. Clemen suggests that the great playwright creates "very diverse images used both by Richard and by other characters," to illustrate "the king's nature and temperament" (59). Hence, to reveal the bond between the country and its king the playwright makes characters like John of Gaunt and the gardener elaborate on the metaphor of the county as a garden and the king as its gardener. Ionesco integrates the same metaphor within *Exit the King*, however, Berenger is not only the king of his country but also "the master of all the universe" (*EK* 79).

At the very beginning, Shakespeare implies that Richard fails to fulfil his responsibility to ensure the prosperity of his garden. Uncle Gaunt glorifies the country and describes it in a highly poetic way. England is: "This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle, / This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars, / This other Eden, demi-paradise" (*RII* 2.1.40-43). Gaunt regards the English land as a sacred and heavenly place which has been the home for a lot of noble man. It is also the most privileged part of the nature as it is protected against the enemies by the sea which functions like a wall defending it. However, having expressed his attachment to his land, Gaunt cannot help regretting that though England is protected against the external threats, it is exposed to internal abuse. Pronouncing Richard as the "Landlord of England" but "not king" (*R II* 2.1.90), he asserts that "This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England," (*R II* 2.1. 50) "is now leased out … Like to a tenement or pelting farm" (*R II* 2.1.59-60). Being an inadequate landlord rather than a magnificent king, Richard leads the country to its destruction and spoils its beauties.

In order to demonstrate the extensive damage Richard causes to his country, Shakespeare creates another character, the gardener. Tillyard considers the garden scene as "an elaborate political allegory" because Shakespeare makes the gardener compare his garden to England, which metaphorically stands for the king's garden (256) Shakespeare's gardener who is highly conscious of the needs of his garden refers to Richard as "the wasteful king" who "had not so trimmed and dressed his land" to explain the extent of irremediable harm that Richard has done to his country and people (*RII* 3.4. 55-56). The gardener also comments on the reason for the present ruined state of the country and says: "The weeds which his [Richard's] broad spreading leaves did shelter, / That seemed in eating him to hold him up, / Are plucked up root and all by Bullingbrook" (*RII* 3.4. 50-52). Similar to Gaunt's observation, the gardener regards the king's flatters whom he calls weeds as the major reasons spoiling the welfare of the country. As a citizen, who is critical of Richard's reign, he is content that Bullingbrook appears as the hero who saves the country by beheading the king's supporters. While he likens the initial stages of Richard's reign to "disordered spring" (*R II* 3.4. 48), he draws a parallelism between "the fall of a leaf" and the king's descent (*R II* 3.4. 49).

Ionesco concentrates on the same metaphor to use it as the major setting of his play and extends it to whole world and universe to bring out the horror which accompanies Berenger's process to his end. Just like Shakespeare, he highlights the symbolic connection between the welfare of the country and the personal attributes of its king. The uncontrollable decay all over the country and the universe is of great significance in *Exit the King* since it reflects the disintegration in Berenger.

Ionesco alludes to Shakespeare's garden scene through Marguerite's compliant about the present sate of the country:

> MARGUERITE: His fields lie fallow. His mountains are sinking. The sea has broken all the dikes and flooded the country. He's let it all go to rack and ruin … Instead of conserving the soil, he's let acre upon acre plunge into the bowels of the earth. (*EK*14).

Just like Richard, Berenger is also described as the inconsiderate ruler who has failed to meet the needs of his state. His indifference and blindness to the realities

of his land has caused the disintegration in the country. Although he argues that he is not prepared for his death since he "was too engrossed in ruling" the country (*EK* 25), it is revealed that he is "an unwise master, who didn't know his own kingdom" (*EK* 79).

Berenger is the king of a country whose existence is questionable as it is just like an illusionary place without a name. Apart from several vague and overgeneralised references to the past like: "Your Majesty, you have made war one hundred and eighty times. You have led your armies into two thousand battles this kingdom is also devoid of a clear historical background. Despite once being known as a kingdom that "stretched for thousands of miles around" and it was not very possible to "glimpse its boundaries," now it is surrounded by enemies since the frontiers have been lost (*EK* 78). It is "only an ever widening gulf" that protects them from their neighbours' invasion (*EK* 78). Despite being "boundless in space" in the past, the country is denied any future prospect as king's death causes destruction all around the country and the universe: "The earth collapses with him. The suns are growing dim. Water, fire, air, ours and every universe, the whole lot disappears" (*EK* 79).

The fact that Berenger is going to die is like an inescapable epidemic. The king's breakdown is also reflected through the changes in his subjects because the country has not only shrunk in size but also its population has decreased to "a few congenital mental defectives, Mongoloids and hydrocephalics with goiters" (*EK* 23). Despite the fact that the king previously could not stand the sight of such crippled people and had them killed, "his Majesty could no longer allow himself that privilege!" as "he'd have no more subjects left" (*EK* 24). Without their existence, Berenger's existence will also be at risk and questionable, which shows his need of the confirmation of these inferior people. The king's reluctance to accept death as the natural outcome of being born has reduced "the birth rate is down to zero" and caused "utter sterility" because of which "not a lettuce, not a grass grows" (*EK* 48). The only remaining hope that after the king "has accepted the inevitable" and "when he's gone", the country will flourish and prosper again turns out to be a mere illusion (*EK* 48). With Berenger's death both his life and the country comes to an end. The remaining people are "poised over a gaping chasm.'' And there is ''Nothing but a growing void all around us [them]" (*EK* 78).

Richard confronts death in Pomfret Castle where he is "cast out of his medieval world of pre-established order and significance" (Calderwood 125). Being isolated from everybody he contemplates on his past experiences and regrets not having made a proper use of his life. Clemen states that when Richard utters his famous speech on time, "the setting and the inner situation [of the king] relate to one another" (28). His psychological entrapment is reflected with his physical imprisonment. He can neither escape the realisation that he has wasted his time, nor can be set free to have a new beginning. Ionesco, uses the prison scene in *Richard II* as the basis for the stage setting in his play, which is described as a place that has already been reduced to its bare essentials. It is a throne room with several doors leading to some other parts of the palace. The basic stage elements are the king's throne at either side of which the thrones for his wives are placed. In addition, it is a rather gloomy, cold and disorganised place as the king complains: "This palace is so badly heated, full of draughts and gales. What about those windowpanes? Have they replaced those tiles on the roof" (*EK* 22). In order to depict the decay in Berenger, Ionesco uses some images. As Bradby observes, *Exit the King* depends "a lot on atmosphere, which is generated by the use of settings, lights, colours, sounds," so "inanimate objects are as important as animate ones" (80). The cracks on the walls which continue to grow bigger, and the never removable cobwebs are the visual images that add to Berenger's disillusionment. With the disappearance of each character from the stage, Ionesco also suggests that Berenger's world dies with him. He emphasises the same idea with the actual removal of the stage props at the end of the play: "*During this final scene, the doors, windows and walls of the throne room will have slowly disappeared. This part of the action is very important*" (*EK* 95).

The gardener in *Richard II* is highly hopeful about Bullingbrook's appointment to the status of monarch as such a change suggests optimism about future. Shakespeare suggests that while the abdication of one king may temporarily lead to uneasiness and distress among the public, with the coronation of another one, the order in the country is restored. Berenger's death, on the other hand, involves the disintegration and the disappearance of the whole universe. For Ionesco's characters, there is no hope for retrieval as they also accompany their king in his journey to oblivion. Death for Ionesco is not restricted to ceasing to exist

physically. With the death of an individual his whole world dies, too.

2.3.2.5. Language

According to Bakhtin, "the *other* is necessary to accomplish … a perception of the self" (in Todorov 95). In order to benefit from the others' perception of himself, one has to interact and communicate with them. Therefore, dialogue has an indispensable role in the way to the individual's self-acknowledgment. Bakhtin states that "life is dialogical by its very nature" and "to live means to engage in dialogue, to question, to listen, to answer, to agree" (in Todorov, 97). However, both Richard and Berenger fail to understand the importance of trying to be engaged in dialogues with people around them. Instead, they prefer listening to the people who utter things that would build up their self-esteem and importance. Thus, at the end they are deserted by the subjects whom they have trusted so much. All they can do is utter their frustrations in their monologues.

Language as a means of communication occupies an important place both in *Richard II* and *Exit the King*, to show otherness, however, the way Shakespeare and Ionesco treat it highly differs. While in poetic language, Richard tries to cope with his conflict of being dethroned and having wasted his time; language, on the other hand, fails Berenger in his attempt to express his fear of death. Shakespeare transforms Richard from a supreme and sovereign authority into a highly eloquent, yet miserable poet. The poetic language intensifies his protagonist's frustration and his downfall and causes his otherness. In *Exit the King*, on the other hand, language proves to be inadequate "to express the absurd condition of man," thus language "is caricatured, and its normal order is violently disturbed" (Misra 65).

Clemen views *Richard II* as "the first instance of Shakespeare's habitual manner of endowing his heroes with unusual imagination and poetic gift" (5). Apart from Richard, other characters like John of Gaunt, make use of imagery to communicate what they mean. Gaunt likens England to a sacred garden, and Richard to an inefficient landlord who ruins the country. Shakespeare puts more emphasis on this idea when the gardener offers a much detailed account of the destruction the king's reign has caused, in a garden metaphor.

Shakespeare, after revealing Richard's incompetence in ruling the country offers another aspect of the king's personality through the poetic language Richard employs. Losing his authority and his power lead to self-questioning and conflict in the king. In order to cope with the frustration of being abdicated, Richard is engrossed in words and pours his heart out. As Richard ceases to be the supreme authority, he "gains the status of a poet in giving voice to his grief afflicted imagination" (Faas147). To preserve his dignity, rather than being dethroned by his rival, he prefers self-abdication and proclaims Bullingbrook as the new king. Simply divesting himself of the responsibilities of kingship, appears to be the easiest solution. However, during Bullingbrook's coronation scene, what seemed endurable earlier is much more painful and degrading in practice. Terry Eagleton observes that, Richard's disillusionment is so intense and unbearable that "he survives his deposition only by rewriting it as tragic drama" (Eagleton 10). By likening himself and the new king to two buckets, he aims to communicate how dreadful and unbearable it is for him to accept the situation. Thus, he becomes the poetic other:

> RICHARD Give me the crown. Here, cousin, seize the crown,
> On this side my hand and on that side thine.
> Now this golden crown like a deep well
> That owes two buckets, filling one another,
> The emptier ever dancing in the air,
> The other down, unseen and full of water.
> That bucket, down and full of tears, am I,
> Drinking my griefs whilts you mount up on high. (*R II* 4.1.181-188)

As Clemen puts it "imagery becomes the characteristic manner of expression of" Richard (5). The ability to "talk in similes" and "to make use of metaphors" is actually "a natural quality of the king's mind and temperament" (Clemen 5). Thus, at this stage of the play, Richard uses the image of a deep well with two buckets that fill each other to meditate on his downfall. While the empty bucket that hangs in the air represents Bullingbrook, the full one refers to Richard. Richard's words bear **"**the symbolic meaning of what occurs on the stage" (Clemen 54). Richard's image not only highlights his distress and anguish, but also indicates that it is because of

Richard that Bullingbrook can enjoy his joyful and happy sovereignty. If Richard were not the full bucket drinking his grief, Bullingbrook would not become the glorious king celebrating his victory.

