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*The Jew as a Taboo:
Arthur Miller's Focus (1945)
and Incident at Vichy (1964)*

INTRODUCTION

Arthur Miller, one of the leading living dramatists in the United States of America, has over the years waged literary battles against his society through the theatre to expose man's precarious situation in the present age. Miller has all along been driven by the desire to awaken in the individual a strong wish to protect the sense of self, the most prized possession any individual could boast of. This desire comes up very poignantly in his *Theatre Essays* (1978) wherein Miller expresses in allegorical and rhetorical terms man's battle with his social environment:

How may a man make of the outside world a home? How and in what ways must he struggle, what must he strive to change within himself and outside himself if he is to find the safety, the surroundings of love, the ease of soul, the sense of identity and the honor which, evidently, all men have connected with the idea of family? (Martin 73)

Faced with what he sees as a domineering and oppressive society that is exclusive and discriminatory in nature, Miller envisions nothing but a bleak future for individuals, especially as the society is divided into two camps — that of the asserting and that of the victims who are overpowered by those asserting. It is in the light of the above, therefore, that we are going to discuss Arthur Miller's presentation of the Jew as an outcast and the Jews as a tabooed people in only two of Miller's works: *Focus* (1945) and *Incident at Vichy* (1964). Furthermore

we would like to define “taboo” in order to understand how the two works cited fit into the framework of the general topic *Taboo*.

SYNOPSIS OF *FOCUS* AND *INCIDENT AT VICHY*

Focus (1945) is a novel that addressed the public problem of anti-Semitism and the need to take a personal stand, and to value the self more highly than society would seem to allow. The protagonist Lawrence Newman is a personnel manager with a large business enterprise which refuses to hire Jews. As an American Gentile, he himself has never questioned the soundness of this policy, having simply internalised the Gentile prejudices of anti-Semitism. Unfortunately he himself, after buying eyeglasses because of his failing sight, becomes an object of persecution. He looks Jewish, and is moved from the front office. He then feels obliged to resign. His marriage to a woman who is similarly mistaken for a Jew merely exacerbates his situation. At her behest, he rises to secure immunity by embracing Gentile prejudices, but is rejected. Assaulted by a group of right-wing thugs, he finds himself inspired by the resistance of his Jewish neighbour Finkelstein. Although his anti-Semitic wife tries to convince his persecutors of his real identity, Newman now takes a stand by refusing to escape. Towards the end of the novel, he no longer challenges the police’s assumption about his Jewish identity. Persecution has made him a Jew and has also convinced him both of the irrationality of prejudice and of the need to confront and defeat it.

However in *Incident at Vichy* the question becomes one of identifying the nature of the individual’s responsibility to others, of demarcating private guilt, the disintegration of the psyche, and those social dislocations which are both a cause of personal angst and primary evidence of the collapse of the social world. In fact, *Incident at Vichy* came indirectly as an outcome of Miller’s journey to Germany where he attended the Nazi trials in Frankfurt. Apparently based on facts, Miller’s play is set in Vichy, in 1942, at a time when the Nazis were rounding up people in the streets all over Europe. Those people were never heard of again. On one particular day, ten people are arrested among whom is an

Austrian Prince, Von Berg, who will eventually be released. After Leduc, one of the arrested Jews, reveals to him his own contribution to the Nazi persecutions through non-resistance, the Prince accepts his responsibility and hands over his pass to Leduc who finally accepts it because he is certain of his right to live.

DEFINITION OF THE TERM "TABOO"

According to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* "taboo" means — among some peoples — "something which religion or custom regards as forbidden, not to be touched, spoken of, etc." The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (*Micropaedia*, Ready Reference and Index, x) among other things, traces the origin of the word taboo: of particular relevance is the allusion to the 18th century usage of taboo in religion, when the word became "equated with the sacred, perceived ambivalently as both holy and dangerous, or pure and impure." The *Micropaedia* goes further to discuss that inherent in the "sacred" is the notion of "a negative, separate, exclusive power, prohibited to man, which causes death or pollution if man comes in contact with it."

