

**THE POLITICAL PLAYS OF ARTHUR MILLER AND KEE THUAN
CHYE: RESISTING THE HEGEMONIC STATE**

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ABSTRACT

The plays of Arthur Miller and Kee Thuan Chye have garnered interests from theatre enthusiasts, the general public, and academicians for their moralistic and didactic plays that often touch on moral and political issues that affect society and the individual. Their plays are most often a reflection of their country's socio-political and socio-economic development and highlight the concerns of the playwright on issues pertaining to the individual, society, and nation. As such, this thesis has closely analysed the selected political plays of Kee, namely, *1984 Here and Now*, *The Big Purge*, *We Could **** You*, *Mr. Birch* and Miller's *The Crucible*, *Incident at Vichy*, and *The Archbishop's Ceiling* from the perspective of the plays being 'resistance' plays that empower the individual while resisting the hegemonic and political state depicted in the plays. In addition, issues such as corruption and abuse of political power by the state and individuals and the persecution of the innocent are characteristics of Kee and Miller's plays. In response, Kee and Miller's plays emphasize the need for the individual to make a moral stand and to resist the hegemony of the state and its agencies. The traditional view of Miller's and Kee's political plays is that their plays are always very didactic, moralistic, and direct in their narrative and plot. The findings of this research posit that there is a development in Miller's and Kee's selected political plays and both dramatist have experimented with creative dramaturgical strategies and incorporated elements of Butler's Performativity and Todorov's the Fantastic in their third wave of political plays. There is therefore a shift in the dramaturgical strategy of Miller's and Kee's work that sees their plays becoming 'creative resistance plays' that transcend the traditional view of Miller's and Kee's political plays as merely traditional political stage plays of their time. Thus this thesis will not only give a different perspective/reading to the political plays of Miller and Kee, but also on the possibility of incorporating newer creative dissenting strategies in the traditional political plays

genre and how political plays could be a form of political communication, an important aspect in nation building and creative means of resistance/dissent.

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ABSTRAK

Arthur Miller dan Kee Thuan Chye adalah dua tokoh pementasan drama terkemuka. Drama arahan mereka yang mempunyai unsur moral dan pengajaran telah mendapat perhatian pengkaji drama, orang ramai, dan ahli akademik. Drama mereka juga kerap kali menyentuh isu-isu politik dan moral semasa yang mempunyai impak terhadap masyarakat dan individu. Hasil pementasan Miller dan Kee juga merupakan luahan hati mereka terhadap yang dianggap penting terhadap pembangunan insan, masyarakat, dan negara. Tesis ini akan mengkaji drama-drama politik terpilih Miller dan Kee iaitu *1984 Here and Now*, *The Big Purge*, dan *We Could **** You, Mr. Birch*. Drama politik Miller yang dikaji ialah *The Crucible*, *Incident at Vichy*, dan *The Archbishop's Ceiling*. Kajian ini mengkaji perspektif 'resistance' yang terkandung dalam drama-drama tersebut yang mendorong individu menentang kezaliman pentadbiran negara dan gejala rasuah dan penyelewangan kuasa negara. Drama-drama politik Miller dan Kee selalunya menekankan betapa pentingnya kesedaran moral dan peranan individu dalam membendung gejala penyalahgunaan kuasa negara. Secara amnya, kebanyakan pengkaji drama berpendapat bahawa drama politik Miller dan Kee bertujuan mengajar nilai-nilai murni dan sikap tanggungjawab bersana. Hasil kajian saya mendapati drama-drama politik terpilih Miller dan Kee telah mengeksperimentasi dengan kaedah-kaedah baru yang mempunyai unsur-unsur Performativity oleh Butler dan unsur Fantastic oleh Todorov dalam kumpulan ketiga drama politik mereka. Justeru itu, tesis ini akan memberi perspektif baru dalam kajian drama-drama politik Miller dan Kee serta kemungkinan menggunakan strategi-strategi baru ini sebagai taktik kreatif dalam pementasan drama politik. Selain itu, tesis ini juga dapat memberi gambaran bagaimana drama politik Miller dan Kee dapat menyumbang kepada pembangunan negara dalam konteks komunikasi politik, pembangunan negara, dan cara-cara kreatif penentangan dapat dijalankan.

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CHAPTER 1: THE POLITICAL PLAYS OF ARTHUR MILLER AND KEE THUAN CHYE: THE DRAMATIC ON STAGE RESISTANCE TO THE HEGEMONIC STATE

I want you to understand that I am not protecting the Communists or the Communist Party. I am trying to and I will protect my sense of myself. I could not use the name of another person and bring trouble on him...I take the responsibility for everything I have ever done, but I cannot take responsibility for another human being.

(Miller, qtd. in Griffin, p.7)

I am just an ordinary Malaysian who cares about his country and wants to see it develop in the right direction. By this, I mean in the direction of a democratic, multi-racial, egalitarian society that upholds the values of fairness and justice, and has a place for every one of its citizens on equal terms, regardless of their race and religion. I also mean that it should be free of corruption, cronyism, power abuse and other transgressions that flaw the system. If the system is flawed, I believe it should be reformed, not blindly tolerated or accepted with a helpless shrug or defended with excuses...(Kee, *March 8*, p.12)

1.1 Introduction

Arthur Miller¹ and Kee Thuan Chye, both respected playwrights of their time, were deemed to be potential political threats² to their respective states, to varying degrees. This is more obvious with the larger than life figure of Miller whose real life was at times more dramatic than what was portrayed in his plays. Miller's *The Crucible* was the play that was truly personal for him as it was allegorical of his personal political struggles with the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) during the anti-communism fervour

in 1950s America. While Miller's involvement with the HUAC committee was direct and personal, Kee's 1984 *Here and Now* was the playwright's socio-political commentary on the state of Malaysian racial politics and its policies from a dystopian view that was in the allegorical mould of George Orwell's 1984. Both plays chiefly follow the emotional dilemma and personal sacrifices that entail in the protagonists' often lonely battle for their personal choices, and are an assertion of their rights in a totalitarian and theocratic state administration that refuses to acknowledge and affirm such actions.

As for Kee personally, the year 1987 was a bleak year for the freedom of democracy in Malaysia because it was the year the government launched *Operasi Lalang*³ on 27th October 1987, a crackdown on government and opposition leaders, political scientists, educationists, members of the press, social activists, union leaders, and non-governmental organisation leaders who were deemed 'threats' to national security. While Kee was away pursuing his MA in Essex University, the change in the political climate in Malaysia gave him the impetus and the inspiration for his second drama, *The Big Purge* which was staged from 11th – 14th May, 1988, at the Essex University Theatre, England. Kee's absence from Malaysia could not have happened at a more opportune time as the possibility of Kee's detention was there as the play was a parody of the government's crackdown on the mostly opposition members.

Collectively, both playwrights and their political plays examine the nature and theory of hegemony and the role of the government or authorities in enforcing rule of power in society and the social elements and tactics used by such political forces to enlarge their political power to contain the threats that may jeopardize their influence and political survival. As such, any move to dislodge entrenched institutions of political power is dealt with severely. In most cases, seen in the anti-communist paranoia in America and

instances of political instability in Malaysia, good political governance has often been misplaced with brute force to neutralise any potential threats of political instability on the grounds that the ends justify the means.

This thesis takes the stand that the political plays of Arthur Miller and Kee Thuan Chye are instruments used by the playwrights as a medium of resistance to the hegemonic state and its state apparatus, and the selected plays show a development from being mere political plays of power and persecution to experimental plays that incorporate elements of the fantastic and performativity as alternative forms of resistance to the state.

For both playwrights, the genre of drama enables performance as an act of resistance that can be experienced thoroughly by the audience; its prowess in resisting such monoliths of state administration lies not only in its symbolic and artistic resistance but also resistance in the form of consensus and discourse generated from the thought-provoking performances of plays.

This would bring into the question the justification for choosing Miller and Kee as the playwrights of choice for this thesis. The choice of Miller in this study is because of his reputation and dominance in the American theatre scene as well as his international reputation as a global playwright. In the context of political plays written in the Southeast Asian Anglophone drama context, we have Willibrordus S. Renda from Indonesia, Kuo Pao Kun from Singapore, and political theatre dramatists from the Philippines such as Bonifacio P. Ilagan and Lutgardo Labad. Such political playwrights are critical of the state and constantly highlight the abuses of power by the political leaders, especially during the dictatorial regimes of Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines and President Suharto of Indonesia. In the Malaysian context of political plays in English, Kee fits the

profile of a political playwright. In addition, he is also considered the most successful political playwright in Malaysia and there is a consistency in the subject matter of his plays that clearly matches the focus of this thesis.

In addition, I would also like to state four reasons for analysing Miller and Kee's political plays in this thesis. The first reason is that both playwrights are very political and morally conscious individuals. Both playwrights are intellectuals and they share the same sentiments regarding the abuse of power by the state and are exceptionally vocal in expressing their thoughts on social, political and economic injustices permeating society and nation. Their political plays clearly demonstrate this vitality and it is the stand of this thesis that the plays are "power plays" that demonstrate the power struggle between the state, and the individual. As such, the plays provide a platform of expression and vindication of the playwrights' internal struggles against external forces that stifle expression and subjugate the individual to the oppressive laws of the state.

Secondly, the political plays of Miller and Kee are crafted in a literary landscape that challenges the hegemonic state in a creative space offering a platform to express dissent against the state government. While the power of the state exerts control over the present reality, their hold is limited to the conscious level. Miller and Kee, being political playwrights, have crafted their political plays to be a platform of resistance and a vindication of their creative rights as purveyors of social ideals such as morality and justice. Such political plays by the playwrights provide a subliminal landscape for a contestation and negotiation of ideas that reveal that the more repressive the state and its laws are, the more the marginalised and persecuted will speak. In the case of Miller and Kee, the genre of drama is utilized as an effective and creative art form of political and social resistance against the politics of race, religion, gender, and class.

Thirdly, both playwrights were writing at a time when the democracy of their respective countries was under ‘threat’, not by an external force, but by the ruling government itself. This could be seen when the perceived threat of communism in the United States in the 1950s led to an excessive crackdown on individuals believed to be communists. The “Red Menace/Alert” scare in 1950s America was also fuelled primarily by Senator Joseph McCarthy⁴ whose accusation that the US Department of State was infiltrated by Communist agents, led to the purging of innocent individuals in private companies, government departments, state departments, schools, hospitals, and the entertainment industry. Many individuals were black-listed, lost their means of livelihood and never regained their former lives. This remained the case unless they could name other ‘Communist agents.’ This act of ‘redemption’ (reporting of people believed to be Communists) only led to a never-ending witch-hunt in America that jeopardized the lives of innocent individuals under the guise of ‘national security.’ In Malaysia, a similar ‘purging’ happened in 1988 when the ruling government arrested hundreds of politicians, mostly from the opposition and individuals in non-governmental associations for being a ‘threat’ to national security. Dubbed *Operasi Lalang* or “Weeding Operation” the crackdown occurred when Chinese educationalist groups protested the government’s move to appoint non-Chinese educated staff to Chinese independent schools. This protest was supported by the Chinese political parties from the government as well as the opposition. In retaliation, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the biggest component party of the government-led National Alliance Front organised a counter-protest. Racially provocative speeches were uttered in the rally organised by the UMNO Youth. Subsequently, *Operasi Lalang* was initiated and the mainly opposition and NGO leaders were arrested by the Malaysian police under the Internal Security Act. Kee and Miller’s plays thus share a similar trait: both dramatists wrote their political plays to protest against the blatant abuse of political power by the governments of their time. Their

plays thus symbolise their dissent to unfair ruling governments which have oppressed the citizenry in their efforts to consolidate power by maintaining the status quo.

Fourthly, the political plays of Miller and Kee have very similar themes such as the opposition to all forms of social control and political fear-mongering by the political state. This is even more glaring when governments elected by the people through the democratic process view every criticism of the government as a form of attack. Miller and Kee's political plays were written out of their sense of responsibility, as a critique of the abuses of political power by the state; their political plays take a moralist stand in the dissemination of universal values. They speak of the ultimate need for individuals to take a position and firmly act on issues pertaining to human conflict in the postmodern age. Besides power, another thematic similarity in Miller and Kee's plays that I find worthy to explore is the issue of racial discrimination. While this is evident in Kee's plays, this thematic focus is not critically discussed by Miller scholars, particularly in *Incident at Vichy*. Thus, the analysis of this theme of racial discrimination could reveal critical insights into the understanding of Miller and the political dimension of his play in relation to Kee's dramatic works.

This thus forms the justification for the comparison of both playwrights in the impact of politics on them, their involvement in it and how politics has shaped their plays as well as their responses towards the state and the persecution of the individual. Thus, the selected political plays of Miller and Kee will also demonstrate politics as the motivation for the playwrights' works and their dramatic resistance to the hegemony and power of the political state and the development of that resistance from the conventional to the creative.

1.2 Research Objectives

This thesis will thus have the following research objectives:

- 1) To prove that the political plays of Miller and Kee are a form of contestation to the hegemony of the state; the plays are a form of resistance against the perpetuation of the politics of fear and persecution and a denunciation of various social and moral injustices.
- 2) To show that the political plays of Miller and Kee are didactic plays that inspire the individual and society to strive and fight for their individuality and rights against the oppressive powers of the state.
- 3) To analyse how the selected plays demonstrate the art form of dissent that affirms such plays as ‘power plays’ that eventually empower the individual to resist the hegemony of the authoritative state and its propaganda of fear.
- 4) To demonstrate how the political plays have moved from being plays about resistance to plays that incorporate creative dramatic strategy as newer forms of resistance against the oppressive powers of the political state.

1.3 Research Questions

As such, the idea of “resistance” in the political plays of Kee Thuan Chye and Arthur Miller such as Kee’s *1984 Here and Now*, *The Big Purge*, and *We Could **** You, Mr. Birch* and Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*, *Incident at Vichy*, and *The Archbishop’s Ceiling* will be analysed in this thesis. The plays would be the focus of this thesis since much can be expounded from a comparative analysis of both playwrights. This analysis would offer new and original insights from an East-West perspective on the dynamics of resistance or

opposition and the defiance towards overt persecution by the political state. Additionally, it will examine how such strategies are exploited by both playwrights in the course of their political plays as a means to negate the powers of the state.

Thus, this thesis will answer the following research questions:

- 1) How the politics of race, religion, gender, and political ideology are manipulated by the hegemonic state and its various institutions to inculcate a culture of fear and subservience in society as demonstrated in the playwrights' work.
- 2) How the "agents" of resistance such as the playwrights demonstrate such concerns in their plays, which are then used as a means of socio-political discourse/political commentary on McCarthyism to the turbulent political climate of Malaysia in the 1980s.
- 3) How the political plays are utilized by the playwrights as an effective means of "resistance" in negotiating the limited creative space given to achieve the fine balance of resistance, and dissent against the hegemony of state politics and the oppressive state in 1950s America and 1980s Malaysia.
- 4) How Miller and Kee's political plays are important in nation building as their plays are a platform for negotiation, providing a deeper understanding of the politics of resistance (including creative resistance) on the sovereign stage of national politics.

1.4 Background Information on Miller: America's Most Prominent Dramatist

Arthur Asher Miller was born in Harlem, New York City on 17th October 1915 to Isidore and Augusta Miller. The Millers were wealthy as they owned a clothing business with a thousand workers that manufactured women's clothes. However the Great Depression of 1929 wiped the family business out and left a lasting impression on the young Miller. It was a time of great difficulty for the Millers as well as America. The stock market crash saw thousands of businesses fold, leaving millions of workers unemployed. Along with it went the American Dream and the hopes and aspirations of many.

The Depression was a traumatic and turbulent time for America and it remains a recurrent theme in Miller's plays. It was not only the collapse of the world's greatest economy post-World War I that Miller was concerned about but the magnitude of the crash and its cataclysmic social and psychological impact on the American people. With the Fall, Miller saw how an individual's identity, hopes, courage, sense of self-worth and, dreams are tied to monetary possession. If the money goes, society and the individual crumble. The Depression signified the collapse of the American Dream and along with it "...the promises which America made... the collapse of a dream which is ultimately connected with their sense of themselves" (Biggsby, *Miller in the Nineties*, 174).

For Miller, the economic meltdown of the 1930s "was the ground upon which I learned to stand" (Miller, *The Shadow of the Gods*, 176) and it gave him an uncanny understanding of the human psyche as well as a wider perspective of the correlation between economic forces and the human self. The Depression was itself to be part of Miller's early informal education. As the realities of that era set in, Miller's economic standing was insufficient to see him through university. His below average high school grades were inadequate to get him admission to most universities but on appeal to the

President of the University of Michigan, Miller was accepted into the journalism⁵ programme of the university.

1.5 Education and Early Plays

To finance his way through university, Miller took on a series of part-time jobs including delivering bread in the early hours of the morning for several dollars a week. Upon enrolling in the University of Michigan, which was also known for its radicalism, Miller found his creative calling in drama when at the age of twenty-one, he won his first Avery Hopwood Award for the play *No Villain*. This feat was later repeated with *Honors at Dawn* and a second place for *Great Disobedience* in 1938.

Miller graduated from the University of Michigan in 1938 and joined the Work Projects Administrations (WPA) Federal Theatre Project in New York City. The national organisation offered work to struggling and unemployed actors, writers, directors and designers. Since a requirement of this project was the submission of creative works, Miller submitted a play entitled *The Golden Years* and later worked on a series of radio plays. Miller also worked in the Brooklyn Navy Yard when an old football injury prevented him from being drafted by the military.

1.6 Miller in the 1940s and Turbulent 1950s

Miller's first foray into Broadway saw *The Man Who Had All the Luck* being staged in 1944. It was unsuccessful and closed after only four days. A more determined Miller returned with a novel entitled *Focus*, a story of anti-Semitism in America. The novel was a success and the playwright followed it up in 1947 with *All My Sons*, which was considered Miller's first Broadway success. The germination of the idea for the play originated from *The Man Who Had All the Luck* in which Miller wrote about the

relationship between a businessman and his brother, a baseball pitcher, and their father. This later gave Miller the inspiration to write his Pulitzer prize-winning play, *Death of a Salesman*.

The play *All My Sons*, which is about a young girl who reports her father to the authorities for selling defective parts to the armed forces, brought Miller instant fame and recognition. Perhaps wanting to immerse himself in hard labour in order to have a first-hand experience of the harsh realities of work and the difficult labour conditions of the working class, Miller worked temporarily as a factory hand, assembling wooden box dividers. He says “I wanted to be with the salt of the earth” (qtd. in Bigsby, *The Cambridge Companion to Arthur Miller* 2).

1.7 Death of a Salesman and the Concept of Tragedy

Miller’s next play, *Death of a Salesman* was a phenomenal success and remains his most successful play ever. Produced in 1949, the play also won the Drama Critics’ Circle award besides the Pulitzer Prize. The play had the honour of being the first American play to be staged in China with the production of *Salesman in Beijing* in 1984.

Miller’s success in *Death of a Salesman* was timely in 1949, especially with post-war social concerns affecting newly-built societies and economies of their time. The universal appeal of the play struck a chord with most Americans with its intense portrayal of Willy Loman as a tragic hero caught in the terrible deception of the American Dream. In the era after the Great War, the Depression, and World War II, America’s economy was growing rapidly and wealth was flowing back to America’s growing middle-class. Miller’s play was a realistic wake-up call to Americans who believed in the warped values of material wealth, personal charm and social honour. More thought-provoking was Miller’s re-

definition of a tragic hero to include the average American on the street and it is this definition that stirred the minds and imagination of the American public in 1949.

I believe that the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were. On the face of it this ought to be obvious in the light of modern psychiatry, which bases its analysis upon classic formulations, such as the Oedipus and Orestes complexes, for instance, which were enacted by royal beings, but which apply to everyone in similar emotional situations. (Martin, *Theatre Essays*, 3)

Miller's *Tragedy and the Common Man* essay in 1949 created much interest in the concept of tragic heroes and the nature of tragedy in drama. Miller's exceptional essay challenged some of the more conservative definitions of the tragic hero and tragedy while pushing for a re-evaluation and a re-focus on the plight of the common man regardless of status or condition. Miller's insistence on the common man as worthy of attention and equal in importance to the downtrodden hero brought renewed interest in the study of tragic heroes in American drama.

Insistence upon the rank of the tragic hero, or the so-called nobility of the character, is really but a clinging to the outward forms of tragedy. If rank or nobility of character was indispensable, then it would follow that the problems of those with rank were the particular problems of tragedy. But surely the right of one monarch to capture the domain from another no longer raises our passions nor are our concepts of justice what they were to the mind of an Elizabethan king. (Miller, *Tragedy and the Common Man* 5)

In writing *Man Who Had All the Luck*, *All My Sons*, and *Death of a Salesman*, Miller was quite clearly setting forth his own critical perspectives and principles on drama. Miller had continually acknowledged his gratitude to Ibsen for inspiring him with the art of creating “a dramatic fact from an idea, and to make audiences listen to what he had to say” (Martin, *Introduction to Theatre Essays*, xxix). In doing so, Miller also found the social plays of Ibsen to be inspiring and the focus on man and his social relations to be truly engaging. Thus, like Shaw, Ibsen, Brecht, and Chekhov, Miller believed that the playwright had a great responsibility to enlighten and provoke audiences to think about important issues affecting society. Thus, Miller’s thematic concerns in his plays have always touched on moral and social issues.

In all my plays and books I try to take settings and dramatic situations from life which involve real questions of right and wrong. Then I set out, rather implacably and in the most realistic situations I can find, the moral dilemma and try to point a real, though hard, path out. I don’t see how you can write anything decent without using the question of right and wrong as the basis. (Martin, *Introduction to Theatre Essays* xxvii)

Miller’s principles were soon tested in the 1950s as it was his most challenging decade. Fresh from receiving multiple honours for *Death of a Salesman*, Miller wrote an adaptation of Ibsen’s *An Enemy of the People* in 1950 in response to the growing fear of communists infiltrating America, especially government positions in the country. In the play, Miller focuses on the conflict between the Stockman brothers, one of whom is a doctor who discovers that the town’s tourist attraction, the hot springs, contained water that was thought to be safe, but was actually poisonous. The town mayor, with the support of the townspeople, decided to cover and suppress the truth and force the doctor to

conform to the majority position so that the town would continue to enjoy the prosperity it had gained as a tourist hotspot. Miller's play was a sort of prelude to *The Crucible* because the latter highlights the need to "resist the pressure to conform" (Miller, *Timebends* 324); "At rock bottom, then, the play is concerned with the inviolability of objective truth" (Miller, *Enemy of the People* 9).

1.8 Miller in the 1960s

The following years saw Miller producing no plays but instead turned his artistic direction to the cinema. *The Misfits*, which was released in 1961, took three years to film. The movie starred Marilyn Monroe whom Miller married in 1956 after a divorce from Mary Slattery, his first wife.

In 1964, Miller returned to the stage with *After The Fall*, a play that reveals the intricacies of man and his moral obligations, and the role of memory as personal history that the protagonist, Quentin, a lawyer, explores to more deeply understand his private failures. The play highlights the passage of the protagonist as he probes his conscience before "a court of his own conscience...[and], gradually comes to understand his collaboration in his own moral failure" (Balakian, 117). *After The Fall* touches not only on the effects of moral consciousness as a source of personal liberation but also on human guilt and betrayal. *Incident at Vichy*, a companion piece to *After The Fall*, also addresses similar issues of human betrayal, but on a level of greater and more universal magnitude: The Holocaust. In the play, Miller forces the contemporary American audience to acknowledge mankind's universal responsibility: "It concerns the question of insight – of seeing in ourselves the capacity for collaboration with the evil one condemns" (Balakian, 126). The play is a dramatization of the rounding-up of suspected Jews by the Vichy government in 1942 for the Nazi-led German government. The unsuspecting Jews know

little of the fate that awaits them in the gas chambers. In their desperation, they cling on to illusions of hope that dissipate as time progresses. In the inevitable journey of despair and death, Von Berg, an aristocrat, whose conscience is besieged by such atrocities, steps in to take the place of a condemned prisoner, Leduc.

Incident at Vichy is Miller's strongest work against the horrors of the Holocaust and Fascism. It is here in this, and other of his early plays, that Miller placed emphasis on tragedies that often correlated with the biblical Fall.

Miller grapples with the chaos of contemporary experience by way of the Fall as much as Faulkner uses original sin, Joyce the Homeric tradition, and Eliot the story of the grail. In Miller's vision, the Holocaust, McCarthyism, and the Depression became the twentieth-century correlatives for the Fall. (Balakian, 120)

After *Incident at Vichy*, Miller's next play, *The Price* was a success internationally when it was produced in 1968. In this play, Miller returns again to the moral and emotional conflict of two brothers, reminiscent of Biff and Happy Loman in *Death of a Salesman*. *The Price* captures the moral debate between Victor, a middle-aged policeman, and Walter Franz, a wealthy surgeon, as they both confront and re-evaluate the consequences of their past decisions on their present lives. The year 1968 was also a busy year for Miller off-stage. In the political arena, Miller served as a delegate to the Democratic Party National Convention and was elected to be the President of PEN (Poets, Essayists and Novelists) in 1965. It was a position he took pride in as he was very vocal and active in the international literary organisation. Miller was against America's involvement in the Vietnam War. Internationally, Miller published *In Russia, The Reason Why*, filmed an

anti-war allegory, and also spoke against the oppression of writers in Greece. Miller also garnered notoriety in Russia when the Soviet Union took umbrage at the travel journal *In Russia* and banned all of his literary works in the Republic.

1.9 The Turbulent 1970s

The 1970s were trying times for the US government with its international involvement in the Vietnam War and Cambodia, and the resignation of President Nixon in the Watergate Scandal. These were some of the major events of the chaotic decade that Miller took inspiration from in the writing of his plays.

The 1970s proved to be a successful decade for Miller as he staked his claim to as one of America's most prominent dramatists since Tennessee Williams. At home, a collection of his plays, *The Portable Arthur Miller*, was published in 1971. The timeless appeal of *Death of a Salesman* is evident in the play's revival in Philadelphia and New York. In 1978, Miller's theoretical but influential essays were published in a collection titled *The Theatre Essays of Arthur Miller*. Abroad, Miller played a significant role in the release from state prison of director/playwright Augusto Boal. He also protested against the arrest of dissidents in the Soviet Union. This was followed by a visit to China in 1978, and the following year saw the publication of *Chinese Encounters* with his then wife. At home, the play *After The Fall* appeared on television; there was also a successful revival of *The Crucible* in New York.

On stage, Miller produced *The Creation of the World and Other Business* in 1972 but it was a short-lived production that ended after twenty performances. The play is Miller's own interpretation of the biblical creation of the world, from Genesis till the story of Cain and Abel. The play is, in fact, a "religious parody and a comic-strip reworking of creation"

(Demasters, 139) and an attempt by Miller to re-write and demythologize biblical Genesis from the twentieth century perspective. Miller portrays a world in which we have chosen Lucifer over God. Choosing to live in such a world devoid of moral responsibility and guilt would only lead to the destruction of mankind and as such, man would then turn to God for compassion and love.

The play may or may not be seen as an apology for Judeo-Christianity, but it is certainly a dramatization of the moral issues implicit in a viable social contract, relevant to Jew, Christian, agnostic, or atheist. It offers a new cosmology for a world in need of fundamental re-evaluation, a world in which mankind in general and the individual in particular assume responsibility for their actions and for their world. (Demasters, *Miller's 1970's Power Plays* 143)

This encapsulates Miller's preoccupation with Man and his personal struggles, and the moral decadence of his time. In the morally-constructed world of his plays, Miller almost always re-focuses on his protagonist at the end of the play and presents the moral choice by which his protagonist must decide his fate. It is usually a moral decision that his characters must make in the end to redeem their sense of self and dignity, either in the face of oppression or through their sense of guilt and complicity in a human conflict that needs moral intervention.

The Archbishop's Ceiling was staged in 1977 and written from Miller's experience with a group of writers in Czechoslovakia. Being under a totalitarian regime, writers, journalists, broadcasters and people who worked in the media were very careful with what they said. Aware that the government was monitoring them, these people were aware of

the unseen threat in their homes: tiny microphones concealed in their apartments by the secret police. Miller incorporates this experience into his play. The setting is an old palace in Prague where a group of writers is staying. Knowing that their conversations are monitored, their language then becomes structured, rigid, and unnatural. Natural conversations are non-existent and communication becomes a tedious process of pretence and a perilous act that might be unmasked at any moment. Truth then is sacrificed due to the fear of retribution and with it, the liberty of the common Man.

With two major plays written in the turbulent America of the 1970s, Miller once again shows the inseparable state of humanity and its social responsibility. The play *The American Clock* adheres to this principle but with a more intense warning that America must revamp its vision and re-evaluate its past values for a deeper understanding of its failures. Set during the Great Depression, the play is a reminder to the country about its miserable economic and social past, a past that many Americans would prefer to forget but which the play forces them to face.

Both were hard-minded attempts to grasp what I felt life in the seventies had all but lost - a unified concept of human beings, the intimate psychological side joined with the social-political. To put it another way, I wanted to set us in our history by revealing a line to measure from. In *Clock* it was the objective facts of social collapse; in *Archbishop*, the bedrock circumstances of real liberty. (Miller *Timebends*, 587)

1.10 The 1980s – Miller as America’s Leading Dramatist

The American Clock was the only fully-fledged play that Miller produced in the 1980s which saw a rise in Miller’s popularity. 1986-1990 marked a period of revivals of his past

plays such as *The Crucible* that was staged in New York, London, Washington D.C., and New Haven. The revival of *The Price* was a success on Broadway in 1985 while in London, *The American Clock* and *The Archbishop's Ceiling* were produced, also successfully. The 1980s were also a decade that saw a rise in the production of one-act plays such as *Some Kind_of Love Story*, *Elegy for a Lady* (1982), *I Can't Remember Anything*, and *Clara* (1987). Miller's reputation and appeal were not limited to the North American continent and the UK but also spread to China with the historical staging of *Salesman* in Beijing in 1983, the first American play to be staged in China with an all-Chinese cast. *Death of a Salesman* continued to be a crowd favourite with 25 million people watching the play on CBS television in 1985. That same year also saw the play being produced in Amsterdam, Tokyo, and Sydney. Most importantly, the decade saw not only the publication of Miller's *Collected Plays Volume II* but also his important autobiography, *Timebends: A Life*, being published in 1987 to rave reviews in America and United Kingdom.

1.11 Miller in the 1990s

In 1991, Miller wrote and opened the play *The Ride Down Mount Morgan* in London at the age of seventy-six. True to the character of his earlier plays that almost all contained central characters with a shadowy past and a flawed present, *The Ride Down Mount Morgan* concerns a man named Lyman Felt who ends up in a hospital after crashing his vehicle while driving down a mountain-side in a blizzard. In a twist of fate, two women arrive at the hospital each claiming to be his wife. Thus, Lyman's bigamous life with two distinct eccentric personalities is revealed before his two wives and his own self. The play exhibits Miller's classic treatment of the merger of his past and present and how memory and fantasy intertwine to generate scenes from Lyman's memory as he contemplates his life in the present predicament. As the tale unfolds, the audience is acquainted with the

successful and materialistic Lyman, “the quintessential Eighties Man, the man who has everything, but there’s no end to his appetite” (qtd. in Bigsby, *Miller in the Nineties* 171). Lyman’s conviction stems from his belief that self-interest comes before everything else, including his marriages to his two wives. He knows, however, that something is wrong with his life and that the accident might reveal more of his life than he wants to know. Like so many of Miller’s plays, it is only at a moment of calamity that confrontations with the past and present might reveal the hope of future redemption.