Poetry sooths Richard's anxiety, but it does not bring a solution to his situation. At least it gives him a deceptive sense of consolation. Berenger, like Richard, turns to literature to express his feelings: "I'm dying, you hear, I'm trying to tell you. I'm dying, but I can't express it, unless I talk like a book and make literature of it" (*EK* 53). The guard, too, announces that: "The King finds some consolation in literature!" unfortunately, Berenger cannot talk like a book, nor is there any hope for him: "No, no. I know, nothing can console me. It just wells up inside me, then drains away" (*EK* 54). Even the doctor states the futility of Berenger's words when he comments: "It's not worth recording his words" as there is "nothing new" and original in what Berenger says (*EK* 53). Therefore, both language and literature as its refined form are far from communicating the fear and perplexity of an individual to the people crowding around him. Berenger views himself abandoned by his family, as they are indifferent to his isolation and loneliness:

> KING: They're all strangers to me. I thought they were my family. I'm drowning, I've gone blank, I've never existed. I'm dying.
> MARGUERITE: Now that is literature!
> DOCTOR: An that's the way it goes on, to the bitter end. As long as we live we turn everything into literature.
> MARIE: If only it could console him. (*EK* 53-54)

None of the characters is interested in the psychological collapse the king experiences due to his coming death. They are mere witnesses of his entrapment and disintegration as neither the king is able to articulate his despair, nor the others can comprehend it. Ionesco's representation of the role of language in human interaction reflects the idea that "words were meaningless and that all communication between human beings was impossible" (Esslin 128).

Ionesco states that people "who do not trouble to think" while trying to express themselves resort to "words that have died and decayed, the ready-made clichés of everyday speech" (in Valency 347). According to the absurd dramatist,

this is the major "obstacle to the communication of ideas through discursive language" (in Valency 347). Because Berenger pays no attention to Marguerite's counsel to see through his real nature and to question who he is, the king only uses language to command both his subjects and nature. For Berenger being obeyed and hearing empty remarks like "Long live the King" are enough proofs of communication (*EK* 7). This indicates how people delude themselves by believing that "they are communicating" while actually they do not communicate at all (Knowlson 170). Instead, they accelerate their otherness. The emptiness of what the doctor says, "May I be allowed to wish your Majesty a good day. And my very best wishes," to greet the dying king, is pointed out by Marguerite's words, "that's nothing now but a hollow formality" (*EK* 19).

The fact that Berenger's orders used to be obeyed implies some form of interaction. However, by making his subjects deaf to his commands, Ionesco shatters the illusion of what is presented as communication. Marie, with the desire to prove that Berenger is still the supreme power urges him to tell her to do something: "Give me an order! Command me, Sire, command me! I'll obey you" (*EK* 32). However, the fact that she fails to obey Berenger's order to come and kiss him as her arms fall to her side, and that she has "suddenly forgotten how to walk" cancels any possibility of communication between them (*EK* 33).

Ionesco compels Berenger to realise that his orders are his means to communicate with his subjects. Therefore, with the hope that maybe people from outside the palace will save him from death, he wishes to interact with them by begging them to help him. To his frustration, his cry to the external world "Help! Your king is going to die!" proves to be futile as "there is no one there," and "it's only the echo" which is "a bit late in answering" which is heard (*EK* 40). Because all his subjects are dead, there is nobody to understand and to respond his plea: "Who will give me his life? Who will give his life for the King's? His life for the good old King's, his life for the poor old King's?" (*EK* 41). Language not only betrays him in his endeavour to share his anxiety with the people whom he regards as his family but also with his ordinary subjects that are considered to be willing to sacrifice their lives for their king.

The culminating point of lack of communication in the play is through Berenger's final speech about his ginger cat. Since "there is no true listener," he is

"talking to himself or recollecting aloud his own memories in the presence of other speakers" (Misra 92). Before Berenger is ready to die, he remembers his cat that he used to feed, stroke and which ultimately "grew into the gentlest of cats" (*EK* 75). The attachment between the king and this animal was so great that the cat "only felt at home with" his owner and considered him as its family (*EK* 76). Having failed to express his disillusionment to his real family members, Berenger holds on to his memories of the cat which was tragically killed by the neighbour's dog:

> KING: How I missed him! He was so good and beautiful and wise, all the virtues. He loved me, he loved me. My poor little cat, my one and only cat. (*EK* 76).

At the end of the play, Berenger is left with only the image of a dead cat to rely on to understand and love its owner. The fact that he repeats that the cat loved him, reveals how lonely and abandoned he is.

Language fails to be the "straightforward guarantee of meaningful communication" (Bradby 74). According to Esslin "words cannot convey meanings because they leave out of account the personal associations they carry for each individual" (146). Observing the breakdown in her mighty husband, Marie cannot help calling him "poor little chap, poor little child" (*EK* 47). While Marie's words reflect how she now views him as he has lost his power and is reduced to a defenceless being, Berenger misinterprets hem:

> KING: Child! A child? Than I can make a fresh start! I want to start again. (*To* MARIE:) I want to be a baby and you can be my mother. Then they won't come for me. I still don't know my reading, writing, and arithmetic. I want to go back to school and be with all my playmates. What do two and two make? (*EK* 48)

Since his mind is occupied with finding a way of escaping death, Marie's likening him to a child sounds like a nice opportunity to avoid his fearful end. Thus, he immediately expresses his desire to be a child again who is in need of learning things from scratch and is offered the chance of experiencing the beauties of life.

The idea that language is deceptive is also in the play. Words are empty clichés. "We can never know what it really means, 'exit' or 'die'. Or if we think we do, our knowledge has deceived us" because "every thing is indefinable" (*EK* 51). Marie's suggestion to the king, "escape from difficulties and you will breathe again!" proposes an existence free from language and its deception as the only real one (*EK* 51).

The reason why Shakespeare made use of imagery is "to lend enhanced expression to the feeling of the character" (Clemen 2-3). In Shakespeare's play imagery intensifies the meaning. In *Exit the King*, Ionesco makes the objects speak for Berenger's disillusionment, as language is far from doing so. To compensate for the inadequacy of language, Ionesco's aim is to "exteriorize the anxiety" of his characters "through objects" (in Esslin 132). Thus, he tries to "make the stage settings speak; to translate the action into visual terms; to project visible images of fear, regret, remorse, alienation; to play with words" (in Esslin 132). His exploitation of the "rich resources of the stage" enables him to create "every element in his plays" as "a bearer of meaning" (Bradby 80).

Because Ionesco makes use of concrete images corresponding to his protagonist's mood, "instead of responding intellectually to his plays," he requires the audiences to "respond with our [their] senses (Bradby 76). The fact that the king's bedroom is full of cobwebs" which Juliette cannot remove as "they keep on coming back" functions as the visual representation of the king's old age and his unavoidable death (*EK* 19). Moreover, the crack on the palace wall and the flooding of the country also symbolise Berenger's end. The fact his crown and his throne are replaced by a wheel chair and a night cap add to the intensity of his disillusionment regarding his loss of power.

Guicharnaud views language as "Ionesco's first victim" because it fails to fulfil its function as a means of communication (219). Therefore, language in *Exit the King* disintegrates and functions as an alienation technique rather than urging the audience to identify with his characters. Richard's use of poetic language urges the audience to identify with him and understand the frustration he has been going through. Since expressing himself through words is a challenge that Berenger can hardly overcome, the audience cannot wholly grasp his disappointment by only relying on what he utters. Thus, in order to fully express his protagonist's agony,

Ionesco employs several visual images.

CHAPTER 3

FEAR OF LOSS OF IDENTITY

3.1. Shylock and the bond

In *The Merchant of Venice* Shylock's bond which "is motivated by racial hatred" is a tool for him to overcome humiliation and assert his superiority to his rival, Antonio (Leeming 74). However, the bond turns out to be a threat to his identity because at the end he is compelled to become a Christian. In *The Merchant*, Shylock makes the bond "an irritable joke against the anti-semitic laws of Venice" yet, it also becomes a peril to Shylock's identity (Leeming 74). Initially the bond disregards the friendship between the Jew and the merchant by making them business rivals. Later it imperils Shylock's identity as it poses a threat to the well-being of both his men and his friend, Antonio.

Both Shylocks fail to realise the fact that, because they are members of the minority, they should have acted much more carefully. Shylock's punishment in the Renaissance comedy only poses a threat to his own life and identity as he loses his properties and it is only he himself who will suffer the consequences of his conversion to Christianity. Wesker's Shylock, never thinks of the possibility that the bond may be claimed because he is encouraged by "both his natural vitality and his belief in the scheme of the things working for good" (*M* XXV). The entrapment whether to save Antonio or the Jews living in The Ghetto, is the major cause of his fear of loss of identity, which leads to disillusionment concerning his philosophy of life.

Different from Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*, the Jew in Wesker's play is not full of the desire for revenge but it is the laws which long for it. Although Tubal is highly conscious of how laws operate in Venice, Shylock seems to ignore them. Shylock advises Roderigues to be bold while he is drawing the plan for the new synagogue, "you don't need money to be bold. You need boldness!" (*M* 17). In the same manner, the Jew tries to appear bold when he decides to mock the laws. In addition to ridiculing the law, Shylock also aims to assert his wish to be treated as a human being who is capable of good intentions. He wishes to revolt against the prejudice that Jews are not to be trusted. However, as everything gets out of control, Shylock is desperate because he can no longer amend what he has done. Rivka, rebukes Shylock: "What you wanted to mock now mocks you! That is what your bond means" (*M* 58). While trying to assert his dignity, Shylock has chained his "friend's life to a mocking bond" (*M* 58).

In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare seems to suggest that laws of Venice will not be bent to save the life of a Venetian as everybody begs Shylock not to claim his bond. In the modern version, nevertheless, Wesker points out that the law will be bent "to save a citizen's life" (*M* 58). Moreover, through Rivka's comments Wesker indicates how little trust Jews have in the legal system. Rivka believes that the Venetians are ready to disregard the law to the extent that Antonio will be allowed to borrow some more money from Shylock, even if the deadline for repayment is over. Shylock would not care about the bending of the law, if it were not a threat to the lives of the people in the Ghetto. Jews object to any extension of the rules fearing that "having bent the law for" them, "how often will they [Venetians] bend it for themselves" (*M* 58). Any kind of reinterpretation of the legal system will definitely cause new uncertainties and insecurities for the Jewish population, especially as far as their identities are concerned.

When Shylock and Antonio talk about the danger they are facing, the Jew is terrified with his act: "Oh friend! What have I done to you?" (*M* 62). Despite the threat posed to his life, Antonio does not react against Shylock's decision of not bending the law in order not to "set a precedent" (*M* 62). They promise each other to be silent during the trial.

For the first time in the play Shylock is observed to be very depressed and pessimistic as his trust in man's goodness is replaced with contempt: "I am

sometimes horrified by the passion of my contempt for men" (*M* 63). His contempt emerges from the "pity for their [Venetians'] stupidities, compassion for their frailties, excuses for their cruelties" (*M* 63). He knows that it is very easy for the Venetian people to find some kind of an excuse for every wrong they do. It is only now that he realises that books also include some information about the dark and wicked side of the human history: "It is as though those books of mine have spoken too much, too long; the massacres by kings, the deathly little spites of serfs, the oppressive jealousies and hurts of scholars, who had more learning and wisdom" (*M* 63). It is difficult for him to find something positive and pleasing about human nature and life. He fears that the number of books which "record men's terrible deeds" will be more than the ones "on their magnificence" so he avoids talking more about this (*M* 64).

Only the innocence and naivety of children make him happy as they have not been taught about the discrimination in the society. Shylock can escape his otherness when he is with them and is filled with hope of life:

> SHYLOCK. Children warm me in the streets. They don't cry out 'Shylock Old Jew' then. No, they skip at my side and hold my hand, on those days I walk so upright, like a young man, and I feel myself respected and loved. An I love myself too. (*M* 64)

The warmth and sincerity Shylock enjoys when he is together with children is one of the rare events when he is valued for his humanity. He is able to experience the "the feeling … that I [he] forms totality" when he sees his reflection as a human being in the eyes of the children for whom prejudice signify nothing (Bakhtin in Todorov 95). Being recognised as a man fills his heart with joy of life and makes him recover his spiritual youth.