Following the above definitions, it is evident that in *Focus* and *Incident at Vichy*, Arthur Miller ironically presents the Jew as an object "forbidden, not to be touched," "impure," "negative," "separate," and capable of causing "pollution if man comes in contact with it." Miller's concept of the Jew as taboo takes its rise from history. Historically, the Jew has been rejected and considered an object of taboo on two grounds: his religion and his race. But in America, in recent years, the decay of piety into interfaith goodwill has rendered the former more and more negligible. This attitude goes far back as to the nomadic life of the biblical Jews in the Wilderness, their settling in Egypt and their eventually being expelled from Egypt. William Shakespeare borrowed this image of the Jew as an outcast, a tabooed race in his portrait of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*. During the Second World War, a similar reaction to the Jew as an outcast, a (profane) antichrist was assumed by the Nazis in Eastern Europe who denounced their enemy in anti-Jewish terms:

Your family names are democracy, Marxism and plutocracy, but your baptismal name is without doubt Judaism (Allan 295).

In the same way, Franco's press and radio broadcast referred to the Jews as "hard-faced atheists, capitalists, and Marxists" (Allan 293-94), and claimed that "atheism [was] the common denominator of the overwhelming majority of Jews" (195). According to Fiedler the "Jews exist for the Western World, not only in history but also in the timeless limbo of the psyche — that is, as archetypes, symbolic figures, presumably representing the characters and fates of alien peoples, but actually projecting aspects of the white Christian mind itself" (Fiedler 470).

Thus, when he wrote his novel *Focus* and the play *Incident at Vichy*, Arthur Miller had in mind the negative connotations long associated with the Jew in the Western World. In fact, Miller's fictionalised representation of the Jew in the above cited works inevitably and regrettably reveals the Jews as a taboo people, capable of contaminating other people. They are simply victimised on the basis of their race.

In fact, *After the Fall* (1964) was the first play in which Arthur Miller directly addressed the issue of the nature of the Jewish experience, especially after the holocaust of the Second World War. Eleven months later, *Incident at Vichy* followed as an extension of the argument presented in the former play. However, by writing *Focus* (1945), Miller had therefore clearly addressed the Jewish problem. When asked in 1978 why the Jewish question became suddenly apparent after the war, he had this to say:

I became far more aware of what Jewishness meant to me. I quite honestly hadn't any such sensation earlier on. It probably was suppressed by the fact that we lived in a country with a lot of anti-Semitism, in the forties, thirties too. And what that does to somebody is to repress his identity in a way. Neither my father nor mother could speak Yiddish. . . . I kind of dug it out of myself. . . . I think the establishment of a new Jewish state probably meant a lot to me. It meant the establishment of an identity that I could never live to have (Bigby: 1967, 217).