The Last Yankee (1993) is another moral play that gives us an intimate glimpse of three women in a mental hospital. Two are admitted for clinical depression while another lies motionless on a bed. The play is a reflection of Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*, of Willy Loman’s obsession with the American Dream that is flawed and the shattering of such a dream and its promises. We see the dream taking root in the character of Patricia who is unhappy with her less than successful carpenter husband. Miller depicts once again the crippling effects of false national myths that are internalized by individuals like Patricia so strongly that the collapse of such a dream takes them along as well. The clinical depression that Patricia experiences is the result of such a belief, and a failure to accept that the reality of such a crushing truth that their lifetime conviction is nothing more than a delusion. While the play zeroes in on the theme of disappointment, despair, and resignation, it is also “...a plea not for resignation but acceptance” (Bigsby, *Miller in The Nineties* 176) of such experiences that might eventually offer hope and redemption for those who are capable of embracing them.

In another Depression era play, Miller’s *Broken Glass* (1994) is an account of a chaotic and spiritually fragmented America of the 1930s. Not only was America plagued by social, economic, and political stagnation but anti-Semitism was also resurfacing during

the emotionally charged times of the Depression. It is in this highly sensitive period that Sylvia Gellburg loses the use of her legs while her husband, who is a respected businessman of Jewish faith, feels threatened by the winds of change blowing in America. Caught in the web is doctor, Harry Hyman, to whom Sylvia slowly becomes emotionally attached during her treatment visits. All of this transpires while Sylvia's husband begins to doubt his sexuality. Thus begins a soul-searching journey by the characters as truth, denial, illusion, guilt and prejudice become part of their painful journey towards redemption and hope.

In the play, Miller was also concerned about the debilitating effects of anti-Semitism in the country where such forms of extremism during the Depression coupled with patriotism and ethnic nationalism, proved destructive to entire communities. The act of betrayal, murder, violence by neighbours, friends, relatives, and kin is indeed as horrifying as it is frightening. The global conflicts of the two world wars, the Holocaust, genocide, and ethnic cleansing are the examples of Man's brutality and capability to inflict pain and death with no lapse in moral judgment. According to Miller, what was worse was that humanity stood by and watched without intervening in such global atrocities. Miller believed that the refusal to intervene, due to the conviction that one was powerless to affect events, was also an act of betrayal to humanity.

In each of us, whether recognised or not, is that same bloody ethnic nationalism. This is not coming from the moon. This is coming from us. And we have not come close to even confronting this thing. All the patriotism and the ethnic nationalism is knocking on the door and it's as dangerous as it ever was...it is the paralysis which could destroy the world...The idea of being paralysed in the face of forces we don't

understand is the mark of our times, perhaps at all times. (qtd. in Bigsby, *Miller in the Nineties* 181)

It is the paralysis of inaction, the indifference of individuals towards society and the lack of accountability in social issues that have largely been the hallmark of Miller's plays. Miller has always attacked the general malaise of his times, especially on issues concerning social responsibility, integrity, and the need to confront reality rather than clinging to destructive illusions of the mind. From *The Man Who Had All the Luck* to *Death of a Salesman*, Miller's plays are contemporary yet sensitive, intimate portrayals of life and its complexities that also explore the need for acknowledgement of responsibility for the evil in the world as seen in *Incident at Vichy* and *After the Fall*. From accepting responsibility for one's actions in *The Last Yankee* to resisting the destructive forces of fear and manipulation in *The Crucible*, Miller has always maintained that we must seek responsibility for our actions and that denial and the inability to face the truth is a deadly form of escapism leading to an inevitable destruction of oneself. His concerns are always directed to the conditions of society and the nature of human values that remain inseparable from one another. Miller scholar Alice Griffin explains how Miller views that "a serious treatment of a human being must encompass the society that surrounds him or her as the force that has conditioned thoughts, culture, attitudes, and values" (Griffin, 16). Another social anchor is the family, one common theme that Miller associates with the individual, and the importance of the family in providing the "the safety, the surroundings of love, the ease of soul, the sense of identity and honour" which are tied to the idea of family (Miller, *The Theatre Essays* 73).

1.12 Background Information on Kee Thuan Chye: Malaysia's Most Prominent Political Playwright and the Art of the Absurd

Malaysia's most prominent and successful political playwright, Kee Thuan Chye was born in Penang on 25th May, 1954. Kee studied at Francis Light School and Penang Free School before graduating with a BA in English from the Science University of Malaysia⁶. Kee was also a recipient of the university's Chancellor's Gold Medal award in 1976. His desire to continue his postgraduate studies at USM was dashed when he was not offered a tutor's position⁷, despite graduating top of his class. Moving down to the capital city, Kee entered journalism. He then completed his MA⁸ in drama at the University of Essex in 1987 and is a now well-known journalist, editor, actor, writer, and an occasional poet. Kee has worked with a number of major newspaper organizations in Malaysia such as *The Straits Echo*, *New Straits Times*, *Business Times*, *New Sunday Times*; his last position was as an Associate Editor with *The Star* in 2009.

Kee's dabbling in drama began during his undergraduate days in Penang when he wrote plays that were mostly existentialist and absurdist in nature. Influences from Pinter, Ionesco, and Beckett were dominant in his earlier plays, reflecting his deep interests in the fragmented state of existence of man and modern society. Most of Kee's earlier plays have very long and odd-sounding titles like *Oh, But I Don't Want to Go, Oh But I Have To* (1974). This play tells of how a stranger disrupts the domestic life of a married couple and persuades the husband to eventually leave with him despite the wife's protestations. In another of Kee's plays written in the same year, *The Situation of the Man who Stabbed a Dummy or a Woman and was Disarmed by the Members of the Club for a Reason Yet Obscure; If There was One*; he brings to life the scenario presented in a painting by René Magritte called "The Threatened Assassin" and has as its central premise a man being hounded by a group of strangers for maintaining his individuality. His ordeal is witnessed

by three onlookers who do nothing to prevent his eventual dismemberment by the group. In the last of Kee's staged plays of the 1970s, *Eyeballs, Leper and a Very Dead Spider* (1975), two men in a room lit with candles find themselves getting weaker and increasingly distrustful of each other as the candles are snuffed out one by one. In the interim, they are visited by several young women, an old woman and a leper.

The influences of existentialist and modernist playwrights on Kee's earlier creative works have remained dominant and substantial from the point of view of dramatization, style, setting, and the names of the characters. Kee believes that he "found an affinity with them, in their bleak vision of a universe on the edge of apocalypse, their loss of faith in language, their sense of nonsense, their portrayal of people confronted with despair" (qtd. in Quayum *One Sky Many Horizons* 252). While Kee's earlier plays were very much experimental and modern, they were a mirror of his sense of displacement and alienation from his own culture due to his inability to speak Mandarin, as well as the dominant culture of the country in which he was born and raised (Quayum, *One Sky Many Horizons* 253).

1.13 Kee and His Plays – 1980s to 1990s

1984 Here and Now was Kee's first major play and the first of his trilogy of political plays staged from 1984 to 1994, that highlights his dissatisfaction with the government of Malaysia over issues such as corruption, abuse of power, oppression of dissent, institutionalised racial discrimination and the hegemonic powers of the state in determining national interests and the construct of nationhood. Staged at the Experimental Theatre in Kuala Lumpur in 1985, Kee's *1984 Here and Now* is an adaptation of George Orwell's *1984* and a clear allegory of Malaysia's political state of affairs. The play is also a powerful critique against the political shenanigans and innate climate and culture of

intimidation and fear propagated by state authorities bent on suppressing the freedom of expression and all forms of dissent against national interests. While Orwell's *1984* deals predominantly with the oppression and suppression of the individual by an authoritarian state, Kee's *1984 Here and Now* focuses on interracial relationships and issues of racial equality in a multicultural country where the voices of dissatisfaction are quite solitary in a society that is indifferent to reforms.

True to his cause of creating "a heightened social and political consciousness" through his plays, (Lim, Introduction to *The Big Purge* 6) Kee's next play, *The Big Purge* has similar political undertones as *1984 Here and Now*. It "is a political satire which offers a critique of Malaysia's oppressive, manipulative politicians and the privileging political structures" (Quayum, *One Sky Many Horizons* 256). In another allegorical depiction of Malaysia set in Equaland, Kee provides a glimpse into the powerful machinations of a master puppeteer who is a symbolic representation of a cunning mastermind and deceitful politicians. The *dalang* (master puppeteer) and the *wayang kulit* (shadow puppetry) that he performs is a unique display of craft and skill. Like an act or performance that is staged, the *dalang* manipulates and controls the political landscape of Equaland through his "puppets" or the five ministers as the ruling state tries to purge the country from all manner of opposition.

*We Could **** You, Mr. Birch* (1994) is undeniably Kee Thuan Chye's most successful and well-known play. It is also considered his most recognizable play because it centres on the assassination of James Wheeler Woodford Birch in Perak in 1875 by the local Malay chieftains. The murder of Birch, Malaya's first British Resident⁹ was due to his interventions in local customs and the political affairs of the state, particularly on the issue of succession of the Perak Malay sultanate. Partly factual and highly dramatized with

Kee's usual technique of satire, dark humour and comedy, Kee's *Birch* was a tremendous success as compared to his two earlier plays. This is due to his precise mastery over the theatrical elements and a tightly-knit plot that blends with the creative incorporation of national history and present events in the country. The play traces the events leading to Birch's assassination from the viewpoint of several historical "characters", albeit fictionalized in portrayal. This also includes characters from the "future" such as Ashburn, Sofea, Sal, and Chee Yoon. Kee's play is thus a contemporary critique on modern Malaysian society, its materialist values and the role of "truth" in history as stated in the official historical records of the country. Kee's *Birch* is also interesting in the sense that he experiments with new perspectives in his treatment of the themes and his juxtaposition of the past and present to convey an altogether bold attempt in staging an experimental play of sorts that is fluid and effective in its representation of social, political and moral arguments.

1.14 Kee's Other Plays and Written Work

From the 1970s to the 1990s, Kee produced three major plays that were a direct response to the political dimension as well as the social, cultural, and historical perspectives of Malaysia. In between his full-time job as a journalist with *New Straits Times* and his last newspaper job with *The Star*, Kee also directed several plays such as Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* (1975), Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (1992) and K.S. Maniam's *The Birch and the Rod* (1994). Kee has also played many roles in theatre, television and film. His most notable ones being Hollywood productions such as *Entrapment* and *Anna and the King* (both in 1999), *1957 Hati Malaya* (2007) and *Sell Out!* (2008). Kee has also appeared in popular television sitcoms such as *City of the Rich* (1996-1997), *Kopitiam* (1999, 2002), *PCK Pte Ltd* (2001), *Each Other* (2003), *Perceptions* and *Singapore Shakes!* (both 2004), and *Mr. Siao's Mandarin Class* (2009).

Kee has also edited a compilation of political essays called *March 8: The Day Malaysia Woke Up* in 2008 that well describes his euphoria with the general election results and the change in the status quo of Malaysian politics that saw the shift in the balance of power from the National Front to the opposition parties. In 2010, Kee wrote an updated and revised edition called *March 8: Time for Real Change*. Kee's penchant for writing on Malaysian politics continued and he focused on the ludicrousness of Malaysian politics and its politicians in *No More Bullshit, Please, We're all Malaysians* in 2012 and *Ask for No Bullshit, Get Some More!* (2013). This was continued with another book by the playwright in 2013 called *The Election Bullshit*, that focuses on re-energising "the people to work for change...when the change they had hoped for during the 13th general election did not take place" (Pragalath, "Kee's New Book Prepares for GE14"). Kee also has a novel¹⁰ lined up but so far this is still in planning stages. Kee is also an online content writer for alternative news media portal Malaysia Chronicle and has contributed articles to other online media sites such as Free Malaysia Today, and Yahoo Malaysia.

1.15 Kee's Latest Endeavour

Kee had also written another political play called *The Swordfish, Then the Concubine* (originally called *The Fall of Singapura*) in 2006. The play made it to the Top 5 out of over 600 entries at the International Playwriting Festival organized by the Warehouse Theatre in Croydon, United Kingdom. In 2008, the play, directed by Ivan Heng of Wild Rice Productions, premiered as the opening play¹¹ at the Singapore Theatre Festival. This play was then renamed *Swordfish + Concubine: The Fall of Singapura* when it was rewritten and directed by Jonathan Lim of Young and Wild in January 2011.

Kee's fourth play remains unpublished but it is essentially based on present day Malaysian politics presented as a fictional-historical play. The playwright once again

treads on familiar territory as the play is very much based on the socio-political issues of Malaysia. Unlike his other plays, Kee takes the political discourse into the folds of history. Here the play is based loosely on the Malay Annals (or *Sejarah Melayu*¹²); the central story is the tale of Hang Nadim who saved Singapore from a swordfish attack. Nadim's strategy was that banana tree stems could be used to repel the attack instead of the proposed human shield of soldiers. The plan succeeds but Hang Nadim was executed by the palace officials who feared that his intelligence could someday erode their influence. Kee's obvious reference here was to the power-mongering individuals in the political institutions of the country.

This story is also intertwined with the story of Nurhalisa, the Sultan's concubine who was falsely accused of treason and killed mercilessly. Kee framed this play in the shadows of a power agreement between Demang Lebar Daun and Sang Nila Utama, and the marriage between the Sultan and the Bendahara's (Chief Minister) daughter. With such examples, Kee states how power, favouritism and corruption are rife in those in power. Kee essentially uses this play as a platform for political critique against what he sees as corruption, cronyism, injustice, moral degradation, religious coercion, and the abuse of political power by the inept Sultan and his court officials. The play ends on a pessimistic note with the character Ris Kaw taking the role of the chorus to ask the audience if they are willing to be "fools" for the sake of survival. Kee once again leaves the audience to consider their choices and options in such circumstances.

1.16 Arthur Miller and Kee Thuan Chye: Resistance through Drama

On "A Note on the Historical Accuracy of This Play" Miller has said that "[this] play is not history in the sense in which the word is used by the academic historian" (Miller, *The Crucible*), but it is Miller's own reading of Salem and its parallels with the McCarthyite

witch-hunts of the House Un-American Activities Committee, to which the playwright drew an obvious connection. It was a repeat of Salem with all its hysteria and anarchy that Miller saw was happening in the American political arena. It was, in Miller's own words "...the maturation of the hysteria at the time which pulled the trigger; without the latter I'd never have launched" (qtd. in Bigsby, Introduction to *The Crucible*, x). Internally, the play focuses on Man's tests of conscience and the mental crucifixions of individuals like John Proctor who refused to let Salem consume their moral consciousness, identity, and values.

Because it is my name! Because I cannot have another in my life!
Because I lie and sign myself to lies! Because I'm not worth the dust on
the feet of them that hang! How may I live without my name? I have
given you my soul; leave me my name! (Miller, *The Crucible*, 133)

In Kee's play *1984 Here and Now*, the playwright grapples with issues such as the use of the ISA (Internal Security Act) by the Malaysian government that allows for detention without trial of anyone who poses a threat to the government, national interest, or national security. Kee views the ISA and the many other laws that follow the mould of the ISA as draconian and hegemonic in a 20th century democratic society. What Kee further laments is the abuse of such laws by the ruling National Front coalition and the implementation of the NEP (National Economic Policy) that has deviated from its true intentions of eradicating poverty and bridging the gap among the various races, to its abused state that only privileges a select majority while marginalizing the other races. The use and abuse of such laws, specifically the ISA and the Sedition Act, are seen by the playwright, Wiran, the protagonist in *1984 Here and Now*, and other characters such as Rong, Runid,

Mawiza, and Ravinen in *The Big Purge*, as laws of aggression that instil fear, terror, and forced subservience in a democratic society.

Miller has said that *The Crucible* “sought to include a higher degree of consciousness than the earlier plays” (Miller, *Brewed in the Crucible*, 173). It is in the very core of the play that Miller sets out to examine the “permanent conditions of the climate of hysteria” and raise recurrent questions that are essential in apprehending this second witch-hunt in contemporary America. In an almost parallel stand, Kee and his plays, namely *1984 Here and Now* and *The Big Purge*, set out to provoke, question, and to challenge such fears that often result in the paralysis of the mind and inaction. Thus, it is in this battle over such hysteria that John Proctor and Wiran are seen to rise above the tirade of madness and guilt. Proctor’s guilt about his adultery and his discovery of his true self when he “regains” his soul from his physical death, together with Wiran’s refusal to betray his lover, Yone, and his courage to stand up to his captors, reflect both the playwrights’ similar view on the issue of morality, the reclamation of personal conscience and redemption of self in the face of insurmountable oppression. To Proctor, like Eddie Carbone in *A View from A Bridge*, the confession that he signs is against the moral integrity of his character. His act of tearing the confession would save his life but it comes at the expense of his conscience, his reputation, and his children’s good name. Hence “Proctor must judge and answer only to himself: human conscience is the final authority, autonomous in all things” (Adler, 98).

For Miller, his concerns in most of his plays remain in the realm of moral consciousness and social concerns and at times, a culmination of both, that can be seen in his earlier successful plays such as *All My Sons*, *Death of A Salesman*, *An Enemy of the People*, *A View from the Bridge*, *The Crucible*, and *Incident at Vichy*. In comparison, Kee’s plays

also dwell in a similar spectrum with a heightened political consciousness that is often interlaced with elements of didacticism and wry humour, seen in plays such as *We Could **** You, Mr. Birch*, and the difficult and dangerous choices one has to make in times of peril as shown in *1984 Here and Now* and *The Big Purge*.

In *The Crucible*, Miller has shown how the overwhelming chaos of hysteria and witchcraft frenzy permeates the tiny Salem community of Massachusetts and how a disconcerted society is obsessed with annihilating all forms of witchcraft and devilry. As obsession, guilt, and fear escalate, the anxieties of the people are amplified by whirlwind accusations by a group of deceptive “witnesses” led by Abigail Williams and “...a klatch of repressed pubescent girls who, fearing punishment for their implicitly sexual revolt, conniving themselves that they had been perverted by Satan” (qtd. in Martine, 52).

The same fearful atmosphere and trepidation could be seen and felt in Miller’s *Incident at Vichy* and Kee’s *The Big Purge*. Kee’s play focuses on the persecution of individuals in the opposition camp in the 1987 opposition crackdown by the Malaysian government while Miller’s *Incident at Vichy* tells the tale of the local police at Vichy and how the German authorities perform a systematic selection process of identifying Jews before incarcerating them. Dramatically poignant, shocking, and intense, Miller’s very moral play deals with the turbulent emotions and paralyzing fear of several individuals as they undergo a physical examination that would determine whether they walk out free or are to be condemned to death. Kee’s *The Big Purge* draws upon similar sentiments as pessimism, suspicion, negativity and fear brought by corrupt and self-serving politicians tear up family, friendships and the social-fabric of community as the entire country descends into political chaos and total fear. Given that the odds are stacked against the individual, would one give up or continue to fight a futile cause? Could imprisonment and a death sentence be strong enough to persuade one to give up one’s conscience and belief?

These are perhaps some pertinent questions that *Vichy* and *The Big Purge* ask in the dramatic portrayal of the characters as they struggle with universal concerns such as liberty and morality.

Miller and Kee both focus on the issue of moral injustice and the abuse of power by those entrusted with it. This can be seen from the theocratic rule of Salem in *The Crucible*, the police and military state in *Vichy* and *The Archbishop's Ceiling*. Similarly, this is exemplified in Kee's iron-fisted government in *1984 Here and Now* and *The Big Purge*, and the terribly inept rule of the Sultan and British colonialist in *Birch*. It is fear that must be resisted and it is the perpetuation of such deceptive fear in a climate of intimidation that is morally and ethically wrong. One such example is in Kee's *1984* where fear is fostered by the secret police and the interrogators in "Room 101", striking psychological and physical fear in the hearts of the innocent. Such debilitating powers of the state are compared to the powers of the religious judges in Salem. This could also be seen in the sadistic and evil Chief Minister in *The Big Purge* and in the deceptive and shadowy power manipulations by the *dalang* (puppeteer). The microphones in Miller's *The Archbishop's Ceiling* are equally manipulative with their existence being equally questionable in the play as the characters put on a "performance" for the "bugs" which could be morally right but ethically wrong as truth is sacrificed along with the performance.

Miller and Kee in their political plays thus show how such a contagion could cause sanctioned violence to be affirmed as a morally right action with dire consequences. And like John Proctor and Wiran, the victims of "hysteria" in the play were subjected to the totalitarian powers of state administration and the atrocities of human tyranny. Miller rationalizes that when institutions such as the state are threatened by oppositional forces that seek to topple, reduce, or disrupt its influence or authority, then these institutions

could legitimate the use of force to counter such oppositional forces. Whatever is deemed deviant or contrary to the state such as opposition to its policies, administration, governance, and power could be neutralised.

Political opposition, thereby, is given an inhumane overlay which then justifies the abrogation of all normally applied customs of civilised intercourse. A political policy is equated with moral right and opposition to it with diabolical malevolence. (Miller, *The Crucible*, 32)

Miller's and Kee's political plays are thus the playwright's testament to the moral need of the individual to resist and battle the debilitating powers of the political state and its agencies that manifest themselves as a corrupt practice, a self-serving demeanour or even a state of mind. Their plays thus invoke the individual to act and to be accountable for their actions in a world that places priority on power, materialism, and the individual.

1.17 Literature Review

In terms of literature review, scholarly criticism and studies on Miller are extensive and vast. This is partly due to Miller's international reputation and fame as America's most influential and successful playwright of the 20th century. Miller's plays are inseparable from the canon of American drama and his international reputation as a playwright against injustice, moral corruption, the senseless culture of materialism, the persecution of the innocent, the hegemony of the state, and the evils of racism and discrimination. Central to his work would be the consistent moral focus on human conscience and the struggle to do what is morally right in times of great difficulty.

Miller scholars past and present such as Robert W. Corrigan in *Arthur Miller: A Collection of Critical Essays* (1969), Robert Ferres in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Crucible* (1972), Robert A. Martin with the indispensable *The Theatre Essays of Arthur Miller* (1978), James J. Martine with the seminal *Critical Essays of Arthur Miller* (1979), and Dennis Welland in *Arthur Miller: A Study of His Plays* (1979) have all recognized Miller and his work as moral plays that focus on the individual.

Other Miller scholars such as Richard I. Evan in *Psychology and Arthur Miller* (1969) have started to expand the horizon of criticism to include aspects of psychology and identity in Miller's plays. Matthew C. Roudane's book, *Conversations with Arthur Miller* (1987) has remained up to the present one of the few critically acclaimed collected interviews ever recorded with the playwright. The 1980s were also thriving times for Miller studies as many literary criticism works were written by renowned academicians and noted Miller scholars such as Harold Bloom, Neil Carson, Leonard Moss, and Robert A. Martin. Eagerly awaited was Miller's autobiography *Timebends* (1987) which provided an intimate insight into the playwright's life and works. *Timebends* was exceptionally insightful in providing additional information on his plays and is a critical read by all Miller enthusiasts. In the 1990s and early 2000s there was also a revival of interest in *The Crucible* with several commendable books such as *Readings on Arthur Miller's The Crucible* (1999) by Thomas Siebold, *The Crucible: Politics, Property, and Pretense* (1993) by James J. Martine, *Understanding The Crucible: A student Casebook to Issues, Sources, and Historical Documents* (1998), *The Crucible in History and Other Essays* (2000) by Arthur Miller himself and *Understanding The Crucible* (2003) by M.N. Jimerson. These critical works on *The Crucible* prove once again the relevance and popularity of the play, from its didacticism as a historical play to its allegorical

associations with McCarthyism and the universal idea of resistance and the reclamation of one's own conscience from oppressors.

Literatures on the "Red Menace"¹³ era or McCarthyism in America are also critical in understanding the context in which Miller wrote his play, and which, subsequently, was probably influential in his other plays. The list provided here gives a detailed understanding of the conditions that Miller wrote in as well as his motivations in fiercely defending the individual in resisting the powers of the state. For starters, Thomas C. Reeves' book, *McCarthyism* (1974) gives a good historical account from the start of the scare to the momentum and shift it generated during the trials. Richard M. Fried's *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective* (1990) is another excellent book that provides a wider focus to the issue abroad and at home, as well as the perspective of the victims of the trials.

In the 1990s, there was a growing interest in the subject with multiple books being published on McCarthyism such as Joel Kovel's *Red Hunting in the Promised Land* (1994), Griffin Fariello's *Red Scare: Memories of the American Inquisition: An Oral History* (1995), John Earl Haynes's *American Communism and Anticommunism in the Cold War Era* (1996), and Albert Fried's *McCarthyism: The Great American Red Scare* (1997). The renewed interest in McCarthyism continued the following decade with multiple books being written on the issue; this was partly due to the 9-11¹⁴ tragedy in America and the fear of America abusing its Internal Security Acts. The three books that I would recommend are Ellen Schrecker's *The Age of McCarthyism: A Brief History with Documents* (2002), John Joseph Gladchuk's *Hollywood and Anticommunism: HUAC and the Evolution of the Red Menace* (2007) and Robert Rapley's *Witch Hunts: From Salem to Guantanamo Bay* (2007).

As Miller scholarship grew since 2001 (after the 9-11 incident) Miller scholars started publishing extensively on the playwright. Steven R. Centola's *Arthur Miller: Echoes Down the Corridor* (2002) and Susan Abbotson's *Critical Companion to Arthur Miller* (2007) were two critical and resourceful books on Miller that provided readers with criticism on Miller from an American centric perspective. This was followed by Enoch Brater's *Arthur Miller: A Playwright's Life and Works* (2005), an illustrated biography that was published shortly after Miller's death in 2005. Another well-researched book by Brater was titled *Arthur Miller's America: Theater and Culture in a Time of Change* (2005) that is an international collection of essays that centres on the theme of Miller's importance in the American theatre scene. It contains interviews with Miller, essays on theatre history, literary-cultural interpretation, pedagogy and how Miller has shaped dramatic theatre, in and beyond the American continent.

A highly recommended book on the playwright would be one written by Jeffrey D. Mason which is a compelling analysis of criticism on Miller's political plays. Published in 2008 by the University of Michigan press, Mason's book *Stone Tower: The Political Theater of Arthur Miller* is an essential guide to Miller's political plays which provides a crucial perspective on Miller's political motivations. This book provides an intimate insight into Miller's lesser-known political plays such *Incident at Vichy*, *The Archbishop's Ceiling*, his theatrical response to the Holocaust in *Broken Glass*, *Playing for Time*, and *After the Fall*, and Miller's treatment of women characters in his plays. Mason's contention is that Miller deeply mistrusted state authorities and was more of a political playwright than a moral dramatist based on his approach in analysing his major plays such as *All My Sons*, *Death of a Salesman*, *The Crucible*, *The Archbishop's Ceiling*, *Broken Glass*, *After the Fall*, and *Playing for Time*. Mason also examines Miller's *Resurrection Blues* and *The Ride Down Mt. Morgan* for the playwright's treatment of female characters.

In addition, Christopher Bigsby, who is the most critically-acclaimed Miller scholar and a world authority on American theatre, has contributed extensively to Miller studies. I would like to begin by mentioning Bigsby's afterword in Miller's *The Archbishop's Ceiling* in the 1984 Methuen edition of the play. In the afterword, Bigsby highlights Miller's blend of social, psychological and political questions as well as the element of metaphysical anxiety in his play that is integrated with Miller's need to assert the significance of identity and a moral stand.

Christopher Bigsby also edited four very important and indispensable books on Miller in the last ten years that I have read closely for my thesis. The first is *Arthur Miller: A Critical Study* (2005) and *The Cambridge Companion to Arthur Miller* (2010, second edition). The updated edition, contains one of the best collection of critical essays on Miller. Most of the authors are prominent Miller and American drama scholars such as Steven R. Centola, Matthew C. Roudane, Janet Balakian, Christopher Bigsby, and William W. Demastes. The essays are arranged chronologically, from Miller's earliest plays to his last. They cover topics ranging from Miller's tradition of social drama, the theme of conscience and community in his plays, his concerns about social apathy, the Holocaust and the Great Depression, his political consciousness, and his 'power plays' such as *The American Clock* and *The Archbishop's Ceiling*.

The third book by Bigsby is a critical and definitive biography on Miller based on all of Miller's personal letters, titled *Arthur Miller: 1915-1962* (2009). The latest book on Miller by Bigsby is the bestseller *Arthur Miller: 1962-2005* (2011) which is a continuation of the first collection of letters published two years earlier. The first tome of collected letters reveals insightful details of Miller's life and his plays, his struggle with poverty and his art form, as well as Miller's earlier beliefs such as Marxism and the

influence of Ibsen in his plays. From the Great Depression to his socialist viewpoints in life, the collection also gives insight into Miller's adaptation of a moralistic viewpoint that is a trademark of his plays. The collection also charts Miller's experiences dealing with the HUAC and his growing political awareness of political issues at home as well as abroad. Bigsby's second book on the dramatist highlights Miller's deeper involvement in the political arena, a move that is perhaps reflective of the moral stand that he passionately upheld as a writer and dramatist. It is also Miller's belief that individuals are complicit in one way or other, and therefore the need for moral courage and action is vital. Bigsby goes on to cover the remaining decades of Miller's life, from his personal life to the increasing critical derision that Miller faced at home. Ironically, Miller received critical acclaim abroad and his reputation as a dramatist grew in Germany, Israel, China, Eastern and Central Europe. Overall, Christopher Bigsby's very thorough work on Miller based on his letters has revealed a playwright who stood by his moral code in the creation of his plays and who possessed an unwavering belief in his role as a moral playwright in a world where indifference and abuse of power must be addressed.

Scholarly articles on Kee, however, stands in contrast to Miller's. While some research has been written on Malaysian drama, much of it is from the postcolonial perspective that also includes Singapore because of the shared historical, political, social and cultural elements. The amount of literary criticism on Malaysian drama in English is very limited and this is due in part to the "lumping" of literary works in this genre with Singaporean literatures in English and other more popular and accessible literary genres such as poetry and prose. Another important factor leading to this lack of literary criticism could also be the dearth of talented playwrights, apart from the first and second generation of Malaysian playwrights who produced great impactful Malaysian plays in English in the 1960s and

1970s. The 1990s saw a revival of the Malaysian drama scene but the lack of published texts has inhibited the critical analysis of many of such contemporary plays.

For an overview history of the Malaysian literary scene, there are some earlier publications such as Professor Lloyd Fernando's article, "English, literature, and Bilingualism in South East Asia" (University of Malaya, 1970) and the essential drama compilations, "New Drama One" and "New Drama Two" (Oxford University Press, 1972). One of the earliest anthologies of Malaysian writers, *Twenty-two Malaysian Stories* (Heinemann, 1968), was compiled by Professor Fernando who also went on to compile another essential read, "Cultures in Conflict: Essays on Literature and The English Language in South East Asia" (Graham Brash Pte Ltd, 1986). A notable collection of literary essays on the Asia Pacific region was compiled by Bruce Bennett, *A Sense of Exile: Essays in the Literature at the Asia-Pacific Region* (Centre for Studies in Australian Literature, 1988) which feature many Malaysian authors and their views of the local literary scene.

While there are no specific literary criticisms on Malaysian drama, there were literary anthologies focusing on Asian English language literatures that included drama such as Shirley Geok-lin Lim's *Writing South East/Asia in English* (Skoob, 1994) and *Skoob Pacifica Anthology No. 2: South East Asia Writes Back!* (Skoob, 1993), *Skoob Pacifica Anthology No. 2: The Pen is Mightier than The Sword* (Skoob, 1994) which provide a good read on literary writing in the region and the many critical key concerns of writers in the Southeast Asian context. The Skoob publications are some of the best collections of writing from Southeast Asia that garnered a lot of interest from many writers in the region. The 1990s were also a productive time for the Malaysian literati as several literary competitions¹⁵ were organized by the New Straits Times Press of which Kee Thuan Chye

was also the literary editor for the literary section and judge for several of the competitions.

Local journals such as “Tenggara: Journal of Southeast Asian Literature” and the “Southeast Asian Review of English” (SARE) provided critical Malaysian content on local literature scene although the former has now ceased to publish. The “Journal of Commonwealth Literature” from the years 1971 to 1987, under the Malaysia and Singapore section, had a good variety of literary criticism focusing specifically on the two countries. Recently, another local online journal, the “Asiatic IIUM Journal of English Language and Literature”¹⁶ has enriched the local literary scene, albeit with an international multi-genre focus.