Before he is totally ruined by the laws of Venice, the last time Shylock is seen to be happy is upon hearing that "the contract is not binding" (*M* 78):

> SHYLOCK. (*stunned, moves first to embrace* ANTONIO). Thank God! Thank God! Of course! Idiots! Cut flesh draws blood. No blood no flesh. Ah Antonio, how could such a simple fact escape us? (*M* 78)

Unlike Shakespeare's Shylock, the Jew in Wesker's play is pleased to learn that he will not have to have his bond and embraces his friend.

Wesker's portrayal of Shylock at the end of *The Merchant* differs a lot from his portrayal at the beginning. His involvement in the bond, transforms the lively and loving Shylock into a disillusioned man about the way he is perceived by the society since he is filled with the fear of loss of identity.

3.2. Berenger and Death

Death is the most important element that disillusions both Richard and Berenger. While Richard acknowledges death as the greatest leveller that abolishes all class distinctions, Berenger tries every possible means to escape it. As a result of their othering process, they become more disillusioned bout their identities and their lives. Thus, when they suddenly lose their crowns, that is their power, they have difficulty in coping with their new status. Richard begins to question himself when he realises the danger of being abdicated. Similarly, imminent death functions as the greatest disillusioning element for Berenger, which encourages him to question his life and his identity. Yet, Ionesco's play "is concerned primarily not with the fact of death, but with the *manner* in which Berenger faces up to its certainty and its imminence" (Knowlson 183). Berenger, from the very beginning "is caught up in an irreversible running-down process" that he cannot possibly control (Knowlson 183).

In *Richard II*, Shakespeare discusses the idea of death both in symbolic and literal levels. However, the playwright is more concerned with the destructive effects of his protagonist's symbolic death, that is his dethronement, on Richard. At the beginning, Richard regards himself immune to death so he is indifferent to the death of other people. As in the example of Gaunt's death, Richard inconsiderately and ruthlessly wishes him to be death as soon as possible: "Now put it, God, in the physician's mind / To help him to his grave immediately (*RII* 1.4. 58-59). However, he is unblinded about death when he himself perceives it as a peril. As Jan Kott, suggests Shakespeare in his history plays dramatises the lives of kings "everyone of whom is an executioner, and a victim, in return" (17). Richard is highly conscious that the path to the crown demands the lives of a lot of people as he himself killed

many to become the king. Now it is his turn to be victimised by the threat of death as Bullingbrook is aiming for the crown. He confesses his fear: "Our [his] lands, our [his] lives and all are Bullingbrook's" (*RII* 3.2.151). His words that "nothing we [he] can call our [his] own but death" reveals that neither his status nor his life belongs to him (*RII* 3.2.151-152). All he has is his death.

His disillusionment is very obvious in his speech which is "a long meditation upon death and the transitoriness of all earthly things" (Clemen 56). He confesses his delusion of being eager "To monarchies, be feared and kill with looks, / Infusing him with self and vain conceit / As if this flesh which walls about our life / Were brass impregnable, and humoured" (*RII* 3.2165-168). As Richard enjoys his status as the king, he ignores the fact that he is only a human being whose body is not immune to death. While reflecting on the ever-presence of death, he "conjures up an image of a character sitting in the court of his own crown, waiting to kill him" (Scott 74). He resembles death to an antic that dwells "within the hollow crown" that "rounds the mortal temples of a king" (*RII* 3.2.160-161). Death is the king enjoying his sovereignty in "his court," where "the antic sits / Scoffing his state and grinning at his [Richard's] pomp, / Allow him [Richard] a breath, a little scene" (*RII* 3.2 162-164). Richard accepts death as the only supreme ruler whose everlasting reign makes Richard scorn his supremacy. With its little pin, death invades the Richard's well-protected "castle wall" and says "farewell king!" (*R II* 3.2.169-170).

Shakespeare points out that death is the greatest leveller that abolishes all the class distinctions. Thus, Richard's fear of loss of identity is intensified with his recognition that he is an ordinary human being as he says: "I live with bread like you, feel want, / Taste grief, need friends. Subjected thus, / How can you say to me I am a king?" (*R II* 3.2.175-177). Richard's language depicts "the picture of the medieval dance of death, coming to commoner or king alike" (Scott 75). Without discriminating between the kings and the slaves, it comes to all. Richard regards himself no different from the people whom he used to call his subjects. Thus, he reveals the absurdity of conventions which demand respect and obedience to the king. Richard, having been disillusioned about his true character, asks people "mock not flesh and blood / With solemn reverence. Throw away respect, / Tradition, form and ceremonious duty" (*R II* 3.2.171-173). At the end of his famous speech, he understands the absurdity of regarding himself as superior to the people

around him and having the right to control their lives when nothing but death matters.

Richard fears losing his identity as he acknowledges his commonness. Berenger is wrapped in a similar anxiety as the idea that death victimises even the most powerful ones is also emphasised in *Exit the King*. Berenger's commonplace reaction to other people's death echoes Richards' as Ionesco's king says "they were going to die one day, anyway" (*EK* 47). Marguerite complains that he was rather indifferent to death when he ordered the execution of even his very close relatives: "I tell you, you had my parents butchered, your own brothers, your rivals, our cousins and grate-grandcousins, and all their families, friends and cattle. You massacred the lot and scorched all their lands" (*EK* 47). Nobody could question the king's authority for he was "the law" and "even above the law" (*EK* 47). Thus, his excuse for killing so many people "for reasons of State" was never doubted (*EK* 47). However, as he is informed about his own death, his carefree approach to it is replaced with anguish: "I don't want to die. Please don't let me die! Be kind to me, all of you, don't let me die. I don't want to" (*EK* 35).

Towards the end of *Richard II*, Shakespeare suggests that Richard's disillusionment is so painful an unbearable for him that death is almost a reward, which saves him from his distress. The reason why Richard is willing for his physical abdication is that "traditional man accepted death as a moment of transition, a mid-point between Time and Eternity" (Misra 66). Although Richard faces the reality that he is no longer protected by God, as a character in a Renaissance play, he still has faith in a supreme creator. For Richard, religion offered some explanations about the human existence and it made him part "of a real community" that is the believers (Esslin 400). His life in this world is only a prerequisite for his eternal life which meant being rewarded in heaven or punished in hell.

What disillusions Richard about his mortality is his abdication, whereas Berenger has to cope with the threat of death without losing his title because Ionesco aims to "ridicule the very notion of heroic posturing" (Scott 76). In *Exit the King*, there is no hint about the existence of a God. Berenger's fear of loss of identity is very intense as "there is no prospect of after-life, and no alternative illusions to serve as a surrogate for God" (Misra 66). Thus, death for Ionesco's king

means non-existence. What is very challenging for Berenger is that "in the absence of such faith the individual self cannot come to terms with death, or non-existence, and so he struggles somehow to transcend it in his consciousness" (Misra 66). Berenger's all attempts to avoid accepting death can be explained with his fear of non-existence.

The idea that "god is dead, above all, to the masses" made the man "live from day to day" and lose his "contact with the basic facts – and mysteries – of the human condition" that relieved the traditional man from the fear of death (Esslin 400). Hence, people in the modern world are reduced to "just atoms in an atomized society" (Esslin 400). Because of not knowing what awaits him after death, Berenger chooses to ignore it and indulge himself in worldly pleasures as he "never looked ahead, he's always lived from day to day, like most people" (*EK* 37). He can only prove his existence by prolonging his life and denying death that is why he has been "too much alive" (*EK* 37).

Ionesco explains that when writing *Exit the King*, he was motivated by idea of putting himself "in the position of someone to whom one would say: "You are going to die tonight" (in Jacquart 46). Moreover, he adds that "No society has been able to deliver us from the pain of living, from our fear of death, out thirst for the absolute" (in Esslin 129-130). Knowing that life is very short is what makes living unbearable. Thus, it is very natural for man to wish for immortality. Marguerite criticises Berenger for having lived his life in a "state of ignorance" and having developed a taste for living. However**,** Ionesco explains the king's desire for immortality in the following words: "We come into the world crying, we end up loving the world and then we no longer want to leave it. We are trapped. It is the mortal condition which is unsatisfying … It is having limitations that distresses me" (in Jacquart 46). Berenger as Ionesco's protagonist is the personification of man's desire to be immortal as well as the visual representation of entrapment on the stage. Berenger tries to express how it feels to be dying:

> KING: When faced with death, even a little and puts up a fight. Suddenly he is all alone, torn from his companions. In him, too, the universe flickers out. It's not natural to die, because no one ever wants to. I want to exist. (*EK* 57)

Berenger wishes to communicate his disillusionment about who he is. He fights against death because he sees it as unnatural. He regrets being alone and the fact that nobody understands him. As Knowlson suggests "Berenger is Everyman in the sense that he must die," he reveals the universal aspect of man in that everybody desires to be immortal (183). Bradby suggests that in his plays Ionesco portrays "an individual crushed by inhuman forces from outside that threaten to invade or annihilate him" (79). In *Exit the King* death is the inhuman threat which overwhelms the protagonist and snatches away his identity forever.

CHAPTER 4

NON-BEING

4.1. Disintegration of relationships in *The Merchant*

4.1.Shylock and the others

The way Shakespeare constructs his play, brings all characters together while they isolate Shylock as the other. It is their discontent with the Jew that binds them together. In Wesker's play, however, Shylock's personality has a disillusioning effect on the people that interact with him. Shakespeare in his comedy aims to entertain people; thus, the follies of his characters like Bassanio, Lorenzo and Jessica are not very explicitly depicted. Wesker elaborates on the hints that Shakespeare embedded in his play to reveal the real natures of these characters. He shatters the notion of ideal friendship symbolised by Antonio and Bassanio. In addition, the modern dramatists shows that there is no prospect of happiness for Jessica and Lorenzo as the young man cannot free himself of the prejudice against the Jewish race and is far from meeting Jessica's expectations of a husband.

The relationship between Antonio and Bassanio has been one of the controversial issues in *The Merchant of Venice*. While some critics view them as the representatives of the idealized form of friendship, some others think that Bassanio is not very sincere to his best friend but is rather a person seeking his own pursuits. One of the most frequent techniques that Wesker employs when rewriting is exploring the relationships among characters in detail. Therefore, he elaborates on the idea that Bassanio is a self-centred figure. In order to display the real nature of

his character, the modern dramatist introduces a godfather and a godson relationship between them. Instead of the loyalty of friendship, what brings them together is only a sense of responsibility that the merchant feels for the good old days he shared with Bassanio's father.

Shakespeare creates Antonio and Bassanio as exemplary friends who are ready to sacrifice their lives for one another. Bassanio is introduced as the merchant's "most noble kinsman," "better company," and one of the " worthier friends" (*MV* 1.1.57-61**)**. However, a careful analysis reveals that beneath this ideal representation, there are some ironic statements that mock their friendship.

In *The Merchant of Venice*, Antonio is the most difficult character to understand. What makes him such a complex figure is his melancholic nature and his relationship with Bassanio, which "has very special facets" that "need a special interpretation" (Midgley 199). The thing that is striking in the merchant is the way Shakespeare depicts "his all-absorbing love for Bassanio" and "his complete lack of interest in women" when most of the characters are involved in searching for mates (Midgley 199).