It is in the light of the above assertion that Lumley maintains that Miller's single subject is "the struggle . . . of the individual to gain his rightful position in his society, a society that by its very nature is too hostile to be mastered" (Lumley 194). Miller's preoccupation with the Jewish people as a tabooed people was quickly recognised by Allen Gutmann who asserted that Miller's picture of the Jew, especially as portrayed in *Focus* and *Incident at Vichy*, implies that Jews and Gentiles are really indistinguishable in their behaviour and in their basic values (Gutmann 305). Also reacting to the events in *Incident at Vichy* and *Focus*, Dillingham considers Miller's plays as tragedies depicting the "failure of man to fulfil meaningful roles because of anti-social crimes" (Dillingham 17). One such crime is, indeed, the taboo image grafted onto the Jew — by what Fiedler calls "a kind of romantic anti-Puritanism" — by the Western world "which aims at setting traditional morality on its head and prefers whim to law, ends with a violent and sentimental espousal of the dark-skinned peoples and a complementary hatred of Jews" (Fiedler 471). Talking specifically about the Jew in America, Fiedler asserts that the Jews have always been considered as strangers, "outsiders in some sense forever . . . an ethnic minority" (447-48). Fiedler further delineates in lucid terms the stereotypes to which the Gentiles have reduced the Jew, dating as far back as to Shakespeare's Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*. To the Gentiles, the Jew has always been a "usurer and a bad father with a knife that lies behind Shylock which existed long before even the dream of America; a European heritage, a villain and a figure of terror" (449). This antagonism between the Jews and Gentiles is equally noticeable in Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* where Robert Cohn, a Jew, is constantly haunted by the war between the Jews and the Arabs. To defend himself, Cohn learns the art of boxing and would not hesitate to knock down anyone who is snooty to him. He is as restless as the other war victims. Little does he realize that his state of ennui remains the same in spite of his changing places, since the problem, as Jake points out, remains with him. Like Newman in Miller's *Focus*, Cohn too wears glasses and Brett, the only female character, confesses that Cohn is not one of them.

In *Focus* and *Incident at Vichy*, Arthur Miller's representation of the irrationality of racism and its connectedness to the mechanism of

hate embodied in the negative aspects of taboo as defined by *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, takes the form of discrimination. To do so, Miller uses a discursive technique, especially in the latter work. Leduc, a Jewish psychiatrist, explains the irrationality of racial discrimination and the animosity that has always existed between the Jew and the Gentile. Talking to Von Berg he asserts:

I owe you the truth, Prince; you won't believe it now, but I wish you would think about it and what it means. I have never analyzed a Gentile who did not have, somewhere hidden in his mind, a dislike if not a hatred for the Jews (Miller, *Vichy* 288).

The above idea is equally highlighted in *Focus* when Mr. Finkelstein, the Jew, questions the concept of irrational hatred that has set the Jews aside as a taboo race. In his conversation with Newman, Finkelstein says:

“What I don't understand is how so many people can get worked up to such a pitch about Jews in that whole hall there ain't a person who knows — himself personally, more than three Jews to speak to. . . . I understand how a person can hate a whole people because I myself slip into the same thing when I forget myself. But I don't understand how they can get excited enough to go sit in a meeting on such a hot night for the purpose they shall get rid of the Jews. To have . . . a disliking is one thing. But to go to work and put yourself out like that . . . I don't understand it. What's the answer to that?” (Miller, *Focus* 182).

Later, Mr. Finkelstein asks Newman, the Gentile who is mistaken for a Jew: “Why do you want I shall get out of the neighborhood?” (182).

The answer to both questions cited above from the two works seems to reveal the irrationality of the racial hatred that has turned the Jews into a cast, a taboo race. In *Incident at Vichy*, Leduc, the psychiatrist, tends to give us, in a somewhat escapist vein, a clue to the answer. He asserts, by way of explanation, that “the Jew is only the name we give to that stranger within everyone” (288). The recognition of this “stranger” — outcast, taboo — threatens one's sense of purity and power. Following this concept, the “stranger” stands for something

which, according to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, is "forbidden, not to be touched, spoken of," something or somebody who, in the light of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, is "dangerous . . . impure . . . negative, separate . . . prohibited to man, which causes death or pollution if man comes in contact with it." This is the same attitude put on by the American Gentiles towards the Jews in *Focus*. In fact, the American non-Jews move out of residential quarters as soon as Jews move in. The conversation between Newman and Fred Carlson attests to this:

"How do you like what's goin' on? Fred."

"Going on how?" Newman asked.

"The neighbourhood. They'll be movin' niggers in on us next."

"Everybody's been talking about the new element movin' around."

"That so."

"Only reason most of the block moved way out here was to get away from that element, and now they're trailin' us out here. You know that Finkelstein?... He's got all his relatives movin' into the house on the corner" (*Focus*, 17).