There has been a growing number of commendable publications on Malaysian literature in English in the last decade such as *In Blue Silk Girdle: Stories from Malaysia and Singapore* (1998), *Malaysian Literature in English: A Critical Reader* (2001), *Colonial to Global: Malaysian Women’s Writing in English 1940s-1990s* (2001), *The Merlion and the Hibiscus: Contemporary Short Stories from Malaysia and Singapore* (2002), *Petals of Hibiscus: A Representative Anthology of Malaysian Literature in English* (2003), *Voices of Many Worlds: Malaysian Literature in English* (2004), *One Sky Many Horizons* (2007), *Writing a Nation: Essays on Malaysian Literature* (2009) and *The Routledge Concise History of Southeast Asian Writing in English* (2010) and *Colony, Nation, Globalisation: Not at Home in Singaporean and Malaysian Literature* (2011). Most of the publications are anthologies of past creative writing works republished and interviews with the authors. A majority of the publications were by public universities such as UPM and IIUM with the exception of the last two books that are a collection of essays on Malaysia and Singapore and the region.

These works only shed light on the general corpus of Malaysian literature as a whole and a select few of the first and second generation of Malaysian playwrights. There are also some interesting books and academic articles written by theatre practitioners and academicians (locally and abroad) such as Mohammad A. Quayum (*One Sky Many Horizons: Studies in Malaysian Literature in English* and *Confessions of a Liminal Writer: An Interview with Kee Thuan Chye*), Lloyd Fernando (“English, Literature, and Bilingualism in South East Asia and Literary English in the South East Asian Tradition”), Anthony Price (“The Situation of the Malaysian Playwright”), Catherine Diamond (“Two Currents of Difference in Kuala Lumpur’s Contemporary Theatre”) Carmen Nge (“Theatre in Malaysia: The Contemporary Situation”), Daizal Rafeek Samad (“Sterilised Scalpels, Sharp Needles, Ruptured Sutures: Kee Thuan Chye’s Operation in *We Could **** You, Mr. Birch*”), Kathy Rowland (“The Politics of Drama: Post-1969 State Policies and Their Impact on Theatre in English in Malaysia from 1970 to 1999”), Krishnaweni Rajoo (“Existentialism in Kee Thuan Chye’s 1984: *Here and Now and We Could **** You, Mr. Birch*”), Solehah Ishak (“The Emergence of Modern Malaysian Theatre”), Margaret Yong (“Colonial, Post-colonial, Neo-colonial and, at Last, a ‘Post-national’ Drama”), Philip Holden (*The Routledge Concise History of Southeast Asian Writing in English*), Ghulam-Sarwar Yousof (“Mapping the History of Malaysian Theatre :An Interview with Ghulam-Sarwar Yousof”), Shirley Geok-lin Lim (“Abstracting the Nation in Kee Thuan Chye’s 1984 *Here and Now and The Big Purge: National Allegory or Modernist Theatre*”), and Jacqueline Lo (“Arrested Development: Early Malaysian Theatre in English and Political Theatre in Malaysia: 1984 *Here and Now*”). These academicians/critics have written on a broad range of issues such as the history of Malaysian theatre in English, Malaysian and Singaporean theatre, issues and challenges, thematic focus, style, influence on plays, characterization, and motivations for writing.

Among all the examples cited, I would single out Catherine Diamond's and Carmen Nge's essay on Malaysian drama from the 1990s to 2000s as a useful and comprehensive analysis of contemporary Malaysian theatre. In addition, Kathy Rowland's MA dissertation on the influence of Malaysia's state policies on the performing arts is a very commendable research work. Rowland argues that the National Culture Policy (1971) has not exclusively influenced the Malaysian arts practice, but rather it is the inter-policy relationship with other state policies post-1969 racial riots (such as the National Economic Policy) that has influenced the Malaysian theatre practice. Rowland's dissertation is therefore insightful in providing a deeper understanding of Malaysia's rigid state policies on the performing arts and impact on theatre practitioners such as Kee Thuan Chye. Shirley Lim's article, "Abstracting the Nation in Kee Thuan Chye's 1984 *Here and Now* and *The Big Purge*: National Allegory or Modernist Theatre" is a good scholarly article that I found to be useful because it specifically focuses on Kee's two major political plays, *1984 Here and Now* and *The Big Purge* from the perspective of the modernist dramaturgical devices of the play and how it dismantles the race and class ideologies of the state.

In addition articles by academicians such as Susan Philip ("Kee Thuan Chye's Political Plays: An Analysis", "Dismantling Gendered Nationalism in Kee Thuan Chye's *We Could **** You, Mr. Birch*", "The Use of Historical Narrative in Kee Thuan Chye's *We Could **** You, Mr Birch*"), Nancy Kathleen Nanney ("Kee Thuan Chye: Politics, Playwriting, and the Contemporary English Stage in Malaysia") and George Watt ("Demastering Historical Narrative in Robert Yeo's *The Eye of History* and Kee Thuan Chye's *We Could **** You Mr. Birch*") are vital articles on Kee that offer an in-depth analysis on the playwright's dramaturgical styles including an analysis of the changes in the direction of his plays. Susan Philip's articles on Kee are on the use of the historical

narrative in *Birch*, an overall analysis of his three political plays, and the aspect of ‘nationalism’ from the perspective of gender. These are truly insightful articles on how Kee supplants national narratives via the female characters’ performances. Her articles on Kee cover the playwright’s work comprehensively and her scholarly articles on Kee are a definite must-read. Non-Malaysian Nancy Nanney’s commendable article on Kee traces the political developments in Malaysia and the political drama scene with Kee as her main research focus. George Watt’s article focuses on the historical narrative in the plays of Robert Yeo and Kee, and critically analyzes the use of the historical narrative in both playwrights, thus emphasizing their use of the historical narrative as an essential dramaturgical strategy. In addition, Robert Yeo has an interview with Kee (“The Writer as Activist: An Interview with Kee Thuan Chye”) published in *World Literature Written in English* (1999). Yeo also wrote an excellent introduction to Kee Thuan Chye’s 2004 edition of *We Could **** You, Mr. Birch*; this also includes the most recent article on Kee that was written by Bakar, Yusof, and Vengadasamy in 2013 (“Collision of Authority and Resistance in a Juxtaposition of the Past and Present: Re-visioning Voices of the Nation in Kee Thuan Chye’s *Swordfish then the Concubine*”) that positions Kee’s play (*Swordfish then the Concubine*) as an important narrative in nation building.

Among all the highlighted books, Jacqueline Lo’s book (based on her PhD thesis) *Staging Nation: English Language Theatre in Malaysia and Singapore* (2004) is an exception. She focuses specifically on Kee and K.S. Maniam as well as other playwrights from Singapore such as Kua Pao Kun and Stella Kon. Written from a postcolonial resistance angle, *Staging Nation* gives a critical analysis and an in-depth assessment of Malaysian and Singaporean playwrights and the socio-political motivations in the production of their work. In addition, another of Lo’s earlier articles, “Political theatre in Malaysia: 1984 Here and Now” (1983) also sheds light on the political theatre in Malaysia and the

inseparable element of resistance in Kee's play. Her companion article "Where are the Bodies? Postcolonial Theory and Theoretical Resistance in Malaysia" (1983) highlights the literary resistance in postcolonial literatures particularly in Malaysia (with an emphasis on Kee's 1984 *Here and now*). Both these articles and her book place importance on drama as a political platform in postcolonial resistance in Malaysia. In relation to Jacqueline Lo's writings on postcolonial resistance theatre, Grace V.S. Chin has also written an interesting article titled "The Anxieties of Authorship in Malaysian and Singaporean Writings in English: Locating the English Language Writer and the Question of Freedom in the Postcolonial Era" (2006) emphasizes the difficulties of literary English language writers (including Kee) of Malaysia and Singapore as they negotiate the limitations imposed by them by the state as well as adapting to challenges of the postcolonial era.

From academicians, we have commercial theatre practitioners such as Faridah Merican and husband Joe Hasham who run the The Actors Studio and Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Theatre (KLPac) and also publish the newsletter, "Living Arts Malaysia"¹⁷ that highlights the latest drama performances in Kuala Lumpur. This information, however, caters mainly to the contemporary/commercial theatre-going crowd. Occasionally, some editions might contain interesting insights on the local drama scene such as the development of Malaysian theatre and the popular culture scene. Krishen Jit's collection of essays, *An Uncommon Position* (2003) is also a critical read as it charts the developments of the theatre, visual art, and dance in Malaysia as well as in Southeast Asia over a period of 40 years.

Other scholars and individuals such as Andrew Ng, Dipika Mukherjee, Ee Tian Hong, Peter C. Wicks, Syd Harrex, Ganakumaran Subramaniam, Shantini Pillai, Nor Faridah

Abdul Manaf, Eddie Tay, Malachi Edwin Vethamani, and Kirpal Singh have also contributed to the corpus with contributions to postcolonial writing, diasporic writing, the Malaysian literary arena, Malaysian literature in English as well as compiling anthologies of Malaysian literary work in English. But again, there is a dearth of critical information regarding Malaysian drama in English and this is very evident in the printed form. Information regarding Kee's life¹⁸ and work however is available in several printed journals while interviews conducted by journalists are available in several online media portals¹⁹.

To complement our understanding of the Malaysian literary scene, one would also have to read up on the Malaysian socio-economic and political perspectives as well as the New Economic Policy to gain a critical angle on Kee's motivations as a dramatist. The following books, journal articles and conference papers are recommended in no random order of importance. On the May 13th racial riots incident, the recommended books are: *The May 13 Tragedy: A Report by Majlis Gerakan Negara* (1969), Tunku Abdul Rahman's *Lest We Forget: Further Candid Reminiscences* (1983), Leon Comber's *13 May 1969: A Historical Survey of Sino-Malay Relations* (1988), two books by Kua Kia Soong, namely *K. Das and the Tunku Tapes* (2002) and *May 13: Declassified Documents on the Malaysian Riots of 1969* (2007) and Cyrus Das' *The May 13th Riots and Emergency Rule* (2007). On the NEP, I would recommend Kamal Salih's "The New Economic Policy After 1990" (1989), "Whither Malaysia's New Economic Policy" (1990) by K.S. Jomo, seminar papers by Zainal Aznam Yusof's "Affirmative Action in Malaysia: An Overview of Progress and Limitations" (2005), Maznah Mohamad's "Ethnicity and Inequality in Malaysia: A Retrospect and a Rethinking" (2005) and Lim Teck Ghee's "Corporate Equity and the NEP" (2007).

Analysed as a whole, this literature review concludes that while Kee's plays have been examined from various angles, there is no collective research done on all of his political plays from the perspective of drama as a form of resistance to the political hegemony of the state. While much has been written about ideology and power in the context of nation building, no research has been undertaken in the analysis of Arthur Miller and Kee Thuan Chye collectively from the perspective of drama as a form of resistance or the development of their work in the 'post-resistance' phase. In addition, there is a dearth of research in Kee and Miller's works that critically examines the 'transformation' of their plays from the perspective of creative dissenting strategies. Most notably, Kee's works have not been subjected to scrutiny in his use of the traditional performing arts/games as a form of resistance in his plays and the element of the fantastic in *Birch*.

Miller scholars have written much on his well-known plays such as *All My Sons*, *Death of A Salesman*, *The Crucible*, *A View from the Bridge*, and *The Price*, with more emphasis given to *The Crucible* and *Death of a Salesman* but there is no critical analysis on his lesser-known political plays such as *Incident at Vichy* and *The Archbishop's Ceiling* that collectively analyse the power relationship between the state and the individual. With the exception of Jeffrey D. Mason's book that concludes that Miller is more of a political playwright than a moral dramatist, most Miller scholars have not analyzed comprehensively such political plays of Miller, namely *The Crucible*, and *Incident at Vichy* and *The Archbishop's Ceiling* from the collective viewpoint of moral resistance or the element of performativity in *The Archbishop's Ceiling*.

Thus, this thesis aims to fill in such gaps as have been revealed in the literature review of both dramatists. My research will bring together two playwrights from two different continents and critically examine their selected political plays and the role such dissenting

plays perform as a need for “resistance” against the destructive and divisive politics of states that rely on the divide and rule policy to perpetuate the continuation of their political power. It is also the purpose of this thesis to show that there is a development in Miller and Kee’s political plays in the sense that the earlier ‘physical resistance’ evolved to include a form of ‘creative resistance’ that includes elements of the fantastic and performativity.

1.18 Theoretical Framework

Kee and Miller’s political plays will be analyzed critically with references to Antonio Gramsci’s theory of Hegemony and Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* that emphasize the study of power and how societal institutions use power as a form of social control. Gramsci’s and Foucault’s theories were found to be the most suitable in terms of correlation and association with Kee and Miller’s first two waves of political plays and their context at the time of staging as well as post-production.

Gramsci’s theory of Hegemony has its socialist roots in Italian Marxism. Being the first Marxist theorist who analysed the issues of revolutionary change in 20th century Western European society, Gramsci concluded that the revolution against bourgeois values lies in an ideological cultural movement or an ideological hegemony. Gramsci’s theory was an improvement of Marx’s analysis of capitalism. He conceptualised the role of ideological hegemony by theorizing that the traditional Marxist theory of power, which was based on force and coercion, was missing on “... the subtle but pervasive forms of ideological control and manipulation that served to perpetuate all repressive structures” (Burke, *Antonio Gramsci, Schooling and Education*). Gramsci thus identified two forms of political control: domination (physical coercion by state agencies) and hegemony, an ideological control perpetuated by consent (Gramsci, *Selections from The Prison*

Notebooks 193). Through the concept of “ideological hegemony”, Gramsci improved on the Marxist theory of power and asserted the importance of ideology as a vital component that complements and sustains state domination.

Gramsci defines “ideological hegemony” as an entire system of values that supports the status quo in the power relations between the political state and society. The propagation of this hegemony seeks to legitimise the power of the ruling elite by creating a prevailing consciousness or common sense that would make the political rule of the state the natural order of things (Gramsci, *Selections from The Prison Notebooks* 406).

Gramsci further divided the superstructures of society into “two major superstructural levels” (Gramsci, *Selections from The Prison Notebooks* 145) that could be called coercive institutions (the government, police, and military) and non-coercive institutions (churches, the family, trade unions, political parties, etc.) This was a far more complex analysis of the divisions in society as compared to Marx’s earlier definition of superstructures. Gramsci’s analysis went further by analysing the reasons why the European working class (after the First World War) was supportive of reformation rather than revolution. Gramsci concluded that it was through the creation of an ideological consensus and use of coercive apparatuses that the ruling class was able to maintain its hold on power. Thus, the ideological hegemony of the ruling capitalist class had to be challenged through what Gramsci defined as counter hegemony. In later years, the French Marxist philosopher, Louis Althusser in his essay *Ideology and Ideological State* (1970) expanded on Gramsci’s theory to include terms such as repressive and ideological state apparatuses and its dominant influence in the political state.

From ideology and state apparatuses, Gramsci also emphasized the importance of education and its impact on individuals who were to be creators of mass consciousness in society as well as agents of resistance against the ruling capitalist, he elaborates: “All men are intellectuals but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals (Gramsci, *Selections from The Prison Notebooks 140*). Gramsci’s defines “intellectuals” as either “traditional intellectuals” (clergy, philosophers, professors) or “organic intellectuals” (managers, teachers, technicians, civil servants). What is essential for a “counter hegemony” to take place would be the creation of organic intellectuals from the working class through obtaining the support of traditional intellectuals in the participation of the revolutionary cause. The amalgamation of both groups of intellectuals would lead to the creation of a social consciousness that would undermine the existing hegemony of the ruling class and anticipate its eventual downfall. Gramsci’s theory of ideological hegemony reviewed some aspects of Marx’s fundamental theory by including an ideological component that incorporates the role of “intellectuals” and “informal educators” as purveyors of change.

Criticisms of Gramsci’s theory of ideological hegemony are diverse; Dominic Strinati’s contention with Gramsci’s ideas is due to the theory’s Marxist background. According to him, a class-based analysis tends to be reductionist with a tendency to simplify the connections between society and culture. Such are the limitations of limiting a social theory within the Marxist sphere of interpretation. The rigid framework employed would make the analysis of individual and society too general, according to Strinati.

David Harris’ criticism stems from his view that Gramsci’s theory of intellectuals is too elitist. A suitable theory, according to Harris “...must be capable of avoiding determinism and prioritising struggle; it must contain, or be capable of containing, a suitable linguistics;

it must be flexible enough to license, as proper politics, the women's movement, black activism, and any other movements..." (Harris, *From Class Struggle to the Politics of Pleasure* 156). Harris adds that Gramsci's theory lacks empiricism because there is no study related to people and their behaviour.

Raymond Williams opines that the theory of ideological hegemony is rigid and abstract because culture cannot be seen as a hegemonic entity; instead, he defines culture as constantly evolving and shaping itself to circumstances dictating its survival. In addition, Williams is of the opinion that a dominant culture eventually produces and forms its own counter-culture. Thus, the idea of evolution and social change are misplaced in the context of Gramsci's discussion of ideological hegemony.

While the criticisms of Gramsci's theory are from a cultural and empirical perspective, the use of ideological hegemony in the first two waves of Kee and Miller's political plays is focused on the concept of hegemony and the political mechanisms of the state that demonstrate such hegemonic qualities. Gramsci's theory offers a critical sociology of culture and a detailed analysis of the forms of domination and subordination in society. Based on such a politicisation of power in a social organisation, the study of Kee and Miller's political plays is based on the study of the influences of such a power in a performative art work that is a mirror to society's anxieties and concerns at the time of performance.

Kee's plays such as *1984 Here and Now* and *The Big Purge*, and Miller's *The Crucible* and *Incident at Vichy*, are a societal microcosm of human conflict between the individual and the political state, in which power and politics form the thematic score. Gramsci's main discussion of power and his discourse on the creation of an ideological hegemony

by the ruling class to sustain class domination and political control seem to reflect the core concern of Kee's and Miller's plays. Both playwrights are very political individuals whose plays represent dissent against an oppressive and hegemonic state. Based on real personal, political, and historical accounts, their plays are a validation of the need for justice and action against the abuses by the state. Just as Gramsci's cultural hegemony theory highlights the states' use of cultural institutions to consolidate its power in capitalist societies, and the need for "organic individuals" to be the agents of a necessary "counter-hegemony", Kee and Miller's plays place stress on individuals to make a political and moral commitment against such an influence. Central characters such as Wiran (a journalist), Proctor (a farmer), Von Berg (an Austrian prince) take up moral positions in the discourse of power and persecution in the plays. Seeking to dismantle such a dominion and supremacy of ingrained 'consciousness' by the state, the political plays are demonstrative of a reactionary stand by the playwrights to assert their moral resistance, exactly what Gramsci sees as vital to undermine the prevailing hegemonic social relations. Gramsci views the role of the individual as imperative and that "...the mode of being of the new intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence...but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organiser, permanent persuader and not just a simple orator..." (Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks 10*).

Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony thus remains as a fundamental theory of power that is best utilized to analyse Kee and Miller's plays.

In my thesis, I will also be analyzing Kee and Miller's plays using Michael Foucault's theory of power and discourse that considers the power structures in society by means of a study of the penal system in modern society. His critical discourse on power is found in his most important work *Discipline and Punish* ²⁰, which is a postmodernism discourse

analysis of the Western penal effected through an analysis of historical documentation from France. Foucault studies the modern day penal system and its evolution through time, revealing it to be a complex system of state power that is part of a set of disciplines that also includes schools, hospitals, and military barracks. Foucault elaborates: “A corpus of knowledge, techniques, ‘scientific’ discourses is formed and becomes tangled with the practice of power to punish” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 23). Through the analysis of the penal system that also includes a study of the ‘body’ and power, Foucault concluded that power structures inherent in society could be uncovered and questioned by analyzing the legitimacy of ‘knowledge’ sanctioned by the state. Such ‘knowledge’ is used as a means to an end by the state to justify its control over society and eventually, the right to rule. The right to rule is therefore an affirmation of political power which is desired above all else in the governance of a state. Nevertheless, Foucault’s critical work has been on the power-knowledge spheres of influence, one that Philip Stokes describes as the central focus of Foucault academic research:

The theme that underlies all Foucault's work is the relationship between power and knowledge, and how the former is used to control and define the latter. What authorities claim as 'scientific knowledge' are really just a means of social control. Foucault shows how, for instance, in the eighteenth century 'madness' was used to categorize and stigmatize not just the mentally ill but the poor, the sick, the homeless and, indeed, anyone whose expressions of individuality were unwelcome. (Philip Stokes, *Philosophy: 100 Essential Thinkers* 188)

Like Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, such a 'control' is by itself a hegemonic means of power by the state. The 'power' to define and to categorize is a form of ideological hegemony by those whose aim is to perpetuate domination and influence over the individual and society. Foucault's discussion of power and knowledge further compliments Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony by delving deeper into the mechanics and dynamics of such power by analysing the knowledge structures of the power structure. Foucault's book is divided into four sections, namely: "Torture, "Punishment", "Discipline", and "Prison." In each part, Foucault extols the mechanisms of power that play the pivotal role in the enforcement of such means of control by the state. In "Torture", Foucault begins by examining public torture and execution in mid-18th and 19th-century France and concludes that such methods of punishment were meant to be a theatrical forum for the public as a display of power and control over the individual. According to Foucault, the body was "...the major target of penal repression" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 8) and the public spectacle of torture was carried out as a sort of 'ceremony' to elicit and provoke a mental image of fear and compliance with several intended and unintended consequences. The process was carried out to demonstrate the show of power by the sovereign, the audience is 'forced' to participate in the process, and correspondingly the torture was akin to a 'show', a justification of the rituals of investigation and the rite of execution. But according to Foucault, there could be some complications such as people disagreeing with the verdict, the manner of torture, the sovereign, to the extent of hero-worshipping the prisoner, thus disrupting the spectacle of 'displayed power'; Foucault contends: "...the great spectacle of punishment ran the risk of being rejected by the very people to whom it was addressed" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 63). The evolution from torture to punishment was a gradual but inevitable movement that society views as more humane and progressive but Foucault theorises it as a new form of continuous social control.

Foucault's discussion of "Punishment" proceeds from his previous discussion of "Torture"; here prisons are the new 'gentler' form of punishment that still incorporates a social display of power in the form of public chain gangs which is another form of subjugation over the "body." As a form of departure from the traditional modes of torture which were unpredictable, ineffective, and disproportionate, the prison was a more controlled and evenly distributed form of punishment. The emergence of the modern industrial age has thus created a new "technology" that Foucault defines as "Discipline" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 137).

Foucault's discussion of "Discipline" is in the context of a more detailed and precise form of discipline that is associated with the entire body. This is derived from a new economy and politics for bodies that emerged from the development of discipline in the 18th and 19th centuries. Here, Foucault postulates that modern institutions were created that subsequently required bodies to be individuated according to their responsibilities that includes training, control, and surveillance which also allowed the "bodies" to perform their tasks within modern age organizations. Discipline, according to Foucault has constructed a form of individuality (for the body) that would permit it to work within the new organizations whose function could construct individuals with an individuality²¹ which is either cellular, organic, genetic, or combinatory in nature.

Foucault concludes that such "Discipline" would create "docile bodies" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 138) that are suitable for the modern industrial age. Individuals who are obedient, subservient and compliant would suit the ideals of a power state and their objective of an internally-disciplined society. With the 'creation' of individuals who are 'conscious' of the laws of the state that are enforced by state institutions by means of observation, the use of excessive force is therefore unnecessary. Foucault explains that

“[the] exercise of discipline presupposes a mechanism that coerces by means of observation...The means of coercion make those on whom they are applied clearly visible” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 171). Foucault postulates the “discipline-observation” method, borrowing Jeremy Bentham’s²² panopticon model that has a single watchman watching over all the inmates of a prison. While it is impossible for a single sentry to watch over all the inmates, the prisoners do not know this and will behave appropriately/normally as they believe they are being watched at all times. This concept would eventually evolve, leading to the birth of the modern day prison, a modern disciplinary institution that would be part of a larger “carceral system” in society that also includes schools, the military, factories, and hospitals. This would eventually lead to a creation of a panoptic society and the creation of “disciplinary careers” that are associated with the other disciplinary institutions under the carceral system, which according to Foucault “...succeeds in making the power to punish natural and legitimate, in lowering at least the threshold of tolerance to penalty” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 300). Thus, the emergence of the prison institution would become the ideal model of a corrective institution in the modern age and its permanence is natural given the effectiveness of the panoptic model in the postmodern age.

Foucault’s model of Panopticism discourse drew several criticisms that were directed at the feasibility of the theory in the modern context of surveillance and emergent surveillance technologies. One of the criticisms questioned the relevance of the Panoptical system in the modern age as the social media platform has perpetuated the subconscious need for self-disclosure of information. This would then make the Panoptic model redundant and ineffective. Another criticism was aimed at the failure of the panoptical control in producing docile subjects. This can be seen in the failure of surveillance states and Panoptical regimes in examples such as “...prison riots, asylum sub-cultures, ego

survival in Gulag or concentration camp, and retribalisation in the Balkans” (Roy, *Post-Panopticism, Economy and Society* 302). In addition, the Synopticon (the surveillance of the few by the many) may very well displace the Panopticon model as the current model of surveillance. Examples of Synopticon are clearly more evident in the current age of information technology and mass consumption of information in areas such as celebrity news reporting and social phenomenon such as viral videos on YouTube which may supplant the effectiveness of a solitary, pervasive, and ‘watchful force’ eyeing the many.

Foucault’s discussion of power is not complete without the notion of resistance because the existence of the former is incomprehensible without the latter. The conception of power requires the presence of resistance for such power relations to exist. It is a mutually dependent equation because the notion of power not only requires resistance, it existentially requires it. According to Foucault, power relations and resistance thus share a relationship of need and co-existence:

At the very heart of the power relationship, and constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom. Rather than speaking of an essential antagonism (between Power and Resistance), it would be better to speak of an “agonism” – of a relationship that is at the same time mutual incitement and struggle; less of a face-to-face confrontation that paralyses both sides than a permanent provocation. (Foucault, *Power* 342)

Foucault maintains that resistance is thus central to the discussion of power and is critical to address the instances of power exploitation in society. Foucault explains that “...the

analysis, elaboration, and bringing into question of power relations and the ‘agonism’ between power relations and the intransitivity of freedom is a permanent political task inherent in all social existence” (Foucault, *Power* 343).

I will be applying both Gramsci and Foucault’s theories of power to the textual analysis of Kee and Miller’s political plays based on what I see as the existence of such hegemonic ideologies of power being dictated by the political state. Gramsci’s theory of cultural hegemony and the notion of domination and ideology is seen in the state’s need for control and influence over individuals and society in general. In addition, through the propagation of state ideology and ‘consent’, the state is legitimising its political rule and this can be seen in both Kee’s and Miller’s political plays. Foucault’s primary discourse is on the notion of power, punishment, and the evolution of punishment, from its earlier existence to its postmodern incarnation of the prison institution. Based on Bentham’s vision of the Panopticon, Foucault translates the former’s architectural vision into a theoretical framework to show how such Power and its alignment to the concepts of torture, punishment, discipline, and the modern prison is legitimised, established, and enforced by the state as an apparatus of power and control. From my analysis, this model of power discourse as well as Gramsci’s ideological hegemony is evidently seen in the play’s political setting that provides the catalyst for the use of the panoptic model and ideological hegemony as a means of reinforcing the state’s hold on power. How Foucault theorizes the panoptical influence and structure could now be seen to be ‘incorporated’ into hospitals, schools, the military, factories; while Gramsci’s assertion of domination and hegemony as a form of power and influence is seen in similar social institutions aligned to the state. This thus validates both Gramsci’s and Foucault’s thesis of the ubiquitous notion of power that exists in society and its perpetuation by the political state. In addition, Gramsci and Foucault’s analysis of power in society could also be applied to language

discourse. A Foucauldian discourse analysis could be done on spoken language to analyse how language could be used to express dominance, to command obedience, and reverence from individuals and society. Both theories could also be applied to an analysis of language as a form of ideological hegemony and power. As such, the nature of coercive language and its perimeters of influence could be studied to find out the motives behind the practice of such a language and its vocabulary of 'control'. Similarly, this analysis of language as a demarcation of power could also be applied alternatively to a study of language as a form of resistance to those in power, something that is very evident in the political plays of Kee and Miller. Thus, based on the parallel outcomes and distinctions between the proposed theories and the plays, Kee and Miller's political plays are seen to resist such notions of power and its encapsulating influence on the individual and society.

1.19 Todorov's The Fantastic and Butler's Performativity

While Gramsci's theory of Hegemony and Foucault's theory of power are used to analyse Kee and Miller's political plays as a means of dissent, the third wave of their political plays seems to incorporate aspects of Todorov's theory of the Fantastic (for Kee) and elements of Judith Butler's theory of Performativity (for Miller).

Tzvetan Todorov, a historian and essayist, is known for his contributions to cultural theory, literary theory, history, and most importantly for his elaboration of the Fantastic, the Fantastic uncanny, and the Fantastic marvellous. The genre of the Fantastic, according to Todorov, is defined as a subgenre of literary works that are imbued with elements of the supernatural, and the 'hesitation' of characters and the readers when they are presented with questions pertaining to the reality of the situation.

This is different from narratives which contain supernatural elements without the reader ever questioning their validity. The reader knows that he must not take them literally. This also applies to poetry because the poem might be considered Fantastic if we require it to be representative. Therefore, a text must not be allegorical, for it to be Fantastic, nor must it be “poetic.”

Collectively, Todorov has summed up the necessary conditions for a work to be called the “Fantastic”:

The fantastic requires the fulfilment of three conditions. First, the text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural or supernatural explanation of the events described. Second, this hesitation may also be experienced by a character, thus the reader’s role is so to speak entrusted to a character, and at the same time the hesitation is represented, it becomes one of the themes of the work – in the case of naive reading, the actual reader identifies himself with the character. Third, the reader must adopt a certain attitude with regard to the text: he will reject allegorical as well as “poetic” interpretations. (Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* 59)

The Fantastic thus requires the fulfilment of the three conditions but Todorov stresses that the three conditions do not have equal value; the first and third conditions are necessary but the second condition is optional although most fantastic texts satisfy all three conditions.

Todorov's definition of the Fantastic could also be considered when the reader experiences some "confusion" in the reading of the story, and this Todorov calls the "uncanny"²³; this refers to a tale with a supernatural element but is explainable, logically. It is a story under the category of "the supernatural explained." At times, there are also narratives under the supernatural uncanny in the pure state. In such works, the events of the uncanny are already part of the established plot which may also include extraordinary and incredible events; the genre of horror in its pure state is one example of the supernatural uncanny.

Alternatively, in the Fantastic marvellous²⁴, the supernatural element is intended to be real. Such narratives are presented as fantastic and end with a general acceptance of the supernatural. This is deemed to be the closest to the genre of Fantastic. Events in the Fantastic marvellous are often unexplained and unrationalized, thus suggesting the existence of the supernatural.

Todorov further explains that there are events in the marvellous genre that do not contain the element of the supernatural. Todorov explains that it is not the reaction of the characters that is important but the rational nature of the event that is essential. The examples of such narratives are the hyperbolic marvellous (details of the narrative are exaggerated but are acceptable within reason), the exotic marvellous (details are exaggerated but are believable due to the character's acceptance of the events), the instrumental marvellous (instruments function in accordance with the needs of the narrative) and scientific marvellous (the function of marvellous instruments is in accordance with the rules applicable to the fictional world).

Critics of Todorov have remarked that he makes no references to other works besides the works of Edgar Allan Poe, and the term “Fantastic” is often confusing as it is commonly associated with fantasy literature. Nevertheless, such concerns have been addressed as Todorov’s theory has been adapted in the study of many other works of fictional poetics, bringing to light their significance to academic discourse. Todorov has also clearly defined his structuralist definition as somewhat different from fantasy literature that does not contain the ambiguity factor; simply put, science fiction and fantasy works eschew the element of ambiguity, and thus they are not considered under this genre.