Despite the foregrounded representation of ideal friendship between Antonio and Bassanio Shakespeare implies that Bassanio sees his friend as "a warranty / To unburden all my [his] plots and purposes / How to get clear of all debts I owe" (*MV* 1.1.130-133). Antonio, on the other hand, is blind to his friend's self-centred nature and is ready to do everything possible for his welfare when he says "be assured / My purse, my person my extremest means / Lie unlocked to your occasions" (*MV* 1.1.136-138). W. H. Auden observes that "Antonio's continual generosity has encouraged Bassanio in his spendthrift habits (86). Bassanio seems to be one of those people whose attitude towards money is that of a child; it will somehow always appear by magic when needed" (Auden 86). Bassanio never considers that "bankruptcy is a real possibility in life" (Auden 86). Thus, he is convinced that in case of financial difficulty "thanks to the ever-opened purse of his friend," Antonio he may easily find financial support (Auden 86).

The friendship between Antonio and Bassanio is spoiled with the news that Antonio's life is threatened by Shylock's bond. Even at the time of great distress, Antonio remains devoted to his friend by clearing Bassanio of any debts to him. All he wants is Bassanio's arrival "to see me [him] pay his debt, to him (*MV* 3.3.36).

Midgley states that during the trial scene Antonio admits defeat because he views death as "his greatest," and the "last opportunity to show his love, and to escape from the world where his part is a sad one" (202). Although Bassanio offers his own "flesh, blood, bones and all, / Ere thou [Antonio] shalt lose one drop of blood," he utters these words with the hope that the doctor expected from Padua will save his friend (*MV* 4.1.112-113). Bassanio tries to amend his mistake of putting Antonio's life at risk, by offering to pay twice the amount that Antonio owes to Shylock. However, Bassanio's generosity is undermined with the fact that it is not even his money but his wife's that he is proposing. To save one of his victims, Bassanio is ready to abuse another person, Portia. His following words clearly reflect his real character:

> BASSANIO. Antonio, I am married to a wife
> Which is as dear to me as life itself;
> But life itself, my wife and all the world,
> Are not with me esteemed above thy life.
> I would lose all, ay, sacrifice them all
> Here to this devil, to deliver you. (*MV* 4.1.279-283)

He is hypocritical as it is always somebody else whom he sacrifices to amend his follies. He returns back to Venice to save Antonio, however, it is ironic that his wife in disguise eventually saves his friend. He is willing to give up everything but his own life for Antonio, who is actually confronting death because of his inconsiderate behaviour.

With the last scene of *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare aims to depict a victorious atmosphere which all the characters seem to enjoy. According to Auden nevertheless, there is a problem with the ending of the play. When the play is produced, a stage director "is faced with the awkward problem of what to do with Antonio in the last act" (Auden 88). As Shylock is defeated and Bassanio is about to get married, "Antonio, the real hero of the play, has no further dramatic function" (Auden 88). While everybody seems to take pleasure in the company of his or her partner, Antonio still feels isolated and out of place. Bassanio has been regarding him as a means of approaching Portia, that is true wealth; now he no longer needs Antonio to support him. Apart from the realisation that being a tradesman involves

a lot of threats, he fails to express the real source of his disappointment in life along with recognising and identifying the follies in Bassanio's personality.

In *The Merchant*, Bassanio is no longer Antonio's best friend for whom he is ready to sacrifice his life but it is an imposed family duty that brings them together since the young man is the merchant's godson. The thing that disturbs Antonio very much is being supposed to teach his godson how to be wise when he himself is questioning his identity and life. Being the godfather, he sees teaching Bassanio wisdom and "Tricks of the trade? Contacts?" as his major responsibility, which is something that he finds very ridiculous (*M* 19). As he does not believe he is wise, he makes fun of this virtue:

> ANTONIO. Here, Bassanio, a little piece of wisdom, here, in my pocket. (*Pause, mock pomp.*) I am now going to be wise! (*Pause. Then as if calling a dog.*) Here, wisdom, here boy. Sit. Still. Quiet now. There Bassanio, sits wisdom. (*M* 6)

His attitude clearly indicates that wisdom cannot be taught and he rejects the responsibility of godfathership. However, such a denial of his duty towards his godson causes some uneasiness in him for he cannot help accusing himself for being "an ungodly man" who "should never have had godsons" (*M* 6). Antonio denies all the role of godfathership and being religious can attribute to him: "I may be your godfather, Bassanio, but I'm not a religious man" (*M* 6-7).

Prior to mentioning the real cause of his arrival to Venice, Bassanio tries to idealise Antonio through the praise that he has heard from his father: "He spoke of little else. What he shared with you, I shared. What happened between you, I saw happen. If I did wrong he'd say, your godfather would not approve of that" (*M* 18). He even pronounces that he has been brought up in the way Antonio would approve of. The young man is resentful when he is faced with Antonio's diffidence in his response to Bassanio's praise: "They call him God" (*M* 18). However, Bassanio is well armed against such responses by saying that "I hate arriving behind letters of recommendation, it's so undignified" (*M* 19). He also manages to gain Antonio's trust by saying, "Forgive me, sir. You know nothing of me. I'll go. But I'll find ways of making myself known to you, and useful, and in the coming moths I'll try

to earn your trust" (*M* 18-19). Antonio states that his reserved attitude is due to his fear of "opportunists and women" (*M* 19). The merchant is not yet aware that he has already been trapped by one of these opportunists as Bassanio is solely interested in his money.

Contrary to what Antonio expects, Bassanio has not come to learn about trade. His goal is to find the money necessary to woo Portia. At this point what makes Wesker's Bassanio different from that of Shakespeare's is that this is the first time he asks a favour from Antonio. That is why the young man is highly embarrassed for having to ask for money. Just like Shakespeare's Antonio, Wesker's Antonio does not have the financial means to support his godson as he utters similar words: "has ships to sea but no cash to hand. More, I plan retirement, and all my wealth lies in their cargoes" (*M* 20). Yet, he has one special friend that he can trust, Shylock.

The merchant expresses his willingness to help the young man. However, he is still not sure about whether his godson really deserves it or not. Therefore, when Bassanio says that "you won't regret this trust, Signor," Antonio's reply is quite restrained "I hope to God I do not" (*M* 21). What these two characters display in this scene shows that their relationship can never be turned into the idealised form of friendship in Shakespeare's play. Talking to Shylock, Antonio is worried that "there was too much calculation in" Bassanio, while the young man is disturbed by the merchant's close interaction with the minority community, "They were all Jews! His friends!" (*TM* 26).

Antonio's and Bassanio's relationship can be termed as a business deal; upon hearing the news about the merchant's misfortune concerning the ships, the godson's initial reaction is "I warned him! A Jew to be trusted?" (*M* 65). What makes him return to Venice when he has guaranteed a marriage to Portia is that "Antonio will expect me [him] to be near him while the court conducts its inquiries" (*M* 66). The fact that he avoids making further comments, makes it obvious that he has used Antonio only as a monetary means to achieve his goal. Unlike the Bassanio in *The Merchant of Venice*, he is no longer the fiery friend who seems ready to sacrifice himself to save the merchant.

During the trial, in an attempt to appear a devoted godson, Bassanio at first tries attacking the Jew. Scorning the evil in Shylock, "Look at that scowl. Have you ever seen such meanness in a face before?"; he accuses him of having vicious

intentions, "He was your friend! You boasted a gentile for a friend" (*M* 71). Later, however, he assumes quite a passive role and does not even talk. Since Wesker's Portia is not a rich lady, Bassanio neither has the means to repay the loan, nor the courage to sacrifice his life for his godfather. As Bassanio remains quiet most of the time, Lorenzo appears more dominant and condemning. He appears to defend Antonio with the aim of saving one fellow citizen, yet his real intention is to make Venice a city free from Jews. The fact that during the trial scene Bassanio avoids interfering in any of the discussions that take place between Lorenzo and Antonio further reveals his cunning nature. For fear of spoiling his relationship with the merchant and Lorenzo, he does not utter a word. In addition, because any words that he says to show that he is on Antonio's side would mean siding with the Jew as well, he simply watches the course of events.

Similar to Shakespeare's play it is Portia who saves Antonio, which is the initiation of a new friendship for both sides. Different from *The Merchant of Venice*, Wesker's last scene does not give importance to Bassanio. Among the three characters, Bassanio seems to be the one out of place. There is not even an exchange of words between the godfather and the godson. Moreover, Wesker points out that Bassanio does not deserve a sophisticated and determined person like Portia as a wife. Instead of her prospective husband, the young woman is more interested in Antonio as she comments: "I'm so grateful you stayed, Signor Querini. These two weeks have been made bearable, and I've found a new friend" (*M* 83). Portia's character and determination makes the merchant regret his life: "I've found a woman who's made me mourn my youth … you, blossoming with purpose, reminding me of a barren life" (*M* 83). Having learnt Bassanio's real nature, Antonio is worried about Portia's future, yet she assures him that there is nothing to be afraid of as she is ready to assert her character and live her life as she wishes.

The disintegration of relationships between Antonio and Bassanio may not be clearly presented in *The Merchant of Venice*. However, Shakespeare's representation of their relationship inspires Wesker to work more on Bassanio's real nature and the motives behind his interaction with Antonio.

In *The Merchant of Venice*, the love affair between Jessica and Lorenzo is set against the monetary and sterile world of Shylock. Shakespeare's depiction of their relationship seems to idealise their feelings. While Jessica appears to be the young

lady who is exposed to her father's tyranny, Lorenzo is the romantic hero ready to save and marry the girl. Although the Jewess suggests that "love is blind, and lovers cannot see / The pretty follies that themselves commit," a closer look reveals that actually their relationship is based upon mutual benefit and exploitation (*MV* 2.6.37-38). Wesker's play suggests that the sole reason why Jessica is attracted to Lorenzo is her admiration for his passionate nature. Although being dominated by Shylock also encourages Wesker's Jewess to flee from home, she has totally different expectations from marriage and life. However, as she is unblended with Lorenzo's real character, their relationship starts to disintegrate.

What draws Jessica to the young man in Shakespeare's comedy is the chance of escaping from the oppression at home. Shakespeare avoids giving any background information about how their relationship has started. Nevertheless, Lorenzo's words, imply that Jessica is the one who organises the flight, "She hath directed / How I [he] shall take her from her father's house, / What gold and jewels she is furnished with" (*MV* 2.5.29-31). Because of the influence of the "magic spell" of "the good qualities" like "beauty, kindness, generosity, and nobility of heart and manners," one is willing "to overlook faults in a romantic person" (Firenze 148). The foregrounded element of love seems to dominate the stage, which is why the fact that Jessica's happiness highly depends on her father's money is ignored. During the elopement scene, Shakespeare emphasises the role of money through Jessica's references to Shylock's ducats. In Act 2, Scene 3, for example, she wants Lorenzo to "catch" a "casket," which "is worth the pains" (*MV* 2.3.34). Similarly, just as she is about to go out of the house, she goes back to "gild myself [herself] / With some moe ducats" (*MV* 2.6.50-51). The way she acts indicates that she feels the need to offer a monetary compensation for Lorenzo's sacrifice, marrying a Jewess. If she were sure that money was not important for her prospective husband, she would not go into the trouble of stealing valuable possessions from her father.

Lorenzo's personal attributes like keenness on poetry and music creates the image of an ideal lover. Yet, this ideal representation is undermined by the calculating nature of "an opportunist and money hunter" (Firenze 148). What draws Antonio closer to Jessica is the fact that the Jewess' flight with her father's money will ensure Lorenzo's lifelong economic satisfaction. Living in a society where

Jews are considered as second-class citizens, he should have valid reasons to risk his reputation as a Venetian gentleman. Firenze, emphasises that Lorenzo's choice of Jewess as a wife is not "to show everyone that for him no barriers exist between these two religions" (148). If Jessica had not been the daughter of a rich Jew, and if she had refused to be converted to Christianity, "probably Lorenzo would not have run the risk of marrying a woman whose religion and race would have always caused him problems" (Firenze 148).

