

Incident at Vichy: A Play Study Guide

Incident at Vichy: A Play by Arthur Miller

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Incident at Vichy: A Play Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Section 1: pages 1-10.....	5
Section 2: pages 10-20.....	8
Section 3: pages 21-29.....	11
Section 4: pages 29-40.....	13
Section 5: pages 40-48.....	16
Section 6: pages 48-58.....	19
Characters.....	22
Objects/Places.....	26
Themes.....	28
Style.....	32
Quotes.....	34
Topics for Discussion.....	37



Plot Summary

"Incident at Vichy" by Arthur Miller is a one-act play about a group of ten men detained by German officers during World War II upon suspicion of being Jewish. As these men begin to understand why they have been detained, they begin to react with fear and anger, yet none try to escape. "Incident at Vichy" offers a view of why the Nazis were able to perpetrate the Holocaust for so long due to denial and complicity.

After being picked up on the streets of Vichy, France, six men and a young boy wait in a detention center, wondering why they have been detained. Bayard tries to convince the excitable Lebeau to calm down while Marchand and Monceau insist this is a routine identity check. Still, Lebeau is convinced the Germans will kill them. The Captain of Police, the Professor and two detectives enter with the Old Jew, Leduc and Von Berg. Marchand is interrogated and given a pass to leave. Meanwhile, Bayard tells the others about Jews being transported by railroad car to concentration camps in Poland where they are worked to death. Monceau, an actor, does not believe that the Germans would senselessly kill the Jews because they enjoyed his acting so much when he played in Germany, but Von Berg, an Austrian prince, insists that many of the Nazis were once cultivated people. As the prisoners nervously examine their papers, Monceau insists they will be fine as long as their papers are in order.

Bayard, a Communist, becomes irritated by Lebeau's panic and insists that they cannot react personally to this because they are a part of history. Ferrand, the cafe proprietor, brings coffee to the officers, and upon leaving the office, he tells the waiter that he overheard the detectives talk of burning people in furnaces. In response, Leduc suggests that three men could overpower the one guard at the door, but no one is willing to attempt an escape; complicity offers a chance of release while rebellion seems to ensure destruction. During this conversation, the gypsy and Bayard are both interrogated, but neither of them return. Monceau refuses to believe that the Germans are burning Jews in furnaces, but Von Berg and Leduc believe that man is truly that atrocious. When the waiter ignores his summons, the Captain drags him into the office and proceeds to beat him. Feeling this position is beneath him, the Major argues with the Professor about their interrogation methods before taking a walk during which questioning ceases pending his return. The boy offers to help Leduc in his escape plan, but Leduc believes it is useless without the aid of Monceau, the only other able-bodied man who still insists the Germans are incapable of this. Leduc and Monceau argue about racial laws while Von Berg tells about the Jewish musicians that were killed in Austria as proof that the Germans would try to exterminate the Jews.

Accepting his fate, the boy asks Von Berg to return his mother's wedding ring which he was trying to pawn for food when he was picked up. As Leduc and the boy decide to escape, the Major returns, intoxicated, and advises them against it. The Major and Leduc argue because Leduc wants the Major to help them escape, but the Major insists it will not matter as he sees a future where human beings are insignificant. Lebeau, Monceau and the boy are all interrogated in turn, but none of them are released. The Old Jew follows this pattern. During this, Leduc asks Von Berg to tell his wife about his



arrest, and Von Berg asks to part as friends; however, Leduc refuses until Von Berg accepts his responsibility in this atrocity which stems from his complicity as he has done nothing to change things. The Professor interrogates Von Berg, releasing him with a pass which Von Berg gives to Leduc and insists he go. Leduc flees. The Professor, the Captain and the detectives rush out to search for Leduc while the Major and Von Berg stare at each other without being able to comprehend one another as a new group of detainees is brought in.



Section 1: pages 1-10

Section 1: pages 1-10 Summary

"Incident at Vichy" by Arthur Miller is a one-act play about a group of ten men detained by German officers during World War II upon suspicion of being Jewish. As these men begin to understand why they have been detained, they begin to react with fear and anger, yet none try to escape. "Incident at Vichy" offers a view of why the Nazis were able to perpetrate the Holocaust for so long due to denial and complicity.

In a place of detention in Vichy, France in 1942, a corridor on the right leads to an unseen door which opens onto the street. There is a private room in the back, and a long bench faces an empty area. As the light rises, it reveals six men and a fifteen-year-old boy sitting frozen on the bench. Marchand, a well-dressed businessman, seems impatient as he continually glances at his watch and the paperwork in his pockets. Out of hunger and anxiety, Lebeau, an unkempt 25-year-old artist, dramatically exhales and rests his head on his hands. Lebeau turns to Bayard, a 25-year-old man who is poorly but cleanly dressed, and asks if Bayard has any idea what is going on. Bayard was just walking down the street. Lebeau was doing the same; something told him not to go out today, but he went out anyway, though he often does not open his door for weeks at a time. When Lebeau tries to ask why Marchand was picked up, Marchand ignores his questions, finally stressing that it is obvious they are doing a routine identity check since there are probably a lot of spies since many strangers have poured into Vichy in the past year. He continues that thousands of people have false papers, and such things cannot be permitted during wartime, especially with the Germans taking over; it is inevitable that things will become stricter. When Lebeau wonders if there is any racial implication, Marchand claims that he sees nothing to fear if his papers are legit before turning away to end the conversation. As Lebeau recalls how he had an American visa in his hand in 1939 before the invasion, Bayard reminds him that this may be routine. Lebeau was packed for America in 1939, but his mother refused to leave her furniture, so he is here because of some furniture and a stubborn woman. Bayard insists it is not that simple and suggests it helps to know the meaning of one's suffering. Monopolies control Germany, so they are here because big businesses want to make slaves out of everyone. Lebeau yells for coffee, but when a police guard meets him halfway up the corridor, Lebeau returns to the bench silently. Marchand requests use of the phone because he has an important appointment at 11, but he is denied. Lebeau mocks Marchand for his concern about an appointment when they are probably being sent to work in a German coal mine. As Lebeau asks if they measured Bayard's nose, 28-year-old actor Monceau leans forward to agree with Marchand that Vichy must be full of counterfeit papers. He advises Lebeau to settle down, believing it best if they all keep quiet.

Lebeau points to the man on the far side of Marchand, wondering why they brought a gypsy since gypsies never have papers. Monceau suggests the gypsy stole the pot he holds, but the gypsy insists the police picked him up when he sat on the sidewalk to



fix his pot. Marchand insists gypsies will say anything and are actually very proud of stealing. Lebeau asks how Marchand got his money, and Marchand explains he is in business. Bayard chides Lebeau for provoking people; he is an electrician, but a certain amount of solidarity would not hurt right now. The waiter recognizes the gypsy who often irritates his customers. Lebeau claims the others remind him of his father, worshipping the hard-working Germans, but he warns "whenever a people starts to work hard, watch out, they're going to kill somebody" (page 8). The Major, a well-built 28-year-old who walks with a limp, comes out of the office and greets the waiter before continuing up the corridor where he talks unheard with a guard. The waiter serves the Major breakfast every morning since he arrived in Vichy about a month ago, and he insists the Major is not a bad fellow. When Marchand asks to use the phone again, the Major claims he is not in charge of this procedure and they must wait for the Captain of Police for returning to the office. Again, the waiter insists that the Major is not a bad guy, and Lebeau asks if the Major knows the waiter is a Peruvian, but Bayard tells him not to discuss that here. Lebeau just wants to find out what is going on; it is one thing if it is a general identity check, but it could be something else entirely.

Section 1: pages 1-10 Analysis

The play opens in a room that appears like a warehouse. Six men and a young boy sit on a bench. They do not seem to know each other as they appear to be mutually curious but self-occupied. They are all anxious and frightened, trying to make themselves unobtrusive. In this first part, the characters that are introduced are Marchand, Lebeau and Bayard. Marchand is a well-dressed businessman who seems eager to be somewhere else, a fact that makes sense when he explains that he has an appointment later on Lebeau is restless and frightened, his fearful energy making him appear aggressive to the others. Lebeau tries to converse with Bayard about why they have been detained. Both of them were arrested while walking down the street. Lebeau asks about the others, but Bayard arrived shortly before Lebeau. Lebeau is uneasy because the building where they are contained looks like a police station. He finds it impossible to stay silent like the others, and he almost wishes he had committed a crime so he would understand why he is being detained. Moreover, he has not eaten since yesterday and is naturally nervous, even before the war.