Fred Carlson is not satisfied with only talking about the unclean, impure "elements" (Jews), but would want to "clean" the quarters of all the Jews: "We just want to clean out the neighbourhood that's all... All we gotta do is make it hot for them and they'll pack up"(18).

This "cleaning up" exercise is further reiterated by the Priest from Boston who brings the message to Chicago. At the big rally the Priest says:

"I have come to you tonight, good people, in the terrible heat of this day, to bring you a message from a city. City beautiful to my eyes but a city reviled and crucified by some who breed hate and feed upon that hate..."

"Boston is cleansing herself, ladies and gentlemen, Boston is standing fast" (172).

In reaction to the message from Boston, the Chicago Gentiles wage a war against the Jews. Finkelstein is beaten up and his provision store destroyed. Ironically, Newman, whose appearance had been altered by his eyeglasses, and who is mistaken for a Jew, is equally attacked.

Gertrude, Newman's wife, remarks this and says: "They turned over your garbage can. Somebody's got you marked for a Jew" (147).

Here again, the latent reasons for considering the Jew a taboo are purely irrational and often based on misconceptions. In *Focus*, Newman asserts that he has always considered this race as "impostors" (40), with a strong desire for "fat women" (42) and caring more for money than cleanliness. In response to Finkelstein's question about why the Jews are hated, Newman provides an answer of his own, not so much as an individual but as a chorus, a representative of the Gentiles. This comes out succinctly in their conversation. Finkelstein asks Newman: "Why do you want I shall get out of the neighbourhood?" Newman replies: "It's not you particularly;" to which Finkelstein replies:

"But it is me particularly. If you want the Jews shall get out you want me to get out. I did something you don't like?" (182)

Newman's response is based on misconceptions, characteristic of the general Gentile attitude towards Jews:

"There's a lot of reasons why people don't like Jews. They have no principles... In business you'll find them cheating and taking advantage" (183).

Some of the reasons why the Jews are hated are easily discerned from Newman's musings: the Jew has a "comical, ugly and obsequious face," "the Jew's ability to make money [is] objectionable," "they allow . . . their beard to grow," the Jew is a "cheat," is "dirty" and "loud" and they act in "an abhorrent way" (184-85). In response to these reasons, Finkelstein argues that he has never been a cheat in business and that the Gentiles are, in fact, bigger cheats:

"Personally I know for a fact that the telephone company is charging five cents a local call when they could make good profit charging a penny... The phone company is run and owned by Gentiles. But just because you are a Gentile I ain't mad at you when I put a nickel in to make a phone call. And still Gentiles are cheating me. I am asking you why you want to get me off this block Mr. Newman." (183-84).

Newman's response to this puzzle reveals the concept of collective responsibility: "You don't understand. It's not what you've done, it's what others of your people have done" (185).

In *Incident at Vichy*, Leduc equally alludes to the problem of collective responsibility: the Jews are accused of being responsible for the war.

Another escapist and flimsy excuse for this discrimination that turns a people into a taboo race is found in Leduc's philosophising about the origin and nature of hate. According to him, each individual finds it necessary to blame someone else for his own inadequacies: "each man has his Jew, it is the other" (288). Leduc's assertion is compatible with Newman's discovery in *Focus* that "the evil nature of the Jews and their numberless deceptions . . . were the reflections of his own desires with which he had invested them" (40-41). In fact, in *Focus* the economic inadequacies of the American Gentiles are blamed on the industriousness of such Jews as Finkelstein who runs a provision store in the neighbourhood. And because they are considered a tabooed race, the Jews "are bound," in Fiedler's words, "by restrictions that determine where they can live, what clubs and fraternities they can join, what hotels they can enter and finally . . . whom they can marry" (472). This is exactly Newman's and Finkelstein's dilemma in *Focus*.