With Jessica's and Lorenzo's arrival in Belmont, Shakespeare creates the illusion of a happily married young couple who have been successful in their flight. However, this optimistic mood soon changes, with the introduction of Lancelot's words. The way Lancelot reflects on their marriage, represents how the general public approaches the marriage of a Christian and Jewess. That Jews are a doomed nation is a widespread idea in Venice. Therefore, any attempt to seek salvation through conversion to Christianity is in vain. Thinking that a marriage to Lorenzo will clear her off her sins, Jessica says: "I shall be saved by my husband; he hath made me a Christian" (*MV* 3.5.15). Lancelot rebukes that "this making of Christians will raise the price of hogs," and if everybody starts "to be pork eaters" the price of the pork will raise" (*MV* 3.5.17-19). Shakespeare points out that Jessica belongs neither to the Jewish nor to the Christian communities. In the play Jessica's conversion seems to be idealised, yet Shakespeare's introduction of a more realistic point of view cannot be disregarded. The playwright stresses that "there is no mercy for me [Jessica] in heaven" for she is "a Jew's daughter" (*MV* 3.5.26-27). Moreover, Lorenzo ceases to be a "good member of the commonwealth" (*MV* 3.5.27-28). Unlike the highly emphasised image of Christian charity and benevolence, Venetians dislike any conversion to Christianity on material concerns. Because "converting Jews to Christians" raises the "price of pork," there will be more people who will feed on pork (*MV* 3.5.28-29).

Jessica and Lorenzo are lovers in a comedy. Despite the dark future implied in Lancelot's words, at the end they are united. According to Yaffe, Lorenzo's "remedy" for the conflict which arises from their different religious backgrounds is music (69). Lorenzo as the poet inspired by love encourages Jessica to listen to sweet music which binds all living creatures together.

In *The Merchant of Venice*, Jessica's marriage to Lorenzo is motivated by the desire to be saved from her father's tyranny and to guarantee reverence though her conversion to Christianity. Despite the passionate words that Jessica and Lorenzo exchange in the Renaissance comedy, in the modern interpretation the lovers seem to be entrapped in confusion concerning their feelings towards each other. Compared to the lovers in Shakespeare's comedy, the lovers in *The Merchant* appear more reserved.

What attracts Jessica to Lorenzo is his poetry. Having listened to Lorenzo's poem 'The Ruins of the Nation's Heart,' Jessica is so much filled with admiration that she "even praised" him (*M* 28). She is moved by the idea of call for simplicity in his poem, but through Shylock's interpretation of Lorenzo's character, Wesker introduces another aspect of the young man's personality. As the Jew puts it his daughter really liked the poem "because it called for simplicity," but she fails to notice that Lorenzo's poetry is actually "a murky thing, full of other people's philosophy" (*M* 22). Wesker portrays Jessica as a sophisticated person who is highly critical of the follies she witnesses around her. Yet, the reason why she cannot see through Lorenzo is her wish to escape from Shylock's oppression. Just like Shakespeare's Jessica, Wesker's heroine sees the prospect of marriage to Lorenzo as an escape from her father's house. However, her choice of a Christian husband is not due to a concern for avoiding eternal damnation, she wishes to escape her otherness and to be assimilated. In addition to admiring Lorenzo for his poetry, she also idealises his character, which she thinks represents everything that Shylock lacks. Because Jessica rebels against her father's domination and his thirst for learning, she finds it easy to identify with another rebel, Lorenzo. Wilcher argues that Lorenzo's display of "a self-righteous iconoclasm that is superficially attractive to Jessica" (121).

Quite different from Shakespeare's Lorenzo, Wesker's character appears rather uncertain about his feelings for Jessica. When asked whether he is in love with the Jewess, he remarks: "Love? Who knows about love? She admired the poem and those who admire us must have merit we think. Can that be love? Respect perhaps" (*M* 28). He does not utter passionate words confessing his love for Jessica. Instead, he declares how much he enjoys the idea of being admired and respected by the young girl. Her high regard of him appeals to his ego, which appeals to his

self-esteem. As a man of contradictions, he feels "passionate appetites within" himself but he cannot decide where to direct his energy (*M* 28). Moreover, he is rather indecisive in nature as he admits: "My nature can't decide itself" (*M* 28). He generally scorns power but at the same time is desperately in need of it "to wipe out the offence" (*M* 28). To the question where power lies he cannot decide whether power resides "in trade or moral principle" (*M* 28).

Another thing that unites Jessica and Lorenzo is their contempt for Shylock. While Jessica is unhappy with the way her father treats her, Lorenzo cannot stand Shylock's practice of usury. As opposed to the Jew's appreciation of knowledge, Lorenzo favours ignorance and simplicity for he argues that "a man can be strong and happy with no knowledge, no art" (*M* 72). He likes Jessica also because she cannot stand her father's sin that is "intellectual pride" (*TM* 28). He thinks she possesses just the opposite qualities of her father.

Wesker makes use of the same elements during the elopement scene as Shakespeare does, yet he reinterprets them in accordance with Jessica's character. Wesker's Jessica has valid reasons for running away from home but displays a more sensible attitude concerning her elopement and its consequences. Unlike Jessica in the Renaissance comedy, the modern one is ashamed of her act of elopement as she says "I'm frightened and I'm ashamed, so I'm trembling" (*M* 54). Although Wesker's Jewess longs for belonging to the larger Venetian community, she is afraid and she trembles because "the decision to break away" and being "cut off" is difficult to acknowledge for her (*M* 55). Wesker's depiction of Jessica points out the difficulty and pain of cutting off one's ties with the community one is born into and brought up in. There is also the uncertainty of whether the new community would ascertain a sense of belonging. Moreover, by saying "I've spent so much … It's cost so much," she expresses her concern for the money she has spent. While Jessica in Shakespeare's comedy controlled the elopement, Wesker's Jessica feels "drained" and her "reason is numb" (*M* 55). Feeling rather discontent with her act, she has difficulty in thinking logically and asks Lorenzo to organize everything for the elopement.

The lovers' first kiss encourages Jessica to believe that she "was born to be the twin to" Lorenzo (*M* 55). Later, nevertheless, this excitement is replaced with anxiety. Jessica, knowing the real implications of the bond, objects to both

Lorenzo's and Bassanio's accusing Shylock of threatening the life of a Venetian. Though she has had some quarrels with her father, she defends him against any ungrounded accusation. Addressing Lorenzo and Bassanio she says: "You misrepresent the bond. Whatever else my father's flaws you know the bond had mockery not malice in it" (*M* 65). Her remark reveals that she has started to view Shylock as a human being possessing both positive and negative qualities. Jessica's initial discontent with what she has done grows so intense that she needs Lorenzo's confirmation about her flight with him. Being aware of the threat awaiting her father, she now doubts what she has done:

> JESSICA. Oh do, Lorenzo, do tell me about myself, what I've done. Make sense of my actions for me. It seemed such a natural, inevitable thing to do. And now this bond, this wretched stupid bond threatens, threatens. (*M* 66)

However, what starts as a soothing conversation ends in greater controversies. Lorenzo, believing in the superiority of Christianity to the doomed race, offers the Jews a safe way to happiness, "But there are always survivors. I will make you a wife, a woman, and a Christian" (*M* 67). Lorenzo's wish enables her to realise that even her prospective husband is full of prejudice against her race. In reply to his words that "there's a great deal of unthreading to do," she simply says: "Yes, I see there is" (*M* 68). Lorenzo may still imply Jessica's conversion in order to undo the misfortunes she has had, whereas she seems to refer to the efforts required to change the public's dogmatic approach to Jews. He is no longer the man she used to admire as she confesses:

> JESSICA. I loved his questioning the wisdom of age, his clamouring to give youth its voice, his contempt for what men wrote in books. His strength, his seriousness, his devotion. I loved, I suppose, escape from oppressive expectations. (*M* 68)

Contrary to what Shakespeare offers in his play, Jessica in *The Merchant*, goes through a bitter realisation making her see the follies not only in Lorenzo's character but also in hers. In addition to admitting that all positive qualities that she

admired in him has been mere pretence, she also declares that she has actually never loved him, but has seen him as a chance of running away from Shylock's expectations from her. According to Leeming, Jessica finally understands "that her romance has been mere romancing" (76). Her idealisation of Lorenzo ends up in frustration. It is only when it is too late, that she admits "his strength is arrogance, his seriousness is pedantry, his devotion is frenzy"(*M* 68). Consequently, she is "confused and drained and without ground beneath" her feet" (*M* 68). With her flight, she wanted to escape being the other in her father's house but she ends up being the other in her relationship with Lorenzo.

At the end of the play, similar to Shakespeare's heroine, Jessica in *The Merchant*, is also disillusioned. Jessica in the Renaissance comedy has to live with the fact that she belongs to neither the Jewish nor the Christian community. Wesker's heroine, on the other hand, realises that she has deceived herself concerning Lorenzo's character. From what Portia remarks it is understood that, rather than marrying Lorenzo, Jessica may go to Jerusalem to live with her father, which also reveals her disillusionment of Shylock's treatment of her. Wesker suggests that Jessica's otherness cannot be overcome by a marriage to a Christian and that in a larger context, one cannot overcome one's otherness by simply changing camps.

4.2. Disintegration of relationships in *Exit the King*

4.2.1. Berenger and the others

The disintegration of relationships in *Richard II* and *Exit the King* is caused by the othering process that both Richard and Berenger go through. It is mostly the existence of the other characters that made the kings feel superior and deceive themselves that being a king they have an identity to rely on. As their sovereignty that is the discriminative power vanishes, they are no different from their subjects thus they are no longer obeyed or respected.

Shakespeare clearly presents how people's respect and reverence to one is closely related with that person's position. Even before losing his crown,

Shakespeare foreshadows the coming humiliation Richard will be exposed to. Lord Northumberland is one of the most important characters who implies that Richard's reign is to end soon. The Lord sides with Bullingbrook in his fight against Richard so he avoids curtsey in making a reverence in the king's presence, as Richard observes: "we thought ourselves thy lawful king. / And if we be, how dare thy joints forget /To pay their awful duty to our presence? (*RII* 3.3. 72-75).

Much more intense frustration and degradation awaits Richard as he arrives in London for the coronation of Bullingbrook. York reflects on the disintegration of the relationship between Richard and his subjects by referring to Shakespeare's famous metaphor that the world is a stage. York resembles Richard and Bullingbrook to actors and the public to audience. Bullingbrook as the new king is the "well-graced actor" and is shown respect as people idly bend their eyes on him (*RII* 5.2.24). Richard, on the other hand sees contempt in their eyes, but they scowl on him. Instead of meeting him with cheers, "No man cried 'God save him', / No joyful tongue gave him his welcome home, / But dust was thrown upon his sacred head" (*RII* 5.2.28-30). Having lost his status, Richard is no longer respected. The public discontent that John of Gaunt and the gardener previously commented upon in this scene turns into a visible representation of disrespect.

In *Exit the King* Berenger "is sorely tried" as his two wives pull him "in opposite directions" (Norrish 85). It is obvious from the very beginning of the play that his relationship with Marguerite has already disintegrated. In addition, that the guard no longer obeys him and the doctor only regards him as a medical case proves that his image no longer commands respect. However, it is Marie's incapability of saving him from death that frustrates him most.