The use of Todorov’s theory is applicable to the third wave of Kee’s political plays, particularly in *We Could **** you, Mr. Birch*. In this drama, the elements of the Fantastic are fully manifested, thus reinforcing my thesis that Kee’s plays had transcended their reactionary and dissenting stance to a more creative expression of resistance. Todorov’s discussion of the Fantastic and the conditions set for the classification of a literary work under the genre help to explain Kee’s third play in the context of characterization which, in part, has contributed to the complexity and success of the play. Kee’s *Birch* therefore departed from his usual pedantic narration and rigid portrayal of characters to a more fluid multicultural representation of Malaysia and its political complexities.

In showing this development, I shall also be reading Judith Butler’s theory of performativity in relation to Arthur Miller’s *The Archbishop’s Ceiling*, and Kee’s *We Could **** You, Mr. Birch*. Both plays represent the development and shift in the dramaturgical strategies in the playwrights’ third wave of political plays. While the latter contains elements of the Fantastic, the former exhibits elements of performativity of the Butlerian vein that posits that identities are formed by performative actions, gestures, and behaviours and are influenced by factors such as gender.

The act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again. The complex components that go into an act must be distinguished in order to understand the kind of acting in concert and acting in accord which one's gender invariably is. (Butler, *Performative Acts* 526)

Butler further explains that external acts such as gestures and speech acts do not express a personal identity but rather one is 'performing' an identity and its perceived level of individuality. Such acts are repeated and are not performed by lone individuals and are seen within the larger context of assumed identities. From the perspective of gender, such 'performed' gendered identities are influenced and enforced by an existing social hegemony that is in place within the larger context of society. According to Butler, gender is thus:

...an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (Butler, *Performance Acts* 519)

Butler further maintains that our gender is thus a performance and such gendered performances are "...stylized repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity" and that such acts constitute "...the identity of the actor..." but it establishes "...that identity as a compelling illusion, an object of belief." (Butler, *Performance Acts* 520). The performativity of gender thus becomes believable over time

and much of its cultural practices and beliefs are ingrained subconsciously to become the acceptable normative behaviour patterns of the present.

While Butler centres her performativity studies on gender, my analysis of Miller's *The Archbishop's Ceiling* will not be focusing on the perspective of gender but rather performativity as seen in the context of identity performance by the characters. Butler has stressed that gender itself is a performance that is scripted, and like all performances, it is "...a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief" (Butler, *Performance Acts* 520). Through the various "structures of embodiment", Butler maintains that gender is in fact a "corporeal style, an 'act,' as it were, which is both intentional and performative..." (Butler, *Performance Acts* 521). Thus, in relation to Miller's play, the supposedly concealed microphones in the Archbishop's ceiling have that impact on the individuals who believe that their speech is being recorded by the "bugs" planted by the state authorities. The listening devices have a performative effect on the individuals, inducing them to act/react in such a manner that is artificial and done to escape possible punitive action by the state. The presumed existence of the microphones and the repeated emphasis that its existence could incriminate them immediately creates an atmosphere of fear and apprehension among the occupants of the apartment whose history of political entrapment is notorious. The enforced belief that there are bugs listening has created a psychological hold on the individuals as they tread carefully and mask their dialogue with sign language to convey the real meaning of their communication.

In Butler's study of gender performativity, she concludes that such acts have no truth in their historical genesis and such "...corporeal styles are nothing other than those

punitively regulated cultural fictions that are alternately embodied and disguised under, duress” (Butler, *Performance Acts* 522). In *The Archbishop’s Ceiling*, the performativity is seen in the production of sign language (gestures) which are done intentionally due to the perceived belief of the existence of the microphones and the notion that political dissidents in the past had been monitored in the apartment. Thus the individuals continue to be subjected to the performativity dictated to them by such assumptions. According to Butler, performativity, which is a mere cultural construction, can be challenged. Since the ‘act’ is “...constituted by the performance itself” (Butler, *Performance Acts* 527), new or alternative performances could disrupt/deconstruct the hegemonic historicity of the performance itself.

Miller’s third political play thus contains elements of performativity that are associated with how speech and acts (gestures) come together to produce meaning, and represents a form of resistance to state hegemony. By citing key concepts of performativity, my analysis will show how Miller has incorporated two levels of performance for the characters in his play, the verbal and the non-verbal. The non-verbal communication seen in the sign language performed by the individuals therefore is a performed resistance by individuals against the political state. This two-layered performance analysis contains the element of performativity that is demonstrative of the creative development seen in both Miller’s political oeuvre, thus marking a distinct shift in the approach to the performativity of dissent and resistance. As Butler has maintained, performativity could be challenged by ‘alternative acts.’ I will also discuss the idea of the ‘failure of performativity’ in Miller’s play and how this is incorporated as part of the dramaturgical solution to the impasse between the issue of the falsity of performance and the catharsis that truth brings to the complexities of fiction and reality in the *Archbishop’s Ceiling*.

1.20 Approach

In Chapter Two, I will begin with an analysis of Kee's *1984 Here and Now* and with Miller's *The Crucible* according to the concept of hegemony and how this is exemplified by the political state in its persecution of the individual. My reading of the plays will also reveal how the plays resist the state's hegemony by means of dramaturgical dissent seen in the performative action by the characters. This will be followed by a continuation of the analysis of the dissenting plays such as Kee's *The Big Purge* and Miller's *Incident at Vichy* in Chapter Three. This discussion will be grounded on the theoretical framework of hegemony and Foucault's theory of power to demonstrate the objections of the playwrights to the political supremacy of the state. In Chapter Four, I will then demonstrate how Kee's political plays such as *We Could **** You, Mr. Birch* and Miller's *The Archbishop's Ceiling* have transcended their old performative strategies to incorporate a new creative form of "resistance" against the political state, marking the point of departure from their earlier reactionary political plays.

1.21 Conclusion.

For Kee and Miller, their plays are a socio-political commentary that forms a social discourse directed to the "centre" from the side of the persecuted/marginalized. Firstly, Miller's political plays were selected based on several considerations, among them, the fact that Miller considered the plays to be his most engaging, troubling, and intimate of all his plays as they involved all aspects of his life, from his political views, his marriage, moral grounding and his religious beliefs, to the impact stemming from his conflict with the HUAC. The plays shaped his personal views and motivations for writing in his subsequent plays. Similarly, all three of Kee's plays display the same thematic concerns as they were based on Kee's personal experiences and first-hand exposure to the political landscape of Malaysia. In addition, Kee's three plays are considered his most important

plays with *We Could **** You, Mr. Birch* being his best play to date, and most suitable to be used in the context of the discourse. Miller's allegorical plays and their direct confrontation with the political climate of conservative 1950s America elicit most comparisons with all of Kee's political plays that also touch on the idea of resistance by the individual and persecution by the state. Kee's chosen plays are clearly political in nature as they fit the analytical discourse framework of this research that hopes to provide a critical discourse on the politics of performance in plays that invite scrutiny of the politically oppressed state of affairs.

Although the political plays were written decades apart and from different geographical boundaries with distinct variables and differences such as culture, history, linguistic competency, socio-political, and socio-economic dimensions, their central concerns deal with the universal and traditional struggle of man versus authority and the journey of redemption and sacrifice individuals have to make in the face of oppression. Thus, charting and analysing the key element of resistance and the shift to an alternative mode of dissent in Kee and Miller's selected political plays, will provide critical insight into how the plays bridge the political dilemmas of the playwrights and their creative and artistic works together. This thesis will bring both playwrights and their selected political plays that span five decades, to be analysed (in a parallel manner) as well as to highlight the American-Malaysian perspective of "resistance" in the political drama studies of the two countries.

CHAPTER 2: THE CRUCIBLE AND 1984 HERE AND NOW: POLITICS, POWER, AND PERSECUTION

2.1 Introduction

In juxtaposing Miller's *The Crucible* and Kee's *1984 Here and Now*, we see two political plays from two different continents, written thirty years apart with political, cultural, historical, and linguistic boundaries separating both the plays and their playwrights. But in giving prominence to such differences, we see a deep connection that binds both plays and their authors together. Miller and Kee are very political individuals, and while my first chapter deliberated on the similarities in the societies of their time, this chapter will attempt to answer the question of how the dramatists, as shown through their plays, react to the political pressures from the state.

This chapter will analyse *The Crucible* and *1984 Here and Now* as powerful and creative plays of resistance (onstage and off-stage) by the playwrights against the political superstructures of their times. In this analysis, we will see how the playwrights use the dramaturgical form and process. My focus will be on the figurative/hegemonic language used in Miller's play, and Kee's structured social critiques, in order to negate the overarching hegemony of the state. I will also consider how the plays are ultimately a powerful critique of the state in their performative strategies as well as their textual content. In doing so, this chapter will eventually demonstrate how the specific plays resist such hegemonies and ideologies perpetuated by the state as well as offering intimate insights into Miller's and Kee's socio-political worldviews in relation to the political situations they faced.

In analysing such distinctions, this chapter is aimed at bridging the gap between both playwrights and to show that the geographical boundaries of time and space and various

demarcations inherent in American and Malaysian societies do not inhibit this discourse. This chapter is thus aimed at bringing both authors and their works together for a more thorough study of the politics of dissent through drama and the multiple representations of drama as seen from the socio-political landscapes of their respective eras.

Arthur Miller's play, *The Crucible*, is one of the most iconic and influential plays of 20th century American drama. Miller's play, set in 17th century Salem, dramatizes the historical events of the tightly-knit Puritan commune as one of the tragic episodes in the history of the New World that still reverberates in the annals of American history.²⁵ In the 1692 Salem witchcraft trials, a total of nineteen men and women and two dogs²⁶ were tried and hanged for witchcraft. It was only in 1957 that the Massachusetts General Court declared the 1692 proceedings to be "the result of popular hysterical fear of the Devil" (Biggsby, Introduction to *The Crucible*) and as recently as 1992, exactly three hundred years later, that the state of Massachusetts took full responsibility for the deaths of all victims of the witchcraft trials.

Based on real historical events and people, Miller's play is an exploration of a harrowing event and its wider implications on Man and society, the persecution of the innocent and the malevolent powers of authoritarian states. Staged in 1953, *The Crucible* is not Miller's most successful play, but it is his most frequently produced work because audiences worldwide understand intimately the universal implications of the "breaking of charity in the context of a re-examined history" (Biggsby, *A Critical Study*, 149). As Miller himself puts it:

People were being torn apart, their loyalty to one another crushed and common decency was going down the drain. It's indescribable, really,

because you'd get the feeling that nothing was going to be sacred anymore. The situations were so exact it was quite amazing. The ritual was the same. What they were demanding of Proctor was that he exposed this conspiracy of witches whose aim was to bring down the rule of the Church, of Christianity. If he gave them a couple of names he could go home. And if he didn't he was going to hang for it. It was quite the same excepting we weren't hanged but, but the ritual was the same. You told them anyone you knew had been a left-winger or a Communist and you went home. But I wasn't going to do that. (qtd. in Bigsby, *Arthur Miller: A Critical Study*, 149)

The Crucible was written by Miller in response to anti-communism trials that were sweeping across America in the 1950s. Called the McCarthy trials because of allegations made by Senator Joseph McCarthy that the State Department was infiltrated by communists, many people were arrested and made to name their accomplices as a testament of their innocence. Many were socially ostracized and were accused of being communist sympathizers. Those who were 'uncooperative', in that they refused to name their accomplices, were mostly blacklisted and unable to find any means of work. Miller himself was called to testify, but he refused to name anyone because he believed this would lead to more people being arrested. Miller's *The Crucible* thus embodies the spirit of resistance and defiance as the dramatist saw what was happening during the McCarthy trials as a repetition of the Salem witchcraft trials of the 1690s.

In comparison, Kee Thuan Chye's play *1984 Here and Now*²⁷ is an adaptation of George Orwell's *1984*. While Orwell's critique was on the stifling and ruthless powers of the state over the individual, class conflict, and the rights of the individual, Kee's

Malaysianized version focuses on how “existing hegemonic power structures perpetuate gross inequalities in the Malaysian society” (Gilbert and Lo, Introduction to *1984 Here and Now* 6). Kee’s concerns also touched on the social relations among races and communal groups that were discriminated against by race-based policies of the National Economic Policy²⁸ (NEP) and the subsequent establishment of the Malay special rights²⁹ enshrined in the Malaysian constitution.

Staged in 1985 at the Experimental Theatre, University of Malaya, the play was a tremendous success for an English language play of that time. The box-office success played to overwhelmingly full houses for five consecutive nights³⁰, and could have continued for another week had their booking permit not been turned down by the university. The play’s sharp criticism of the Malaysian government policies³¹ that include the Internal Security Act (ISA) and its pro-*bumiputera*³² policy was considered a rare feat in the 1980s. For a public performance, a police permit was needed; the fact that it was approved was puzzling to the playwright as well as the organizers of the play.³³ The play was also considered significant because it was the “first English language agit-prop theatre to be staged in the country”³⁴ (Lo, 83). Shirley Lim states that Kee’s play made an impact because it was received as a performance of the real, “a crucial distinction in which the traditional fictivity of drama – its representational character – is abrogated for performativity – its presentational transgressivity between the boundaries of the imaginary and social reality” (Lim, 123). Kee’s *1984 Here and Now* reflects the realities of the present more evidently than the fictional world the play portrays, and this aspect of realism and obvious reference to Malaysia is glaring in this play which is his most direct commentary on Malaysia’s racial politics and the overwhelming hegemony of its ruling political parties.

In addition, Kee's 1984 *Here and Now* emerged at a period of consolidation of the 1967 National Language Act and the Amendment Act in 1971 that elevates the position of Bahasa Malaysia or the Malay language as the national language of Malaysia. The 1969 racial riots was a turning point in the country's history as a massive social-engineering economic policy that specifically focused on the Malay ethnicity was implemented to elevate the economic imbalances plaguing the young nation. Together with this affirmative action plan, several other policies bent on fostering national unity through a strong emphasis on the Malay identity, were introduced. Bahasa Melayu³⁵ or the Malay language would be the official language of the nation. The raised status of the Malay language also meant that Malay literature or *Sastera Melayu* would become the national literature of the country and would be given official status and national recognition. In terms of written literatures, literatures written in the other languages including English would be considered "sectional literatures." Furthermore, the Constitutional Amendment Act of 1971 was passed, which made it illegal to dispute or question the status of the Malay language as the national language as provided for in Article 152 of the Malaysian Constitution. Also in 1971, the National Culture Policy was articulated on the following principles:

- 1) The national culture of Malaysia must be based on the cultures of the people indigenous to the region;
- 2) Elements from other cultures which are suitable and reasonable may be incorporated into the national culture; and
- 3) Islam will be an important element in the national culture.³⁶

The National Culture Policy thus elevated the status of the Malay language and gave emphasis to the Malay culture and identity. This has resulted in the English language being relegated to the margins and literary works written in English not receiving any recognition³⁷ from the Malaysian government. Kee's play is thus a direct response to such policies that discriminate against minorities as well as speakers of English and other languages such as Mandarin, Tamil, and other dialects spoken by the other ethnic communities in Malaysia. From the vibrant and thriving Malaysian drama scene of the 1960s, the following decade saw the immediate decline of Malaysian drama written in English.³⁸ The silence on the stage was finally broken by K.S. Maniam's *The Cord* (1983) and Kee's 1984 *Here and Now*. There were another two plays³⁹ that followed suit, but Kee's play is the only play that challenged the race-based economic policies and the notion of the Malaysian national identity that is based on the valorization of the Malay culture.

2.2 The Language of the Figurative, Hegemonic, and the Manipulative in *The Crucible*

This primary section will analyse Miller's figurative and hegemonic language and Kee's use of social commentary and its effectiveness as a means to dismantle and negate the ideological and hegemonic superstructures of the political state. At the same time, the perpetuation of fear and conformity by the state via the same means to consolidate its power base will also be analysed.

I will give an overview of Miller's treatment of figurative language, an analysis of Judge Danforth and Abigail Williams' hegemonic and manipulative language and how Miller challenges the state hegemony via his intense portrayal of John Proctor's language of resistance.

To begin, Miller scholar Ronald Hayman describes the language in *The Crucible* as “simple and functional; sometimes it is picturesque with images jostling against each other” (19). It is Miller’s brilliant mastery and use of figurative language in *The Crucible* that shows how powerful such language could be. What attracted Miller to write the play was also the challenge of creating a powerful and emotional language befitting the paranoia and turbulence of the witch-hunt scare of Salem. The strength of the play also stems from its imagery-laced dialogue and beautifully-crafted language that is evocative in its imagery and is intense in its emotions, as is evident in the conversations between the characters. In addition, the “pithiness of the language and the directness of its imagery” evokes a certain fascination and appeal in the playwright’s mind that also corresponded with the mood and intensity of the politically turbulent America of the 1950s.

In *The Crucible* lies also the debilitating and ideological use of figurative language manipulated for the purpose of self-interest and power. Miller was clearly alluding to the power of such language and how it is used to persuade, project, interpret, define, legitimize, and concretize thought, ideas, meaning, the abstract, and right from wrong. This is also evident in Kee’s play where language plays a similar role in oppressing and subjugating an individual. To Miller, such language is used in *The Crucible* as a means to oppress and repress. Its use can be seen as a hegemonic tool by those in power to discipline and punish those who disobey the state, as well as a form of dissent. The McCarthy trials and the Salem witch-hunt trials were thus an echo of one another from the deep-rooted human emotions of fear, guilt, and paranoia to the theological, ideological, linguistic, cultural and political dimensions.

God and the Devil, capitalism and communism, constituted the ideological site for a conflict in essence about power but also, therefore, about which legitimising language could prevail...Victory was to be declared over those whose cunning made them forswear or invoke ambiguity at a time of absolutes...If *The Crucible* is full of petitions, warrants, confessions, then before the House Un-American Activities Committee individuals were confronted with their signatures and petitions, Party membership forms, published articles, invoked now as evidence of collusion and public subversion. (Bigsby, *A Critical Study* 160-161)

The creation of such colourful language appealed to Miller who considers such an endeavour a highly demanding art form, “one that would require new muscles” (Miller, *The Crucible in History* 3). It was the language of a bureaucratic theocracy that:

...makes the seventeenth century both distant and close, that enables his characters to discover within the limiting vocabulary and grammar of faith-turned-dogma a means to express their own lives...The language of *The Crucible* is not authentic, in the sense of reproducing archaisms or reconstructing a seventeenth-century lexis...It is authentic in that makes fully believable the words of those who speak out of a different time and place but whose human dilemmas are recognizably our own. (Bigsby, *A Critical Study* 157)

The Puritan society of Salem operated using the same hegemonic principle such as the use of ideology. In Salem, the pervasive religious ideology was one method to regulate

and maintain control over the population on the basis of religious sanctity and peaceful living, “a combination of state and religious power whose function was to keep the community together...” (Bigsby, Introduction to *The Crucible* 6). The Salem theocracy nevertheless maintained its religious and political influence through the appointment of religious ministers such as Hale and Parris, and judges such as Danforth whose religious rule perpetuates the religious legitimacy of the theocracy garnered from the consent of its citizenry.

Miller has also said that writing *The Crucible* gave him the opportunity to use the seventeenth-century language of New England that was mysterious and sensual: “how it swings from an ‘almost legalistic precision’ to a level of metaphoric richness” (qtd. In Marino, 469). Miller thus used this strategy to incorporate this “swing” to its present-day form of binary opposites in the play. The use of binary opposites in the play by Miller is also used to illustrate “[a] world totally of extremes; heat and cold, white and black, light and dark, soft and hard, lightness and weight signify the existence of the ultimate opposites: good and evil” (Marino, 468).

Miller also played with elements of heat and cold in *The Crucible*⁴⁰ to suggest how the intensity of the trials subsided from its initial frenzy to the cold and barren conditions of Salem after the witchcraft trials. Most would assume the metaphors of fire and burning refer to the fires of hell or other impending danger such as the forthcoming witch-hunts, but in reality, Miller used such metaphors and images to mean impending strife and chaos from the ravaging political and religious condemnations that were about to plague the community. This example can be seen when Giles Corey and Francis Nurse arrive at Proctor’s farmhouse. Upon meeting Reverend Hale, Francis Nurse worries about his wife, and asks Hale what he should do since his wife has been charged. Hale responds: “Believe

me, Mr. Nurse, if Rebecca Nurse is tainted, then nothing's left to stop the whole green world from burning" (Miller, *The Crucible* 67). In another example, when Proctor requests that Deputy Governor Danforth who is the chief judge, hear Mary Warren's deposition about Abigail's lies, Judge Danforth responds critically: "Now, Mr. Proctor, before I decide whether I shall hear you or not, it is my duty to tell you this. We burn a hot fire here; it melts down all concealment" (Miller, *The Crucible* 82-83). The judge is also implying that his 'fire' will purify the community by melting down the disguises of the witches. While Judge Danforth thinks that he is a purifying force, to Miller's view, Danforth is a destructive person who believes in the use of force and intimidation to instil obedience. As Judge Danforth's position is one of power, his reprimand is thus seen as a caution to whoever is out to disrupt his judgement or those who do not yield to the power of the state theocracy. Danforth is quick-tempered and constantly imposes his will on others, yielding to no other reasoning but his own. He is a dismissive individual and condescending to anyone who does not show respect for his authority. Danforth uses his legal knowledge and experience to crush anyone who is against his views. Much of this can be seen in Danforth's language of hegemony which I will analyse in the second part of this chapter.

Miller's control over the use of figurative language can be seen in this beautiful blend and contrast of colour and warmth in an intimate conversation between husband and wife. Miller brilliantly combines the nuances of human emotions with the tenderness of a home-cooked meal and the intimacy of the moment is complemented with the beautiful seasonal change of green fields and rich fertile lands, signifying the blossoming of relations between Proctor and Elizabeth.

PROCTOR: It's well seasoned.

ELIZABETH, *blushing with pleasure*: I took great care. She's tender?

PROCTOR: Aye. *He eats. She watches him.* I think we'll see green fields soon. It's warm as blood beneath the clods.

(Miller, *The Crucible* 48)

Miller delicately shows Proctor's affections and love for his wife through his romantic endeavour to bond with his wife. Here, Proctor aims to put aside the coldness of their relationship, "It's winter in here yet", and embrace a new start that is represented by the new season of spring and the scent of purple lilac flowers. Proctor is clearly alluding to the cold war that had been brewing between them when Proctor admitted to his adulterous affair with Abigail Williams. Miller's use of imagery, stimuli of sense, colour, and symbolism⁴¹ describe Proctor's genuine efforts in his attempt to put the past behind them and by doing so, he hopes to rekindle their love as they embark on a new chapter of their lives.

PROCTOR: It's winter in here yet. On Sunday let you come with me, and we'll walk the farm together; I never see such a load of flowers on earth. *With good feeling he goes and looks up at the sky through the open doorway.* Lilacs have a purple smell. Lilac is the smell of nightfall, I think. Massachusetts is a beauty in spring!

((Miller, *The Crucible* 49)

Here, warmth and coldness are associated with Proctor and Elizabeth's complicated husband-wife relationship. Warmth is associated with Proctor and coldness with

Elizabeth. Proctor's affair with Abigail Williams has made his wife distrust him and the cold shoulder that Elizabeth gives him prompts Proctor to try to reignite their passion and to win her love again. Proctor's love for the warm "summer" and rich fertile lands is contrasted to the coldness of their house. Later in the play when the incarcerated Proctor is reunited with Elizabeth, she takes some of the blame for his adultery and points out her frigidity and indifference in their relationship. "I have read my heart this three month, John...I have sins of my own to count. It needs a cold wife to prompt lechery" (Miller, *The Crucible* 126).

Miller's use of an overtly legalistic language also forms aspects of a ruling and hegemonic theocracy influencing the Salemites' way of life. This can be seen from the strong metaphor of judgement that is sometimes intertwined with the elements of heat and cold. Proctor feels that Elizabeth is constantly judging him even though he had confessed to adultery and he feels this to be unbearable at times. Here, Elizabeth's 'forgiveness' is likened to the unforgiving coldness of winter and it is evidently not the type of mercy Proctor is asking for. Nevertheless, Proctor still has to undergo 'the crucible' of his integrity and name in more ways than one later in the play.

PROCTOR: No more! I should have roared you down when first you told me your suspicion. But I wilted, and, like a Christian, I confessed. Confessed! Some dream I had must have mistaken you for God that day. But you're not, you're not, and let me remember it! Let you look sometimes for the goodness in me and judge me not.

ELIZABETH: I do not judge you. The magistrate sits in your heart that judges you. I never thought you but a good man, John – *with a smile* – only somewhat bewildered.

PROCTOR, *laughing bitterly*: Oh Elizabeth, your justice would freeze beer!

(Miller, *The Crucible* 52-53)

The use of legalistic and biblical language is not surprising in Salem because of its theocratic rule. Therefore, it is not surprising that religious governing dominates all social aspects of the inhabitants' lives and this includes the daily correspondence of its people. Here, we could also notice aspects of Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony and how the ruling capitalist class maintains its control through established religious institutions.

It is perhaps the religious dogma of the theocracy that incensed Proctor. His disdain for Parris and his ill-gotten luxuries, his refusal to both to rest on a Sabbath⁴² and baptize his child mark him as Gramsci's "organic intellectual", someone who dares to challenge the religious state. This is in contrast to the "traditional intellectual", Reverend Hale, whose tomes of scientific books eventually cannot undo the personal vengeance of Abigail or the vindictiveness of Judge Danforth. When Proctor is asked to recite the Ten Commandments as proof that he is a "covenanted Christian", he falters on one commandment and reassures Hale that this should be a minor misgiving. This is another example of Gramsci's ideological hegemony in Salem whereby not knowing one's commandments is considered a sin and being "good covenanted Christian" means one is judged by one's ability to recite the full commandments. Such an ideology is perpetuated by the theocratic state to influence and control the minds of Salemites and Proctor's

forced recital is thus an example of the impinging hegemonic influence of the Salem theocratic state upon the community.

After Proctor's failure to recite the Ten Commandments, Reverend Hale proclaims to Proctor that "Theology, sir, is a fortress; no crack in a fortress may be accounted small" (Miller, *The Crucible* 64). Ironically, the theocracy of Salem that rules according to God's law has failed the many innocent lives that were hanged on the basis of lies and hearsay, a fact that Proctor knows well; hence his unwillingness to give up his name over a blatant lie. Like Wiran in Kee's *1984*, Proctor epitomizes the homegrown organic intellectual/hero who risks everything for his conscience and honour. Proctor resists the temptation to choose the easy way out. Death is Proctor's only salvation, preferable to continue living a disgraced life.

In *The Crucible*, there are multiple interpretations to the word "weight" that Miller has incorporated into the play. In the beginning, the word is associated with the literal weight of Reverend Hale's book to its figurative meaning, books being books of authority in subject matter and the truth they hope to reveal. With the full weight of the Salem theocracy supporting the accusations of Abigail Williams and a naïve chief judge who believes in her lies, her allegations thus carry "weight" and all who had wronged her are now in the crosshairs of her vengeance. Miller later expanded on the metaphorical and figurative connotations of "weight" to include the importance of official legal work as highlighted in this conversation between Proctor and Mary Warren.

PROCTOR: You will not go to court again, Mary Warren.

MARY WARREN: I must tell you, sir, I will be gone every day now. I am amazed you do not see what weighty work we do. (Miller, *The Crucible* 56)

In another example, Reverend Parris uses the word “weight” to describe the significance of Proctor’s potential confession to the rest of Salem if he is allowed to sign it.

PARRIS, *feverishly*: It is a great service, sir. It is a weighty name; it will strike the village that Proctor confess. I beg you, let him sign it. (Miller, *The Crucible* 131)

In the midst of the persecution of the innocent in the Salem witchcraft trials, Proctor’s conscience is stirred from hearing how old Giles Corey fought to defend his honour even in his dying moments. In the court officials’ bid to forcefully obtain his ‘confession’, Corey was crushed with stones in yet another example of a state theocracy abusing its political powers. In an intimate yet touching scene, Corey displays courageous resistance to the theocracy’s unyielding stand against dissenting individuals.

PROCTOR: When were he hanged?

ELIZABETH, *quietly, factfully*: He were not hanged. He would not answer aye or nay to his indictment, for if he denied the charge they’d hang him surely, and auction out his property. So he stand mute, and dies Christian under the law. And so his sons will have his farm. It is the law,

for he could not be condemned a wizard without he answer the indictment, aye or nay.

PROCTOR: Then how does he die?

ELIZABETH, *gently*: They press him, John.

PROCTOR: Press?

ELIZABETH: Great stones they lay upon him until he plead aye or nay.

With a tender smile for the old man: They say he give them but two words.

“More weight,” he says. And died. (Miller, *The Crucible* 125)

Corey's death scene is one of the most touching in Miller's play. The associations with the word "weight" change when Corey uses it as it carries a multiplicity of meaning that pays tribute to the integrity and bravery of his character. It is the "weight" of legalistic opinion that found Corey to be 'guilty' of his 'crimes' but such a ruling does not crush him. He refuses to be 'weighted down' by such accusations and pressure from the courts to confess. His request for "more weight" could also mean the accusations against him lacked real weight. He is possibly challenging his persecutors to increase the strength of their accusations against him. Corey chooses to remain silent not because he is afraid but because his actions will enable his estate to be inherited by his children, and thus kept out of Parris' hands. Corey's strong and personal act of defiance clearly shows his resistance to the state theocracy, its laws, and Judge Danforth's oppressive judgement. In terms of language, Corey voices his thoughts honestly and directly (like Proctor). His simplicity in speaking and curt approach is meaningful and effective. This is contrasted to Danforth's legalistic verbosity and courtroom jargon that is constantly highlighted to distinguish his powerful position as a high court judge.

The metaphors, images, symbols, and figurative language that permeate the landscape of *The Crucible* are literary devices which rely “...heavily on the interplay between the literal and figurative meanings of the words” (Marion, 469). Miller had laboriously crafted in its inception not only a historical play of tragic consequences but a play with a forceful dramatization of 17th century Salem that requires a realistic depiction of the linguistic nuances of the period to accurately portray the tragic sensibilities of the Salem witch-hunt trials.

2.3 Deputy Governor Danforth and the Language of Hegemony

Miller’s strength in the play lies in his imaginative reconstruction of the language of the past to have a striking similarity with the political language of oppression in the McCarthy trials of the 20th century. *The Crucible* is a play in which “language is a weapon” (Biggsby, *A Critical Study* 158). In fact, in both Kee and Miller’s plays examined in this chapter, language is a weapon and a tool used to discipline dissenting individuals.

Miller has demonstrated his prowess in capturing to near perfection, the intensity of the times by moulding his characters to embody, for example, the cold and merciless Judge Danforth who possesses an authoritative and condescending demeanour. He crushes his opposition with his arrogant knowledge of law and theology, coupled with a proud, coercive language that regards any challenge to the Salem theocracy as a threat to the ruling orthodoxy, or his pride. Danforth views any challenge to the system as an attack on the Salem theocracy and emphasizes this figuratively, using words such as “sharp” and “precise” to describe his judgement. Judge Danforth emphasizes such words because he wants to make it clear that there is no middle ground and no grey areas of probability in his judgement. “Sharp” and “precise” also imply that he has measured and studied the challenge to the system, and is therefore fair and unbiased in his conclusion. What this

really reveals about Judge Danforth, however, is his insistence at looking at the world from his perspective. Danforth basically does not allow any opposition or dissent in his courtroom. This is another example of Gramsci's notion of ideological hegemony where Judge Danforth perpetuates his own ideological hegemony of thought and imposes it on all individuals. There is no questioning of his discretion as his judgement and ruling is unquestionable and infallible.

DANFORTH: No, old man, you have not hurt these people if they are of good conscience. But you must understand, sir, that a person is either with this court or he must be counted against it, there be no road between. This is a sharp time, now, a precise time – we live no longer in the dusky afternoon when evil mixed itself with good and befuddled the world.