Marchand's snobbery is evident as he refuses to acknowledge any of Lebeau's questions, finally insisting that this is just a routine identity check which is necessary because of how many people in Vichy have false papers. He also refuses to acknowledge that this has anything to do with race. Unable to contain his anxiety, Lebeau asks Bayard if he is Peruvian, but Bayard chides him for asking such questions, reminding him that there is no use in becoming hysterical. Lebeau laments that he did not escape to America in 1939 because his mother refused to leave her furniture, though he was packed and had obtained a passport. Bayard insists this is a result of big businesses trying to enslave everyone, showing himself to have Communist sentiments which foreshadows the discovery that he is an outspoken Communist; this is revealed as Bayard shares more of his political ideas. When Marchand requests to use the phone because he has an appointment, Lebeau mocks Marchand's concern since they



are probably being sent to a German coal mine, indicating Lebeau's realistic view of the Germans, the war and what awaits the detainees. Monceau's agreement with Marchand that the check is routine sets Monceau, Marchand and even Bayard in contrast with Lebeau as they insist upon maintaining a state of denial in which they persist in their belief that nothing bad will befall them. Monceau joins Bayard in his attempts to convince Lebeau to calm down. Marchand believes the French should economize on personnel due to the shortage in manpower, suggesting it would have been much easier for them to place a notice requiring everyone to come to the station to present their documents instead of wasting an entire morning and suffering so much embarrassment. The men wonder why the gypsy has been detained since he is obviously not Jewish, and this allows them to reinforce their denial, though they acknowledge that the gypsy's detainment may be related to theft, as gypsies are well known to be thieves, which would be completely different from their detainment. Lebeau's claim that they need to watch out for the Germans because when a people starts to work hard, they are going to kill someone foreshadows the fate that awaits this group of detainees in addition to summarizing the Nazis' activities during World War II. The Major appears near the end of this section, but he disclaims any control over this procedure, telling the detainees that the Police Captain is in charge. This claim shows that the Major is not pleased with his duty, and the waiter claims the Major is not a bad guy, indicating that perhaps the Major is not as bad as the rest of the Germans, though later his unwillingness to help the detainees shows a different side of the problem of the Holocaust; many people were unwilling to stand up for the Jews for fear of what it would mean to them. Again, Bayard yells at Lebeau for asking so many questions, but Lebeau insists he just wants to know what is happening. From the very beginning of this play, the theme of anti-Semitism is introduced as the detainees question whether they are in this situation because they are suspected of being Jews.



Section 2: pages 10-20

Section 2: pages 10-20 Summary

The first detective enters with the Old Jew, followed by the second detective with Leduc and the Police Captain with Von Berg and the Professor, ordering the Old Jew, Von Berg and Leduc to sit on the bench. When the Major enters, the Leduc asks the reason for this; they have no authority to arrest him in French territory because he is a captain in the French army. The Major and the detectives discuss how they can find more people to arrest, but the Captain tells his detectives not to arrest anyone in a crowd because he does not want to cause alarm. Marchand believes he is first, so the Professor leads him into the office. Leduc asks the others what this is about, and Monceau says it seems that they are checking identification papers. Leduc grows cautious and quietly alarmed. Lebeau asks if they measured Leduc and Von Berg's noses like they did his. He believes they need the detainees to carry stones, but Leduc insists he has never heard of forced labor in the Vichy Zone. Bayard offers to share information, but he does not want anyone quoting him. He works in the railroad yards, and when a thirty-car freight pulled in yesterday, a switchman heard people inside. The freight came from Toulouse where there has been a quiet roundup of Jews in the past few weeks, and since the engineer was Polish, Leduc asks if they were being sent to concentration camps. Monceau insists a lot of people are volunteering to work in Germany since they are doubling the ration for anyone who goes. Bayard disagrees since he has never heard of locking volunteers up, including women and children, but Leduc has never heard of them applying Racial Laws down here as it is still French territory, despite the Occupation. Von Berg asks if they have all been arrested for being Jewish, claiming he is sorry because he had no idea, but Bayard says no one said anything about being Jewish and as far as he knows, no one here is Jewish.

Bayard continues his story by teaching them how to unbolt the train doors to escape if they can, warning "don't believe anything they tell you- I heard they're working Jews to death in the Polish camps" (page 15). Monceau objects because he has a cousin at Auschwitz and has received letters that he is doing well and has even been taught bricklaying. Bayard dismisses Monceau's claim, insisting that the others should get out of the train before it gets where it is going, and Leduc agrees that he has heard the same thing. Monceau believes they are all hysterical because the Germans have been picking up Jews for years before the war, and he cannot believe they are all dead; the Germans are people. Leduc speaks this way because the Germans are people. Monceau refutes the idea because he has played in Germany and knows the German people, but Leduc studied in Germany for five years and then at the Psychoanalytic Institute in Vienna, Austria. Von Berg mentions that he is Viennese and a cousin to Baron Kessler who was involved with the school, but Leduc coldly claims he was never in that circle. Monceau recognizes Von Berg's name, and Von Berg admits he is a prince, though he claims it is of no importance anymore. Lebeau wonders why they want an Austrian prince, and Von Berg suggests the Nazis resent the nobility since few noblemen take responsibility for the reactionary regime. Leduc agrees that it is obvious



they would want to destroy whatever power the nobility has, but Von Berg laughs because he has no power. Still, he possesses a certain standing since his name is a thousand years old, and it is dangerous if someone like him is not vulgar enough as he claims Nazism is an outburst of vulgarity, and the Nazis are angered by any sign of refinement. Von Berg left Austria because of the vulgarity since it is impossible for people who respect art to hound the Jews and turn Europe into a prison. Monceau argues that the Germans have a great respect for music, but Leduc suggests it is not those people doing this. Von Berg claims he knows many cultivated people who became Nazis, and art is no defense for this; he admits that perhaps he does not understand much about this situation.

Section 2: pages 10-20 Analysis

As the play continues, three more detainees are brought, and thus the Old Jew, Leduc and Von Berg are introduced, as well as the Police Captain and the Professor, a Nazi who assists in questioning the detainees. Leduc argues that he cannot be arrested because he is a captain in the French army, but his protests are ignored. The second detective throws Leduc onto the bench before telling the Major that there are certain neighborhoods where they head when they run away from Paris so he can obtain as many as the Major can handle. The first detective suggests there are at least a couple thousand people in Vichy with false papers. The Captain tells them to avoid taking anyone out of a crowd because they do not want to alarm people, and then he dismisses both detectives. This indicates that what they are doing will cause alarm if it becomes widely known. As Marchand is taken into the office to be questioned, Leduc recognizes the Major from Amiens in June 1940, but the Major returns to the office. When Leduc asks what is going on, Monceau continues to nurse his delusion by suggesting they are checking identification papers. More realistic, Lebeau believes the Germans need laborers, but Lebeau objects that he has never heard of forced labor in the Vichy Zone. This is important as most of the detainees have fled to Vichy from the northern half of France which is occupied by the Germans. Fulfilling earlier foreshadowing, Bayard shows himself to be an outspoken Communist as he tells the other detainees about the trains taking Jews to concentration camps in Germany and Poland, warning them to escape if possible. Monceau claims that those in concentration camps volunteer to go, but Bayard has never heard of confining volunteers to trains. Leduc comments that he has never heard of them enforcing Racial Laws this far south in France, causing Von Berg to ask if they have been detained upon suspicion of being Jewish.

Bayard denies that any of them are Jewish, showing that he suspects the reason for their detainment, before continuing his warning about the concentration camps. Monceau continues to object that there is anything wrong at the labor camps, insisting the other detainees are acting hysterically since the Germans are people and he refuses to believe they are capable of such atrocities. Furthermore, he has acted for the German people which reinforces his believe that they are incapable of what the others accuse them. Leduc notes that he studied psychiatry in Germany and Austria, causing the others to believe his pessimism stems from his psychiatric career. Leduc's reference



to Austria also leads to Von Berg admitting he is from Austria, and eventually, the others realize that Von Berg is a prince. Von Berg's mention of his cousin, Baron Kessler, elicits a cold response from Leduc which foreshadows the discovery that Leduc knows about Baron Kessler though he claims he was not in that circle at this point. The realization that Von Berg is an Austrian prince leads several of the others to reaffirm their belief that this is all routine; however, Leduc and Von Berg discuss Von Berg's power and why he could have been arrested. Von Berg left Austria because he believes their pursuit of the Jews is vulgar; moreover, in response to Monceau's claims that the Germans respect art, Von Berg insists that art is no defense for Nazism as many cultivated people he once knew have become Nazis.