Through Berenger's recollection of his memories with Marie, Ionesco depicts the king and the queen as devoted lovers: "In the morning we used to open our eyes at the very same moment … We used to think the same things at the same time. And you would finish a sentence I'd just started in my head" (*EK* 71). Berenger remembers the way they completed each other, yet Marie as his soul mate is unable to offer him any help as he faces his death. Love offers no consolation to the dying king. Ionesco chooses Marie as Berenger's most dedicated supporter who constantly strives to reassure him of his power and existence**.** According to Martin Esslin, in Ionesco's drama the characters can only bear "the futility and failure of

human existence …by self-delusion and the admiration of a doting, uncritical wife" (151). The relationship between Berenger and Marie may appear as love but it is only another deception to cope with the meaninglessness of life. Thus, Marie's understanding of love is far from saving the king from death because it is reduced to "sentimental superstition" (*EK* 32). Marie has to accept that her charm "no longer casts its spell over the King" (*EK* 67). With one last effort, she tries confessing her devotion to Berenger and reminding him of what he once felt for her. Addressing him, she says "You used to love me, you love me still, as I have always loved you" (*EK* 67). To her disappointment what she receives as a response is "I don't know why, but that doesn't help" (*EK* 67). The king is incapable of responding to her love as it is of no use when he is faced with death.

Esslin further observes that through the representation of their relationship, Ionesco "satirises the emptiness of polite conversation, the mechanical exchange of platitudes that might as well be spoken into the wind" (151-152). Marie's reference to conventional ideas about love such as "Love lifts you up, you let yourself go and fear lets go of you. The whole universe is one, everything lives again and the cup that was drained is full" is absurd and futile (*EK* 68). Ionesco rejects the possibility of escaping death by finding refuge in love. The reason why love fails them is that they have deceived themselves by calling their mutual dependence love. Berenger and Marie have been in need of each other to cope with their fear of non-existence. Berenger admits that his love for Marie was never real as he confesses: "I've always loved myself, at least I can still love myself, see myself, contemplate myself" (*EK* 72). Though being in love abolishes selfishness and self-centredness, Berenger is merely concerned with himself and totally ignores Marie. He even rejects her by saying that "Don't you ever come any nearer either. You frighten me with your pity" (*EK* 44). Although before Berenger dies, he pronounces Marie's name, "it now means nothing to the King" (*EK* 84). He repeats it "without understanding" because "like a parrot" he only utters "sounds that are dead" (*EK* 84).

For characters like Berenger and Marie being forgotten is parallel to non-existence. Thus, at the end of the play when Berenger can no longer resist death, Marie is alarmed to see the fact that her husband does not remember her and is leaving her behind. Her worry is not because of losing somebody she loves. Instead,

she fears confronting her non-being: “I’m nothing if he forgets me. I can’t go on living if I don’t exist in his disturbed heart” (*EK* 81). “If you forget me, if you abandon me, I no longer exist, I am nothing” (*EK* 82).

Love in *Exit the King* loses its value as it is transformed into an illusion to rely on in an attempt to avoid non-existence. As Berenger has no other choice but to accept death, he is disillusioned about love and he loses his touch with his wife who has been so affectionate and tender.

4.3. Awareness of non-being in *The Merchant*

In *The Merchant of Venice* Shakespeare does not devote much attention to how Shylock feels about the confiscation of his goods and his involuntary conversion to Christianity. He wants to be excused for he is not feeling well and leaves the court. Whether his silent retrieval is the sign of submission or the beginning of new conflicts is not very clear. Shakespeare’s Jew is disillusioned that both the society and its laws disregard him. Before the trial, he knew that he was the other, but now he is reduced to nobody. Wesker’s Shylock before realising that the bond is a threat to his identity, tends to close his eyes to the discrimination the Jewish race has been exposed to. He is filled with the aspiration of the unity among all citizens of Venice. During the trial scene his disillusionment in people reaches its peak. However, at the end of the trial scene, he is reminded of the fact that he is only a Jew whose otherness is symbolised with the “yellow hate” he has to wear (*M* 37). These events make him realise that all his efforts to assert his identity have been futile and he has been reduced to a non-being in the eyes of the Venetian society.

Shylock has decided not to give any explanations to the Doge so that he can avoid any accusation and condemnation against his race. Towards the end of the trial, Shylock, who has remained silent and patiently endured the charges against him, cannot stand Lorenzo’s rebuff of his humanity. Lorenzo utters his speech on Shylock’s humanity to confirm the Jew’s existence as a human being. However, Shylock revolts against such an attempt. Seeing that his all endeavour has failed, he just bursts out and defends himself: “I do not want apologies for my humanity.

Plead for me no special pleas. I will not have my humanity mocked and apologised for … My humanity is my right, not your bestowed and gracious privilege" (*M* 76-77). He points out that his race is treated as a readymade and constantly available excuse for the follies and frauds in the society along with any frustration the Venetians experience:

> SHYLOCK. Jew! Jew, Jew, Jew! I hear the name around and everywhere. Your wars go wrong, the Jew must be the cause of it; your economic systems crumble there the Jew must be; your wives get sick of you – a Jew will be an easy target for your sour frustrations. (*M* 77)

Throughout the play, Shylock has been a character, who has tried to overlook his otherness and be part of the society he lives in. Now, to his disappointment he has to acknowledge that all his attempts to undo the hatred towards his race have been in vain. Shylock's philosophy of life that "there is scheme of things which works for good" used to make him optimistic and hopeful about future (*M* 5). Though his friendship with Antonio proves that a Jew and a Christian can be loyal friends, the rest of the society fails to comprehend the innocent and naive side of their relationship. At the end, he has to confront the fact that it is not possible to shatter the dogmatic and prejudicial views and alter the attitudes of the Venetians who are convinced about the wicked nature of the Jewish race.

Graziano's comments on the reason why Shylock prefers being silent reveals the bigotry of the Christians. He argues that Shylock has been avoiding talking for fear that "the moment he opened his mouth he'd hang himself with his arrogance" (*M* 77). Shylock protests against this: " If we are silent we must be scheming, if we talk we are insolent," which shows that no matter what he does, people are armed against with prejudice towards him (*M* 77). Despite all these accusations, he denies uttering any explanations as he is well aware that nobody will understand the motives behind his bond: "I'll have my pound of flesh and not feel obliged to explain my whys and wherefores. Think what you will, you will think that in any case" (*M* 77). He no longer has the desire to communicate the good intentions behind his actions.

All Antonio's attempts to save his friend from the ungrounded accusations concerning Shylock's practice of usury fail to do so. Despite the fact that Portia does not have any knowledge about law, being an outsider in Venice, she can be more critical about the legal system. As a result, she is able to identify the follies in the bond by pointing out that it is neither possible to cut human flesh without shedding any blood nor cut exactly one pound of flesh. She resolves the case by saying that the bond "cannot be executed because torn flesh draws blood … [and] because precise weight cannot be achieved" (*M* 78).

Different from Shakespeare's Portia in disguise, the things that she can do are limited as she is unable to save Shylock from a symbolic death of losing his books. It was easy for Shylock to risk his life for Jews in Venice. However, losing his books is far more detrimental to his identity than simply being put to death. Yet, what is meant by property is quite distinct from the earlier comedy version of the play. There is no real threat to Shylock's life as the Doge offers mercy, yet the Jew has to abandon all his books. His final words reveal the kind of an illusionary life Shylock wanted to create for himself throughout the play. As his relationship with Antonio proves, religion has never been Shylock's concern in his strive to be part of the Venetian life. Striving to disregard his religious beliefs and focusing more on the humane aspect while trying to be part of the Venetian life, he has created a world which is not in touch with reality. Nevertheless, no matter how hard he has tried to escape from the fact that he is a member of an exploited community, at the end of the play he has to admit the bitter reality. He is not only defeated by the suffocating legal system, but also by life itself. He has always enjoyed reading books and forming his unique interpretations and reshaping his world view in accordance with what he has acquired. Unfortunately, what Shylock has learned in his books about being critical and questioning of dogmas, does not help him in the real world. It is only possible in the world Shylock himself has created. Having failed him to deal with the real world, they only made him frustrated now:

> SHYLOCK. No. Take my books. The law must be observed. We have need of the law, what need do we have of books? Distressing, disturbing things besides. Why, my dear friend, they'd even make us question the laws. Ha! And who in his right mind would want to do that? (*M* 81)

The world of books encouraged him to think so freely that he even mocked the laws which ignored his humanity. These laws can in no way tolerate such an act. At the end he is totally ruined and has lost his aspiration for life. His final words illustrate what a great change he has undergone, " My appetites are dying, dear friend, for anything in this world. I am so tired of men" (*M* 82). Although both *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Merchant* end with the image of a frustrated Jewish character, they differ in what disillusioned them. While the Jew in *The Merchant of Venice* is disappointed because of failing to have his bond, losing all his property and having to convert to Christianity, the protagonist in *The Merchant* is frustrated due to the huge gap between the real world and the fictional world of books. He feels defeated because "he has lost his will to keep fighting his contempt and believing in the scheme of things" (*M* xxv).

The Venetian society has rejected all Shylock's wish to be accepted as a human being, who is justly treated. Such a realisation has detrimental effects on Shylock's identity as he realises that he has been deceiving himself about his place in the Venetian culture. Despite his love for the city, he can no longer live in Venice but has to go to "Jerusalem … to be buried there" (*M* 83). According to Wilcher this decision "marks the end of his struggle to resist ignorance bigotry" (118). His words "My appetites are dying, dear friend for anything in this world. I am so tired of men" reflect the change he has undergone (*M* 83). The energetic and bold figure at the beginning of the play is replaced with a terribly disillusioned and frustrated weary man.

The very first acts in *The Merchant of Venice* are devoted to the possible reasons for Antonio's sadness, yet they fail to give a clear cause. The only cause he can offer his companions is through a reference to the famous Shakespearean metaphor that the world is a stage and on this stage, he has a sad part. Wesker, on the other hand, from the very beginning states that Antonio's sadness is because his friendship with Shylock makes him question his identity and the way he has spent his life. He gradually develops the awareness that despite being a Christian, he is also the other in the society as he is realises the follies in the way it treats people who have their unique aspirations to follow.

Wesker's merchant is filled with admiration for his friend as he listens to Shylock's exciting talk about how he has devoted his life to collecting books,

reading them. As a man in his mid-sixties, Antonio resents his life style as a merchant because he sees how full Shylock's life is. Shylock has spent his entire life commenting on the meaning of it and questioning the good and bad aspects of the laws. In addition, he enjoys interpreting the works of the great scholars and forming his own ideas. In Shakespeare's comedy, being a merchant is a very respected profession and provides one with a good reputation, whereas in its modern interpretation, for Antonio it implies not only imprisonment in one place, but also a life devoid of purpose. Hence, Shylock along with some other Jewish characters and their way of life act as a disillusionment for Antonio as he confesses: "Those books. Look at them. How they reminded me what I am, what I've done. Nothing! A merchant! A purchaser of this to sell there"(*M* 3). He is the middleman between the seller and the buyer which binds him to his office all day. He has never travelled to different places to see how trade operates or to "steal time for myself [himself] in such places" for "it never worried me [him] this absence of curiosity for travel" until he meet Shylock" (*M* 3-4). Antonio is ashamed of his own occupation that involves no excitement or satisfaction, which makes him "so weary with trade" (*M* 4).

At the end of the play, he bitterly regrets having wasted his life by being a merchant and a patrician. When he utters that Shylock's "yellow hat belongs to both of" them, he no longer sees himself as part of the Venetian nobility, which requires strict adherence to rules and blindness to the rigidity of the legal system (*M* 63). Antonio is ready to welcome death for saving Shylock because he has recognised the emptiness of his life**.** Shylock is the only thing that he values in his life, so sees no harm in sacrificing himself for him. Unlike the Antonio figure, who is victorious at the end of *The Merchant of Venice*, Wesker presents a character who is not directly accused of being involved in any wrongdoing but goes through a quest of identity. The Doge clears him of any crimes, for he is a member of the superior community, but is discontent with the punishment that Shylock receives: "you take his life when you take his books" is how he summarises his disillusionment (*M* 79).