(Miller, *The Crucible* 87)

Danforth's view is that the court of justice is above reproach and as such, an individual must choose to either be on the side of justice or against it. Such is his simplistic view of the complexities of justice. John Proctor who dares challenge his authority is then viewed by Judge Danforth as a rebel who must be restrained to preserve the integrity of the court. Reverend Hale's lament in Act Three succinctly sums up his frustrations with the court when he asks, "Is every defense an attack upon the court?" (Miller, *The Crucible* 87). Judge Danforth unfortunately brushes Hale's sensible concern aside.

In another scene, Reverend Hale's concerns surrounding the nature of the accusations are once again highlighted, but Judge Danforth rebuffs Hale's advice. Instead, Judge Danforth raises the spectre of fear and alludes to a devilish plot to topple "Christ".

DANFORTH: Mr. Hale, you surely do not doubt my justice.

HALE: We cannot blink it more. There is a prodigious fear of this court in the country -

DANFORTH: Then there is a prodigious guilt in the country. Are you afraid to be questioned here?

HALE: I may only fear the Lord, sir, but there is fear in the country nevertheless.

DANFORTH, *angered now*: Reproach me not with the fear in the country; there is fear in the country because there is a moving plot to topple Christ in the country!

HALE: But it does not follow that everyone accused is part of it.

DANFORTH: No uncorrupted man may fear this court, Mr. Hale! None!

To Giles: You are under arrest in contempt of this court. Now sit down you down and take counsel with yourself, or you will be set in jail until you decide to answer all questions.

(Miller, *The Crucible*, 90 -91)

This again is Judge Danforth's main reasoning, one that that he often uses to shield himself rather than the judiciary from further criticism. His constant reminders to others of 'guilt', 'fear', 'corruption', and religious anarchy only serve to consolidate his bastion of power and ultimately his pride, as a high court judge. These are his attempts at raising fear and justifying that his court is not just necessary, but has to be powerful enough to eradicate such vices from society. This is also reminiscent of Big Brother's use of the Klot threat in Kee's 1984. The use of such a threat is a psychological means of instilling fear and control by Big Brother in his quest for political control and dominion.

Danforth thus represents, in Gramsci's cultural hegemony, not only the "traditional" intelligentsia of the state but also the entire political and ideological superstructure of the Salem theocracy. His rule of law reinforces social control of the state through coercive and consensual means through the propagation of the common ideology or in this case, the theocracy of Salem. Danforth's iron fist ruling is itself a one-man hegemonic force that is much to Reverend Hale's disappointment as his advice as another traditional intellectual of the state, is most often ignored. Judge Danforth tries to conceal his pride every time he silences another who challenges 'his' court by directing any protest as a challenge to the highest judicial authority in Salem. Judge Danforth thus believes that he is the court and the court represents him.

DANFORTH: Disrespect indeed! It is a disruption, Mister. This is the highest court of the supreme government of this province, do you know it?

(Miller, *The Crucible* 79)

Such pride and ego are exhibited by Judge Danforth and despite being "...thirty-two year at the bar" (Miller, *The Crucible* 92), Danforth could not see through the bluff of Abigail's scheme. His statement above clearly demonstrates his pride. Danforth emphasizes that the presiding court is the "highest court of the supreme government of this province", further pushing the point that his position is one of authority because he is in charge of the highest court in Salem. He is offended that Giles does not know the authority or the power of the court.

In another scene, Danforth yet again demonstrates how egoistic he is by abusing his position and threatening to hang Mary if she does not confess. His intimidating language

again emphasizes both his sense of his own authority and the punishment he is capable of dispensing should an individual displease him.

DANFORTH: I cannot hear you. What do you say?

Mary utters again unintelligibly.

You will confess now or you will hang! *He turns her roughly to face*
him.

Do you know who I am? I say you will hang if you do not open with
me!

(Miller, *The Crucible* 109)

In Act Four, Judge Danforth's arrogance and ignorance of his actions is seen when Parris informs him of a possible riot by the townspeople caused by the trials. Danforth replies pompously, "Why at every execution I have seen naught but high satisfaction in the town" (Miller, *The Crucible* 117). Later, when Reverend Hale pleads for more time to obtain Rebecca Nurse's confession, Danforth refuses to comply. Angered, Danforth's retaliates: "While I speak God's law, I will not crack its voice with whimpering. If retaliation is your fear, know this – I should hang ten thousand that dared to rise against the law, and an ocean of salt tears could not melt the resolution of the statutes" (Miller, *The Crucible* 120). In Danforth's view, justice is equated to compliance and obedience to the state's law regardless of how cruel it is perceived to be.

Danforth's overzealousness is continued in the subsequent 'confession scene'. In the scene, he demands an oral confession from Proctor, and despite his written 'confession' of his 'involvement' with the Devil and witchcraft, Proctor refuses to comply. Instead, Proctor chooses to deny Danforth the act that could very well save his own life. Realizing

his own cowardice in trading his good name for his life, he tears the signed confession in a final attempt to prove his innocence and to denounce the witchcraft trials as a mockery of justice, innocence and the goodness of God. Proctor refuses to give the document to Judge Danforth who by this time, is infuriated with Proctor's action.

DANFORTH, *pointing at the confession in Proctor's hand*: Is that document a lie? If it is a lie I will not accept it! What say you? I will not deal in lies, Mister! *Proctor is motionless*. You will give me your honest confession in my hand, or I cannot keep you from the rope. *Proctor does not reply*. Which way do you go, Mister?

His breast heaving, his eyes staring, Proctor tears the paper and crumples it, and he is weeping in fury, but erect.

DANFORTH: Marshall!

(Miller, *The Crucible* 133)

Danforth's language is full of intimidation as he delivers Proctor an ultimatum. If Proctor does not hand over the confession, he will be hung. It is well noted how Danforth tries to cajole Proctor into handing over his "honest confession". Danforth's logic is that Proctor must surrender the paper or he will face the gallows. Despite Danforth's ultimatum that Proctor has to face the "rope", Proctor shows no fear, infuriating Danforth even more that his threat has no effect. An individual like Proctor will continue to resist efforts to break his will. Proctor resists Danforth's verbal threats because he believes that his honour and name are worth more than his life

2.4 Abigail Williams and the Language of Manipulation

From Judge Danforth, we move on to the character of Abigail Williams and see another example of how figurative language is manipulated as a means to an end. Abigail Williams threatens the other girls to not reveal anything that might arouse suspicion about their “un-Christian” activities in the forest at night.

Now look you. All of you. We danced. And Tituba conjured Ruth Putnam’s dead sisters. And that is all. And mark this – let either of you breathe a word, or the edge of a word about the other thing, and I will come to you in the black of some terrible night and I will bring a pointy reckoning that will shudder you. And you know I can do it; I saw Indians smash my dear parents’ heads on the pillow next to mine, and I have seen some reddish work done at night, and I can make you wish you had never seen the sun go down! (Miller, *The Crucible* 19)

The use of such vivid and brutal images of death and slaughter demonstrates the desperation of Abigail Williams’ character as well as revealing aspects of her gory past. She is capable of doing anything to keep the truth from being told. Her use of words like “black” and “reddish” implies her knowledge of the black arts. She threatens to come unsuspectingly “...in the black of some terrible night...”, a time which is also associated with the conjuring of magic and the dead, to punish those who dare reveal their secret. The metaphor “pointy reckoning” refers to the fate of the informer who will be at the receiving end of a sharp blade from her. Her description here tells us that she is clever at manipulating and influencing her friends through her verbal threats. Abigail’s gory and graphic description also tells us that she is far from the innocent child image she presents

to Danforth, and that she is very cunning and manipulative. Abigail emerges as a shadowy and mysterious persona. Her intensity comes across very powerfully in her use of manipulative and intimidating language. We see how the childish game played in the forest of the night turns deadly; its repercussions on the Puritan community are more than the girls could ever have imagined.

Abigail also attempts to persuade Proctor to leave his wife. She knows Proctor's character very well and plays with his emotions and feelings to draw Proctor close to her. Abigail has a way with words in contrast to Proctor who is a man of few words. In this scene, Miller's use of metaphors describe Abigail's passion and lust for Proctor. She chooses to use binary opposites of cold and heat to describe Proctor as a full-blooded man who longs for her as she longs for him.

ABIGAIL: I have a sense for heat, John, and yours has drawn me to my window, and I have seen you looking up, burning in your loneliness. Do you tell me you've never looked up at my window?

PROCTOR: I may have looked up.

ABIGAIL, *now softening*: And you must. You are no wintry man. I know you, John. I know you. She is weeping. I cannot sleep for dreamin'; I cannot dream but I wake and walk about the house as though I'd find you comin' through some door. She clutches him *desperately*.

(Miller, *The Crucible* 22)

She tries to charm by appealing to his weakness and aptly uses the metaphor of coldness to describe his current relationship with his wife, Elizabeth. Abigail is not only clever in

her words but she is also sharp in her observation of his marriage. This is the basis of her argument for them to rekindle their illicit liaison. Abigail has noticed Proctor looking up at her window. She cleverly tells Proctor, “You are no wintry man”. She understands his loneliness and the cold impasse of his relationship with Elizabeth. The use of heat as a binary opposite to cold is Miller’s way of describing Abigail’s pent-up passion for Proctor. Her ability to detect Proctor’s “heat”, to cure his “burning loneliness” and to provide sexual gratification for him are Abigail’s ways of coaxing him to leave his wife. She encourages him to look for her, telling him “...you must”. By crying, Abigail hopes to appeal to Proctor’s softer side, her repetition of the words “I know you” is to emphasize how deeply she knows Proctor, and “I cannot...” is to demonstrate to Proctor that she cannot imagine the meaninglessness and forlornness of life without him. By doing so, Abigail puts the burden of her emotional feelings on Proctor, suggesting that only he can relieve her of her anxieties at not being able to “sleep” or “dream”. Abigail’s emotional outpouring here seems to suggest that Proctor is the only individual she could be open with and honest about her emotions. In desperation, she clutches at Proctor but when Proctor firmly pushes her away, calling her “child”, she admonishes him for not thinking that she is a woman.

ABIGAIL, *with a flash of anger*: How do you call me child!

PROCTOR: Abby, I may think of you softly from time to time. But I will cut off my hand before I’ll ever reach for you again. Wipe it out of mind. We never touched, Abby.

ABIGAIL: Aye, but we did.

PROCTOR: Aye, but we did not.

ABIGAIL, *with a bitter anger*: Oh, I marvel how such a strong man let such a sickly wife be –

PROCTOR, *angered – at himself as well*: You'll speak nothin' of Elizabeth!

(Miller, *The Crucible* 22)

Abigail constantly reminds Proctor of their sexual liaison and tries to make Proctor guilty, telling him that they did commit adultery. Despite her anger at Proctor, however, she tries to placate him but at the same time. Abigail challenges Proctor's pride by calling him a "strong man" who is controlled by a "sickly wife". The use of binary opposites here illustrate and emphasize the contrast between Proctor's physical strength and his sickly wife.

Abigail Williams' drinking blood and dancing in the forest with the girls and Tituba the slave was discovered by Reverend Parris. Abigail makes great effort to conceal the fact that she was the leader of the forest revelry. In this scene, Abigail Williams defames Tituba to avoid being suspected by Reverend Parris.

ABIGAIL: She comes to me every night to go and drink blood!

TITUBA: You beg me to conjure! She beg me make charm –

ABIGAIL: Don't lie! *To Hale*: She comes to me while I sleep; she's always making me dream corruptions!

TITUBA: Why you say that, Abby?

ABIGAIL: Sometimes I wake and find myself standing in the open doorway and not a stitch on my body! I always hear her laughing in my sleep. I hear her singing her Barbados songs and tempting me with –

(Arthur Miller, *The Crucible* 41)

Abigail pins the blame on Tituba because she does not want the reason for the revelry at night to be exposed. Tituba's charms and potions were concocted at Abigail's request because she believed that such love potions would win over Proctor's heart. Abigail knows what to say to deflect attention from her, and draws attention to Tituba instead by saying that she is forced to "drink blood" and dream of "corruptions." Abigail cleverly peppers her language with such keywords (and descriptions of erratic behaviour) that have associations with the mystical and dark forces, thus drawing the attention of Reverend Parris and Reverend Hale. Abigail's sexualized description of her standing naked, with "not a stitch on my body" is also meant to draw attention to the explicit nature of her actions that she later blames on Tituba's "corruptions". In positioning herself as the victim, Abigail puts the blame on Tituba as she knows that she herself is in a privileged position being the niece of Reverend Parris, and coming from a respectable family in Salem. Abigail also knows that her word will be trusted and Tituba, being a bought slave from Barbados, will be suspect in this situation. Abigail blames Tituba's "Barbados songs" for such an influence; her choice of the word "tempting" is also symbolic as it is suggestive of Tituba being the snake who tempts Eve in the Biblical story of temptation. In positioning Tituba's ethnicity, social status and cultural background as the 'other', Abigail makes Tituba the scapegoat because she is the easiest target in the witchcraft scare of Salem.

In another example, Abigail who was accused by Mary Warren, threatens to leave the courtroom knowing very well that the entire hearing will be jeopardized by her absence as she is the main witness. Her brazen language and bold reasoning convince even the cold and unreasonable Judge Danforth.

ABIGAIL: I have been hurt, Mr. Danforth; I have seen my blood
runnin' out! I have been near to murdered every day because I done
my duty pointing out the Devil's people – and this is my reward? To
be mistrusted, denied, questioned like a –

DANFORTH, *weakening*: Child, I do not mistrust you –

ABIGAIL, *in an open threat*: Let you beware, Mr. Danforth. Think
you be so mighty that the power of Hell may not turn *your* wits?
Beware of it! There is – *Suddenly, from an accusatory attitude, her
face turns, looking into the air above – it is truly frightened.*

DANFORTH, *apprehensively*: What is it, child?

(Miller, *The Crucible* 100)

Abigail uses her position as a primary witness to her advantage. She clearly has Judge Danforth on her side as without her testimony, all the cases would fall through. This would, of course, be an embarrassment to a senior judge with three decades of experience. Abigail knows this and could even threaten Judge Danforth openly. Abigail also uses Danforth's ideological vocabulary against him. By emphasizing how she is putting her life at stake by performing her duty, she openly threatens Danforth, mockingly reminding him of his own mortal limitations by quoting the influencing power of "Hell". Danforth is intimidated by Abigail's response and tries to calm her down by calling her "child". In Danforth's view, she is truly only "a child", which shows his bias as he considers her to be a young and innocent individual caught up in the throes of the trial. Another reason for Abigail Williams' control over Danforth could possibly be the sexual element that has enticed the judge to be accommodating to her. This could be seen when Judge Danforth questions Parris on the validity of the claim that the girls were found dancing naked in

the woods. Judge Danforth's reaction seems to suggest that he is captivated by Abigail's bizarre behaviour in the woods.

DANFORTH: Do you deny it, Mr. Parris?

PARRIS: I do not, sir, but I never saw any of them naked.

DANFORTH: But she have danced?

PARRIS, *unwillingly*: Aye, sir.

Danforth, as though with new eyes, looks at Abigail.

(Miller, *The Crucible* 98)

Miller scholar, Christopher Bigsby, has commented that the play is not just about power but also about the theme of oppressed sexuality. According to Bigsby:

The Crucible is a play about the seductive nature of power and that seductiveness is perhaps not unconnected with a confused sexuality. The judges were people who chose not to inquire into their own motives. They submitted to the irrational with a kind of perverse pleasure, a pleasure not entirely drained of sexual content. They dealt, after all, with exposure, with stripping souls bare, with provoking and hearing confessions of an erotic forthrightness that no other occasion or circumstances would permit. They saw young women cry out in a kind of orgasmic ecstasy...the irrational nature of the accusations, their sexual frisson, the lack of any proof beyond "spectral evidence"...were part of their lubricious attraction. (Bigsby, *Introduction to The Crucible* xviii-xix)

Abigail Williams was not only able to manipulate her position and coerce her friends to do her bidding, but she was also able to capitalize on the sexually-charged atmosphere of the trials to out-manoeuvre Proctor's honest but blunt approach that Judge Danforth found antagonistic.

Abigail uses her emotional threats effectively, perfectly timing her statements and threatening to leave the trial if she is forced to answer questions that make her uncomfortable. In addition, Abigail constantly uses the imagery of murder and blood, thus reinforcing her association with the powers of darkness that fuels her private vengeance on Elizabeth. Her dark language, that is, her references to death and the devil "...contains all its imagistic associations, for Abigail becomes a dark power of hell in the play" (Marino, 477). Abigail's statements are often very descriptive and full of bloody images, gore and hate. Her language thus implies her own evil and darkness; she is definitely not "the child" that Judge Danforth thinks she is.

She is not only articulate and persuasive in her words and reasoning but also extremely convincing in her dramatic performance of having been visited by the Devil during the courtroom hearings. Thus, Abigail not only uses evocative images and the figurative element in language to achieve her means, she acts convincingly as well. Abigail performs her most believable act in Act Three when Proctor, Mary Warren, and Reverend Hale accuse her of being a liar. Almost immediately, "...Abigail, pointing with fear, is now raising up her frightened eyes, her awed face, toward the ceiling – the girls are doing the same – and now Hawthorne, Hale, Putnam, Cheever, Herrick, and Danforth do the same. What's there? He lowers his eyes from the ceiling, and now he is frightened; there is real tension in his voice" (Miller, *The Crucible* 106). Abigail's performance here shows that she is not only a good actress but a deceptive individual whose mannerisms and body

language have fooled the members of the court with the exception of Proctor and Reverend Hale. This is because the inherent ideological hegemony of the Salem theocracy has created a consensus or “common sense” that conditions people’s minds in a way that they live in an unquestioning environment and have accepted a subservient culture. In Salem, the townspeople do not question the authority of the judges and instead accept wholeheartedly their judgements on the witchcraft trials, thus proving Gramsci’s theory of ideological hegemony where the political state uses domination and hegemony to control the population.

Abigail thus continues with this pretense that she is “...in a genuine conversation with the “bird”, as though trying to talk it out of attacking her”; she invokes “God” and cleverly seeks to tarnish Mary Warren’s credibility by declaring, in her trance-like state: “But God made my face; you cannot want to tear my face. Envy is a deadly sin, Mary” (Miller, *The Crucible* 106). Mimicking an annoying children’s habit of repeating every word uttered, Abigail, with the rest of her friends, engage in this juvenile torment, and succeed in exasperating Mary Warren who finally sees the futility of going against them. Judge Danforth fails to see through this charade and threatens to hang Mary if she does not stop using her ‘powers’ on Abigail.

Abigail’s triumph in the end demonstrates how convincing her act is in fooling a senior judge, clergy, ministers, and the townspeople who seem to be more enamored by her display of ‘hysteria’ than concerned about her salvation. Abigail also succeeds in persuading Mary to rejoin her group, seen in her “...infinite charity...” to reach out to Mary. She also convinces the ‘impartial’ Judge Danforth to side with her in condemning Proctor to his death. Danforth’s conviction of Abigail’s antics does not stem from his

ignorance but is more likely due to Abigail's use (and knowledge of) Danforth's ideological language that convinces Danforth of Abigail's testimony.

Abigail's blatant lies, her extensive use of the images of death and blood imagery coupled with her acting result in mere lies being turned into a real witchcraft hunt. Abigail in this sense manipulates the ideological hegemony of the Salem theocracy. It is a system that she does not believe in but knowing the society's complete adherence to civil law, Abigail manipulates the judiciary by influencing Judge Danforth and subsequently manipulates her privileged position in the court to her favour. In accordance with what Gramsci's theory of ideological hegemony says, Abigail thus creates her own ideology of power and manipulates multiple individuals to pursue her personal vendetta against John Proctor's wife. The analysis of the use of the language of hegemony and manipulation in Miller's play occasions an analysis of acts of resistance. In the rest of this discussion on Miller, I will analyse John Proctor's acts of resistance and its dissenting qualities that challenge the hegemony of the Salem theocracy and its supporting agencies.

2.5 John Proctor's Language of Resistance

From Judge Danforth and Abigail Williams, we now move on to the character of John Proctor whose resistance is seen by his use of dissenting language. This language is associated with Miller's crafted identity of Proctor as a morally upright individual who is steadfast in his principled beliefs. A hardworking farmer who does not adhere to the theocratic rule of Salem, he is the rebel who is not easily cowed by Judge Danforth's authority. Judge Danforth senses that Proctor is not the usual common farmer of the district. Like Wiran in Kee's *1984*, Proctor is an individual who decides to take action upon seeing the abuse of power and immorality of community/state leaders in Salem. John Proctor is Miller's example of an individual who resists the overwhelming powers

of state theocracy that is represented by the authoritative Judge Danforth, the other clergy, and people with vested interests in the state. Proctor thus symbolizes Miller's moral stand in what he sees as the need for a moral resistance against the overwhelming forces of greed and the evils of tyranny permeating in society and the state.

Miller begins by describing Proctor as "...a farmer in his middle thirties...he [has] a sharp and biting way with hypocrites" (Miller, *The Crucible* 19). He is a hardworking and honest farmer who does not involve himself with the politics of the community, but he is not entirely indifferent to the events in Salem. Proctor is further described to be "...powerful of body, even tempered, and not easily led – who cannot refuse support to partisans without drawing their deepest resentment. In Proctor's presence, a fool felt his foolishness instantly" (Miller, *The Crucible* 19). His calmness, patience, and intelligence are well-known and because of this, Proctor is respected and well-liked in his community. At times, this has caused resentment among other more senior and affluent members of Salem who are puzzled by Proctor's popularity.

Proctor's honesty and bluntness in speaking up on matters relating to the welfare and livelihood of the community has earned him the disdain and ire of the likes of Reverend Parris, who constantly questions Proctor's absence during Sabbath, and Thomas Putnam, the biggest landowner in Salem whose frequent run-ins with Proctor on ownership of lumber is a contentious point between the them. Proctor's supposed lack of morals is constantly highlighted by Putnam but ironically, Proctor's logical and moral reasoning is far superior to all of Putnam's moral and religious convictions.

It is these two figures of authority that Proctor speaks up against in Act One of the play. Tired of Reverend Parris' inefficiency in containing the spread of witchcraft rumours in

Salem, Proctor questions Parris on the lack of consultation with the wardens before calling the witchcraft specialist, Reverend Hale of Beverly. Here, Proctor's patience and calm demeanour are contrasted to Reverend Parris' indecisiveness and impatience.

PARRIS: A wide opinion's running in the parish that the Devil may be among us, and I would satisfy them that they are wrong.

PROCTOR: Then let you come out and call them wrong. Did you consult the wardens before you called this minister to look for devils?

PARRIS: He is not coming to look for devils!

PROCTOR: Then what's he coming for?

PUTNAM: There be children dyin' in the village, Mister!

PROCTOR: I seen none dyin', This society will not be a bag to swing around your head, Mr. Putnam. *To Parris*: Did you call a meeting before you – ?

PUTNAM: I am sick of meetings; cannot the man turn his head without he have a meeting?

PROCTOR: He may turn his head, but not to Hell!

(Miller, *The Crucible* 26).

Parris and Putnam's rhetoric sees both of them silently postulating on the existence of witchcraft in Salem; by creating such a panic, they might profit from it. Parris' non-decisive action further strengthens Proctor's contempt of him. Proctor believes that Parris' brashness in calling Reverend Hale will trigger unnecessary panic and will fuel speculation in Salem with regard to the rumours of witchcraft. Proctor appears to have more sense and logic than Parris who is supposed to be a preacher but is easily swayed

by his own insecurities and does nothing to stop such speculation. He is straightforward and blunt in his questions/statements about whether Parris has contained the rumours and whether Parris has consulted the wardens before calling Reverend Hale. Proctor admonishes the reverend for his irresponsible action. He thinks it may prove to be the catalyst of misfortune to the community. Proctor's mention of the word "Hell", meanwhile, is a foreshadowing of the forthcoming violence and terror befalling the community in Salem. Parris' actions will have 'hellish' consequences as he has allowed his own selfishness and personal agenda to rule over his reason and action. Reverend Parris is then seen to be a person who has abandoned rational truth for irrational fears. Proctor's constant reminder to Parris is only met with resistance and scorn. Reverend Parris equates obedience to the church and to him as necessary because "...a minister is not to be so lightly crossed and contradicted" (Miller, *The Crucible* 28). He perpetuates a certain hegemony which Gramsci describes to be a form of ideological control or "common sense" that is meant to strengthen the state theocracy via Parris' position as a "traditional intellectual". In this short snippet between Parris and Proctor, we see the former re-emphasizing the need to be obedient to the state theocracy and the latter resistant to the perverse logic advocated by Parris.

PARRIS: There is either obedience or the church will burn like Hell
is burning!

PROCTOR: Can you speak one minute without we land in Hell
again? I am sick of Hell!

PARRIS: It is not for you to say what is good for you to hear!

PROCTOR: I may speak my heart, I think!

(Miller, *The Crucible* 28)

One should note also the recurring metaphor of “hell” and Parris’ emphasis on the individual’s spiritual allegiance to the religious institution. According to him, the consequences of such a disobedience is the destruction of the church itself. Proctor dismisses this as another coercive strategy by Reverend Parris to sway public opinion in his favour and to silence him, but Proctor is disgusted with the constant reminders of the underworld as a perverse ideology that is meant to cow dissenting individuals like Proctor.

To Proctor, the use of religion and its doctrines has been manipulated in Salem to serve the needs of power-hungry individuals such as Reverend Parris. Proctor’s “...sick of Hell” figure of speech shows that he is tired of Parris’ constant preaching of fire and brimstone. Such preaching has no influence on Proctor as he is not swayed easily by Parris’ wild assumptions and allegations that are founded on his own personal insecurities and greed. In fact, Proctor is unafraid of “Hell” and demonstrates independence of thought. Proctor is insistent on his own feelings and opinion; he is very direct and straightforward in his language. Here is another example of Proctor’s blunt response which has irked Putnam and Parris.

PARRIS, in a fury: What, are we Quakers? We are not Quakers here yet, Mr. Proctor. And you may tell that to you and your followers!

PROCTOR: My followers!

PARRIS – now he’s out with it: There is a party in this church. I am not blind; there is a faction and a party.

PROCTOR: Against you?

PUTNAM: Against him and all his authority!

PROCTOR: Why, then I must find it and join it.

There is shock among the others.

(Miller, *The Crucible* 29)

Here, Parris insinuates that Proctor and his “followers” are out to cause trouble in the church. Proctor’s brutal honesty and defiance is evident when he says that he must therefore join the alleged “faction” which is against Parris and his kind. Proctor does not sugar coat his words, and his resistance to Parris stems from what he (Proctor) sees as an abuse of religious power and authority by Parris in the theocracy of Salem. Proctor is thus an example of Gramsci’s “organic intellectual” who is needed to challenge the state’s regime and its various superstructures that perpetuate an ideological hegemony. Proctor has even said of Parris, “I like not the smell of this ‘authority’ (Miller, *The Crucible* 29), further reinforcing his view that his contempt for Parris is due to his contentious greed for power and influence. The noxious “smell” of Parris’ authority is a figure of speech that serves to foreshadow the overbearing authority of the ministers and judges that will soon overrun Salem with fear, suspicion and false accusations of the innocent, among others. Proctor will challenge the overbearing authority of the Salem theocracy in Act 2 when his wife is accused and arrested for the practice of witchcraft.

In the scene, Reverend Hale arrives to arrest Proctor’s wife who is accused of witchcraft. The accuser is none other than Abigail Williams, the chief architect of the entire Salem witchcraft trials. Miller’s use of binary oppositions between heaven and hell, and innocence and treachery is seen in Proctor’s emotional defense of his wife. This is one of Proctor’s most emotional condemnations of the farcical Salem trials.

HALE: Proctor, if she is innocent, the court –

PROCTOR: If she is innocent! Why do you never wonder if Parris be innocent, or Abigail? Is the accuser always holy now? Were they born this morning as clean as God's fingers? I'll tell you what's walking Salem – vengeance is walking Salem. We are what we always were in Salem, but now the little crazy children are jangling the keys of the kingdom, and common vengeance writes the law! This warrant's vengeance! I'll not give my wife to vengeance!

(Miller, *The Crucible* 73)

In his attempt to persuade Reverend Hale of the illogical charges that are levied against his wife, Proctor mocks the judiciary that gives power to the courts and the accuser to indict anyone based on accusation alone. Proctor's description of innocence is seen in the images of heaven, the words "holy" and "born" and the simile "...as clean as God's fingers". This is contrasted later to the dark connotation of "vengeance" viewed as a person walking in Salem seeking revenge. One should also note Proctor's directness of his description of the so-called witnesses of the trials. Proctor describes them as "crazy children" holding the keys to the gates of heaven, a disturbing image that is both provocative and alarming. Proctor is also saying figuratively how they have let "mischievous" children (a reference to Abigail Williams and her group) dictate and control the Salem judiciary and the community. The warrant which serves as a symbol of the legitimacy of the sacrosanct laws of the state could be so easily manipulated by these "children" that Proctor considers it to be meaningless.

Subsequently, Proctor reaffirms his promise to save Elizabeth from the personal persecution of Abigail Williams. He describes his action by using the metaphor of an

unstoppable ocean swamping the courts with its volume of water and cleansing it from the influence of personal vengeance. The metaphor of the “ocean” signifies the strength and magnitude of Proctor’s moral resistance unmatched by the Salem court. His declaration that “I will fall like an ocean” aptly describes how he is like the powerful ocean water that will cleanse the Salem courts of lies and deceit. In short, Proctor will not stop at anything to save his wife.

PROCTOR: I will bring you home. I will bring you soon.

ELIZABETH: Oh John, bring me soon!

PROCTOR: I will fall like an ocean on that court! Fear nothing,
Elizabeth.

(Miller, *The Crucible* 73)

From the end of Act Two, Proctor begins his personal quest to prove his wife’s innocence in the Salem witchcraft trials. Believing that telling the truth will set her free, Proctor does not hesitate to rise to the challenge even when Reverend Hale urges him to testify in the hearings. At the risk of his reputation and past affair being exposed, Proctor tells Hale that “I falter nothing” (Miller, *The Crucible* 65), and seeks to expose Abigail Williams. Proctor’s presence in court to testify in the trials marks one of the most decisive moral actions he has ever taken. His action is not merely to save his wife but also the lives of his friends and every innocent individual accused of witchcraft in Salem.

Proctor feels much anger and disillusionment that the presiding judge of the trials, Judge Danforth, refuses to see the truth even when he has confessed to his adultery. He tells Judge Danforth that “I have made a bell of my honour! I have rung the doom of my good name – you will believe me, Mr. Danforth! My wife is innocent, except she knew a whore

when she saw one! (Miller, *The Crucible* 103). Here, Proctor uses the metaphor of a “bell” to signify his reputation. His confession of adultery is likened to the ringing of a “bell”; its sound will be heard far and wide. His confession, once made, cannot be retracted because it involves his reputation. The figurative meaning of “rung the doom of my good name” means that Proctor’s confession of adultery has therefore condemned his life and honour; he has therefore rung his own bell of doom. Proctor’s impassioned plea and heartfelt explanation are rejected by Danforth who refuses to consider Proctor’s public confession. Danforth refuses to move from his rigid legalistic viewpoint and prejudice against Proctor whom he thinks is out to overthrow the court hearings.

To Proctor, it is ironic that such allegations of witchcraft carry so much weight when they are merely based on allegations, but when he and Mary Warren attempt to tell the truth, they are accused of lying and trying to disrupt the court proceedings.

Proctor is exasperated that Judge Danforth, with his years of judicial experience, could fall for Abigail’s act. To Proctor, this is the breaking point. He admonishes Danforth for his incompetence and naivety that has brought much grief to him and his wife, Elizabeth⁴³. He foretells the moral judgement about to befall all who do not speak or act for justice, and includes himself and Judge Danforth as being complicit in all the failings and sins of the Salem community.