Section 3: pages 21-29

Section 3: pages 21-29 Summary

Marchand returns from the office with a white pass in his hand, and he hurries past the line of prisoners, ignoring the boy's question about what they asked, to show the pass to the guard and leave. Lebeau was sure that Marchand was a Jew, and Bayard suggests that Marchand simply insisted his papers were valid, so Lebeau asks Bayard to look at his papers. Meanwhile, the Professor summons the gypsy, forcing him to leave his pot on the bench. Bayard tells Lebeau that his papers look good, and when Monceau comments that Marchand looked Jewish, Leduc points out "Jews are not a race, you know. They can look like anybody" (page 22). As Monceau and the boy examine their papers, Monceau believes it is a question of one's credibility as Marchand carried himself with a certain confidence. Lebeau agrees that it is a matter of papers, but Marchand certainly looked Jewish. Monceau disagrees because if Marchand is not Jewish, that means this is a general checkup on the entire population. The office door opens, and the Police Captain gestures toward Bayard; however, Bayard sits again when Ferrand, a café proprietor, arrives with coffee and rushes into the office, the door shut behind him. Monceau comments that Bayard looked very uncertain of himself, and Bayard defensively claims it is natural to be nervous when facing a room full of Fascists. Monceau is not criticizing Bayard but reminding him that it is important to seem confident because Fascists have a sense for victims and can tell when someone has something to hide. It is necessary to create one's own reality to avoid feeling like a victim, and Monceau suggests thinking of something that makes him feel self-assured because he must make them believe he is who his papers say. Bayard claims one is in a bad way if they have to put on an act to feel their own rightness. He insists one can have real confidence if they remember the causes of this war, but Leduc asks "what confidence can one feel from an understanding that turns upside down in an afternoon" (page 25)?

Bayard has faith in the future which is Socialist. None of them are alone as they are all members of history, and as such, they cannot react personally to this. Leduc asks what one can be if not oneself, claiming it is hard to go in reverse when people usually try to experience life. Bayard claims his spirit is in the future when the working class rules the world. Von Berg claims he has confidence in certain aristocrats and certain common people, causing Bayard to point out that "class interest makes history, not individuals" (page 27) and that facts are not troublesome. Von Berg asks what happens if the facts are dreadful and nothing but disaster can come from them, pointing out that 99% of the Nazis are working class people. Bayard could not bear to live if he believed only a few thousand decent people of integrity were all that stood between him and the end of everything; he believes the working class will destroy Fascism because it is against their best interests. Von Berg claims it is a mystery because they adore Hitler, noting that he saw the adoration of Hitler among his own servants and thus can find no reassurance in facts. At the sound of laughter from the office, Von Berg notes that they laugh like Germans so perhaps vulgarity has no nation after all.



Section 3: pages 21-29 Analysis

When Marchand returns from the office with a pass, this indicates he can leave. It also indicates that he is not a Jew, and the fact that he hurries and ignores the other detainees demonstrates that he has already disassociated himself from this situation and that he does not care about the others. The gypsy is summoned into the office next, and the fact that he does not return insinuates that he is not as lucky as Marchand. The others become more nervous after Marchand is released, so they start examining their papers under the assumption that they will be fine as long as their papers are in order. When the Old Jew pitches forward, Von Berg and the boy catch him and help him back to his seat, and as Leduc checks the Old Jew's pulse, he asks if they actually measured Lebeau's nose, learning the Professor measured it with his fingers. The men continue to debate whether the reason behind their detainment is race as they question whether or not Marchand is actually Jewish. Some believe he was while others do not believe so. Lebeau agrees that he is often mistaken for a gentile, and when Bayard tells him to cut it out, Lebeau insists he is just trying to find out what he is in for. Bayard asks if Lebeau has ever thought of anything besides himself, noting that artists demoralize everyone which demonstrates Bayard's irritation with Lebeau. Bayard is summoned to the office for his interrogation, but he receives a brief reprieve when Ferrand arrives with coffee. Monceau comments that Bayard did not look confident, launching into a lecture about the important of appearing confident and not seeming like a victim since Fascists recognize a victim despite how stupid they are. This advice shows that Monceau is more aware of the dangers of their situation than he will admit; he seems to be an optimist, hoping for the best even when he knows it is not likely. Bayard's response about the working class and the future shows that he anticipates a Socialist future, denying the possibility that the Nazis could possibly win. He enjoins the other detainees to develop political consciousness in order to make an intellectual stand against their detainment. Leduc and Von Berg join the discussion at this point, each of them disagreeing with Bayard's ideas. Bayard claims that facts are not troublesome, but Von Berg insists that sometimes the facts are dreadful, destroying Bayard's hopes in the working class by pointing out that most of the Nazis are working class people. While Bayard claims that the working class will not allow Fascism because it is against their best interests, Von Berg emphasizes that the working class adores Hitler as he has seen first-hand. The laughter from the office leads to Von Berg commenting on the vulgarity of their captors, combining the French Captain and detectives in his assessment of the Germans as vulgar.



Section 4: pages 29-40

Section 4: pages 29-40 Summary

Mr. Ferrand leaves the office, laughing, but he loses his smile once he closes the door. He weeps as he whispers in the waiter's ear, claiming he told him to leave the city fifty times before rushing out. The waiter tells the others that they are not being sent to work; they have furnaces in Poland where they burn the Jews up. Lebeau insists they will be fine if they have regular French papers, but the waiter claims they will look at their penises. The boy stands as if electrically shocked, but he sits when the Captain appears and beckons to Bayard who disappears into the office. Lebeau looks at his papers in terror, and as an accordion plays from the building next door, Leduc notes there is only one guard at the door and three men could take him. Von Berg claims he has no strength and would only be in the way. Monceau asks if Leduc really believes they have furnaces, and Leduc claims it is possible, encouraging the others to do something. Monceau argues because dead Jews are useless and he finds such a non-advantageous atrocity completely unbelievable, but Von Berg finds it believably atrocious because it is so vile. He believes in the fire since it proves the Germans exist and point the way to the future where "what one used to conceive a human being to be will have no room on this earth. I would try anything to get out" (page 33). When Monceau argues that they arrested Von Berg who is obviously not Jewish, Von Berg informs him that the Professor reacted to his accent and likely thinks he is another refugee. When the Professor appears to motion to the waiter, the waiter runs to the guard whom he knows and implores him, but the Captain throws the waiter causing him to collide with the Major. The Captain drags the waiter into the office, and the others hear the sound of blows being struck.

The Major asks the Professor wouldn't it be easier to just ask them, but the Professor claims they will not tell the truth so it is either go door-to-door or make this inspection. The Major argues that not all who are circumcised are Jews, and the Professor acknowledges that a small amount of gentiles are circumcised, insisting he would never mistake the Major for a Jew when the Major admits that he is circumcised. The Major announces he will be back, telling the Professor to carry on without him, but the Professor argues that the Major is in command of this operation and must take his place. The Major argues that he is experienced in battle and is only on loan until a SS officer takes over, but his resistance fails as the Professor insists that the Army is not exempt from carrying out the Racial Program. The Major insists he will return shortly, but he is not accustomed to sitting in an office. The Professor refuses to continue until the Major returns, slamming the office door. The Major limps away, ignoring Leduc, but the boy tells Leduc he will try it with him. Lebeau says he will try also but warns that he is too hungry to be useful. Monceau argues that the guards will shoot them all down, and if they manage to escape, they will really tear them apart when they are caught. The boy pleads because he needs to pawn his mother's wedding ring since there is no food in the house, but Monceau advises the boy to do nothing and he will be released. He insists Bayard was obviously a Communist, and the waiter irritated the Captain.



Leduc appeals to Monceau who refuses to risk his life for nothing, but Leduc argues that they have just been told that they are marked for destruction. When Leduc asks why they are checking penises if it is a general checkup, Monceau yells that there is no proof of that. Leduc begs Monceau to help because there is only one guard at the door and they may never get another chance like this. When Lebeau notes they would be guarded more heavily if this were serious, Leduc claims the guards rely on them to use logic, but they need to listen to their feelings, and he can feel the danger here. Again, Monceau argues that he has played in Germany, and that audience could not burn actors in a furnace. Von Berg tells how he supported a small orchestra, and when three of his players prepared to escape when the Germans came to Austria, he housed them and convince them no harm would befall them. The soldiers came for one player of beautiful music and took him once the rehearsal ended. He is dead now. Von Berg cautions "nothing any longer is forbidden" (page 40).

Section 4: pages 29-40 Analysis

Mr. Ferrand's cheerful expression changes as soon as he closes the office door, and he cries as he whispers in the waiter's ear and insists he repeatedly warned him to leave the city. Despite his apparent grief at what he sees as his employee's fate, he is unwilling to offer a defense for his friend and leaves immediately. The waiter repeats what he has been told: that the Germans are sending the Jews to be burned in furnaces. This emphasizes the cruelty of the Nazis and foreshadows these detainees' fates. Still, Lebeau shows himself to be in denial, insisting they will be fine as long as their papers are in order. The waiter refutes this idea, telling the others that the interrogators will look at their penises to determine whether they are Jewish, emphasizing the importance of circumcision in Jewish culture. Bayard is summoned to the office next, and the fact that he does not return indicates that all of his fears were legitimate. With Bayard gone, Leduc assumes the role of rational resistance, suggesting that three of them could overpower the one guard at the door and escape.