Different from Antonio in Shakespeare's comedy, being no longer on the side of the Venetian celebrities, he is deprived of the right to give the ultimate decision about Shylock's life. Although he tries to testify that his friend "did not want to set a precedent in law" he can only watch Shylock's being brought to destruction (*M*

81). Having fulfilled his self-questioning, he regards himself as a potential loss. As he confesses to Portia the realisation that he has had "a barren life" has come at the very late stages of his life, "What mixed blessings in these last years of my life, to meet an acerbic old Jew who disturbed my dull complacency" (*TM* 83). Antonio sees how full of purpose Portia's life is. Having met her, restless years are ahead of Antonio.

Wesker's merchant can be regarded as a fully developed character who is aware of his loses and gains in his life. Thanks to his friendship with Shylock, he has gained the ability to be critical of the so-called well functioning Venetian system of law and trade along with what the borders of human relations are. From now on, he has to live with the consciousness that he is also an outcast and it is not possible for him to be part of the Venetian society again.

Though it may not be very clearly discussed, towards the end of the play, the way Wesker depicts the relationship between Shylock and Antonio shows the disintegration in their relationship as well. Due to the negative influences of the law and the racial discrimination in the Venetian society, their friendship collapses. They both are dispersed in different directions. While the disillusioned Shylock plans to go to Jerusalem, the merchant will be engaged in his regular responsibilities. Through the physical distance between the friends, Wesker suggests that it is not possible for them to be united again.

4.4. Awareness of non-being in *Exit the King*

Richard and Berenger used to deceive themselves by thinking that kingship at the same time makes up their identities. However, now that they do not have their crowns, they are tormented with the question who they are if not the king. Shakespeare towards the end of *Richard II* shows, Richard's disillusionment with his identity and acknowledging his non-being. Throughout his career Ionesco's "central concern has remained that of the relationship between the 'self' and the 'non-self'" (Knowlson 169). Thus, he portrays a similar pursuit in *Exit the King* as the protagonist strives to recover what he thought to be his self. However, Berenger has to accept that his identity has been only an illusion and realise his non-being.

For Richard, self-abdication is a clever move, which offers him temporary relief. However, the consciousness of Richard's self-dethronement leads to much serious consequences than the king can ever imagine. He has difficulty in coping with the awareness of non-being: "Oh that I were as great / As my grief, or lesser than my name, / Or that I could forget what I have been, / Or not remember what I must be now!" (*RII* 3.3.136-139). The source of his grievous disposition is the fact that he was the sovereign commanding everybody in the past. Now, his self is diminishing. Because he has difficulty in figuring who he is, he views himself as a traitor: "if I turn mine eyes upon my self / I find myself a traitor with the rest" (*RII* 4.1.246-247). He is condemning himself for what he has done because he has given his "soul's consent / T'undeck the pompous body of a king" (*RII* 248-249). It is Richard's own faults that have caused his anguish.

When he is charged with committing "grievous crimes … against the state and the profit of this land," he resents being reduced to an ordinary individual (*RII* 4.1.222-224). His disgrace is reflected in his words that he himself "Made glory base, a sovereignty a slave, / Proud majesty a subject, state a peasant (*RII* 4.1.243-251). Even being addressed as the lord, is insulting for him as such a reference mocks him when he has "no name, no title" (*RII* 4.1.254). He is aggravated by not knowing "now what name to call" himself (*RII* 4.1.258). Previously, Richard has associated himself with the sun "rising in our [his] throne the east" (*RII* 3.2.50). Nevertheless, in order to reflect on his illusionary identity as a king, he uses the image of "a mockery king of snow" (*RII* 4.1.259). It is now Bullingbrook who is referred to as the sun, whose emergence as the new king destroys Richard's identity just like the sun melts the snow. Melting away is a very painful process for Richard since each single drop symbolises his vanishing self (*RII* 4.1.253-261).

Richard's sudden death is a rewarding experience for him as it saves him from his continuous self-quest and torment concerning who he is: "Thus play I in one person many people, / And none contented. Sometimes am I king, / Then treasons make me wish myself a beggar, /And so I am" (*RII* 5.5.31-34). He wishes to be a king again but later as he recalls his fall from his majestic status, he prefers being a beggar, which involves no downfall at all. Nevertheless, feeling discontent with being a beggar, he imagines himself as a king again, but only to be "unkinged by Bullingbrook" (*R II* 5.5.37) and is reduced to being nothing: "And straight am

nothing" (*R II* 5.5.38). He confesses that being dethroned for him has the implication of being nothing. Through his characterisation of Richard, Shakespeare clearly shows how much people depend on their status to form their identities. Richard's state also exemplifies that it is not easy to give up the illusion of being the authority .

A similar case is observed in Ionesco's theatre since it is "full of people performing the drab, ritualistic gestures of everyday living, existing without really existing" (Knowlson 176). They are not aware of their non-existence, so they never come to realise the important problems concerning their lives. Ionesco's characters develop "an attitude of stupid, unthinking, and, what is worse, unfeeling 'tired neutrality', an insensitivity" towards life (Knowlson 176). Just like Richard, while Berenger is busy administering his ultimate power and enjoying a carefree life, he fails to understand that such regular practices of him are far from proving his existence. His too much involvement in everyday routines may have coloured his life, yet it has prevented him from being engaged in more significant issues regarding his existence. Because he develops an uncritical attitude towards life, he ignores to reflect on death as it turns out to be the most important threat to his existence. Now he has nothing to depend on but some physical functions in his body to prove his existence: "I'm alive, I can think, I can see, I can hear, I can still see and hear. A fanfare!" (*EK* 58).

Death means non-existence for Berenger. In order to prolong his life so that he can escape non-existence he deludes himself in absurd ways of being remembered by his subjects and remaining alive through some tricks. One way Berenger creates to overcome his non-existence is through the deception that he is very important for his people. He wants to be assured that he will be remembered by them: "Oh please make them all remember me!" (*EK* 48). He fears that when he is gone, people will "laugh and stuff themselves silly and dance on" his tomb as though he has never existed (*EK*48). To be eternal he wants to "make them despair and perpetuate my [his] memory in all their history books. Make everyone learn my [his] life by heart. Make them all live again"(*EK* 48). He is in need of convincing himself that the existence of his people very much depends on their memories of him. With the desire to guarantee remembrance, he tries to control the lives of the people who are

left behind. At this stage he sounds like a dictator who is agitated by the fear of being forgotten. His utters a long list of commands to be eternal:

> KING: Let the school children and the scholars study nothing else but me, my kingdom and my exploits. Let them burn all the other books, destroy all the statues and set mine up in all public squares. My portrait in every Ministry, my photograph in every office of every Town Hall, including Rates and Taxes, and in *all* the hospitals. … Let them cry my name throughout eternity, and beg me and implore me. (*EK* 49)

He is desperately in need of some kind of illusion that he is going to leave some trace in people's minds so that he will not cease being. Ionesco explores the psychology of a person who is facing death. However, Berenger's yearning for timeless existence is undermined with the fact that he depends on man made objects like books, statues and photographs, which are as temporary as the king's life. Ionesco constructs this speech in such a way that Berenger himself undermines what he has just uttered. While he urges that all books, but the ones that praise him must be burned, he fails to recognise the fact that any king in the future may order the destruction of the books about the former ones.

Because he cannot trust anybody except himself to cater for his remembrance and existence, he wishes everybody else dead but himself. To achieve his aim he is ready to give up everything and everybody for his survival: "Let every human creature die provided *I* can live forever, even alone in a limitless desert. I'll come to terms with solitude" (*EK* 52). What is more, he is engaged in making some absurd promises like keeping "alive the memories of the others," and missing "them quite sincerely" on condition that he lives (*EK* 52). He argues that his aim is to prevent his people from feeling void after he is gone because. His psychological state proves that people can be very self-centred and can easily discard anybody when they are faced with a danger.

Despite his highly pronounced selfishness, Berenger strives to disguise it with the image of the perfect monarch who is very concerned with his subjects' well-being: " *I* feel pity when I think how they'll miss me, never see me again, and be left behind all alone. I'm still the one who thinks about the others, about everyone"

(*EK* 53). He wants to escape death by claiming that he wishes to prolong his life so that the country will not be dragged into chaos. However, such an idea is quite absurd when it is uttered by a man who is utterly powerless and is bound to an invalid chair. Blind to his own egoism he accuses his subjects of disregarding him: "Selfish, the lot of them. They only think of their own little lives, of their own skins. Not of *mine*" (*EK* 50). His awareness of non-existence is so intense that he wants to be to be remembered "to the end of time" and even "beyond the end of time, in twenty thousand years, in two hundred and fifty-five thousand million years" (*EK* 50). The absurdity of his wish is revealed through his words that "There'll be no one left to think of anyone then. They'll forget before that" (*EK 50*).

According to Esslin "The Theatre of the Absurd expresses the anxiety and despair that spring from the recognition that man is surrounded by areas of impenetrable darkness, that he can never know his true nature and purpose, that no one will provide him with ready-made rules of conduct" (Esslin 426). Berenger personifies the anguish of the inability to make sense of himself and his life. Berenger seeks answers to the question why he dies and how it is possible for people to accept their death. The king wants help from the people who died before. He inquires about how "countless thousands who died before" him "managed to accept death and die" (*EK* 54). Furthermore, addressing the people who dreaded death and refused to die, he prays for help to cope with the fear. He is curious about the source of courage and serenity in the people who died in a dignified way so that they can teach him resignation. He wonders how they managed to "feel disgust for life" and commit suicide (*EK* 55). In addition, he wants to learn from the people who died blissfully what made then accept death: "What face did you see close to yours? What smile gave you ease and made *you* smile? (*EK* 55). He is vulnerable as he receives no consolidating answers. Ultimately he turns and looks into himself, yet what he sees is the emptiness that surrounds him:

> KING: I'm full all right, but full of holes. I'm a honeycomb of cavities that are widening, deepening into bottomless pits. It makes me dizzy to look down the gaping gulfs inside me. I'm coming to an end (*EK* 68).

With the threat of imminent death everything that has been so familiar has suddenly become unrecognisable. Due to his othering process, he is estranged from himself. Now, his self and identity disintegrates into several unknown parts that he cannot make any sense of. His attempt to find out who he is fails as he is lost in his emptiness and worthlessness.

Ionesco emphasises the non-being of his protagonist with the long list of Berenger's achievements that the guard reads out. He is considered to be the person "who invented gunpowder and stole fire from the gods" (*EK* 73) In addition, he is also the playwright who "wrote tragedies and comedies, under the name of Shakespeare" (*EK* 74). It is him who designed the telegraph, the telephone, the first aeroplane, the rails and railways and automobiles as he used to the "chief engineer" (*EK* 73). The guard glorifies the personality and the accomplishments of the king, whereas Juliette's remarks undermine what has been said. The guard praises Berenger by saying "he did everything with his own hands," Juliette contradicts him by pointing out "he was never any good with his hands! He used to call the plumber at the slightest sign of leak" (*EK* 74). Moreover, his image as successful king is distorted with his vulnerable state in the present. He is said to have "split the atom," whereas "now he can't even turn the light off. Or on!" (*EK* 74).

The guard's list of the king's achievements outlines the history of mankind. Through such references, Ionesco states that even the greatest works cannot relieve people's sense of non-being. Everything loses its importance as he says: "I don't remember what I did. I forget, I forget," (*EK* 75**).** His inability to remember the achievements attributed to him reveals that Berenger has not really accomplished any of these things and has not done anything of high importance to contribute the development of mankind.