PROCTOR, *laughs insanely, then*: A fire, a fire is burning! I hear
the boot of Lucifer, I see his filthy face! And it is my face, and yours,
Danforth! For them that quail to bring men out of ignorance, as I
have quailed, and as you quail now when you know in all your black

hearts that this be fraud – God damns our kind especially, and we
will burn, we will burn together!

(Miller, *The Crucible* 111)

Proctor has virtually given up on any form of justice from the hearings. His highly emotional language describes his anger, desperation, and exasperation. The image of “fire” here refers to the inferno of personal vengeance and greed that is engulfing Salem, and Judge Danforth only has himself to blame for encouraging the firestorm of lies and false accusations. In addition, the image of “fire” is also associated with the act of immolation of individuals found guilty of practising witchcraft. Proctor emphasizes and repeats the word “fire” and “burn” because he knows the impending tragedy and punishment that will befall the community. Proctor associates Danforth with the sound of Lucifer’s “boot” and his “face”; Danforth’s evil intentions, his “black heart”, and personal pride have brought ruin to everyone. It is the start of a great evil and there is no salvation possible for either of them. Both Proctor and Danforth must suffer the consequences of their actions (as well as sins). And like the lies and accusations that have spread in Salem, even Judge Danforth will not be able to contain the ‘heat’ that will most likely engulf all of them.

Proctor’s refusal to sign his confession in Act Four despite Danforth’s pleadings demonstrates Proctor’s moral integrity and resilience. Proctor’s heartfelt language is touching and as he tries to logically explain to the judge. Proctor reasons that his verbal confession should suffice but Danforth is insistent that Proctor sign a confession. To Proctor, this is not acceptable and Proctor thus argues, resisting Danforth’s reasoning:

PROCTOR: I have confessed myself! Is there no good penitence but
it be public? God does not need my name nailed upon the church!
God sees my name; God knows how black my sins are! It is enough!
(Miller, *The Crucible* 132)

In this short passage, Proctor juxtaposes the “black” of his sins with how lowly his name is. It is not fit to be “nailed upon the church” because in Proctor’s view, God knows his heart is tainted with blackness. The “black” represents evil and sin in the representation of the dichotomy of good and evil in the play. Proctor refuses to accept Danforth’s authority, thus undermining and resisting his judgement. In Proctor’s view, only God who is merciful and forgiving is his judge and not Danforth, who seems to be the antithesis of a court judge.

Proctor’s inspiration for moral resistance is also drawn from Corey’s sacrifice of himself for his children’s future. Corey’s action brings shame to himself as Proctor felt he could not match Corey’s selflessness and determination in maintaining his honour and dignity even at the hour of his death. Proctor is thus torn between signing his name away to redeem his freedom or to be hanged for refusing to sign. By ignoring Danforth’s persuasion to sign his confession, Proctor refuses to be used by Danforth to justify his own wrongdoings.

PROCTOR: You will not use me! I am no Sarah Good or Tituba, I am John
Proctor! You will not use me! It is no part of salvation that you should use me!

DANFORTH: I do not wish to –

PROCTOR: I have three children – how may I teach them to walk
like men in the world, and I sold my friends?

DANFORTH: You have not sold your friends –

PROCTOR: Beguile me not! I blacken all of them when this is nailed
to the church the very day they hang for silence!

(Miller, *The Crucible* 132)

Proctor's emotionally charged language is associated with his valiant act of refusing to sign the confession, is justified from his strong moral perspective of not wanting to be used as a pawn by Judge Danforth in the ensuing Salem trials. In addition, he refuses to tarnish the memory of those who died refuting the allegations of witchcraft. To sign the confession would mean that Proctor is guilty and by association, those who have also died protesting their innocence. His refusal and resistance would condemn him. But Proctor decides to emulate Corey's decision as a final act of moral resistance in upholding what the theocratic state cannot take away from him, that is, his name, honour and reputation. At Danforth's query as to why Proctor refuses to sign the confession, he declares that his good name, honour and reputation are more important than even life itself:

PROCTOR, *with a cry of his whole soul*: Because it is my name!

Because I cannot have another in my life! Because I lie and sign
myself to lies! Because I am not worth the dust on the feet of them
that hang! How may I live without my name? I have given you my
soul; leave me my name!

(Miller, *The Crucible* 133)

The simplicity of Proctor's language is evident in this heartbreaking scene. Proctor's language is direct and powerful. The forcefulness of Proctor's language is felt in its

repetition that reinforces the idea of defiance and resistance to what Proctor views to be morally wrong. It is through his inaction (Proctor's refusal to sign) that he mounts the resistance against his accusers. Proctor would not give up his dignity and integrity, symbolized by his name, to lies and deceit. It is through his final moral action and conviction that he redeems himself.

In Proctor's last moments with Elizabeth, he remarks "...I do think I see some shred of goodness in John Proctor. Not enough to weave a banner with, but white enough to keep it from such dogs...Give them no tear! Tears pleasure them! Show honour now, show a stony heart and sink them with it! (Miller, *The Crucible* 133). Proctor knows that he has not wavered, even at the last minute. His victory may be small but it is still a satisfying triumph over his accusers. Proctor's language is rich in colour symbolism and metaphors. The colour white represents his innocence and the "banner" symbolizes his honour. Again, the metaphor of weight is alluded to ("stony heart") when Proctor encourages his wife not to be moved by emotions and to be resilient in the face of his death. By showing an emotionless state, or "stony heart", Elizabeth is resisting their accusers who will be eventually be 'weighed down' by their own guilty conscience.

Although Proctor's struggle ends in his death, the resistance he puts up is not futile as it contributes to the end of theocracy in the subsequent years. *The Crucible* thus draws a parallel with our time of the dangers of extremism and fanaticism, seen in both the Salem witchcraft trials and the McCarthy hearings. In *The Crucible*, Miller shows how hegemonic and figurative language could be used as a manipulative element through the characters of Judge Danforth and Abigail Williams. Miller portrays John Proctor as an agent of moral resistance against the former two characters, thus emphasizing the

dramatist's stand on the need to make a commitment on personal morality in the face of adversity.

Miller had wanted to show, through *The Crucible*, "the sin of public terror is that it divests man of conscience, of himself" (Introduction 155). As Proctor's conscience weighs heavily towards the end, Elizabeth, his wife, urges him, "But let none be your judge. There is no higher judge under heaven than Proctor is" (Miller, *The Crucible* 127). The metaphor of judgement comes into play, and Elizabeth urges Proctor not to allow others to judge him harshly as none would be a better judge than himself. Elizabeth believes the conscience of his heart has prevailed against "the evil of state sponsored Fanaticism" (Marino 473) that is encouraged, ironically, by a decadent Judge, thus proving that those who have the authority to judge are not always righteous. In the end, Proctor does find his conscience and puts up a strong moral resistance against the Salem theocracy and self-serving individuals. Proctor resists Reverend Parris, Thomas Putnam, Abigail Williams and the Salem theocracy represented by Danforth. Most importantly, Proctor overcomes his own sense of guilt and redeems himself through his death.

Miller, through the play, also demonstrates how language can be so easily manipulated and:

"...so easily accommodated to the purpose of power, whether in seventeenth-century Salem or 1950's Washington..." In the 20th century, "McCarthy's America found itself not only at the interface of two ideologies with their supporting linguistic systems but at a moment in American history when New Deal politics and the utopianism of thirties

and wartime America, shattered on the ambition of those who rode a new conservatism, as it did the paranoia they fostered.”

(Bigsby, *A Critical Study* 163)

Miller thus grapples with the two realities of Salem and the McCarthy era by creating what he has called “a kind of sculpted language” (Miller, *Author’s Note* p.vii) that well demonstrates “the inseparable link between communal chaos and personal trauma” (Miller, Director’s foreword). The two eras were a personal testament to Miller on the state of political and religious oppression that culminates with the vindication of the “ability of the individual to challenge power and the language with which it seeks to legitimate itself” (Bigsby, *A Critical Study* 165).

From Salem to Washington, and from Abigail Williams to John Proctor, Miller demonstrates how language, even in its figurative use, “...[is] no longer a precise agent of communication...It [is] a weapon, blunt, coercive, and frequently opaque. It [is] like a spell, pronounced over those who appeared the source of threat” (Bigsby, *A Critical Study* 161). It is used as a means of liberation, a form of dissent, and as a means of condemning individuals to the point of ruin and beyond.

Judge Danforth and Abigail Williams’ use of hegemonic/figurative language, turns it into a destructive weapon. It is a form of communication that excludes the rationality and reasonableness that Proctor steadfastly believes in. The manipulative qualities of such expressions hold influence over crowds into believing untruths and lies, and all that is “conjured”. Proctor, by logic and moral reasoning, is unable to break such fantasies and deceptions. Nevertheless, Proctor’s consolation is that he is able to reclaim his honour and reputation in death through resistance.

Moving on, the second part of my chapter will analyse how the political playwright Kee uses the structured social critique as a form of resistance in *Birch* to oppose the hegemonic and theocratic power structures of the state.

2.6 1984 Here and Now: Kee's use of Social Discourse to Deconstruct the Hegemony of the State

In the play *Birch*, Kee resists the hegemonic state with his use of structured social critique and dramaturgical elements such as social commentary, satire and parody. Kee's structured social critique is divided into his resistance towards the hegemony of the national language, unfair race-based affirmative policies, the abuse of power by the political state, and gender discrimination.

By structuring his arguments in such a manner, Kee tries to systematically dismantle the hegemonic structures of political power and its equivalent, represented by individuals such as Big Brother, Shadrin, and Yone's father who embody the culturally-repressive patriarchy. Kee frames such issues by means of a social discussion and commentary and at times, incorporating elements of parody in the selected scenes.

2.7 The Hegemonic Construct of Nationhood

Kee starts by criticizing the hegemonic construction of nationhood. In Act One, Kee creates an atmosphere of religious and political fanaticism. This is seen in how Party members from all walks of life (with the exception of Wiran) denounce the disco-dancing and soap-opera love scenes that are projected onto "...a wooden frame suggesting a television set" (Kee, 1984 *Here and Now* 18). From the opening scene itself, Kee critiques the Party members' extreme response to the influence of Western culture. Adapted from Orwell's *Two Minute Hate*⁴⁴ which features Party members in futuristic

Oceania watching films of the Party's enemies and showing hatred for them, Kee's opening scene parody sets the socio-political framework inherent in the community. The disco dancing and love scenes are followed by a frenzy of condemnations by the Party members and religious denunciations by officials, showing how the dominant hegemony and theocracy of the state imposes its ideological and moral control on the minority. The following scene on the screen depicts the Kloots⁴⁵, a representation of the Communists (who are predominantly Chinese in ethnicity) as the enemies of the nation. With a common 'enemy', the ideological manipulation in the construct of a common 'Other' is thus made necessary to ensure continued support of the hegemonic state. As Lo observes:

In general, the construction and foregrounding of an external enemy de-emphasises internal factionalism within the national body. While the external Other consolidates the hegemony of the existing political structure, the fact that the communists have historically been identified with the Chinese/Prole problematises the issue of imposed homogenization and calls attention to the ideological interests served in the construction of the national body. (*Staging Nation*, 87)

1984 Here and Now, in essence, seeks to highlight the "autocratic deployment of race, class, religions, and gender ideologies to demonize, oppress, impoverish and aggrandize different segments of Malaysian society" (Lim, 122). The parodical first scene is the medium Kee employs to deconstruct and disrupt the dominant narratives of nation-building while provoking the audience into a heightened intellectual awareness of the existing socio-political condition. Influenced by the Brechtian school of thought, Kee's play consists of short scenes that move in quick succession with modernist theatre elements⁴⁶ such as "...posters, slide projections, motion pictures, stylized sets, and garish

lighting effects” (qtd. in Lim 121). Such dramaturgical devices are combined with a strong parodic element and allegorical narrative that form the playwright’s critique of the hegemonic construction of nationhood.

2.8 The Hegemony of Politics and Language

In the play, Kee begins by highlighting examples of Big Brother’s political hegemony and deconstructs it via the element of social discourse. Kee does this by citing many examples of Big Brother’s presence in a structured manner in the play. In Big Brother’s “unity speech” to his Party members in Act One, he asserts that the power of the Party must not be challenged or their rights threatened. The Party members must therefore unite to face all possible threats. As for the Proles, Big Brother stresses that “...we welcome them to stay. But they must understand that, above all else, the Party members must be kept happy. The Party members must not feel threatened or deprived in this land that is rightfully theirs” (Kee, 1984 *Here and Now* 20). Big Brother’s speech demonstrates how he has created an ideology pertaining to the rights of Party members. His reminder that the Proles must be kept in their place and not question the rule of the Party for the sake of the country further emphasizes the cultural hegemony that is created to consolidate the power of his rule and to preserve the interest of his political party. Together with the creation of the hegemonic concept of nationhood, the political hegemony of Big Brother’s rule soon creates a perception that the Party is all-powerful and irreproachable even when one of its Party members made a seditious statement that could create chaos in the country. This is seen in Act One when Jumon wants to publish a story on how a Party member, Kala, uttered a seditious statement, but was instead cautioned by his chief sub-editor not to.

JUMON: And, therefore, he can get away with making seditious statements. I'm sure if a Prole had made a similar statement, he would have been arrested.

CHIEF-SUB: I don't want to argue with you, Jumon. That's the reality of the situation and you should be aware of it. (Kee, *1984 Here and Now* 21)

Later, the conversation between the sub-editor and Jumon is disrupted with the arrests of the chief editor and cartoonist of the newspaper. Their arrests, it seems, are due to the content they had published which was critical of Big Brother's establishment. As they discuss the arrests, the chief sub-editor turns on the television for another of Big Brother's important media announcements stressing the importance of not questioning the "...rights and privileges of Party members..." and that the "Inner Party will not hesitate to take stringent action against those who attempt to undermine it" (Kee, *The Big Purge* 26).

With the play's episodic structure and the quick successive scenes, the audience is exposed to the pervasive element of Big Brother's political hegemony that seems to permeate the country. From the headquarters of the Party members, to Jumon's newspaper office, the common streets and the coffee shops, Big Brother's power and influence is far-reaching.

Kee also depicts the deeply-divisive politics and fragmented race relations between Party members and Proles which is largely due to the manipulation of racial and religious politics by Big Brother in order to remain in power. This is inherent in the mainstream media headlines that Wiran notices when he walks down the street: "Newsmen detained

for threat to peace”, “Students abroad recalled for violating Party policies”, “Party members suspended for desecrating Prole place of worship”, “Infighting among top leaders of Prole party” (Kee, 1984 *Here and Now* 27). What Wiran also sees is a scene between a mother and her son that is depicted by Kee to be the underlying sentiments of a deeply-fragmented country that is racially, politically, religiously divided by the politics of power perpetuated by Big Brother.

MOTHER: You doan play widem, hnarh. I doan like. You play wit
our kind.

SON: I wan, I wan.

MOTHER: You hear wat I say or I beat you.

SON: Wy I carn play widem?

MOTHER: Dey all Party member.

SON: But dey got nice toy.

MOTHER: I doan care. Dey all Party member. You come back.

(Kee, 1984 *Here and Now* 27)

The above dialogue between a mother and her son, though only a short snippet, is a revelation of the socio-economic condition, racial stereotyping and ideological hegemony that is pervasive and deeply entrenched in the society. Here, Kee’s observation is an obvious reference to Malaysia’s racial politics, deeply-divided race relations and institutionalized racism that creates distrust among the different ethnic groups in the country. The Prole mother prohibits her son from playing with “Party members” and this is possibly due to her stereotypical views of Party members while the child is indifferent to this and wants to play with the “nice toy” owned by the “Party member”. Stressing that the son should play with “wit our kind”, Kee is making a strong

statement with this scene of the vicious cycle of racial segregation. According to Foucault's *The Discourse of Language*, this is an example of a production of discourse by the state that is meant to control, influence, regulate and control its people. The discourse of the power bearers thus becomes naturalized within the oppressed and influences the individual's way of thinking. Here, Big Brother's propagation of racial politics has influenced the minds of the people; the eventual fragmentation of race relations is the result of such a discourse. This then results in a deeply-divided society which would be easy for dictators such as Big Brother. His perpetuation of racial politics and hegemony of a dominant culture further strengthens such disunity in society, thus enabling his rule to continue unabated.

Kee soon moves to dismantle Big Brother's imposed hegemonic construction by showcasing a multi-racial crowd performing a tiger dance in Act One. The performance is soon disrupted by a policeman because of permit issues. The group protests at first but later disbands reluctantly. Kee's example, which is a response to a cultural issue⁴⁷ in Malaysia, speaks of the displacement and rejection of an immigrant culture despite the efforts being made by the community to integrate with the National Culture of Malaysia. Lo comments that this is a parody by Kee to show the difficulties of the "immigrant" cultures to develop an organic bond with the country. Thus, "...such symbolic offers of reconciliation are rejected by the authorities that break up the dance and quell the dancers' demands for 'a truly united nation'" (Lo, *Staging Nation* 90). Kee's scene also highlights the dissatisfaction of the minority races toward the state for its uncompromising stand on the cultural elements that can or cannot be included as part of the national culture. Clearly, the grand cultural narrative of the nation has excluded the immigrant narratives of the minority races, and the exclusive power to determine this construct is itself an ideological strategy of the state. Thus Kee's parody which is based

on a real cultural issue in Malaysia speaks of this marginalization and exclusion from the nation's official narration. In Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, Gramsci describes this as the "...the hegemony of a fundamental social group over a series of sub-ordinate groups" which sees the propagation of a belief that is based on a perceived "common sense" dictated by the political state for the perpetuation of its own self-interest. (Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks* 406). In the context of Kee's *1984*, the playwright believes that the state's unbridled power over the selection of the official culture of the state has thus enabled it to selectively construct a culture of the state while systematically marginalizing the cultural narratives of the other migrant cultures in the country, thus perpetuating its own cultural hegemony.

Kee highlights the hegemony of language as well and focuses on the Chinese Malaysian community, the Proles in the play. This is a convenient, believable, and strategic move for the playwright because Kee is himself an ethnic Chinese, and creates his characters from this ethnic perspective, highlighting, at the same time, the current socio-economic and political issues that are relevant to the ethnic Chinese community. The issues plaguing his characters are therefore current, realistic, and believable. By making the "Proles" more Chinese, Kee's move is not only strategic but political as well.

By highlighting the dissatisfactions of the Chinese community, specifically, and the other ethnic communities in Malaysia in general, Kee successfully focuses on and highlights some of the idiosyncrasies (as well as weaknesses) of the "Proles" which include gambling and the deeply-entrenched patriarchal system of their culture. Kee criticizes his own ethnic community and redirects that focus to other communities as well, suggesting that such issues are prevalent in all these other communities. Overall, Kee's concerns are with the injustices done to all Malaysians, regardless of ethnicity.

His interest lies in how the lives of the people have been affected in one way or other by Big Brother's racial politics and fear-mongering.

Secondly, while his portrayal of the Proles may be seen as stereotypical, Kee's audience could recognize the real socio-economic and socio-political issues faced by the Proles and other ethnic communities in Malaysia. The element of humour and parody in the depiction of the Proles is also intended to achieve the opposite effect. Kee's portrayal of the Proles has a multi-pronged effect. In its stereotypical depiction, Kee criticizes his community (the Proles) while highlighting their plight. Kee's audience, however, might reject such a portrayal because it is inaccurate. If the audience rejects such a depiction, Kee, in fact, has successfully challenged the stereotypical depiction of race among his audience by going against the typical discourse of racial stereotyping. Nevertheless, Kee's goal is that his audiences should ultimately recognize the socio-political message of his play regardless of the cultural portrayal of the Proles. In addition, Kee wants members of his audience to be cognizant of their political rights and the political power of the state that must be resisted by all responsible individuals.

Kee then tries to deconstruct the hegemonic notion of a 'national language' by positioning the language spoken by the Party members as a culturally superior language as compared to the non-standard English spoken by the Proles. Kee does this by capturing the ingenious use of colloquial Malaysian English in the play as the language of the Proles/non-Malays. In the play, the Party members speak one of the three Malaysian English sociolects, namely "acrolect", "mesolect" and "basilect". The "acrolect" is "...the most standard and highest form..." (Mavic and Abram, "Malaysian English: From the Old to the New") and is also known as Official Malaysian English/Standard Malaysian English. According to a three-tiered approach by

Baskaran⁴⁸ to describe Malaysian English, the linguistic differences (phonology, syntax, and lexis) in the “acrolect” are not distinct from British English, possessing only slight variations acceptable in the lexis and phonology. The Proles meanwhile, speak broken Malaysian English/Patois Malaysian English or the “basilect” level that contains severe and major variations in phonology, syntax, and lexis. It is the lowest end of the continuum and is often described as “broken Malaysian English” due to the deviation in the linguistic levels.

Thus, by contrasting the difference in the use of language between the Party members and the Proles, Kee is bringing the audience closer in their association to the political landscape of Malaysia that is driven by racial politics and policies that discriminate against the languages/cultures of other communities while giving prominence to the national language and culture of the Malays. By showing such a distinction, Kee provides an intimate view of issues clearly affecting his own ethnic community and the other minority races affected by the discriminatory policies of the state.

While the Proles speak in basilectal English, which is dominated by Chinese nuances, the Party members speak in acrolectal English that is representative of Bahasa Malaysia, the national language of Malaysia. In addition, top party officials, high-ranking government officers and Big Brother himself speak at the level of the acrolect/Standard Malaysian English. This language dichotomy indirectly forces the audience to confront the issue of “cultural superiority” and “racial essentialism” (Lo, 87). The Standard Malaysian English that is spoken by the Party members is thus associated with the colonial language, English; the Party members themselves are seen as native speakers of the language. By showing how the Proles/non-Malays speak colloquial Malaysian English, which is lower in stature than Standard Malaysian English, Kee creates a

distinction between the Party members and the Proles. This is how Kee views the Malay political and cultural dominance, which to him, is a form of cultural hegemony. Kee's efforts are seen to imply that he is bringing the often marginalized non-mainstream language to the forefront of national debate with a discourse that is aimed at challenging Bahasa Malaysia's position with a colloquial language that is synonymous with the collective Chinese Malaysian identity.

The focus on the usage of non-standard English in *1984 Here and Now* thus demonstrates Kee's deep understanding and knowledge of the "colourful spectrum of Malaysian English" (Gilbert and Lo, Introduction 11) that he uses with strong doses of crude humour and wit. In reality, Kee's efforts attempt to dismantle the concept of hegemony by encouraging dialogue and critical reflection as a means of resistance against the fixed notions of language and culture.

Kee has a deep understanding of the idiosyncrasies of Malaysian life and often his observation is focused on humorous intersections of common everyday activities of the Proles. In another example highlighting Big Brother's hegemony, Kee gives us this short parody, which is a humorous conversation in a coffee shop. In this scene, Kee captures succinctly, the political and cultural nuances of the Proles.

PLAYER 1: Dam bad luck laa. Never get der card I wan

Mus chane place la.

PLAYER 2: Wy you worry? Nex game, der wind will blow your way

laa.

PLAYER 1: Wind from your backside la, like der Party.

PLAYER 3: Haiya, doan tok about der Party now la.

PLAYER 4: Ya, bring more bad luck only. Look at my card, all split.

PLAYER 2: Like our Prole party lah. Weak like anything. Everything Big Broder say, OK. Like balls shaking in der pants, man. And now, quarrelling some more, der leaders. Wan more power, wan top post. Firs, dey should be more strong to bring our problem to Big Broder. Instead, every time big Prole party meeting, big quarrel. Trow chair some more. No shame la, dese people. Meanwhile, our people suffer. Our chiren carn get place in university. Every year, only so many people can go in. Not fair la. Ay, ay, wait, wait! I wan der card. Doan lah play so fas!

(Kee, 1984 *Here and Now* 28)

Kee's astute power of observation of Malaysian life should be given credit as this scene from the play, though humorous, is intensely interlaced with dissatisfaction, frustration, and anger. Kee's parody of what can be termed as "coffee shop talk", or personal ramblings by the Proles/non-Malays are in fact grouses by the people on state politics, Federal policies on education, and socio-political commentaries that are topped with elements of superstition like not changing seats or mentioning negative/unlucky words ("the Party") during a mahjong game. A serious contentious issue exposed in this short banter between Proles is the issue of equality among citizens and the limited number of university places for the Proles, with meritocracy and education being a recurring theme.

While Kee uses the Malaysian colloquial language⁴⁹ as a contestation of the national language, the use of "la", "can", "wan" that is a distinct feature of the basilectal variety, has not undermined the serious underlying message of the conversation, one that Kee has strategically infused with the frustrations of the common people under the guise of

a multi-layered social discourse. In contrast, the acrolectal variety of English spoken by the Party members could imply that they have access to privilege and education, being the ruling elite of the country. The differences in language nuance could also imply higher economic and social standing, thus emphasizing the differences between the Party members and the Proles in terms of language command. The use of the acrolectal and basilectal English in the play not only highlights such differences between the Party members and the Proles but the audiences in Kee's play would indirectly identify with the more common language spoken by the Proles. Thus by using a more local spoken slang, Kee could possibly enjoy greater audience understanding for the Prole characters as compared to the Party members with their standard Malaysian English that would essentially sound foreign to them.

In another example, Wiran (a Party member) and Yone's (a Prole) first meeting also highlights the differences between the language differences spoken by the two ethnic groups.

WIRAN: You don't even know me. How can you like me?

PW: People tok. And I like wat I see.

WIRAN: For a Prole, you speak the language very well. Except for your accent.

PW: Lots of Proles can speak it well now. (*Awkward silence.*) I wan to work more wit you in der Movemen.

(Kee, 1984 *Here and Now* 37)

Here, one can notice the differences between the acrolectal English spoken by Wiran and Yone's mesolectal variety of English. One notes that Yone's command of Malaysian

English is at the mesolectal level, which is higher than the basilectal (third level) colloquial Malaysian English spoken by most Proles. There are slight variations in phonology, but there is overall intelligibility in the syntax and lexis of her language. Even Wiran commends Yone for her language proficiency, which could be attributed to her tertiary education. Here, Yone's character is an example of how Kee was possibly trying to correct the stereotype of Proles being unable to master the language and Yone's statement of how "[lots] of Proles can speak it well now" is a reaffirmation of that view. Through the character of Yone, Kee also challenges the ideologies of "cultural superiority" and "racial essentialism" (Lo, 87) prevalent in Malaysia and in the context of Kee's *1984 Here and Now*.

From the hegemony of culture and language, Kee then moves on to discuss the hegemony of the patriarchal system which, when viewed collectively, is part of the whole power structure existing in society that the playwright feels must be resisted because any form of hegemony, be it cultural, political, religious, or economic, would be oppressive in nature. Kee's inclusion of this aspect of male dominance over the female gender could be seen as an extension of the non-political subjugation of women that is as divisive and repressive as it is unjust.

2.9 Gender Discrimination and the Patriarchal System in *1984*

In a move by Kee to highlight his dissent at other forms of power abuse, Kee highlights incidences of gender discrimination and the overbearing patriarchal system that he strategically infuses with the main plot.

In Yone's father, we see an individual who uses his role as the family's breadwinner as a means to impose conformity on his family, which inevitably also shows the economic

dependence of women on men. From the perspective of Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, what is seen here as the abuses created by the patriarchal system, is the hegemony of political economism. According to Gramsci: "...although hegemony is ethico-political, it must be economic, must necessarily be based on the decisive function exercised by the leading group in the decisive nucleus of economic activity (Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks* 373). Thus, Yone's father uses his position as the breadwinner to control the family, spurring her to break his 'economic' hold on her. Her means of liberation is thus tied to her means of providing for herself and her tormented mother, whose fate she tries to distance herself from by means of education and employment. Her heartfelt pleas are protests against such hegemony that manifests itself in many of the play's social, political, and economic concerns. Through Yone, Kee manages to dramatize to the audience, the conflict in her life, from her strife with her father and elder brother, to other circumstances surrounding her difficult personal life that she recounts to Wiran. This short revelation by Yone highlights a multiplicity of issues faced not only as herself, but also as a Prole, and as a woman. Her family's economic conditions form an effective first person perspective which positions the narration from a very personal point of view.

YONE: One day, I got fed up. After finish schooling lah. I couldn get a place in university because places for Proles limited. So I wen out to work. Wen I got enough money, I move out of der house. My fader woulden let me go. He said I had no shame. My moder was very sad but she understood me. She argued for me. My fader beat her, call her moder of a prostitute...After dat, my fader cut her housekeeping money. Gave only harf, you know. But he still expected her to buy der same tings as before. My moder, when she run out of money near the

end of der mun, she borrow from people, scared my fader complain if he's not satisfied wit der food and oder tings...I help her wen I got der money. Wen I carn, I feel all torn up inside. (Kee, 1984 *Here and Now*, 47)

Yone's personal outpouring touches on the lack of equal opportunities in higher education, a point that Kee constantly depicts with regard to Malaysia's New Economic Policy that favours ethnic Malays over the other races in the country. This oft-repeated point is again associated with Kee's emphasis that he was "...writing about things that move me – racism, unequal opportunities, backwardness, our closing ourselves up, about curbs to freedom of speech and expression" (Ten, 95). Yone's father's frustrations with such policies could possibly be one of the reasons why he has deep antagonistic feelings towards Party members and has tried to force his convictions on Yone. Her refusal to accept his convictions makes him abusive towards her. Yone's narration is indirectly a reaffirmation of such feelings that she disagrees with or is unwilling to accept. They range from her disagreement with her father and brother's racial chauvinism, to the abusive relationship and sexism that Yone and her mother face within her family, in addition to the racial oppression of Proles by the Party members, thus highlighting the double oppression that women face within society.

Yone's discrimination and suffering, however, is not confined to her home. The emotional refuge and understanding that she seeks from Wiran, however, is a mistake as he too abuses her verbally and emotionally over her past relationships with other men. This is despite Yone's explanation that she had been drugged and raped. Ironically, Wiran is seen to be treating Yone unfairly despite his high ideals of a fair and corrupt free society where everyone is treated equally and without discrimination. He places

unrealistic expectations on his partner. Expecting her to be chaste and 'pure' as a woman, he seems to be overly concerned about the number of men Yone has slept with and forces her to recount all the lurid details of her past. Kee's portrayal of Wiran could be interpreted as fair because the creation of a perfect protagonist would not be possible and Wiran, who discriminates against Yone, proves that he is a flawed protagonist as well, just like Miller's heroes. The theme of gender discrimination is therefore very evident as well as the multiple layers of oppression that exist in Kee's patriarchal society of *1984 Here and Now*. Highlighted below is another scene where Wiran verbally abuses Yone:

WIRAN: Was it good?...Did you have a great time with him in bed?...Hnarh? Did you?...You bitch! And who was the third?

(Blackout. The scene re-opens a little later. YONE is about to finish talking about her past.)

YONE: ...He was der las. He told me he would marry me but he didn. I had an abortion. I regretted de affair. I still do.

WIRAN: What else?

YONE: Dere's nutting more to tell.

WIRAN: You know what your sordid love life is like? Do you? Like a porno book. You have no shame.

(Kee, *1984 Here and Now* 59)

Yone's dialogue, once again speaks of her condition of torment and suffering that Kee uses to give voice to a marginalized female. He also comments on the role of men who have failed in their traditional roles as providers of the family but have instead become tormentors of women. Yone's plea is for a deeper understanding of her plight and

condition that she has endured at the hands of a physically abusive father and verbally abusive brother, a womaniser and a rapist. From Yone's predicament, Kee shows how the female undergoes multiple levels of oppression and discrimination in society. From gender discrimination at home, to external socio-economic difficulties and sexual exploitation of women outside of home, Kee shows how the character of Yone, and the female gender in general, has to battle multiple discriminatory fronts that further alienate and marginalize them. Despite all this, Kee shows that Yone resists such a hegemony and discrimination by her own strength of will and perseverance. She joins the political movement H.O.P.E. and helps Wiran in his quest for political freedom. Her resistance to and racial stereotyping of the Party members can be seen when she insists on moving out of the family house and even makes friends with Party members. Yone is also financially independent and is capable of taking care of herself. Despite her troubled past, she has shown persistence and maturity in facing her challenges and is optimistic about her future.