Unfortunately, the only other able-bodied man at this point is Monceau who refuses to participate in such a rebellion, insisting that it will only make their situation worse. Monceau insists that the Germans are incapable of such a pointless atrocity and cruelty, but Von Berg comments again on the vulgarity of the Germans, believing that human nobility has been extinguished for the sake of self-interest. That is the Germans' power, to do these things because they are nothing, making it important for them to make a clear impression. They hate the Jews so the most honest thing for them to do is burn them up as they strive for a new nobility of the totally vulgar. Monceau tries to argue that their detainment is unrelated to race since Von Berg, who is obviously not Jewish, was arrested, but Von Berg informs the others that the Professor reacted to his accent, indicating that this is about race and also foreshadowing that Von Berg will be released after his interrogation. The waiter's fear is obvious when he begs the guard to assist him, but the others see the futility of resistance when he is dragged into the office and beaten.

The Major's discontent with his position is obvious as he and the Professor discuss their methods. Obviously annoyed with the Professor's means of interrogation, the Major



decides to take a walk, resulting in an argument with the Professor. The Major feels that this assignment is beneath him, but the Professor's veiled threats concerning the fact that the Major's orders come from higher up the chain of command result in the Major resigning himself to a situation in which he is trapped. Still, he insists on taking a walk to get away from the situation for a bit, a fact that infuriates the Professor who refuses to continue the interrogations alone. The Major's absence indicates a reprieve for all of the remaining detainees since the Professor ceases his questioning until the Major returns. Once the Major leaves, the boy and Lebeau agree to aid Leduc in his attempt to escape, but Monceau mocks the plan, insisting they will all be slaughtered. He furthermore excuses the continued absence of Bayard and the waiter by claiming Bayard is a Communist and the waiter annoyed the Captain; his justification of their absence demonstrates his continued denial in regards to the severity of his current situation. Monceau reiterates that it is a general checkup and they will all be fine if their papers are in order. He also refuses to believe that the interrogators are examining penises, a measure of extreme denial as the Major and the Professor discussed it fairly clearly before the Major left. Monceau reminisces about how he came to be in Vichy; Monceau was playing Cyrano in Paris, but he had Jew stamped in his passport so his gentile roommate, another actor, urged him to flee because he had Communist literature. Monceau decided to trash his books, but as he did, a man watched him from a doorway. Realizing his name and address were stamped in every book, Monceau kept walking. Like the others, he has fled to Vichy to escape persecution of the Jews, but still, he refuses to accept that he is being persecuted because he is a Jew. Leduc again pleads with the others to attempt an escape, eager to avoid the future that he knows awaits them all, but Lebeau believes they would be guarded more heavily if they were really in trouble, causing Leduc to explain that the Germans count on them to use logic and fall into a state of complicity because of their own rationale; just because the Jews are rational does not mean the Germans are also as proven by the events that occur in this play. Monceau continues to insist that the Germans are incapable of burning people alive, but Von Berg disagrees, telling a story about several of his musicians who were killed for being Jewish. He warns the others that nothing is forbidden any longer. Von Berg's distress during this conversation shows his disapproval of the persecution of the Jews, but despite his kind intentions, he has thus far been unwilling to do anything to prevent the racist slaughters, lamenting the events without attempting to change anything despite his status as an aristocrat.



Section 5: pages 40-48

Section 5: pages 40-48 Summary

The boy asks if they will let Von Berg go, and Von Berg responds affirmatively if this is about catching Jews, so the boy asks him to return the ring to his mother. Von Berg agrees to try to help Leduc, but Leduc insists it is hopeless since Lebeau is weak with hunger and the boy is too light; "I wanted to get away, not just slaughtered" (page 40). Monceau claims Leduc cannot bait him, and when Leduc asks if he is religious and he says no, Leduc asks why Monceau wants to be sacrificed as he is the only other able-bodied man but has no impulse to do anything to better their situation. Monceau refuses to play the role of the victim because he believes they will accept his papers, and if he is thrown into a freight car, he will know he has done his best. He refuses to answer when Leduc asks what will happen if they order him to open his fly. Leduc notes that they have all been trained to die, but Monceau tells Leduc to commit suicide alone instead of involving the others. He insists every government has laws which it enforces, and when Leduc insists not every government has laws condemning people based on race, Monceau disagrees, citing examples such as the Russians condemning the middle class, the English condemning the Africans, Indians, French and Italians, and the American condemning the Negroes; every country has condemned others because of race. Still, Monceau believes he will live in peace if he obeys the law with dignity. Though he does not like the law, the majority obviously does or they would overthrow it. He claims people like Leduc brought this on everyone by giving Jews a reputation for subversion and discontent. Leduc claims Monceau wants to die because his heart is conquered territory. Again, the boy asks Von Berg to deliver the ring to his mother, and Von Berg agrees, affected.

The boy and Leduc stand and peer down the corridor, but the Major appears at the far end and tells them not to try it because there are sentries at both ends. He claims this is as inconceivable to him as it is to them, but Leduc says he would believe it if the Major shot himself and some of the others. The Major argues that he and the others would just be replaced, but Leduc points out that maybe this group could escape. When the Major asks why Leduc deserves to live more than he does, Leduc responds "because I am incapable of doing what you are doing. I am better for the world than you" (page 45). The Major's feelings about this mean nothing if he is unwilling to help them, but if he helps them, Leduc will remember an honorable German and love him for the rest of his life. Leduc believes it is important to be worthy of someone's love and respect, yet the Major insists that nothing of that kind is left so it does not matter if he is loved. The Professor and the Captain appear as the Major yells about Jews being like dogs. When the Professor tries to pull him aside, the Major draws his revolver and fires into the ceiling before sitting beside Lebeau. He looks at Leduc and asks how they can be people anymore when he has the Professor at the end of his revolver and someone else has all of them. As a man of honor, the Major says he will not tell them what Leduc advised him which he considers a sign of his decency. He notes that Leduc is a combat veteran with no record of subversive activities against the Germans and asks if Leduc



would leave if the others were kept. Leduc answers affirmatively, but he does not know if he could walk out with a light heart. He puts his trembling hands in his pockets, but the Major tells him not to hide his hands because he is trying to understand why Leduc is better for the world than he is. Leduc claims he has "no duty to make myself a gift to your sadism" (page 48). The Major pushes Leduc and goes to the office to interrogate the next detainee, Lebeau who follows the Professor into the office. As Leduc returns to his seat, Monceau asks if Leduc is happy now that he has infuriated the Major.

Section 5: pages 40-48 Analysis

The boy seems to realize that he is not going to leave the detainment center when he asks Von Berg to return his mother's wedding ring, since Von Berg will be released if this is about catching Jews. His selflessness seems to inspire Von Berg who offers to help Leduc with the escape attempt. Unfortunately, Lebeau is unable to help as is the boy, and Monceau still refuses to aid in their escape, claiming he will know he did his best if they do not accept his papers. This portion of the play continues to show the characters' reactions to their situation; several of them accept their danger and want to do something to improve their situation, but others insist on the justness of the law, believing they will be released. As Leduc points out, the Germans' main weapon is complicity. The detainees are faced with the decision of acting passively and hoping for survival or rebelling against authority which increases their risk of danger if this inspection is routine and not racially motivated. The reality is that an attempt to escape is more likely to result in a positive outcome, but the majority of the characters refuse to admit that they are being detained because of their race. Only Leduc and Von Berg are truly willing to fight due to their principle and faith in the nobility of man. Lebeau wishes he was like Von Berg, arrested by mistake, and though he has done nothing wrong and is not ashamed of being a Jew, he feels guilty because he has started to believe the terrible things they say about Jews after hearing it for so many years. People do not believe they can be killed, but he believes it. Lebeau was caught while taking a walk before work, though he knew it was dangerous, because he wanted to see something real. This shows the stigma that anti-Semitism causes even amongst Jews as they are told so many negative things about their race that they cannot help beginning to accept some of the insults as factual. When Leduc objects to the laws condemning people because of race, Monceau legitimately points out many countries have condemned people based on race citing examples such as the Russians, the English and even the Americans in regards to their enslavement and subsequent dehumanization of Negroes. Monceau continues to believe he will survive if he obeys the law, causing Leduc to chide Monceau for his complicity. In turn, Monceau claims that rebellious Jews like Leduc are what leads to the hatred of Jews.

Just as Leduc and the boy decide to attempt an escape, the Major returns and warns them not to try it. With the Major's return, the main confrontation of the play occurs between Leduc and the Major. As Leduc tries to convince the Major to release the detainees, the Major insists that it is irrelevant to help them since he will only be punished if he aids them, and his aid will not stop the persecution of the Jews. Furthermore, he disregards the right of life since he foresees a future that contains an



authoritarian mass society where humans are irrelevant. The Major disregards Leduc's claim that it is important to be worthy of someone's love and respect for this reason. Intoxicated, the Major draws his weapon on the Professor, showing Leduc that there is a long chain of command which none of them can thwart. Though the Major obviously is nervous and feels guilty about the nature of the inspections, he becomes very defensive when questioned by Leduc. This demonstrates the truth of Von Berg's claims that the insecurity of Nazism is what leads to their vulgarity and violence; both the victims and the Nazis are trapped in a system where they find little room to resist. Leduc maintains his courage despite the Major mocking him, insisting he will not yield to the Germans' sadism. The Major returns to his duty, summoning Lebeau who does not return to the others. Monceau accuses Leduc of infuriating the Major, insinuating that Leduc sharing his viewpoint of their situation may have worsened their circumstances.