All Berenger can remember is his ginger cat whose image communicates the king's evaluation of his life. Initially the cat's memory proves the king's existence as it helps him recollect his past. However, a closer analysis reflects the analogy between the life of the king and the cat. Berenger's final speech summarises his life and his awareness of non-being. Just like its owner the cat throughout its life, avoided any interaction with the outside world and led a well-protected and secluded life. It was so ignorant to the life outside the king's palace that when Berenger tried to introduce it to external world the cat "was terrified, afraid of the

pigeons that hopped all around him" (*EK* 76). Similar to Berenger, the cat created a peaceful and soothing world for itself where it was protected from any threats. The cat considered the king and his court as its family and "only felt at home with" them and "thought *we* [the king] were cats and cats were something else"(*EK* 76). Its life was so secluded that " to him other animals and cats were strange creatures he mistrusted or enemies he feared" (*EK* 76). However, when it was leading a self-content life, suddenly the balance is disturbed with the need to explore the world outside:

> KING: And yet one day he must have felt the urge to go out on his own. The neighbor' big dog killed him. And there he was, like a toy cat, a twitching marionette with one eye gone and a paw torn off, yes, like a doll destroyed by a sadistic child. (*EK* 76)

Death is objectified with the image of a fierce dog killing the cat. The illusion of a segregated life is spoiled by the image of a dog which killed the cat. Thus, the cat's contact with the external world results in its death. Similarly, when Berenger loses his power he realises that there is another world existing outside his own illusionary one. His first interaction with his individuality ends in frustration. In the hands of death, he has turned into a toy cat or a doll.

The memory of his cat brings Berenger closer to death. Because the cat's death meant losing something dear to him, it helps him to understand that he cannot escape it but he has to resign. He reflects on the transformation one undergoes once he is dead as he recalls his dreams about the cat: "But it wasn't him anymore. What a transformation! It was a different cat, fat and ugly. An enormous she-cat. Like his mother, the wildcat. A bit like Marguerite" (*EK* 77). Berenger's dream shows how subjective people's perception of things may be. An object or thing that one used to be so fond of may easily turn into something unrecognisable. It also indicates that as soon as a person dies, he disappears forever and gradually his image is distorted and forgotten. The fact that even he himself has difficulty in recognising the animal loving him in his dreams, makes Berenger realise that death involves being forgotten. Thus, he is able to overcome his fear of death as he understands that he

cannot help being forgotten. He realises that even if he is remembered, it will not be him because death transforms everything.

At the end of the play, Berenger who has been a puppet in the hands of death "becomes increasingly aware of his defeat" (Guicharnaud 227). He accepts that in face of death his life has been an illusion and all his attempts to change his predicament are in vain.

4.5. Absurdity of existence

Martin Esslin states that The Theatre of the Absurd is not concerned with "arguing *about* the absurdity of the human condition" but "it merely *presents* in being" (25). Ionesco through his portrayal of "clown-like or puppet-like people," shifts "the focus from the absurdity of human behaviour to the absurdity of the human condition" (Norrish 89). Berenger's tests of power to command both animate and inanimate subjects are absurd. The state of King Berenger, who has deceived himself by claiming that "kings ought to be immortal" reflects how easy it is for people to acquire "a taste for authority" (*EK* 36). However, the king is disillusioned about the absurdity of his existence as he is to die in a very short time. In his fight against death Berenger "never appears to be more than a grotesque mockery of a king" because all his attempts to assert his dignity and to be immortal are ridiculous and "merely laughable" (Bradby 81).

Beneath the representation of a feeble figure who has been deceiving himself that kings are immortal, lies the absurdity of the human life. It is in human nature to develop a taste for life and be reluctant to be disillusioned. The Theatre of the Absurd aims to address people who have been disillusioned about the conventional plays which are far from relieving them of the anxiety of living in a world which is deserted by God. Plays speak to people for whom "the world has lost its central explanation and meaning" and whose life is devoid of any purpose (Esslin 399).

In *Exit the King* Ionesco suggests that an individual creates his own world as Berenger is said to have "created the sun" on "the day he was born" (*EK* 80). To his individual kingdom, he has added "the sky and oceans and mountains" (*EK* 80). He also had people to serve him. However, this world vanishes as the king dies.

Ionesco represents this though the disappearance of his subjects from the stage. One creates himself as he creates the world. He confines himself within the boundaries of this world and is unwilling to inquire about the existence outside his own.

It is time for the king to stop worrying about his past as Marguerite says: "He's got to travel light. (*To the* KING:) Throw everything away, lighten the load" (*EK* 83). Thus, when Marie tries to make the king remember who she is by making him look at her face, her image is "too heavy for" Berenger, who is no different from a ghost. That is why she is the first to disappear from the stage. Although the guard swears that he will never leave his lord, the moment he utters it he disappears. Similarly, Juliette says "We are here beside you, we'll stay with you," and she deserts him (*EK* 87). After asking for forgiveness the doctor leaves: "Forgive me, your Majesty, I must go. I'm afraid I have to go" (*EK* 87). Only Marguerite remains on the stage to assist him in his journey to death and her presence does not hinder Berenger's resignation. As she says: "He will start his journey with a picture of *me* in his mind. That won't get in his way. [It will leave him when it has to]" (*EK* 84). Marguerite is the one who liberates him.

The absurdity of existence is revealed through Marguerite's final speech on life and death. She resembles the man's existence in his world to dream. The absurdity of existence arises from the man's deception that what he experiences in this world is real. She tries to help Berenger confront the reality that his reign in this world has only been an illusion that he loved and enjoyed so much: "Sometimes you have a dream. And you get involved, you believe in it, you love it" (*EK* 89). She refers to death as awakening but because the dream is so beautiful and desirable, man has difficulty in understanding what the real thing is as "in the morning … the two worlds are still confused" (*EK* 89). The memories of the dream world are so sweet that man tries to hold on to them (*EK* 89). But to his frustration they slip between one's fingers, as "the brutal reality of day drives them away" (*EK* 89). Thus, one finds himself entrapped with self-questioning:

> MARGUERITE: What did I dream about, you ask yourself? What was it happened? Who was I kissing? Who did I love? What was I saying and what was I told? Then you find you're left with a vague regret for all those things that were or seemed to have

> been. You no longer know what it was that was there all around you. You no longer know. (*EK* 89)

The attempt to prove the reality of dream ends in disillusionment as it is not possible for one to remember who he has been and assert himself. Berenger's state confirms Marguerite's summary of man's existence in this world since he finds it difficult to figure out "what was there all around" him (*EK* 89). Berenger is able to remember his dreamy existence: "I know I was part of a world and this world was all about me" (*EK* 89). Nevertheless, everything else has disappeared and lost its meaning as he inquires "what else was there, what else? (*EK* 89).

One is attached to the beauties of this world very strongly. This turns being disillusioned and giving up the sweet dream of life into a big challenge. In order to accept death, Berenger has to be untied from "some hands that cling" to him and hold him back (*EK* 89). When the king is highly confused about who he is as he repeats "Me. Me. Me.", Marguerite reminds him that what he considers as his identity is just an illusion: "this you is not the real you" but only "an odd collection of bits and pieces, horrid things that live on you [him] like parasites" (*EK* 90).

Michael Scott argues that at the end of the play Berenger's "fear of death is conquered by facing it" and the king is able to preserve his dignity (80). He is finally restored to his throne, which is something he desperately tried to do throughout the play. With the disappearance of Marguerite Berenger is left on his own to face his death as the stage directions say: "*there is nothing on the stage except the* KING *on his throne in a grayish light*" (*EK* 95). Ionesco's presentation of Berenger's death as an instance of "*fading into a kind of mist*" is contrasted with the king's long and tiring fight against death (*EK* 95).

In the absurd world where Berenger lives "illogicalities are left unexplained, paradoxes unresolved" (Bradby 76). However, because the Theatre of the Absurd "is trying to present a sense of being," Ionesco does not "investigate" or "solve problems of conduct or morals" (Esslin 403). Despite the fact that the ending of the play is vague, Scott argues that it is far from being "pessimistic" (80). Knowlson argues that the mist into which Berenger disappears is no mere stage trick, but is surely a metaphorical indication as to the limits of our knowledge" (Knowlson 184).

One can formulate his individual perception and understanding of death, which will lead the correct path to accept the ultimate end.

In *Exit the King*, Ionesco offers a representation of a person's frustration of being faced with death. To communicate the anxiety of a dying man he tries to "administer a shock" to the sensibilities of the audience (Bradby 81). As it is suggested by Esslin, *Exit the King* "speaks to a deeper level of the audience's mind" because it is an absurd play (Esslin 412). Berenger's portrayal on the stage "activates psychological forces" in the viewers, as well as it "releases and liberates hidden fears" (Esslin 412). At the end of the play, the audience having witnessed the othering process in the king and the disillusionment he has undergone, is involved in a similar process. Each individual spectator is encouraged to reflect on his life and question his existence. The play shows that life in the modern world is as meaningless and ridiculous as the one presented on the stage. As Guicharnaud suggests Ionesco "shows reality to be equally absurd" in his play (218). When the audience laughs at the follies of Berenger and the absurdity of his attempts to prove his existence, they actually mock their own lives which most of the time is no different from what is presented on the stage.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Bakhtin utilises mirror as the object to highlight the importance of the role of the other in the achievement of one's self-consciousness: He says that: "The image I [one] sees in the mirror is necessarily incomplete; yet, in any way, it provides us [him] with the archetype of self perception; only someone else's gaze can give me [him] the feeling" that he forms totality" (in Todorov 95). Bakhtin's idea reflects not only Wesker's and Ionesco's approach to Shakespeare, but also the predicament of the protagonists in their plays. The image of a malicious Jew that Wesker perceives in Shakespeare's portrayal of Shylock, encourages the modern dramatist to reinterpret *The Merchant of Venice* so that the image of Shylock as a Jew can reach totality. In Shakespeare's representation of King Richard in *Richard II*, Ionesco perceives the anguish of a man who involuntarily breaks down and he reflects the same agony on his King Berenger in *Exit the King* to reveal the anxieties of the modern man.

This thesis argued that Shakespeare is an invaluable source for Wesker and Ionesco to discuss the question of the other in their plays. Shakespeare's portrayal of a Jew motivated Wesker to reflect on the entrapment of Shylock as the other in Renaissance Venice. In his play, Wesker offers an in-depth analysis of the causes of Shylock's otherness and how they hinder his integration with the society he lives in. Wesker also displays the effects of Shylock's otherness on his identity and how it contributes to the disillusionment of the other characters. Shylock tries to break out of the established roles and rules, but fails to do so. Wesker points out that a social system, under which different individuals can be united, does not exist. One is

either within the system conforming to its rules, or outside becoming "the other." Any nonconformity faces being crushed.

Ionesco dwells on Richard's illusion that he is the supreme power to depict the absurd world his protagonist creates for himself. Berenger, is carried away with his role as a king and abuses it. However, his self-defined world becomes his prison, making him the other. Ionesco's king undergoes his othering process and with the help of the other characters around him, he is disillusioned about his existence in this absurd world. Ionesco's play further displays a universal theme: Man's inability to accept his mortality and his brief reign in life. Even an ordinary individual would find it difficult that his life becomes meaningless towards the end; when it is a man who has been infected with self-importance all his life, like Berenger, the end becomes impossible to accept.

Both Wesker and Ionesco in their plays reflect the irony of life. Man deceives himself by thinking that he has infinite control over his life, but is bitterly disillusioned when he fails to maintain it. The great effort that man spends to avoid the disintegration in his relationships and life is futile. Once the illusions that make life meaningful fade, man is left on his own to cope with the meaninglessness and absurdity of his existence.

In conclusion, through the remade versions of his plays the idea that Shakespeare is also modern in many aspects is more emphasised. Through Wesker's and Ionesco's plays Shakespeare once more testifies that the roles assigned to different individuals by the society or other individuals become restrictive.

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