Even though Yone asserts her independence of her father, the deeply-entrenched traditional and conservative values of the patriarchal system remain. The multiple layers of discrimination that exist within the confines of home, family, and society only allude to the vast hegemony of the patriarchal system, thus deepening the concern of the playwright for the pervasive hegemony of power through its various forms.

2.10 The Hegemony of Big Brother and The Political State

From Yone and her representation of a marginalized individual, Kee directs our attention to Big Brother's psychological manipulation in the play, to once again deconstruct the hegemonic power of the state. In Act Two, Kee highlights Big Brother's domineering, shadowy, and often insidious speeches and instructions that are often state propaganda

aimed at privileging the Inner Party members as well as safeguarding the interests of the present state hegemony. What is called “Newspeak”⁵⁰ in Orwell’s *1984* is more complicated in Kee’s play in the sense that the nature of the speeches by Big Brother are often “outrageous declarations in ostensibly specific terms, as if they were unchallengeable truths, but the ultimate messages are vague, or worse, meaningless” (Lee, *Big Brother Lives*, Introduction viii). Its often curt and commanding tone dismisses any options for discussion or arbitration. The following Big Brother speech on the national culture policy is one example how the coercive state imposes and propagates its cultural ideology on racial essentialism.

BB: The Administration will not entertain any view that questions the policy on national culture. The policy clearly states that the national culture will be based on Party member culture. The people must help speed up the implementation of the national culture with dedication, responsibility and sincerity. The Administration cannot guarantee the tiger dance a place in the national culture. It is not a question of all races being represented but whether the traditions of each race can enrich and contribute greatly to national culture... (Kee, *1984 Here and Now* 32)

As the paramount leader of the Party, Big Brother is a dictatorial but revered figure of the Inner Party, the elite council that governs all Party members. The figure of Big Brother is televised with traditional Malay music known as “Gamelan”⁵¹ being played in the background. Jacqueline Lo in *Staging Nation* has observed that the use of such instruments is to “foreground Malay hegemony in state administration” (Lo, 90) and this is also seen in the portrayal of Inner Party members as shadowy figures behind the screen in the form of traditional Malay puppeteering or *wayang kulit*.⁵²

By appropriating the traditional form to depict the workings of the Inner Party, the production makes a strong statement about the use of tradition to perpetuate Malay political and cultural dominance...The *wayang* performance gave the impression of a shadowy realm where manipulation took place and conjured an ambience different from that of the common people. (Lo, 92)

This *wayang kulit* performance also adds a mythical and mystical element to Big Brother. His total control over the state, which is extended to a daily televised presence, is an example of a projection of power that surpasses the traditional and the modern. This is how power and influence transgresses the medium of its dissemination or propagation while exerting psychological control over the minds of its directed audience. Big Brother's constant televised messages encroach and impinge upon the lives of the people while maintaining an aura of authority, reverence, fear, and God-like stature. In what Gramsci describes as the propagation of "common sense" and "consent", the "legitimacy" of Big Brother's rule is strengthened by the tacit agreement between the state and society which in turn is strengthened by his strategies of coercion, theatrics, and illusions of personal grandeur. By not appearing in person, he achieves a level of invincibility and detachment that is further strengthened by his control and repeated appearance on television. The character of Big Brother thus is a symbol of state power with total control over the visual media, a conventional but effective form of media that autocratic governments like to have ownership over for their state propaganda.⁵³ It is a most effective medium to disseminate information, and the state to control this media apparatus means that a certain ideological system would be in place, as observed by Lo:

The foregrounding of the role of visual media in a country that still has a high rate of illiteracy points to a more sophisticated critique of information networks and their dissemination of state propaganda. Historically, the media had been a powerful institution for mobilizing support for the dominant ideology, as shown in the opening video depicting the Kloots⁵⁴ as the national enemy. (Lo, 91)

Lo further adds that the dominant image of Big Brother is another “embodiment of state hegemony” (Lo, 92). His control over state politics, administration, and politics is total. He is the mastermind behind the Party and Inner Party establishment. Throughout the course of the play, Big Brother would deliver propaganda speeches and outline pro-government policies that further enforce the political, hegemonic, and cultural dominance of The Party.

The Opposition Party has accused the Second Minister of Economy of having invoked racist sentiments in calling for Party members to own 45 percent share of the economy. In leveling such an accusation, the Opposition Party itself is committing an irresponsible act. The Opposition Party itself is pandering to racist sentiments...To prevent this and to assure the races of this nation that there has not been an encroachment on their rights, Parliament has today amended the Constitution to waive the ruling on sedition on all matters pertaining to the economy provided they do not question the rights and privileges of the Party members, as has been guaranteed by the Constitution. (Kee, *1984 Here and Now* 26)

This propaganda message clearly outlines the motives of the regime; namely, to put an end to the dissent that is described as an “epidemic”. Like other shadow puppetry shows, the mainstay action behind a screen coupled with the shadowy ambience creates a mysterious aura of the underworld that is usually associated with demons and spirits. Here, the effect is achieved with traditional Malay instruments conjuring a surreal atmosphere that masks the pre-emptive actions of the shadowy council, highlighting once again Big Brother’s hegemony of power.

This scene is played wayang kulit style with human characters behind a large screen. Their dialogue is delivered in heightened manner, their physical mannerisms broad, puppet-like. Altogether, the atmosphere is one of foreboding. Wayang kulit instruments, particularly the percussive ones, can be used to punctuate key moments. The serunai is played to herald the opening of the scene. Then the characters enter. First, two INNER PARTY MEMBERS, some from each side of the screen.

(Enter BIG BROTHER, his shadow looming larger than the rest, towering over all.)

BB: We are agreed then.

There must be a cure for the epidemic.

We have been too soft, too liberal.

But the nation must survive!

IPM 3: Freedom is slavery!

BB: There must be responsibility with freedom. The people must be made to understand that.

IPM 3: Discipline is strength!

BB: We will not compromise the peace of this nation or allow another Woeful Wednesday to happen. The people must always be on guard against the threat posed by the Kloots. It is the responsibility of every citizen to contribute to the continuation of peace and security and to ensure that the nation is free of trouble. No one is exempted from this responsibility; no one at all. The nation must survive!

(Blackout.) (Kee, 1984 Here and Now 63-64)

Big Brother's grand presence exudes an overpowering sense of dread. Jacqueline Lo is right to call the portrayal of Big Brother the "embodiment of state hegemony" that deeply perpetuates elements of ethnic Malay cultural tradition. Big Brother's propaganda language seems obvious, that the country must be united at all cost, and the "Kloots" are the ones capable of galvanizing them in their bid to end the brewing dissent against the government. With the end justifying the means, Big Brother reasserts his fundamental position that everyone must act to ensure the survival of the nation or the ruling party. In a typical fascist-like rally, the Inner Party members shout out their synchronized, military-style condemnation of all who oppose Big Brother's ruling regime and his leadership. Kee has purposefully shown the effects of Big Brother's divide and rule policies on the populace. He has also revealed how the political state has manipulated socio-political issues to crush dissent in the name of national security and the interest of the majority, thus perpetuating its own political hegemony and consolidating its rule over time.

Kee's portrayal of Big Brother is parodic. While Big Brother's speech may be authoritative, and his person may be symbolic of state hegemony and the evils of political tyranny, Kee's description of the pomp and gallantry surrounding him is highly

exaggerated to the point of being ludicrous. Kee describes Big Brother's actions as being akin to those of an emperor with puppet-like movements, stripping him of any human likeness and emotions as he dictates the next devilish course of action. Kee's Big Brother's *sans* traditional music and other accompanying theatrical elements appears to be quite powerless. Without the accompanying fanfare, Big Brother is a poor figure devoid of power and presence. He is a solitary figure making political statements and scheming against the opposition. Big Brother's 'power' is thus part theatrics and part 'mystery'. He is vulnerable if stripped of such accompanying effects that follow him throughout the play. One then might question the validity of Big Brother's existence. Thus, Kee's strategy of representation here is two-fold; on one level, Big Brother appears to be a megalomaniac and on another, his representation to the audience is often questionable. While the audience could identify with the political statements uttered by him, his existence is nevertheless to be questioned because he is constantly shrouded in secrecy and mystery. Hence, this dual representation of Big Brother as being 'everywhere' but also 'neither here nor there' suggests that the projection of his power is at the same time, punctuated with doubts pertaining to the validity of his existence. In doing so, Kee has shown how the state is functioning under the politically repressive administration of Big Brother. By portraying and highlighting the coercive manipulation of Big Brother and how his party members perpetuate tyranny and manipulate political events in their favour, Kee provides the justification for an obligatory and moral resistance to the oppressive government helmed by Big Brother.

In another example to consolidate his claim of how the current administration is as repressive, and oppressive as it is hegemonic, Kee further highlights the gross abuse of political power by Shadrin, a top cadre of the Inner Party Big who is ironically, the "Minister of Truth and Information." In that scene, Shadrin tries to coerce Wiran into

admitting his involvement and ‘guilt.’ Shadrin chooses a psychological approach by deliberately ‘exposing’ Yone and Barouk as turncoats to “The Movement for A New Brotherhood”. Not only does he say that Yone is a double-agent, but Shadrin’s attack becomes more personal when he points out that Yone has also betrayed Wiran’s love by sleeping with many men in “...the line of duty.” In an apparent attempt to make Wiran confess and admit his guilt, Shadrin attacks Yone by calling her a “slut” and “prostitute”. Shadrin goes even further by producing new evidence of Yone’s betrayal to further break Wiran’s resolve. Shadrin’s forceful coercion here exemplifies the use of coercion as a form of power to bend and break individuals like Wiran who continue to resist the rule of Big Brother.

SHADRIN: She was planted to trap subversive elements like you. Like Barouk, whom you dealt with in the Movement For A New Brotherhood. He was also planted. But I can see Yone is more relevant here. You were deceived. You thought she loved you, but she was only doing her job. She is a promiscuous woman.

WIRAN: That’s not true!

SHADRIN: Oh, didn’t you know that? You are probably thinking how you could have loved a slut, aren’t you?

WIRAN: That’s not true!

SHADRIN: Oh, didn’t you know that? You are probably thinking how you could have loved a slut, aren’t you?

WIRAN: No! No! You are only saying that to make me betray her.

SHADRIN: I don’t have to do that. She’s one of us. She has also slept with many men, most of the time in the line of duty.

WIRAN: Stop that, you bastard! (*A bolt of pain*)

SHADRIN: You refuse to believe me. All right. Then I'll show you concrete evidence. I have here a videotape that will convince you of the truth. It shows your beloved Yone making love to a man she never told you about. You remember, of course, that she told you of her past and she had only gone to bed with Party members. The man in this tape happens to be a Prole.

WIRAN: You forced her to do this, you bastard!

SHADRIN: See for yourself how freely she enjoys the act.

(He plays the videotape. *WIRAN watches, writhing in his seat.*

(*Kee, 1984 Here and Now 80*)

Shadrin's manipulation of facts is very convincing as he manouvres the situation in his favour. He is bent on breaking Wiran's resolve and willpower in the interrogation, and his deceptive ways are equally matched with his deceitful character. Shadrin declares at the beginning of the play that "We provide the truth and the information", but nothing is further from the truth as Shadrin is a minister of propaganda and torture under Big Brother's autocracy. Through his own admission, Shadrin explains how through ingenious state propaganda, the people are manipulated to believe "...the most flagrant violations of reality" due to their political complacency. Thus, Big Brother's control of power over the people is absolute, as "[whatever] the Party holds to be the truth is truth. The Administration, which controls the Party, controls reality" (*Kee, 1984 Here and Now 76-77*).

Kee's answer to such a hegemonic force is to highlight the human spirit; its tenacity to overcome evil and injustice will eventually triumph over the fear of human persecution

and the many dangers that lie in the way. Wiran, despite being crestfallen at such a 'revelation' by Shadrin, then cries out:

WIRAN: Life will beat you. As long as there are others like me out there, there is a chance you will be defeated. The human spirit will defeat you. Love will defeat you. Love for life, for humanity.

(Kee, 1984 *Here and Now* 79)

Wiran is certain that despite his inability to beat the system, he is not alone in his quest for change as there are many other individuals like him who are willing to fight for the cause. In Gramsci's definition, the hegemony of the state could be resisted by "wars of position" or "wars of movement". Wiran is thus representative of the "organic intellectual" who resists the state's hegemonic influence using the latter. Wiran's optimism and philosophic belief that the goodness of the human spirit and forces are greater than the fear of a despotic rule seems to echo Kee's own convictions as well as a playwright. His consistent political view is that a democratically elected government should always be clean, fair, and efficient while being duty-bound to protect the interests of its citizens. Wiran then becomes Kee's representation of the common individual, who must make a stand against a corrupt and immoral government protecting their own personal interest at the expense of the people. Kee once again reaffirms this personal vindication in an intimate conversation between Yone and Wiran that reconsiders empowerment of the human spirit as a form of resistance against all forms of persecution.

YONE: Dey carn do that. It's der one thing dey carn do. Dey can make you say anything but dey carn make you believe it. Dey carn get inside you.

WIRAN: That's true. They can't get inside you. If you can feel that staying human is worthwhile. Even when it's futile, you've beaten them. They cannot alter your feelings. They can lay bare everything you have done or said, but they cannot change your heart. (*WIRAN laughs an assured, triumphant laugh.*) They cannot change your heart!

(Kee, 1984 *Here and Now* 66)

Yone's revelation in colloquial Malaysian English inspires Wiran to understand that the strength of the human spirit is paramount in any human conflict that involves a struggle for political change. Nevertheless, Kee the political playwright does believe that action is the driver of momentum and the ending of the play sees Wiran's rallying speech to ramp up conscience-driven action for political awareness and public action in confronting the multiplicity of issues plaguing the country. Wiran's call is also Kee's passionate plea to rise beyond "complacency" and "fear" and to unite regardless of ethnicity. With only moral and democratic values as their guide, the patriotic call for national ownership moves from centre stage to the audience and Wiran's clarion call marks the end of Kee's 1984.

WIRAN: Are you all going to sit here and do nothing? The hope of this nation lies with you! Are you going to sit here and let it go to the dogs? Stand up! Stand up and unite! Party members, Proles, whoever you are, wherever you are. Speak up for your rights! This is a democracy. Stand up for your freedom, for racial equality and integration, for humanity and justice, for truth, for a nation capable of greatness! We all have a stake in this nation! If you believe in all

these, say yes! You have the power to bring about changes. Unite!
Stand up and say yes! Yes, the future lies with you! Yes, you will
rise above fear and complacency! Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes!
(Kee, 1984 *Here and Now* 82)

Thus Kee's strategy has been that he infuses his play with cohesive social discussion that is structured to show the hegemony of power by Big Brother whose administration perpetuates the discourse of cultural and racial superiority. While such abuses of power are clearly shown to be happening at the political level, Kee also critiques the hegemony of the patriarchal system that in turn subjugates the female gender to another level of oppression that is cultural in nature. Kee's dominant use of social commentary in the course of his critique of the state and society serves the dual purpose of imitating as well as trivializing a situation to invoke laughter and ridicule. In addition, what Kee achieves through the generated laughter and ridicule is an exposition and revelation that jolts the audience to an unnerving reality once the audience realizes that the staged situations are a mirror of their own predicament at the social, political, and cultural levels. The imitative quality of parody that seeks to create humour and to satirize the hegemonic state that is used by Kee also has a reflective element that lulls the audience into a sense of complacency before delivering a stinging message in its depiction of the state's politics of manipulation and power.

2.11 Conclusion

Like the moral playwright Miller, Kee's play touches on moral issues like "racism, unequal opportunities, backwardness...[which are] curbs to freedom of speech and expression" (Ten, 95) besieging a multi-racial and multicultural nation such as Malaysia. While there are differences between both plays in the socio-political aspects of American

and Malaysian societies in general, both playwrights and their allegorical plays demonstrate the use of drama as a form of dissent to the forms of injustices existing in the societies of their time.

From the malign powers of theocracy, guilt, betrayal, and greed, to the stifling and discriminating laws in an oligarchical state, Kee's and Miller's plays eventually focus on the plight, persecution, and triumph of the human spirit. The inter-racial relationship between Wiran and Yone transcends the communalism and racism among Proles and Party members to finally end on a positive note of future reconciliation. In *The Crucible*, John Proctor rises beyond the hysteria of greed and vengeance to redeem himself of his adultery with Abigail Williams and finally be reconciled with his wife, Elizabeth. Both Miller and Kee's plays are a testament and product of their times. From the 1950s McCarthy trials in Washington to the fight for social justice and equality in *1984 Here and Now*, both playwrights resort to the use of allegory to comment on the hegemonic political, social, and cultural conditions of their times.

Kee and Miller also demonstrate an uncanny understanding of the human psyche and emotions through the political plays that demonstrate "the mechanism by which power is sustained, challenged, and lost" (Bigby, *A Critical Reader* 150). In both plays, what was "sustained", "challenged" and "lost" was the hegemony of state power and the individual who dares to challenge the political state. The medium for such a contestation is the courageous efforts put up by Wiran and Proctor to resist the hegemony of the state as represented by Big Brother and Judge Danforth.

In *The Crucible*, Miller shows a certain duality in language construction that "effectively depicts how polarized society became in Salem in 1692 and America in the 1950s. Each

side became deeply entrenched in opposition so that there was no middle ground; the extremes denied the moderation necessary for political, personal, emotional, and rational compromise” (Marino 469). As such, Danforth and Abigail’s use of hegemonic/figurative language demonstrates how language could be as coercive and manipulative as it is deadly when one is in a position of power. Proctor’s strong logical and moral reasoning does not save him from being condemned because of the overwhelming theocracy that is against him. Proctor’s resistance to the state, viewed from a Gramscian perspective, could be defined as a challenge to the cultural hegemony of the theocracy, represented by Danforth. Similarly, Wiran’s strong reasoning against racial politics falls on deaf ears due to the entrenched political superstructure and hegemonic influence of Big Brother and his culture of fear.

Through the use of structured social critique and examples of moral resistance, both dramatists protest against individuals who hold tremendous power. Proctor and Wiran, being symbolic representations of their creators, then challenge and question the hegemony of the state and the individual over such a pervasive abuse of power. While Wiran and Proctor also choose physical action in retaliation to the coercive methods of the state, they represent the agents of change and conscience of the persecuted and marginalized. Together with the plays that are also a dialogic platform of discussion, both entities represent the insight needed to know how the cultural hegemony of state and its agencies is to be resisted.

From racial politics to the abuse of power by the state, Kee and Miller’s works are forms of resistance and opposition to oppression, suppression, subjugation, and persecution of the innocent. An analysis of the methods used in both plays reveals how the playwrights have remained steadfast in the style and influence of political satire and naturalist drama.

The effective use of metaphors, symbolism and evocative imagery has resulted in two complex plays of resistance that were written as a direct response to the hegemony of the state. As such, *The Crucible* and *1984 Here and Now* are an enduring and true testament of the courage demonstrated in playwriting, and the playwrights' understanding of the drama in politics and the politics of drama, on stage and off-stage, from turbulent America to the *Here and Now* in Malaysia.

University of Malaya

CHAPTER 3: THE POLITICAL AND HISTORICAL IN INCIDENT AT VICHY AND THE BIG PURGE: FROM PERSECUTION TO RESISTANCE

3.1 Introduction

My previous chapter outlines my analysis and discussion of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* and Kee Thuan Chye's 1984 *Here and Now* from the perspective of resistance and how this salient theme is dramatically reinforced through the dramaturgy of the plays. The analysis of the language further reveals how aspects of resistance have been woven into the core of the plays. Further, the forceful and commanding tone of the language used emphasizes the opposition to the hegemonic state, their agents as well as other oppressive and dominant representations of hegemony subservient to the state. The highly dramatic, intense, and moralistic approach by Miller and the satirical and parodic nature of Kee's plays are contrasting in their approaches, and dichotomous in their influence, style, structure, approach and characterization.

In this chapter, I will analyse another two plays by the two playwrights, Miller's *Incident at Vichy* and Kee's *The Big Purge*. Firstly, I would like to state the reasons for the comparison between the two plays. Kee's *The Big Purge* deals with major issues such as the abuse of political power by the Chief Minister and the hegemony of the state over its people. Miller's *Incident at Vichy* shares a similar concern but has more emotional, intense and a deeper portrayal typical of Miller's style as compared to Kee's use of satirical and parodical elements that often take a humorous approach. Kee's play centres on the political "troubles" faced by the Chief Minister in "purging" Equaland of political opponents and dissenters and highlights the ruthless approaches employed by the state to stay in power. In *Vichy*, Miller focuses on the purging and annihilation of Jews in the German-controlled state of Vichy in France and the play remains the playwright's "most critical and analytic response to Fascism and to the Holocaust" (Balakian 123). In Kee's

The Big Purge, the Chief Minister discriminates against the non-Equas through state policies, while in *Vichy*, we witness similar discriminatory policies being applied to the Jews. The underlying theme of power and persecution of the individual based on race and religion (and by extension, economic status) takes centre stage in both.

The Chief Minister in *The Big Purge* holds tremendous political power and clout in the play while in *Vichy*, the political state is represented by the Vichy state police and the German military which exert dominion of the state through coercion and discipline, thus demonstrating their hegemonic influence on the general population, and on the Jews specifically.

Such discipline and coercion is further demonstrated in Miller's play by the political state's exertion of control and influence over the body, physically and racially. By this means of control, the political state, represented by the Vichy police and German military, aspires to fight, control, and 'possess' the body that is symbolically represented by the Jewish race/individuals through various physical coercion methods. From disciplined bodies, the bodies (Jewish individuals) become docile bodies and objects that are thus dominated by the state.

In this chapter, I will further reinforce my thesis of how the political plays of Miller and Kee can be analysed as a means of resistance to the political situations of their time and how these political plays were used as a subtle means to subvert the inherent state political dominion and the pervasive hegemonic powers. I will draw from the two plays such and show from my analysis of the plays, the dynamics of the aspects of performativity utilized as a form of resistance against the state superstructures. This will demonstrate again the modes and methods of resistance as presented in their diverse performances. Kee

structures his resistance through social discourse and the traditional performing arts. Miller's resistance, however, is a morally-driven initiative. Both emphasize the need for the individual to act against the political state and its hegemonic power and influence. This analysis will then use Gramsci's theory of hegemony and Foucault's theory of power that positions the political plays as not only performances about persecution but as plays that utilize the concept of resistance as a method of contestation between the state and the individual when no dialogical space is given to the oppressed.

I will now analyse Miller's *Incident at Vichy* from the perspective of individual resistance. I will demonstrate how Miller's *Vichy* unravels the systematic racial and 'bodily' discrimination of the individual by the state and how this state-sanctioned discrimination is resisted by Miller's morally-driven resistance represented by Von Berg. I will first begin by discussing the context and motivations that inspired Miller in writing *Incident at Vichy*.

3.2 The Context to *Incident at Vichy*

To Miller, *Incident at Vichy* is not only about Nazism or the Holocaust but a "historical work out to address a historical phenomenon" (Biggsby, *A Critical Study* 258). Like *The Crucible*, the play emphasizes the importance of conscience and honour in times of conflict and persecution. Events that deal with historical human conflict, brutal wars, and the Holocaust have often moved and inspired Miller to dramatize the plight of human misery and the brutality of authority. This is very evident in *The Crucible*. Miller said that the Salem witch-hunts "remained an inexplicable darkness" to him (*Introduction to Collected Plays* 155). In addition, Miller's historical plays also revealed his concerns with "history, memory, and the moral consequences of human behaviour" (Balakian 125); such themes are largely evident in his plays such as *After the Fall*, *The Price*, and *Incident at Vichy*. Miller's thematic concerns expanded to include religious, moral, social and

psychological perspectives that were common in his best plays written from the 1950s to the 1970s. Miller scholar, Janet Balakian elaborates on Miller's focus on social plays and its influence on his work.

But whatever the style of presentation, Miller's plays assume an underlying rational structure to existence, demonstrate the pressure of the past on the present to which it is causally connected. In the sixties, Miller continued to write social plays, examining the way, society shapes and breaks the psyche. He persisted in creating what he calls a poetic theatre, one that fuses social and psychological conflicts [...]Indeed, Miller's Old Testament sensibility always drove him back to the mythic Fall in Genesis, for which the Depression, the Holocaust, and McCarthyism became his twentieth-century correlatives. (Balakian 136)

Miller has always been fascinated with the psychological aspect of human actions and their consequences for the individual and society. Miller's belief was that "private and public histories were a key to present realities" (Balakian 117) and in *The Crucible*, the "higher degree of consciousness" (Miller, "*Brewed in The Crucible*" 173) that Miller was referring to was the deep sense of realism that constantly moved him. This deep sense of realism is also seen in *Incident at Vichy* and *The Crucible*, both of which are among the very few of Miller's historical plays.

Incident at Vichy was written in 1964 as a one-act play⁵⁵ and concerns a group of prisoners rounded up by the Nazi authorities during the World War II in the district of Vichy⁵⁶, France. The play premiered on Broadway on 3rd December 1964 at the ANTA

Washington Square Theatre in New York City. The production closed on 7th May, 1965 after 32 performances. Miller also adapted the play for a 1973 television production⁵⁷ and in 2009, the play was revived in New York by the Off-Broadway group The Actors Company Theatre (TACT).

In *Vichy*, Miller deals with aspects of characterization such as attitude and reaction, and themes that evoke a higher level of consciousness. The play reminded Miller of the Holocaust and the perils of war. Miller sought to understand the atrocities of war together with the complex nature of humanity and the sweeping of emotions and feelings expressed in times of great tribulation. Adding to the flux of Miller's thoughts was the idea of the compliance of individuals to an evil act even if it does not involve the individuals directly.

After a visit⁵⁸ to the concentration camps of Mauthausen⁵⁹ in post-war Germany initiated by his wife Inge, Miller wanted to write a play about the Holocaust and its atrocities. This was partly due to Inge's conviction that she was complicit in the evils of the past because her father had been a member of the Nazi Party during the war. Miller, a Jew, was deeply moved by the Mauthausen visit but consistently maintained that he was not writing about the Holocaust as a Jew but because of "our complicity with it, murders from which we all profit if only by virtue of having survived" (Bigsby, *Arthur Miller 1962-2005*, 47). Thus, Miller's connection was more of a psychological and human connection with the events that unfolded in the past, for to be completely indifferent and to detach oneself from traumatic historical events would be a form of betrayal to the memories of the departed. It is this obligation that Miller felt when he wrote the play. Thus Miller experienced a connection with the trauma and plight of those condemned in the past. To Miller, the flux

of emotions, of shock and at times confusion, which he felt, is necessary in the attempt to understand the traumatic event.

Miller's sense of shock at seeing in person what he had previously registered as historic fact necessitated its presence, but that same sense of shock made it difficult for him convincingly to locate the connection that would make it the logical image for something beyond its numbing mysteries. (Biggsby, *Arthur Miller 1962-2005*, 31)

In creating *Incident at Vichy*, Miller sought to understand the motivations for such atrocities which occurred and the indifference of humanity at large. Miller needed a deeper understanding of the nature of evil before he could comprehend the nature of this 'mystery' The end product is then a play that is about more than just human suffering and the atrocities of war; *Incident at Vichy* is Miller's exploration of human action and moral courage that is needed to induce hope and alleviate suffering in times of human conflict.

3.3 Summary of *Incident at Vichy*

Miller's *Incident at Vichy* begins with a group of individuals captured in Vichy, France by the German authorities. While *Vichy* does not match the intensity and dramatic passion of *The Crucible*, the play does have its moments of transcendence, especially in the portrayal of the human spirit (or the lack of it) in the face of oppression. *Incident at Vichy* begins with a number of detained individuals; among them are Lebeau (a painter), Bayard (an electrician), Marchand (a businessman), Monceau (an actor), an old man (a Jew), Leduc (a psychiatrist), Von Berg (an Austrian prince), Ferrand (a café proprietor), a gypsy, a young boy, a waiter, and four prisoners. On the side of the interrogators are a

German major and Professor Hoffman (a Nazi); they are assisted by two French detectives, a police guard, and a French police captain.

The first half of the play depicts the prisoners' dilemma with the nature of their detention which was never explained to them, and the hard realization that the reason for their detention is not as simple as it seems. While Lebeau, Monceau, and Marchand speculate wildly on the reason, Bayard makes a grim speculation that they all could be headed to their deaths after hearing rumours of mass killings of Jews in German concentration camps in Poland. Unable to fathom the reality of the situation, most of the prisoners relapse into a state of denial with the exception of Leduc whose prognosis of the situation is grim and whose efforts in rallying the rest are futile. The others seem to be overly optimistic about the situation; their inability to act on a situation that compels them to save their lives is ironic. Equally distressing is their naïve view that a brutal event like the genocide of the Jews could never take place in the present. The perpetuation of this misguided trust lulls them into a state of complacency.

With there being seemingly no likelihood of mass killings in the modern age, the rest of the individuals, with the exception of Leduc and Von Berg, remain resigned to their impending fate. Although Leduc and Von Berg's discussions (from politics to philosophy) form the heart of the play, they are overshadowed by the impending doom soon to befall most of the captives at the detention centre. Von Berg in the end decides to give his papers to Leduc and this act of sacrifice is gladly taken by Leduc who feverishly runs for his life. The scene of the German major confronting Von Berg being interrupted by the arrival of four new prisoners frames the final scene of the play⁶⁰.

Thus in the play, Miller was confronted with the perennial question of Man's complicity in the massacre of the Jews in World War II as well as the noble act of sacrifice a person is willing to undertake for a complete stranger. While *The Crucible* is an allegorical, historical, and political play, *Incident at Vichy* leans towards war, history and politics. All this is laced with Miller's universal call for action against the persecuted and a sense of accountability in the direst of situations.

3.4 Discipline and Docile Bodies

Foucault's discussion on power, how it is structured, propagated, and maintained through state institutions such as the prison system, was introduced in his seminal work, *Discipline and Punish*⁶¹ published in 1975. Drawing on the evolution of the prison system, Foucault critically traces how such an institution propagates what he sees as three structures of operation, namely "torture", "punishment", and "discipline." This power structure could then be replicated in society and reinforced through state institutions by means of its political power. Foucault's theory of power is thus applicable in *Incident at Vichy* as a discourse on how power is used by the state, and even among individuals, as a form of control, to regulate, to define, and to persecute individuals while maintaining a certain hegemonic position.

Foucault's theory of power and knowledge under "discipline" speaks of how this mode of action is exerted on the individual as a means of control and "...[becomes] the general formulas of domination" (Foucault 137) by the state. In the play, the Vichy police and the German military begin rounding up individuals who are suspected of being Jews. This correlates with Foucault's discussion of "coercion of bodies" (Foucault 169) where the main function of the disciplinary power is to 'train'. Foucault further elaborates:

Instead of bending all its subjects into a single uniform mass, it separates, analyzes, differentiates, carries its procedures of decomposition to the point of necessary and sufficient single units...Discipline 'makes' individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise. (Foucault 169)

The arrest of individuals in the play is associated with this coercion method that subjects the individual to a systematic screening process sanctioned by the state. This, indirectly, has a profound effect on an individual even though he has done nothing wrong. The feeling of guilt and the anxiety of being picked up by the state would have the average person extremely nervous and tortured by feelings of insecurity even though he has not done anything wrong. Thus, the coercion of individuals is not only physical but also psychological as well. This can be illustrated in the opening scene where the individuals, while waiting to know the reason for their detention, are waiting on a bench "...facing a large empty area whose former use is unclear but which suggests a warehouse, perhaps, an armoury, or part of a railroad station not used by the public. Two small boxes stand apart on either side of the bench." (Miller, *Incident at Vichy* 1). Being put in an open "public space" that is guarded by sentries posted at the end of the corridor is an example of how "Discipline proceeds from the distribution of individuals in space" (Foucault 141). This "art of distributions" is one example of how the Vichy police and German military consolidate power and enforce discipline over individuals. This "art of distributions" employs four strategies, namely "enclosure", "partitioning", "functional sites" (space for supervision), and "rank" ("the place one occupies in a classification") (Foucault 145). Such strategies are seen in the detention area of the play, thus proving Foucault's theory of power and discipline as a form of control over individuals.