Section 6: pages 48-58

Section 6: pages 48-58 Summary

The Captain beckons to Monceau who takes his papers out of his jacket and cheerfully greets the Captain as he enters the office. The boy reminds Von Berg where his mother lives, asking if this applies to him since he is a minor. When the Captain beckons to the boy, the boy says he will not be fifteen until February and can get his birth certificate to prove it, but the Captain simply urges him into the office. The Old Jew prays softly as he rocks back and forth. With only the Old Jew, Leduc and himself remaining, Von Berg turns to Leduc and expresses the wish that they had met under other circumstances as there are many things he would like to ask Leduc. Sensing an imminent summons, Leduc asks Von Berg to tell his wife that he was arrested. He also asks Von Berg to tell her the truth about the furnaces because it should be known. When Von Berg notes it will be difficult to tell a woman such a thing, Leduc insists he should be able to say it since it is happening. Von Berg becomes hopeful that they are taking so long with the boy, suggesting the boy is too young and perhaps they will also release Leduc since there is such a shortage of doctors. Leduc struggles with his anger, finding it difficult since Von Berg keeps finding shreds of hope, especially since Von Berg will survive. Von Berg points out that he cannot help that, and he insists it will not be easy for him to walk out of here. He left Austria because he was close to suicide. Not only did they murder his musicians, his friends barely had any reaction, and he cannot understand such indifference. When Leduc notes that Von Berg has curious ideas about human nature, Von Berg asks "but what is left is one gives up one's ideals" (page 51)? Leduc apologizes, but he knows the violence inside people's heads and finds it difficult to listen to amelioration, even if it is well-meant. He understands that Von Berg must ameliorate a bit in order to survive, but it is still infuriating because the suffering is so pointless; there is no lesson or meaning to it which is why it will be repeated over and over forever. It cannot be shared because it is an absolute waste. Trying to collect himself against his terror, Leduc bemoans what devils the Germans are. He changes his mind and tells Von Berg not to mention the furnaces to his wife, and Von Berg is relieved. Leduc tells him that there was no reason to get caught since his family has a good hideout, but he went to find codeine for his wife's toothache. Von Berg offers to financially aid Leduc's wife and two young children before wondering if he can bribe the guard even as he notes it is unnatural to wish for a money-loving cynic. Leduc claims that is the price of idealism. He knew it was senseless to search for codeine, and though he and his wife are no longer in love, it is too difficult to separate in these times.

The Professor beckons to the Old Jew, grabbing him and forcing him to leave his bundle when the Old Jew does not move. The bundle rips when the Professor pulls on it, and they are all surprised as feathers float out of it. The Captain and the Professor carry the Old Jew into the office with the Major following behind with deadened eyes. Brushing feathers from them, Von Berg asks if he can part with Leduc's friendship. Leduc notes that he is not angry at Von Berg or even at the Nazis; he is angry that he was born before the day that men accept their own nature: that man is not reasonable, is full of



murders, and his ideas are the tax he pays for the right to hate and kill with a clear conscience. He is angry that he deluded himself and did not teach others what he knows. Von Berg insists there are people who would rather die than commit murder as he begs for Leduc's friendship, but Leduc claims he has never analyzed a gentile who did not have a hidden dislike of Jews. Von Berg covers his ears, proclaiming this is not true of him. Leduc says Von Berg will never destroy the truth of this atrocity until he knows what is true of him; everyone has their Jew, someone they hate, and for Von Berg, this is the man whose death leaves him relieved that he is not him. Despite Von Berg's decency, he will never be anything until he faces his own complicity with this. Von Berg insists he has never spoken against Jews, and he dislikes the implication that he has anything to do with this monstrousness. Leduc admits that he has heard of Von Berg's cousin, Baron Kessler, who is a Nazi that helped remove all of the Jewish doctors from medical school. Von Berg had heard as much but forgot because Baron Kessler is his cousin. Despite his anger, Leduc mourns for Von Berg as much as for himself. He sees violence when he hears Baron Kessler's name, but Von Berg only sees it as a small part of the man he loves. Leduc wants Von Berg's responsibility, not just his guilt. He wants him to understand that in some small way, Baron Kessler was doing his will, and if he had accepted that, he could have possibly done something to stop it. Covering his face, Von Berg asks what can save them. The Professor beckons to Von Berg who stares at Leduc, angrily brushing the Professor's hand away before following him into the office after Leduc smiles at him. Leduc sits motionless alone, finally making a decision and pulls his knife from his pocket. As he starts to head for the corridor, Von Berg returns with a pass in his hand. He walks past Leduc but suddenly turns and hands the pass and the boy's ring to Leduc, telling Leduc to go. Von Berg angrily waves Leduc away when Leduc asks what will happen to him. Backing away and covering his eyes in guilt, Leduc claims he was not asking Von Berg to do this because Von Berg does not owe him this, but Von Berg yells at him to go! Leduc hands his pass to the guard and disappears into the street. A few minutes later, the Professor comes out and asks what happened to Von Berg's pass, but Von Berg ignores him so the Professor yells "man escaped" (page 58). The Captain and the Major rush out of the office, and the Captain leads the guards outside to search for the escaped man. The Major looks up the corridor and then back at Von Berg who gets to his feet and faces the Major whose face fills with anguish and fury. The two men stare at each other, forever incomprehensible to one another. Four more prisoners are brought in, and they look around the room and at the two men who stare at each other so strangely.

Section 6: pages 48-58 Analysis

As the play draws to a close, Monceau is interrogated and, like most of the other detainees, does not return. The boy reminds Von Berg of his promise to return his mother's wedding ring, but as he is summoned to the office, he talks of his youth, hoping to save himself. The Old Jew's prayer indicates that he recognizes the severity of the situation and searches for salvation from a higher power. This is the only time that the Old Jew speaks during the play. Alone, Leduc and Von Berg continue to discuss their situation; both of them find hope in the principles of men, but they each doubt that the Germans display such principles. Leduc also seems to sense that he will not be



released, so he asks Von Berg to tell his wife what has befallen him. At first, he wants his wife to be told about the furnaces because he believes such an atrocity should be known, but he changes his mind later, deciding to spare his wife from such pain instead. He is disgusted by Von Berg's optimism because Von Berg has no reason to be anything but optimistic since he is not Jewish and will almost definitely be released. Von Berg explains his depression which results from the indifference of his friends to the persecution of the Jews. This demonstrates the reason that the Holocaust was able to be executed for such a long time; the complicity and lack of opposition from both the Jews and others who did not necessarily agree with the slaughter of an entire race allowed the Germans to continue their persecution without fear of reprisal. This is also demonstrated by the fact that the detainees do not attempt to escape in this play. Leduc sees this extermination as a waste as there is nothing to be learned from killing the Jews. Von Berg brainstorms about how he can help Leduc whose friendship he hopes to depart with, but it seems hopeless.

The Old Jew is taken into the office and does not return, again demonstrating the harshness of the Germans' interrogation and persecution. Left alone, Von Berg continues to pursue his hope of Leduc's friendship which spurs Leduc to explain that he is not angry at Von Berg or even the Nazis; he is upset that he deluded himself about the nature of man for so long and will now die before he is able to explain man's nature to others. When Von Berg objects to this negative assessment of humanity, Leduc insists that all gentiles have a negative opinion of Jews, proving this by his claim by showing Von Berg's own complicity with this through his cousin, Baron Kessler, who is a Nazi. Von Berg realizes that he knew this about his cousin but let his familiar affection overshadow his opinion of such proceedings. Leduc feels sorry for Von Berg and his subconscious complicity, though he insists that Von Berg should accept responsibility for his complicity. Von Berg seems to realize the truth in Leduc's statement while he is being interrogated by the Professor. Left alone, Leduc prepares his knife, deciding to attempt escape, showing that he is not compliant to his future in the hands of the Germans; however, Von Berg returns with a pass before Leduc can act, fulfilling the earlier foreshadowing that Leduc would be permitted to leave. Surprisingly, Von Berg hands the pass to Leduc and tells him to leave, deciding to sacrifice his own freedom for a Jew though there is little chance that either will survive. Von Berg does so because he realizes that accepting the status quo will never inspire change in the Nazi system, but perhaps the Germans will cease justifying their actions if they are forced to kill their own. Leduc objects to Von Berg's sacrifice, but Von Berg insists he leave, spurring Leduc into action as he hands the pass to the guard and rushes away from the detention center. When the Professor exits the office and sees Von Berg, he realizes that Leduc has left in Von Berg's place, so a search ensues for Leduc though the play ends before the outcome can be revealed. While the others search for Leduc, the Major stares at Von Berg. The two men do not understand one another. Neither agree with what is happening to the Jews, but while the Major refuses to act for fear of being punished, Von Berg decides that he cannot live in a society where killing a people based on race is permissible. Von Berg shows himself to be the hero of this play. Still, the four prisoners brought in as the play ends enforces the Major's belief that this atrocity will continue since one person cannot inspire the necessary changes to end the activities of Nazism.