In *Incident at Vichy*, Monceau gives another twist to the concept of discrimination which is based on irrationalism. He thus confesses:

The Russians condemn the middle class, the English have condemned the Indians, Africans, and anybody else they could lay their hands on, the French, the Italians . . . every nation has condemned somebody because of his race, including the Americans and what they do to Negroes. The vast majority of mankind is condemned because of its race (279).

It is in the same light that Leduc philosophises on the universal concept of hatred:

Until you know it is true of you, you will destroy whatever truth can come of this atrocity. Part of knowing who we are is knowing we are not someone else. And the Jew is only the name we give to that stranger, that agony we cannot feel, that death we look at like a cold abstraction. Each man has his Jew; it is the other. And the Jews have their Jews. And now, now above all, you must see that you have yours — the man whose death leaves you relieved that you are not him (288).

This same irrationality induces Baron Kessler, Von Berg's cousin, "to remove all the Jewish doctors from the medical school" (289) in Austria during the Second World War. In addition Von Berg admits that all his Jewish musicians were murdered in Austria and nobody raised a voice to condemn the atrocity (284-85). In fact, Moss has bothered to investigate and he has come up with the result that the phrase "again and again forever" occurs as a refrain in Miller's writing of this period, "suggesting here the persistence of violence"(75) provoked by the irrationality of racism. As Leduc confirms, this racism has reduced the Jews to nonentities. "We are symbols" (330) deprived of love and "that is why there is nothing and will be nothing." The Jewish artist, Lebeau, logically concludes that the Jews are partly responsible for this nasty state of affairs, which has reduced them to a taboo race:

They keep saying such terrible things about us, and you can't answer. And after years and years of it, you... I wouldn't say believe it, but you... you do, a little. . . . You get tired of believing in the truth (278).

In Miller's play, the Jews, as a taboo race, have "been trained to die," because man will not tolerate his fallibility and, as Leduc asserts, "sacrificial murder will be repeated again and again forever" (285). All this is likely to happen because love has disappeared. The Major taking guard over the rounded-up Jews points to this fact in most vivid terms:

There are no persons anymore, don't you see that. There will never be persons again. What do I care if you love me? Are you out of your mind? What am I, a dog that I must be loved? You . . . goddammed Jew? (280-81)

This is convincing evidence that such discrimination against the Jews originates in depersonalisation, is born of hate or, say, of the death of love.

On the other hand, the plot seems to imply that the Jews themselves are partly responsible for their fate: as stated by Leduc, they have been passive and have tended to accept their lot — “We have been trained to die.” “The Jew,” as the West Indian writer Frantz Fanon asserts, “is a slave of the idea that others may have of him. The white man is not the other person, but the real or imaginary master besides” (quoted in Wauthier 161-62). Writing a propos the Jews, Jean Paul Sartre argues that they “have allowed themselves to become poisoned by other people’s opinion of them and live in fear that their actions should not conform to this; thus we might say that their conduct is perpetually predetermined from the interior” (quoted in Wauthier 161).

Commenting on Sartre’s assertion and comparing the Jews with the Blacks, Fanon maintains that

the Jew may be overlooked as such. He is not wholly what he is. One can wait and hope. He is a white man and, apart from a few very debatable characteristics, he can pass unnoticed. . . . Of course, the Jews have been bullied, driven out, exterminated, burnt, but those are minor troubles. The Jew is not liked from the moment he becomes vulnerable (quoted in Wauthier 162).

From the two citations above, one may conclude that the Jews have been the victims of irrational opinions compounded by what was perceived as passivity and vulnerability. However, Monceau, one the of characters in *Incident at Vichy*, seems to react to this accusation by universalising the concept of role playing in victimisation:

Everyone is playing the victim these days; hopeless, hysterical, they always assume the worst. . . . You accuse us of acting the part the Germans created for us; I think you’re the one who’s doing that by acting desperate (276-77).