Characters

Leduc

Leduc is one of the Jewish detainees who is brought to the detention center after the play begins. He is a psychiatrist who studied in Germany and at the Psychoanalytic Institute in Vienna. Leduc is one of the main characters in this play. Several pages into the play, the Captain of Police, the Professor and two detectives enter with the Old Jew, Leduc and Von Berg. In response to hearing about the furnaces in Poland and Germany, Leduc suggests that three men could overpower the one guard at the door, but no one is willing to attempt an escape; complicity offers a chance of release while rebellion seems to ensure destruction. The boy offers to help Leduc in his escape plan, but Leduc believes it is useless without the aid of Monceau, the only other able-bodied man who still insists the Germans are incapable of this.

Leduc and Monceau argue about racial laws while Von Berg tells about the Jewish musicians that were killed in Austria as proof that the Germans would try to exterminate the Jews. As Leduc and the boy decide to escape, the Major returns, intoxicated, and advises them against it. The Major and Leduc argue because Leduc wants the Major to help them escape, but the Major insists it will not matter as he sees a future where human beings are insignificant. During the others' interrogations, Leduc asks Von Berg to tell his wife about his arrest, and Von Berg asks to part as friends; however, Leduc refuses until Von Berg accepts his responsibility in this atrocity which stems from his complicity as he has done nothing to change things. The Professor interrogates Von Berg, releasing him with a pass which Von Berg gives to Leduc and insists he go. Leduc flees.

Von Berg

Von Berg, a main character and a detainee brought to the detention center after the play begins, is an Austrian prince who was detained on suspicion of being Jewish because of his accent. Several pages into the play, the Captain of Police, the Professor and two detectives enter with the Old Jew, Leduc and Von Berg. Monceau, an actor, does not believe that the Germans would senselessly kills the Jews because they enjoyed his acting so much when he played in Germany, but Von Berg, an Austrian prince, insists that many of the Nazis were once cultivated people. Von Berg contributes frequently to the debates between Monceau and Leduc, agreeing that the Germans are capable of this atrocity of burning Jews in furnaces. Leduc and Monceau argue about racial laws while Von Berg tells about the Jewish musicians that were killed in Austria as proof that the Germans would try to exterminate the Jews. Accepting his fate, the boy asks Von Berg to return his mother's wedding ring which he was trying to pawn for food when he was picked up.



During the others' interrogations, Leduc asks Von Berg to tell his wife about his arrest, and Von Berg asks to part as friends; however, Leduc refuses until Von Berg accepts his responsibility in this atrocity which stems from his complicity as he has done nothing to change things. The Professor interrogates Von Berg, releasing him with a pass which Von Berg gives to Leduc and insists he go. Leduc flees. The Professor, the Captain and the detectives rush out to search for Leduc while the Major and Von Berg stare at each other without being able to comprehend one another as a new group of detainees is brought in.

Marchand

Marchand is a businessman who is detained in Vichy. He insists the inspection is routine. Marchand is questioned and released.

Lebeau

Lebeau is a painter who is arrested while taking a walk. He is a bearded, unkempt twenty-five-year-old. Lebeau is nervous about his detainment, suspecting the racial implications because the Professor measured his nose before arresting him. He is also weak from hunger since he has not eaten since yesterday. Lebeau is the fifth prisoner to be questioned, and he is not released.

Bayard

Bayard is a poorly but cleanly dressed twenty-five-year-old electrician. He chides Lebeau for his nerves, insisting the interrogations are routine identity checks. Bayard is an outspoken Communist who tells the other detainees about the trains filled with Jews that are taken to concentration camps in Poland. Bayard is the third detainee to be interrogated; he is not released.

Monceau

Monceau is a Jewish actor who is detained at Vichy. He has played in Germany and refuses to believe the Germans are capable of burning people in furnaces because of their appreciation of the arts. He refuses to aid Leduc in his escape plan, insisting that will definitely result in punishment while he believes complicity may be rewarded with release. As a result, Monceau is the sixth prisoner to be questioned, and he is not released.



Ferrand

Ferrand is the cafe proprietor who delivers coffee to the Major and the Professor. He overhears the detectives discussing how the Jews are being burned in furnaces, and though he warns his employee, the detained waiter, he is unwilling to offer his aid.

Gypsy

The gypsy is a detainee who is arrested on the sidewalk when he sits to fix his pot. He is the second prisoner who is questioned, but he is not released.

Waiter

The waiter is a detainee who is questioned fourth and not released. The Captain handles him roughly when he attempts to appeal to the guard whom he knows.

Boy

The boy is not quite fifteen years old. A detainee, he is arrested while on his way to pawn his mother's wedding ring since they have no food in their house. The boy is willing to aid with Leduc's escape plan, but Leduc decides the boy is too light to aid his cause. Realizing he will not be released, the boy asks Von Berg to return his mother's wedding ring. The boy is the seventh prisoner who is questioned; he is not released.

Old Jew

The Old Jew is a quiet, sickly detainee. He does not communicate with the other prisoners, and the only time he shows any sign of life is when he prays before he is interrogated. The Old Jew is the eighth prisoner who is questioned, and he does not return.

Major

The Major is a disabled German Army veteran who is in charge of the interrogations at Vichy. He feels that the duty is beneath him, but he eventually accepts the pressure he feels from his superiors. Feeling this position is beneath him, the Major argues with the Professor about their interrogation methods before taking a walk during which questioning ceases pending his return. As Leduc and the boy decide to escape, the Major returns, intoxicated, and advises them against it. The Major and Leduc argue because Leduc wants the Major to help them escape, but the Major insists it will not matter as he sees a future where human beings are insignificant.



Police Captain

The Police Captain is a French man who helps question the detainees.

Professor Hoffman

Professor Hoffman is a German Nazi who questions the detainees. He convinces the Major to adhere to his responsibility when the Major objects to the interrogation methods used.



Objects/Places

Vichy, France

Vichy, France is the German-occupied French territory during World War II where this play takes place. The detainees were arrested on the streets of Vichy.

Detention Center

The detention center is the main setting of "Incident at Vichy". This warehouse is where the prisoners are detained while the officers ascertain whether they are Jews.

Office

The office in the detention center is where the Major, the Professor and the Captain question the detainees.

Corridor

The corridor leads to the street but is guarded to prevent the detainees from leaving unless the Professor grants them a pass of release.

Passes

The Professor gives detainees who pass the inspection, proving they are not Jews. This allows them to leave. Marchand and Von Berg are the only detainees who receive passes, but Von Berg gives his pass to Leduc.

Ring

The boy was arrested while on his way to pawn his mother's wedding ring so he could buy food for their house. When the boy realizes he will not likely be released, he asks Von Berg to return the ring to his mother, and Von Berg passes the ring off to Leduc along with his pass of release.

Austria

Austria is Von Berg's homeland where he is a prince. Leduc also studied psychiatry in Austria.



Germany

Germany is behind the persecution of the Jews whom they hate. Monceau has acted in Germany, so he refuses to believe that people who appreciate art are capable of such a pointless atrocity.

Furnaces

Ferrand tells the others when he overhears the detectives talk of sending the Jews to the furnaces in Poland to be burned. This elicits a debate among the detainees as some believe this claim while others deny it.

Poland

The detainees discuss rumors of Jews being sent to concentration camps in Poland, such as Auschwitz, where Jews are worked to death. Like the furnaces, some of the detainees believe this rumor while others do not.



Themes

Anti-Semitism

The most obvious theme addressed in "Incident at Vichy" is the theme of anti-Semitism, hatred of Jews. This theme plays a large role as the play occurs during the Holocaust when the Germans slaughtered the Jews out of a racist hatred. When the play opens, seven detainees are gathered together in a detention center in Vichy, France, wondering why they have been detained. Several of the prisoners insist upon maintaining a state of denial, certain that the inspection is routine, but others recognize the racist motivations behind their arrests. The majority of the detainees are indisputably Jewish. Bayard tells the others about the trains taking Jews to Polish concentration camps where he heard that Jews are being worked to death. Von Berg asks if they have all been arrested for being Jewish, claiming he is sorry because he had no idea, but Bayard says no one said anything about being Jewish and as far as he knows, no one here is Jewish. Monceau believes they are all hysterical because the Germans have been picking up Jews for years before the war, and he cannot believe they are all dead; the Germans are people. Many of the prisoners insist upon maintaining their comfortable denial, even when they hear about the furnaces where Jews are being burnt. Monceau argues because dead Jews are useless and he finds such a non-advantageous atrocity completely unbelievable, but Von Berg finds it believably atrocious because it is so vile. That is the Germans' power, to do these things because they are nothing, making it important for them to make a clear impression. They hate the Jews so the most honest thing for them to do is burn them up as they strive for a new nobility of the totally vulgar. The prisoners also learn that their interrogators are forcing the detainees to reveal their genitals, determining their race based on whether they are circumcised.

Lebeau wishes he was like Von Berg, arrested by mistake, and though he has done nothing wrong and is not ashamed of being a Jew, he feels guilty because he has started to believe the terrible things they say about Jews after hearing it for so many years, showing that the anti-Semitism of others has influenced his opinion of himself. After arguing with Leduc about it being pointless to release this group of detainees, the Major rants about how Jews are all like dogs, showing his true opinion. When Leduc comments on the murderous nature of man, Von Berg insists there are people who would rather die than commit murder as he begs for Leduc's friendship, but Leduc claims he has never analyzed a gentile who did not have a hidden dislike of Jews. Von Berg covers his ears, proclaiming this is not true of him. Leduc says Von Berg will never destroy the truth of this atrocity until he knows what is true of him; everyone has their Jew, someone they hate, and for Von Berg, this is the man whose death leaves him relieved that he is not him. Despite Von Berg's decency, he will never be anything until he faces his own complicity with this. Von Berg insists he has never spoken against Jews, and he dislikes the implication that he has anything to do with this monstrousness. Ultimately, Von Berg demonstrates that he is not anti-Semitic when he



decides to give his pass to Leduc, effectively sacrificing himself to save the life of this one Jew.

Complicity

The most important theme that Arthur Miller addresses in "Incident at Vichy" is the concept of complicity, regarding this as the reason that the Nazis were able to perpetrate their persecution of the Jews via the Holocaust for such a long time. Part of this complicity is seen in the detainees' denial as they refuse to accept why they have been arrested and what awaits them following their interrogations. The only character who does not demonstrate an excessive amount of complicity is Leduc who unsuccessfully tries to rally the other prisoners to attempt an escape. Though the characters are aware, at least in part, of the persecution of the Jews, the decision to act proves difficult as the detainees believe acquiescence offers the hope of release while they remain certain that attempting to escape will indisputably damn them all. Another example of complicity is seen in the character of Ferrand who does nothing to aid the waiter despite knowing what awaits his friend. The Major does not agree with the moral implications of his duty, but he yields to the pressures of his superiors, knowing that the alternative is to be persecuted himself.

When the only detainees remaining are Von Berg and Leduc, the two have an in-depth conversation where Leduc shares his philosophy on the nature of man. Leduc notes that he is not angry at Von Berg or even at the Nazis; he is angry that he was born before the day that men accept their own nature: that man is not reasonable, is full of murders, and his ideas are the tax he pays for the right to hate and kill with a clear conscience. He is angry that he deluded himself and did not teach others what he knows. Von Berg insists there are people who would rather die than commit murder as he begs for Leduc's friendship, but Leduc claims he has never analyzed a gentile who did not have a hidden dislike of Jews. Von Berg covers his ears, proclaiming this is not true of him. Leduc says Von Berg will never destroy the truth of this atrocity until he knows what is true of him; everyone has their Jew, someone they hate, and for Von Berg, this is the man whose death leaves him relieved that he is not him. Despite Von Berg's decency, he will never be anything until he faces his own complicity with this. Because Baron Kessler, Von Berg's cousin, is a Nazi, Leduc wants Von Berg's responsibility, not just his guilt. He wants him to understand that in some small way, Baron Kessler was doing his will, and if he had accepted that, he could have possibly done something to stop it. At the end of the play, Von Berg receives a pass, but he gives it to Leduc, sacrificing himself to save this Jew and showing that he will not comply with what he knows to be wrong. Von Berg knows that the Nazi regime will not change their methods until they are forced to kill their own, beginning with him.

Human Nature

An important theme in "Incident at Vichy" is the concept of human nature. To begin with, each of the detainees are forced to question why they have been arrested and to



ponder what will happen to them. Most of them choose denial, insisting that the Germans would not attempt to slaughter the Jews. Lebeau panics as he questions why he has been detained, but Marchand and Monceau insist that this is a routine identity inspection. Bayard tries to discourage Lebeau from becoming hysterical, even as he shares his suspicions with the other detainees. Lebeau tries to control his fear, but it nearly overwhelms him on several occasions. In regards to Von Berg being an Austrian prince, he notes that it is dangerous if someone like him is not vulgar enough as he claims Nazism is an outburst of vulgarity, and the Nazis are angered by any sign of refinement. Von Berg left Austria because of the vulgarity since it is impossible for people who respect art to hound the Jews and turn Europe into a prison. Von Berg claims he knows many cultivated people who became Nazis, and art is no defense for this in response to Monceau's claims that the German people are not capable of this atrocity since they have such a great respect for art. Bayard has faith in the future which is Socialist. None of them are alone as they are all members of history, and as such, they cannot react personally to this. Leduc asks what one can be if not oneself, claiming it is hard to go in reverse when people usually try to experience life. Bayard claims his spirit is in the future when the working class rules the world. Von Berg claims he has confidence in certain aristocrats and certain common people, causing Bayard to point out that "class interest makes history, not individuals" (page 27) and that facts are not troublesome. Von Berg asks what happens if the facts are dreadful and nothing but disaster can come from them, pointing out that 99% of the Nazis are working class people. Bayard could not bear to live if he believed only a few thousand decent people of integrity were all that stood between him and the end of everything; he believes the working class will destroy Fascism because it is against their best interests. Von Berg claims it is a mystery because they adore Hitler, noting that he saw the adoration of Hitler among his own servants and thus can find no reassurance in facts.

Monceau does not believe the Germans are burning Jews in furnaces because dead Jews are useless and he finds such a non-advantageous atrocity completely unbelievable, but Von Berg finds it believably atrocious because it is so vile. That is the Germans' power, to do these things because they are nothing, making it important for them to make a clear impression. They hate the Jews so the most honest thing for them to do is burn them up as they strive for a new nobility of the totally vulgar. He believes in the fire since it proves the Germans exist and point the way to the future where "what one used to conceive a human being to be will have no room on this earth. I would try anything to get out" (page 33). Monceau insists every government has laws which it enforces, and when Leduc insists not every government has laws condemning people based on race, Monceau disagrees, citing examples such as the Russians condemning the middle class, the English condemning the Africans, Indians, French and Italians, and the American condemning the Negroes; every country has condemned others because of race. Still, Monceau believes he will live in peace if he obeys the law with dignity. Though he does not like the law, the majority obviously does or they would overthrow it. He claims people like Leduc brought this on everyone by giving Jews a reputation for subversion and discontent. Leduc claims Monceau wants to die because his heart is conquered territory.



At the end of the novel, only Leduc and Von Berg remain in the detention center. Leduc notes that he is not angry at Von Berg or even at the Nazis; he is angry that he was born before the day that men accept their own nature: that man is not reasonable, is full of murders, and his ideas are the tax he pays for the right to hate and kill with a clear conscience. He is angry that he deluded himself and did not teach others what he knows. Von Berg insists there are people who would rather die than commit murder as he begs for Leduc's friendship, but Leduc claims he has never analyzed a gentile who did not have a hidden dislike of Jews. Von Berg covers his ears, proclaiming this is not true of him. Leduc says Von Berg will never destroy the truth of this atrocity until he knows what is true of him; everyone has their Jew, someone they hate, and for Von Berg, this is the man whose death leaves him relieved that he is not him. Despite Von Berg's decency, he will never be anything until he faces his own complicity with this. Von Berg insists he has never spoken against Jews, and he dislikes the implication that he has anything to do with this monstrousness. Leduc admits that he has heard of Von Berg's cousin, Baron Kessler, who is a Nazi that helped remove all of the Jewish doctors from medical school. Von Berg had heard as much but forgot because Baron Kessler is his cousin. Despite his anger, Leduc mourns for Von Berg as much as for himself. He sees violence when he hears Baron Kessler's name, but Von Berg only sees it as a small part of the man he loves. Leduc wants Von Berg's responsibility, not just his guilt. He wants him to understand that in some small way, Baron Kessler was doing his will, and if he had accepted that, he could have possibly done something to stop it. When Von Berg is interrogated, the Professor presents him with a pass because he is not Jewish, but Von Berg gives his pass to Leduc, choosing to sacrifice his own freedom for the freedom of a Jew as an attempt to change the Nazi system by forcing the Germans to kill their own instead of justifying their actions.



Style

Point of View

The point of view in "Incident at Vichy" is third person and limited as well as reliable. This is necessary as the work is a play comprised completely of a small amount of stage directions and dialogue. This limits the amount of information regarding the characters and their situation, focusing primarily on their situation with little emphasis on character development beyond how it pertains to each individual's reaction to their situation. This is important as it allows the play to maintain its focus on the characters accepting why they were detained and their reactions to their situation. This is significant as the main lesson of the play is to show how the Nazis were able to perpetrate the Holocaust for so long, due to others' complicity and indifference.