TOWARDS A PANACEA

Arthur Miller and other Jewish writers have not merely been concerned with the taboo image imposed on the Jew, but they have attempted, each in his way, to find a solution to this issue. As we have seen above, especially in *Focus* and *Incident at Vichy*, the Jew was considered as an outcast, untouchable and capable of contamination. In fact this image is vividly portrayed in *Focus* when Newman refuses to touch the old Jew's hand from whom he buys a newspaper.

[He was] careful not to touch the man's hands with his own. He would not have been especially horrified to have touched them but he did not like the idea of it. He fancied a certain odor of old cooking coming from Mr. Finkelstein (12).

According to Sherwood Anderson the Jew, "cerebral, talkative, melancholy, the enemy of his own sensuality, stands for all that is negative and reprehensible in modern life" (Fiedler 471-72). These negative prejudiced attitudes and misconceptions are therefore responsible for the taboo tagged on the Jew. In response to this animosity, Miller proposes a democratic humanism and a change in mentality as a panacea. In fact, Fiedler suggests that "the dilemma of the Jew is a tragic doom from which only the greatest wisdom may finally be capable of delivering us" (Fiedler 474). That wisdom arises out of the recognition of our "connectedness" and love. Bayard, one of the characters in *Incident at Vichy* alludes to this "connectedness:"

None of us is alone. We're members of history. Some of us don't know it, but you'd better learn it for your own preservations (265).

Arthur Miller himself proposes the sacrifice of the self in order to recover personal dignity, that of the human spirit, undoubtedly the individual's highest virtue:

The only force that can keep the world from destruction . . . is the will of man to survive and to reach his ultimate, most conscious, most knowing, most fulfilled condition, his fated excellence (Miller, *Crucible* vii).

Miller further maintains that in fact “man is condemned to live within the social laws of modern times and because of this, he can’t simply walk away and say to hell with it” (VII). Like everybody else, the Jew must accept his identity and integrity coupled with a strong will to survive.

This “force that can keep the world from destruction” — “the will of man to survive” — comes out clearly in *Focus* when Finkelstein takes a stand against his oppressors. Talking to Newman, and to the Gentiles at large, Finkelstein maintains:

Don’t you see what they’re doing? What the hell can they get out of the Jews? . . . How many times must it happen, how many wars we got to fight in this world before you will understand what they are doing to you. Move. You want me to move. I will not move. I like it here. I like the air, I like it for my kids. I don’t know what I’ll do but I will not move. I don’t know how to fight them but I will fight them (198).

This call for resistance to external forces is similarly echoed in *Incident at Vichy* when Leduc rhetorically prompts Monceau to act: “In short, because the world is indifferent you will wait calmly and with great dignity — to open your fly” (277).

Monceau also adds that another way out is, in fact, not to be self-defeatist, pessimistic: “The important thing is not to look like a victim. Or even to feel like one” (263).

The dilemma arises from the fact that whether the Jews fight back like Finkelstein in *Focus* or are called to action and advised “not to look like . . . victim[s]” in *Incident at Vichy*, they constitute, as a group, a microscopic minority whose actions are almost insignificant in the face of the overwhelming majority of Gentiles’ hostility. So in addition to the Jewish approach to this problem, the Gentiles have still a greater role to play. This comes out very clearly in *Focus* where Newman, a Gentile mistaken for a Jew and equally persecuted, re-examines for the first time the bases of racism. In his opinion, this discrimination is

irrational and based on a kind of tradition. Newman, after allying with Finkelstein to fight the attacking thugs, confesses:

True enough, Finkelstein often let his beard grow for two days, but it seemed childish to tell him to get off the block because he did not shave often enough. And looking at Finkelstein now, Newman saw that he had not really hated him (185).