The play is comprised mostly of dialogue with a small amount of exposition in the form of stage directions. This is useful as "Incident at Vichy" is meant to be seen, not read, so the dialogue is beneficial in examining the characters' reactions to what is going on. The viewpoint varies between all of the characters as they express their opinions of their situation, but the main contributors are Lebeau, Bayard, Monceau, Leduc and Von Berg, especially the last two.

Setting

This place is set in the real world, in a place of detention in Vichy, France in 1942, during World War II when the Nazis persecuted the Jews. The characters are mostly prisoners who have been detained upon suspicion of being Jews. The other characters are the police and military men who interrogate the suspected Jews, as well as Professor Hoffman, a Nazi who aids in the questioning. The Major is unhappy with his assignment since he is trained for battle, but he accepts his position for fear of punishment. The prisoners include an artist, an electrician, a businessman, an actor, a waiter, a gypsy, a psychiatrist and an Austrian prince; however, their occupations do not matter. All that is important to their interrogators are whether or not the detainees are Jews.

Vichy, France is the German-occupied French territory during World War II where this play takes place. The detainees were arrested on the streets of Vichy. The detention center is the main setting of "Incident at Vichy". This warehouse is where the prisoners are detained while the officers ascertain whether they are Jews. The office in the detention center is where the Major, the Professor and the Captain question the detainees. The corridor leads to the street but is guarded to prevent the detainees from leaving unless the Professor grants them a pass of release. Austria is Von Berg's homeland where he is a prince. Leduc also studied psychiatry in Austria. Germany is behind the persecution of the Jews whom they hate. Monceau has acted in Germany, so he refuses to believe that people who appreciate art are capable of such a pointless



atrocities. The detainees discuss rumors of Jews being sent to concentration camps in Poland, such as Auschwitz, where Jews are worked to death. Like the furnaces, some of the detainees believe this rumor while others do not.

Language and Meaning

The language used in this play tends to be fairly casual for the time period, though it is more formal than modern speech. The grammar used is fairly proper, though sentences are often cut off by interruptions and extreme emotions. The language used is chosen because it serves to show the characters' denial and acceptance of the situation as well as their subsequent reactions. The language used aids comprehension of the play's major themes as it allows the focus to remain on the characters' conversations with minimal distractions.

The language characterizes the characters' feelings about their situation, primarily denial, anger and fear. The play is comprised mostly of dialogue with a small amount of exposition in the form of stage directions. This is useful as "Incident at Vichy" is meant to be seen, not read, so the dialogue is beneficial in examining the characters' reactions to what is going on. The language utilized aids the writing style as it keeps the reader focused on what the characters say about their situation, allowing readers to view their anger, fear, denial and so forth. Overall, the language used makes this play very easy to understand though some of the characters' philosophical musings may remain more elusive for some readers.

Structure

"Incident at Vichy" is a one-act play that consists of fifty-eight pages. As such, there is no division of chapters. The play is quite vague as it shares very little about the characters other than their occupations and their reactions to their detainment. Yet, this is extremely useful as the purpose of the play is to show that the Germans were able to perpetrate the persecution of the Jews for so long due to the Jews' denial and others' complicity and indifference. The play takes place during a short amount of time, presumably several hours.

"Incident at Vichy" by Arthur Miller is a one-act play about a group of ten men detained by German officers during World War II upon suspicion of being Jewish. As these men begin to understand why they have been detained, they begin to react with fear and anger, yet none try to escape. "Incident at Vichy" offers a view of why the Nazis were able to perpetrate the Holocaust for so long due to denial and complicity. The pace of this play is very slow as it focuses on the characters' reactions to their detainment which frequently seem somewhat circuitous. The play is not difficult to read, though it is meant to be viewed instead. The narrative is linear with the only background given pertaining to the German Nazis' occupation of France during World War II. Overall, the play is easy to read, though the detainees' situation is distressing and inspires further thought on the depravity of humanity.



Quotes

"There are thousands of people running around with false papers, we all know that. You can't permit such things in wartime. Especially now with the Germans starting to take over down here you have to expect things to be more strict, it's inevitable." Marchand, page 3

"You know- you all remind me of my father. Always worshiped the hard-working Germans. And now you hear it all over France- we have to learn how to work like the Germans. Good God, don't you ever read history? Whenever a people starts to work hard, watch out, they're going to kill somebody." Lebeau, page 8

"But I've never heard of them applying the Racial Laws down here. It's still French territory, regardless of the Occupation- they've made a big point of that." Leduc, page 14

"But how would that be possible? Can people with respect for art go about hounding Jews? Making a prison of Europe, pushing themselves forward as a race of policemen and brutes? Is that possible for artistic people?" Von Berg, page 20

"Jews are not a race, you know. They can look like anybody." Leduc, page 22

"But that's why one must seem especially self-confident. I'm quite sure that's what got that businessman through so quickly. I've had similar experiences on trains, and even in Paris when they stopped me several times. The important thing is not to look like a victim. Or even to feel like one. They can be very stupid, but they do have a sense for victims; they know when someone has something to hide." Monceau, page 24

"What am I to them personally? Do they know me? You react personally to this, they'll turn you into an idiot. You can't make sense of this on a personal basis." Bayard, page 26

"He heard the detectives; they came in for coffee just before. People get burned up in furnaces. It's not to work. They burn you up in Poland." Waiter, page 30

"I find it the most believable atrocity I have heard... Because it is so inconceivably vile. That is their power. To do the inconceivable; it paralyzes the rest of us. But if that is its purpose it is not the cause. Many times I used to ask my friends- if you love your country why is it necessary to hate other countries? To be a good German why must you despise everything that is not German? Until I realized the answer. They do these things not because they are German but because they are nothing. It is the hallmark of the age- the less you exist the more important it is to make a clear impression. I can see them discussing it as a kind of... truthfulness. After all, what is self-restraint but hypocrisy? If you despise Jews the most honest thing is to burn them up. And the fact that it costs money, and uses up trains and personnel- this only guarantees the integrity, the purity, the existence of their feelings. They would even tell you that only a Jew would think of the cost. They are poets, they are striving for a new nobility, the nobility of the



totally vulgar. I believe in this fire; it would prove for all time that they exist, yes, and that they were sincere. You must not calculate these people with some nineteenth-century arithmetic of loss and gain. Their motives are musical, and people are merely sounds they play. And in my opinion, win or lose this war, they have pointed the way to the future. What one used to conceive a human being to be will have no room on this earth. I would try anything to get out." Von Berg, pages 32-33

"They are relying on us... To project our own reasonable ideas into their heads. It is reasonable that a light guard means the thing is not important. They rely on our own logic to immobilize ourselves." Leduc, page 39

"I refuse to play a part I do not fit. Everyone is playing the victim these days; hopeless, hysterical, they always assume the worst. I have papers; I will present them with the single idea that they must be honored. I think that is exactly what saved that businessman. You accuse us of acting the part the Germans created for us; I think you're the one who's doing that by acting so desperate." Monceau, page 41

"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." Monceau, pages 43-44

"No, tell her the truth... The furnaces. Tell her that... I don't regard it as a rumor. It should be known. I never heard of it before. It must be known." Leduc, page 50

"I can tell you that I was very close to suicide in Austria. Actually, that is why I left. When they murdered my musicians- not that alone, but when I told the story to many of my friends there was hardly any reaction. That was almost worse. Do you understand such indifference?" Von Berg, page 51

"You see, this is why one gets so furious. Because all this suffering is so pointless- it can never be a lesson, it can never have a meaning. And that is why it will be repeated again and again forever." Leduc, page 52

"Prince, in my profession one gets the habit of looking at oneself quite impersonally. It is not you I am angry with. In one part of my mind it is not even the Nazi. I am only angry that I should have been born before the day when man has accepted his own nature; that he is not reasonable, that he is full of murder, that his ideas are only the little tax he pays for the right to hate and kill with a clear conscience. I am only angry that, knowing this, I still deluded myself. That there was not time to truly make part of myself what I know, and to teach others the truth." Leduc, pages 54-55

"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 part, 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!" Leduc, page 56

"I wasn't asking you to do this! You don't owe me this!" Leduc, page 58

Topics for Discussion

Compare and contrast two of the prisoners in this play.

How does the Major feel about his job, and how does this change?

Why does Monceau refuse to participate in Leduc's escape plan?

Why have these prisoners been collected, how is their guilt determined, and what will happen to them if they are not released?

Which character in this play is the most sympathetic, and why?

Who is Von Berg, and why does Leduc insist that Von Berg secretly dislikes Jews?

Why does Von Berg give his pass to Leduc?

What does this play demonstrate about the Holocaust during World War II?