This acknowledgement therefore creates a bond between the Gentile Newman and the Jew, so much so that the Gentile assumes the role of the biblical good Samaritan. He nurses Finkelstein after the attack:

The blood was even spreading the stain that covered the whole front of his shirt. Newman held onto his arm and they walked to the door and out of the store. . . . Newman led his friend along the sidewalk and up the path of his house and onto the porch. When he had put Finkelstein to bed, he walked out of the house and went into the store and turned out the lights (228-29).

Newman here appears to be born again for he has found love and kindness instead of hatred and discrimination: in his eyes, he and Finkelstein are now akin.

In *Incident at Vichy*, Von Berg eventually recognises his complicity in the atrocities of his Nazi brothers after Leduc's penetrating analysis of his commitment with the Nazis' crimes:

Your cousin. I understand. And in any case, it is only a small part of Baron Kessler to you. . . . When you said his name it was with love; and I'm sure he must be a man of some kindness, with whom you can see eye to eye in many things. But when I hear that name I see a knife. You see now why I say there is nothing, and will be nothing, when even you cannot really put yourself in my place? . . . It's not your guilt I want, it's your responsibility — that might have helped. Yes, if you had understood that Baron Kessler was, in some part, in some small and frightful part — doing your will, you might have done something then, with your standing, and your name and your decency; aside from shooting yourself (289).

Nevertheless, Von Berg begs Leduc's friendship — "I asked your love" (288) — and asks the most succinct question:

“What can ever save us?” (289)

The answer lies in what Bigsby calls “humanistic commitment . . . to a tentative positivism of human life”(1967; xvii). For the dignity of man lies in his ability to face reality in all its senselessness; to accept it freely, without fear, without illusion. As Bigsby further elaborates:

The absurd lies not in man’s situation but rather in the ridiculous prospect of his surrendering freedom and thus identity to a systematized conformity. Consequently, the realization of the emptiness of the universe is the first and necessary step towards understanding the freedom and responsibility of man. It is for this faith in the need to confront that vision of the world, to accept that freedom that Miller . . . produced the myth (xiv).

In fact, Moss concludes that Miller’s lesson in his works is that it is immensely difficult to be human, precisely because “we cannot detect our own hostility in our own actions. It is tragic fatal blindness” (74). In Miller’s view, our refusal to countenance our own destructiveness becomes infinitely destructive. So to affirm their humanity, men must charitably accept their common failings and their selfishness. This accounts for Newman’s and Von Berg’s acceptance of their failings in *Focus* and *Incident at Vichy*. This is a first step towards an active redemption based on love and the natural propensity of man for connectedness.

CONCLUSION

In *Focus* and *Incident at Vichy*, Arthur Miller exemplifies the mechanism of hate which has inevitably reduced the persecuted Jews to a taboo people — a people considered “unclean,” “impure,” “not to be touched,” “negative, separate” and which cause “death or pollution if man comes in contact with it.” The picture in both works is one of a world deprived of humanism, in which people cease to exist, and in which everybody is held at gunpoint. The Major states this very clearly in *Incident at Vichy*.

“Tell me . . . how there can be persons any more. I have you at the end of this revolver — he has me — and somebody has him — and somebody has somebody else” (281).

It is really a world inimical to human existence, a world that can only be saved by love, collective responsibility and human connect- edness. In fact Miller’s project of the Jewish predicament simply constitutes an attempt at establishing a historical and suitable context for the demonstration of the irrationality of human hostility and destructiveness. If man was created by God in his image, and if Christ’s last injunction was to love our neighbours as we love ourselves, the concept of making one race, one generation, or one nation a taboo is absurd. On the one hand, it is the responsibility of the oppressed to rise out of that state of oppression and, on the other, the oppressors must come to terms with the mechanism of their hate, their destructiveness, so that Martin Luther King’s Dream may come true. This will make the world a place where the children of the Jews and of the Gentiles can walk hand-in-hand as brothers and sisters. Whether considered as “recalcitrant or rejected,” Fielder maintains, the Jews “are still God’s chosen people.”

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