To further illustrate this point, in the opening scene of *Vichy*, the characters are seen pacing around restlessly. Consisting of nine men and a boy, they are “anxious” and “frightened” and do not know the reason for their detention. They do not know one another and “are sitting like people thrown together in a public place, mutually curious but self-occupied” (Miller, *Incident at Vichy* 1). There is an overwhelming sense of inertia⁶² in the introduction, a feeling of malaise that both Miller agreed with director Harold Clurman was overpowering. The stage design in *Incident at Vichy* is significantly different than the sprawling and multi-level stage design of *After the Fall*. *Incident at Vichy* concentrates on a closed and limited space. The individuals grouped together are puzzled by their surroundings. Taken in by the local enforcement, they are brought to a police station but housed in a detention area with a building that could resemble anything from a warehouse, armoury or an abandoned railway station house. Miller scholar June Schlueter likens the detainees in the introduction to the tramps in Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* who are clueless of the fate that will befall them. They sit on a long bench with two small boxes at the side and keep themselves busy to kill time. As the waiting gets longer, the individuals continue to while away time thinking that this was just a mistake and their presence there is inconsequential. Schlueter further adds: “As the prisoners wait to be summoned individually into the adjacent room, where the identity check takes place, they try to replace despair with hope, even as it becomes increasingly clear that there is none” (Schlueter and Flanagan, *Arthur Miller*, 102).

The discipline that is exerted by the Vichy state police and German military thus creates the compliance of the individual who is also subjected to the influence of the political entity. The creation of “docile bodies” is the result of this discipline; the “body” is seen to be useful, only if it is both a productive and subjected body at the same time. According to Foucault:

Discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile bodies.'

Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience). In short, it dissociates power from the body; on the one hand, it turns it into an 'aptitude,' a capacity,' which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection. If economic exploitation separate the force and the product of labour, let us say that disciplinary coercion establishes in the body the constricting link between an increased aptitude and an increased domination." (138)

This influence and impact of such a disciplinary mechanism could be seen even among the German military, in the character of the German Major who is caught between his responsibility as military officer guarding the detainees and his reluctance to be there doing such work that has nothing to do with his training, which is in engineering and artillery. There exist a fleeting moment of moral goodness in the Major when he empathizes with the detainees and even tries to rescue Leduc and the Boy when they attack the guard. The Major seems embarrassed to be there, and says "...this is all as inconceivable to me as it is to you" (Miller, *Incident at Vichy* 53). At one point, the Major refuses to take orders from the professor but reluctantly agrees after being threatened subtly by the latter. Like the rest of the individuals who have been disciplined and are forced to be docile and submissive, the Major is in a similar predicament. He is forced to carry out tasks that makes him unhappy and to disobey his designated duties would invite disciplinary action from his superiors. The Major has also been made into a docile body by the upper echelons of the German military and he has no choice but to obey his

superiors. His unhappiness is very much evident when he tries to comprehend the 'situation' of his captives and poses philosophical questions to Leduc, twice saying: "I am trying to understand why you are better for the world than me" (Miller, *Incident at Vichy* 56) and "Why do you deserve to live more than I do?" (Miller, *Incident at Vichy* 54). The Major eventually stops short doing anything to help the detainees as he is caught in the dilemma of either being loyal (subservient) to the German army or face the consequences of punitive military action.

In Vichy, the creation of docile bodies also happens from the act of defining something as 'foreign' or 'inferior' as a means of exerting power and dominion. The individuals in the play (such as Bayard), in their fear and uncertainty, tend to impose this discipline on the weaker members of their group, in order to placate their fears of being persecuted or that they are 'inferior.' Bayard's identity as a foreigner continues to haunt him and when Lebeau asks Bayard twice whether he is a Peruvian, the latter in his frantic denial could not escape from the truth and the possibility that this could give sufficient grounds for the Germans to detain him. Bayard is annoyed at Lebeau's questions on whether the Germans "measured his nose", which for Lebeau, has become the most traumatic experience for him:

LEBEAU: ...I am walking down the street before, a car pulls up beside me, a man gets out and measures my nose, my ears, my mouth, the next thing I'm sitting in a police station – or whatever the hell this is here – and in the middle of Europe, the highest peak of civilization!

(Miller, *Incident at Vichy* 6)

Lebeau's experience of having his nose measured could be the state authorities' extreme way of adhering to the Aryan ideal/definition of the 'perfect race.' This enforced "disciplinary coercion" by the state is a precursor to a more inherent and larger persecution of the Jews by the Germans. Lebeau's experience here is a foreshadowing of the extremities (and atrocities) the German military will commit towards the Jewish people in enforcing the hegemony of the Aryan race. Using such a systematic and selective process of coercion and domination as narrated by Lebeau, Foucault describes this strategy of state discipline as:

Small acts of cunning endowed with great power of diffusion, subtle arrangements, apparently innocent, but profoundly suspicious, mechanisms that obeyed economies too shameful to be acknowledged, or pursued petty forms of coercion....(Foucault 139)

Just as Bayard, Marchand, and Lebeau had defined the Gypsy so erroneously, the political state wields such power as well. The state's use of such questionable methods of determining individuals of the Jewish faith seems illogical and humorous but such a method, as far-fetched as it may be, could be true from Lebeau's account. The central question remains: are the authorities conducting arrests based on racial profiling? The thematic concern of persecution in *Vichy* is the integral question in the minds of the detained individuals. The state thus wields the power to define and to persecute individuals as they see fit. Citing the example of forced nose measuring, Lebeau poses the question to Monceau, Leduc and the Austrian prince, Von Berg. On one occasion, Lebeau also tries to measure Bayard's nose, (which could be Lebeau's way of aligning Bayard with himself), much to his anger. His repetitive queries on nose measuring are not answered and while Lebeau's actions may be comic relief to offset the intensity of the

moment, they are symbolic because they are the representations of Lebeau's fears of being detained and persecuted by the Germans. In the opening scene, Lebeau's concerns of racial persecution are also highlighted in a brief conversation on the threat of racial persecution between himself and Marchand.

LEBEAU: You don't get any...special flavour, huh?

MARCHAND: What flavour?

LEBEAU, *glancing at the others*: Well like...some racial...implication?

MARCHAND: I don't see anything to fear if your papers are all right. *He turns front, concluding the conversation.*

(Miller, *Incident at Vichy* 4)

Ironically, all the detainees are subjected to power of "disciplinary coercion" by the state while they are, at the same time, accusing the Gypsy. Confusion soon spreads since no one has any information on the nature of their detention. They can only speculate on the nature of their captivity and this leads to further unsubstantiated assumptions that worsen their confusion.

Individuals like the Communists Bayard and Lebeau eventually give way to their own insecurities and discriminate against members of their own company. The Waiter joins in the fray and says that the Gypsy is not to be trusted. Marchand despises all the rest who are not of his stature and thinks nothing about human compassion, being concerned only about his business dealings. Monceau, on the other hand, is too oblivious of the political storm in Europe and dismisses the rumours of Nazi concentration camps as merely wild imaginings. He steadfastly refuses to believe that the Nazis could commit such atrocities

as the Germans are still people capable of rational thought. What is alarming is Monceau's strong conviction that the persecution of Jews is impossible because there is always that extent of decency and civility in times of conflict, and always that a sense of "proportion" (Miller, *Incident at Vichy* 19). Even Bayard's narration of what a Polish engineer in southern France told him about Jews being rounded up and put in concentration camps at Toulouse and Auschwitz was dismissed by Monceau as mere hearsay and unsubstantiated claims.

Confusion and uncertainty thus cloud the judgement of the detainees as they grapple with the uncertainty of their situation. Their long wait for answers is further complicated by their inactivity and indecisive decision whether they should escape or remain at the detention centre. From being 'disciplined', Miller's characters have now become 'dociled' bodies and remain trapped in the state's structure of control and seem listless in their efforts to save themselves. From being 'docile' bodies, the persecuted characters in Miller's *Vichy* who are mostly Jewish will eventually be made into 'impersonal' beings, from subjects (individuals) to 'objects' by the Nazi machinery, once again demonstrating the diabolical nature of the state's power over the persecuted individual, and in this situation the Jews and Gypsies, who are the targeted groups by the German military.

3.5 The 'Objectification' of the Individual

The detainees in *Vichy* are indecisive and seem reluctant to act. Their 'paralysis' is seen in their refusal to save their own lives and the acceptance of their own condition as somewhat fated. From being 'disciplined', they are now 'docile bodies' and will soon be made into 'objects' by the state's purge. The objectification of the Jews (and other ethnic groups like the Gypsies that the German military consider as inferior) is thus a form of power control that is, an attempt by the German authorities to dehumanize the persecuted

racism, and to label and strip them of their identity in order for the persecution process to be justified.

Firstly, the objectification would involve the 'discipline' and 'coercion' methods (explained in the earlier sections) employed by the state that result in the individuals believing that resistance against the political state is an impossible task, if not a suicidal one. Reducing them to a state of subservience and making them into docile bodies are the objectives of the process. Persecuted individuals who are victims of such a purge would believe that it is extremely difficult for them to go against the power of the Vichy state. Individuals such as Lebeau, Von Berg, and Monceau are non-committal in their efforts to escape due to what they see as the impossibility of escaping from the German military. This is what Foucault defines as "hierarchical observation" and "surveillance" put in place by the state to maintain such "disciplinary coercion."

Foucault defines "hierarchical observation" in his theory of power and knowledge as "[the] exercise of discipline [that] presupposes a mechanism that coerces by means of observation" (Foucault 170). "The means of coercion make those on whom they are applied clearly visible" and by such means, "[surveillance] thus becomes a decisive economic operator both as an internal part of the production machinery and as a specific mechanism in the disciplinary power" (Foucault 175). In the play, the wide open courtyard serves as a physical place for such an observation to take place which correlates to the "art of distributions."

Secondly, the 'objectification' of the Jews can also be seen with the physical presence of a German military officer, (the Major) and the German professor whose role is to "normalise judgement" (Foucault 184) in the physical enclosure. The German Major's

role is to keep the individuals in their place and to ensure that they do not escape; thus his presence is still very much to control 'docile bodies' through the means of 'coercion.' This is similar to Bentham's idea of Panopticism which Foucault sees as a form of efficient 'self-imposed discipline.' The placement of one authoritative individual could maximise the disciplinary mechanism of surveillance and keep all other individuals in check. By individualizing the subjects and placing them under constant visibility, maximum discipline is enforced and the function of power is sustained. Thus, the efficiency of the institution's influence and control over the individual is maximized.

The professor's role is more complex and though Foucault argues that "disciplinary punishments" have "the function of reducing gaps" and "must therefore be essentially corrective" (Foucault 179), in the play, the professor does not perform his physical inspection to rehabilitate; rather his examination is done as a means to select and persecute individuals who are Jews. It does serve as a means of classifying and encouraging conformity, which is how Foucault would define disciplinary punishment. The professor's physical examination of individuals does fulfil three of the five⁶³ conditions of "punishment." In essence, the professor's physical examination "...differentiates individuals from one another", "it measures in quantitative terms and hierarchizes in terms of value of the abilities, the level, the 'nature' of individuals" and it defines the "abnormal" (Foucault 182-183). The persecution of Jewish individuals is thus hidden in the guise of a physical examination, its potential victims oblivious to the insidious nature of the examiner. A piece of paper thus determines the life and death of an individual after the Professor's physical examination. Like the production line in a factory, each individual is examined for 'defects', demonstrating once again how the 'body' is constantly under scrutiny by the state and constantly subjected to the state's influence in the manipulation of the 'body' for its political will.

The third method in the 'objectification' process is the 'classification' process which is after the physical examination. The German professor's 'verdict' to determine who the Jews are, is a political act in itself because according to Foucault, the 'body' is constantly being manipulated, influenced, and shaped by the discourses of power.

The body is directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs. This political investment of the body is bound up...with its economic use; it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination; but, on the other hand, its constitution as labour power is possible only if it is caught up in a system of subjection in which need is also a political instrument meticulously prepared, calculated and used; the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body. (Foucault 25-26)

The classification process thus seeks to validate and verify the perceived notion of the 'body' being a signifier for the identification of the Jewish race. The 'body' is subjugated and probed. Like an object, the 'body' is labelled, categorized and identified for physical markers of the Jewish faith. By forcing the 'body' to be assessed, examined, the state exerts total power and authority over the persecuted 'body.' From the 'discipline' and 'coercion' tactics of the state to the 'production' of the 'docile individual', the body is rendered an 'object' by the state, thus 'dehumanizing' the subject (individuals).

The Gypsy in *Incident at Vichy* also fits into this mode of subjugation, and made into a “docile” individual by the state. The Gypsy seems to endure obvious discrimination in Miller’s play. The Gypsy whose identity is already known, is subjected to a “disciplinary coercion” within this group of individuals who out of desperation, vilify someone else in response to the hopelessness of their own situation. The individuals thus subject the ‘body’ of the Gypsy to ‘external markers.’ As Foucault explains it “...they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs (*Discipline and Punish*, 25-26) dictated by their own ‘power discourse.’ By doing so, the other detainees feel there is hope for them but the reality is that hope is as elusive as the assigned ‘guilt’ of the Gypsy. The Gypsy is thus subjected to the power of such individuals who, with their superior economic and social positioning, question and dictate his identity.

Like the Jews, the Gypsy is a representation of Miller’s assertion that every individual has participated in the persecution of another being, emphasizing the truth of Leduc’s claim that “...even Jews have their Jews” (66). Here, the economic value of an individual is emphasized and the notion of class and status is given priority over the dignity of the individual, highlighting once again the class hegemony among the individuals. The idea of the persecuted among the persecuted is clearly exemplified in the treatment of the Gypsy who experiences a deeper and more intense discrimination bordering on stereotype and ignorance from his ‘peers.’ The racial discrimination⁶⁴ against the Gypsy which was shown by Marchand’s disdain based on social, economic, and racial perspectives is soon adopted by other members of the group who eventually victimize him for being a social and economic ‘outcast’, a “docile body” subjected to individuals who have the power to ‘classify’ and ‘define’ the Gypsy as they see fit. Viewed collectively, all the individuals in the detention centre are “docile bodies” subjected to the power structures of the state and here the Gypsy appears to be persecuted more often because of his ‘docile’ nature,

the perceived stereotype of Gypsies and the group's own insecurities regarding their own detention.

In a similar approach to the Professor's method of racial profiling, Bayard profiles the Gypsy according to the "evidence" before him. The Gypsy also undergoes the 'objectification' process, formally (during the physical examination) and informally (by his fellow detainees). By labelling the Gypsy as "inferior", Bayard upholds the notion of racial superiority which is akin to the ideology of Aryan supremacy⁶⁵ propagated by the Nazi's. Bayard's act of labelling moves the blame and pressure of guilt to another individual, in this case, the character of the Gypsy. The Gypsy becomes the focal point of their frustrations simply because of the negative view of his community as nomadic, shiftless and lacking in social and economic standing in society. Terrified, Lebeau immediately does the same and presses the Gypsy for an answer out of sheer desperation. The extent of his desperation sees Lebeau cajoling the Gypsy to admit to a theft that he did not commit, by possibly lying that he is "different" from the rest, and that stealing is second nature to him. To Lebeau, both of them will be persecuted in time. The Gypsy thus becomes a prime mover of their suspicions and a target of the group's frustrations and anxieties.

In Miller's *Vichy*, all the detainees are symbolic of the "body" that the political state seeks to possess and manipulate for political reasons. By means of 'discipline' and political legitimacy, the state enforces discipline to ensure the "coercion of bodies" (Foucault 169) and the subjugation and persecution of individuals. From the Jew to the foreigner and to the Gypsy, the individuals in *Incident at Vichy* are subjected to the torturous wait for a physical examination that determines their life and death. Miller's *Incident at Vichy* thus examines the state's claim over the "body", physically as well as politically, as a measure

of its political power. The human body is subjected to what Foucault defines as the “machinery of power” that “...explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it...” for dominion by the state (Foucault 138).

The analysis of *Incident at Vichy* thus shows that the discriminations are based on race and religion. The next section of my analysis will examine the resistance of the individual against the nature of such political persecutions and how such resistance is associated with Miller’s advocacy of moral accountability in the face of human indifference and the incapacitating evils of mankind.

3.6 Resistance and the Individual

The Beckettian element in Miller’s play is pervasive with the overwhelming sense of inertia enveloping the characters’ ability to act. In the introduction, the characters are sitting on the bench with “...attitudes expressive of their personalities and functions, frozen there like members of a small orchestra...” (*Incident at Vichy* 1). Miller’s emphasis has always been on the morally right course of action and the ability to act within one’s conscience on the given situation. As such, according to Bigsby, “Miller cannot rest in such a tension. Not to rebel against the absurd is to succumb to it, to compound it. It must be possible to resist and in resisting discover the values which seem to have been evacuated from the world. The gesture, when it comes, is arbitrary; hence its shock value” (*A Critical Study* 250). Thus, the act of resisting would be the morally right action for the Miller hero to rise in the midst of hopelessness and futility in *Incident at Vichy*.

It must be stressed that all the characters in the play want to escape and to resist their oppressors but they are unable to overcome inertia. Perhaps it is the Foucauldian influence of discipline that has overpowered them so much that they are afraid to rebel against the

superstructures because of the repercussions they would have to endure if they resist. Unlike Proctor in *The Crucible* who boldly challenges the Salem theocracy, the individuals here have been conditioned by the state/military hegemony to remain subservient to the status quo without being able to challenge the 'natural' order of the day.

The persecution of the individual based on race and religion thus forms a focal point in the early part of the play and is a precursor to Miller's concern for the accountability of the individual and complicity with the atrocities committed against humanity. From Bayard's anxiety about his Peruvian identity being found out to Lebeau's fears that his Jewish identity would be exposed, Miller's characters in *Incident at Vichy* serve as a reminder of the collective responsibility of the individuals in symbiotic relationship, as well as the organic connectivity between individuals and society in a time of social and political upheaval like the Holocaust. Miller's concern in *Vichy* is that it should be more than just an informative and historical performative play that is didactic and oratorical; Miller also brings home the point of the destructive and transformative dimensions of the Holocaust on the individual and society. The theme of social responsibility to resist the evils threatening the social and moral fabric has been at the forefront of many of Miller's major plays such as *All My Sons*, *The Crucible* and *Death of A Salesman*. Resistance is therefore necessary; that the playwright sees the social function and contribution of drama succeeding in its social role of either accommodating, complying with or resisting the situation. For Miller, writing a play is a form of challenge to the issues of his time and is possessed of social responsibility in form and function.

To write after such events, was to face a challenge, for how could art itself be said to have survived. Viewed in one way the ironies of the theatre of the absurd (as presented by Samuel Beckett and Eugene

Ionesco) were a logical response. But for Miller this was to make art complicit with the forces it existed to resist. In the presence of such defining events, art, Miller implies, has a special responsibility. It either accommodates itself to, acquiesces in, social and metaphysical irony or it resists it. And in that context theatre becomes central as a direct expression of a fundamental community of mutually dependent individuals (Biggsby, Introduction, *Cambridge Companion to Arthur Miller* 5).

Miller's *Incident at Vichy* is therefore not just a play about commitment, acknowledgement of guilt and "...immorality associated with Vichy, France during the war but also about evil writ large" (Balakian 129). It is a social system of injustice that has to be stopped and Miller provides a choice for the characters in his play to either submit to the pressures of conformity or to act against the system. Moral responsibility and freedom of choice is therefore an option for the detainees and as such Miller leaves the option open for them. It is their own decisive action that will rescue them from imminent death. These actions, whether redemptive or otherwise reveal the character's depth and integrity. Balakian points out on Lawrence Lowenthal's observation⁶⁶:

They are all faced with undeniable limits, but within these limits they are always free to act, the Jew can resist or submit; the German can murder or rebel. Indeed, the structural movement of the play is existential in that the pressure to choose – to defy or cooperate with the Nazis – becomes inevitable. The only solution to the plague that Miller depicts is responsible and free human action; *Incident at*

Vichy affirms that we cannot flee from commitment and responsibility into determinism. (Balakian 128)

Miller is therefore advocating resistance that is based on morality as a guiding principle of determined action. Kee shares a similar concern. In both *Vichy* and *The Big Purge*, we see examples of the hegemony of the state exemplified by the German forces in Vichy and the Machiavellian Chief Minister of Equaland. The persecutions in Equaland which are predominantly racial, religious and cultural in nature, are inherently similar to the persecutions in Miller's *Vichy*. From archaic racial laws to the use of state enforcement in the detention of Jews, we see the mobilization and deployment of the Vichy French police and their systematic selection, roundup and mass arrest of individuals suspected of being a Jew. All this accurately portrays Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony and Foucault's mechanisms of state power. Miller was interested in what he defines as the "...contradiction between an efficient technological machine and the flowering of human nature, of human personality." He further adds that "It's for that reason that I am interested in the Nazi machine, the Nazi mechanism" (Roudanne, *Conversations with Arthur Miller* 145).

While Miller has shown that in times of oppression and persecution there can be moments of human grace and salvation, he was also intensely curious about the ideology of the Nazi party and its obsession with fascism, anti-Semitism and biological racism. Miller views that the Nazi ideology had "...annihilated an idea of human connectiveness and this was the tainted inheritance they had passed on, along with the literal and symbolic victory of the machine over human nature" (Bigsby, *A Critical Study* 253). George Orwell's 1984 iconic image of a boot stamping⁶⁷ on a human face is a powerful visual depiction of Miller's concern. is interested in the complexities of human oppression and compassion,

and the psychological and moral dimensions of an individual's action/inaction. In *Incident at Vichy*, Miller's proposed solution is clear: it is a morally guided act (one could view it as a form of defiance/resistance) that must be undertaken to bring morality and kindness to an otherwise cruel and indifferent world. To do so, Miller's moral hero must rise to the occasion; and in the play, this hero is none other than Von Berg.

3.7 Miller's Moral Hero: Von Berg

Miller's hero, Von Berg, is a Catholic Austrian Prince whom the authorities randomly arrested while he was buying a newspaper. The character of Von Berg was actually based on a story told by a friend of Miller's wife, Inge Morath. He knew a Prince from one of the oldest noble houses in Austria and who had been blacklisted by the Nazi party due to his resistance. This resonated with Miller who wrote in his autobiography of how human brutality must be resisted by a moral force. This was an important question for Miller to answer as he delved within the human psyche, to find the spirit of resistance to evil.

I had been taught to recognize danger – even where it did not exist – but not how to defend against it. The dilemma would last a long time.

The same quandary, and the effort to locate in the human species a counterforce to the randomness of victimization, underlies the political aspect of my play *Incident at Vichy*. But as history has taught that force can only be moral. Unfortunately. (Miller, *Timebends* 27)

Miller's inspiration for Von Berg, Prince Josef Von Schwarzenberg is ideal because he embodied "...an elemental resistance to the fascist spirit" (*Timebends* 538). The depiction of Von Berg as Miller's moral hero, fitted well with the America of the politically

turbulent 1960s when *Incident at Vichy* was produced. In Von Berg, Miller saw a transcendent individual who could serve as the saviour of the people by providing them with a moral compass. In Balakian's analysis, Von Berg is the ideal Miller hero representative of the sixties because of the then fracturing of morality in society, past and present. Miller explains:

That faceless, unknown man would pop up in my mind when I read about the people in Queens refusing to call the police while a woman was being stabbed to death on the street outside their windows. He would form himself in the air when I listened to delinquent boys whose many different distortions of character seemed to spring from a common want of human solidarity. Friends troubled by having to do things they disapproved of brought him to mind, people for whom the very concept of choosing their actions was a long forgotten thing. Wherever I felt the seemingly implacable tide of human drift and the withering of will, in myself and in others, this faceless person came to mind. And he appears most clearly and imperatively amid the jumble of emotions surrounding the Negro in this country, and the whole unsettled moral problem of the destruction of the Jews in Europe. (cited in Balakian 129)

Morality has always been Miller's choice for structural change in society and the individual. But it is quite surprising that in *Vichy*, the choice of a moral hero would be the Prince. From *All My Sons*, *A View from the Bridge*, *Death of a Salesman*, *The Crucible* to *The Price*, Miller's choice of a protagonist had always been someone from humble beginnings emerging out of the working class and possessing a salt of the earth

disposition. In addition, the characters were also burdened with a certain dilemma and must undergo a test of character and tribulation before they could claim their moral victory. In *Vichy*, Von Berg is born privileged into a gentleman's life. He does not worry about his detention as his papers are valid and secure, and aside from a few lost hours in the morning, he is safe. Von Berg is not affected by the anxieties of the group, and asks innocently whether they had been arrested for being Jewish. He apologizes for his embarrassing question when Bayard asserts that nobody is Jewish in their group. While Von Berg is Miller's choice of the moral hero, he does not arrive at this state without going through inner conflict which leads to realization and understanding. The play's central focus is the philosophical debate between Leduc, a psychiatrist⁶⁸ from the Psychoanalytic Institute in Vienna who was detained with the rest of the individuals, and Von Berg.

Leduc's debate with Von Berg starts with his frustrations at being arrested. Leduc blames his wife for his predicament. There are hints of a strained marriage which add to the frustration and stress that Leduc is feeling. His disdain for his wife started when he complains that she was the cause for his arrest. He was on his way to getting her toothache medication, when he was arrested. Thinking that he might be sent to the furnaces, Leduc insists that Von Berg inform his wife of his fate. Von Berg refuses to do it, not out of guilt but perhaps out of the hope that Leduc could be saved. As he listens to Leduc, Von Berg's compassion is aroused as he is truly concerned for the fate of Leduc's two children. Miller scholars⁶⁹ have sometimes labelled Leduc as an opportunist and a villain who had used his skills as a psychologist to influence the Major and Von Berg to help him to escape. Von Berg's mercy is intertwined with his sense of hope. In the play, he is the compassionate man. At the beginning of the play, he was the only one who showed concern for the elderly Jew. Von Berg believes wholeheartedly in the role of ideals as he

stresses to Leduc: “ But what is left if one gives up one’s ideals? What is there?” (61). Leduc’s frustrations are soon revealed when he emphasizes how individuals are not accountable for their actions, and their ideals and conscience are only an insignificant part of themselves compared to the fuller brutality of their actions. Leduc thus regrets being born “...before the day when man had accepted his own nature; that he is *not* reasonable, that he is full of murder, that his ideals are the little tax he pays for the right to hate and kill with a clear conscience” (*Vichy*, 65). According to Bigsby, the sum of Leduc’s anger is “...his failure to [recognize] that we exist after the Fall” (*A Critical Study* 257).

The prince is frustrated that Leduc does not regard the potential goodness of an individual at all. He offers his friendship to Leduc who pessimistically explains that every individual would have, at one point or another, discriminated against someone:

Even 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, despite your decency. And that is why there is nothing and will be nothing – until you face your own complicity with this...your own humanity” (*Incident at Vichy*, 66).

Hearing this, the prince vehemently denies that he has ever discriminated against anyone, swearing how he would rather put a gun to his head before committing such an act. But Leduc dismisses Von Berg’s heartfelt protestation and shatters his idealism and hope by exposing the truth of Baron Kessler, Von Berg’s cousin who was a Nazi and responsible for removing all the Jewish doctors from The Psychoanalytic Institute in Vienna. Terribly and disillusioned with the state of things, Von Berg is overwhelmed with guilt at the thought of his cousin’s role in the discrimination against Jewish doctors. Leduc then drives

home his point in perhaps the most important lines in the play, proclaiming to Von Berg: “It’s not your guilt I want, it’s your responsibility – that might have helped... You might have done something then, with your standing, and your name and your decency, aside from shooting yourself! (66-67).

In a dramatic twist of events, Von Berg offers his pass to Leduc redeeming himself by giving his papers to a certainly condemned individual. It is an unexpected move that surprises even Leduc. Not only does he give up his papers, Von Berg also remembers the ring that was entrusted to him by the Boy who wanted to give it to his mother. This act of sacrifice by Von Berg is notable as it represents a form of personal resistance against the current systematic system of oppression. In a way, Von Berg’s acting against the overwhelming inertia could be interpreted as not only a form of resistance against the hegemony of the state but also against the notion of physical discipline. Unlike the other prisoners and even the German Major who have given up resisting, Von Berg’s action is guided solely by his moral conscience; this ultimately challenges the system of bodily discipline and renders the classification of Leduc meaningless. Thus, moral action can overcome the actions of the disciplined body. Von Berg takes it on himself to break the inertia by his action in the final scene.

Miller’s moral hero is thus made; he regains his self in an arbitrary act of moral courage and integrity that transcends the chaos and degradation of human life in times of conflict. The final scene from the play shows a stunned Leduc accepting Von Berg’s pass and fleeing for his life. Von Berg urgently reminds him about the Boy’s gold ring for his mother as he leaves.

VON BERG, *in a strangely angered whisper, motioning him out:*

Take it! Go!

Von Berg sits quickly on the bench, taking out the wedding ring.

Leduc stares at him, a horrified look on his face. Von Berg hands him the ring.

Number nine Rue Charlot. Go.

LEDUC, *in a desperate whisper:* what will happen to you?

VON BERG, angrily waving him away: Go, go!

Leduc backs away, his hands springing to cover his eyes in the awareness of his own guilt. (Miller, Incident at Vichy 69)

Von Berg's final act is done in full knowledge of its consequences. But he does as it is the only act that would redeem him, not only from the guilt of complicity but most importantly, from moral inaction on his part. He is thus transformed from being a mere spectator to an individual who dares to sacrifice his life for a complete stranger. His sacrifice for Leduc is also indirectly an act of resistance against the hegemony of the state and a personal moral triumph over the oppression of the individual by forces far greater than he could comprehend.

Moving on to Kee's play, *The Big Purge*, I shall first contextualize Kee's motivations for writing *The Big Purge* before moving on to the analysis of the play according to the defined research perimeters.

3.8 Background to Kee Thuan Chye's *The Big Purge*

Kee Thuan Chye's *The Big Purge* was staged on 11th -14th May 1998 at Essex University Theatre, England. It had an entirely foreign cast with the exception of Kee and his wife, Lim Choy Wan.

In *The Big Purge* Kee explores the machinations of political power, the abuse of it, and the relationship between the three biggest ethnicities⁷⁰ in fictional Equaland, although it is clear that Equaland refers to Malaysia. Here, Kee associates "Equas" with the Malays (Malay Malaysians), the "Chingchongs" with the Chinese Malaysians the "Inayahs" with Indian Malaysians. In a play that focuses again on the Malaysian society, Kee presents a stinging political satire more intense than *The Big Purge*. While depicting the struggles of five individuals who are caught in the middle of political and racial strife, Kee's approach in the dramatization of conflict is through a multi-faceted strategy in which he depicts the socio-economic and socio-political afflictions in *The Big Purge* as a multi-racial and multi-cultural dilemma faced by individuals from all levels of society. Kee has said that this play was written as a response to the Malaysian government's crackdown on the opposition in 1988. Dubbed "Operasi Lalang"⁷¹, the government's mass crackdown did not go down well with Kee whose play is a direct response to what he sees as an abuse of power by the state and a violation of democratic rights. While Kee's *1984 Here and Now* is an allegory of Malaysian politics and society, *The Big Purge* is an even sharper critique of the Malaysian government with direct reference to the 1988 raid on dissenters, thus making it not just allegorical but a stinging political satire on Malaysian politics and society.

The Big Purge in essence traces the struggles of two couples, Thang Rong and Joan Thang, (who are Chingchongs) Runid and Mawiza (who are Equas), and Ravinen, who

is an Inayah. Rong, a loyal citizen is hesitant about emigrating to Australia but his wife Joan is bent on leaving. Runid and Mawiza on the other hand are liberal Equas who work with the H.O.P.E. Movement. Its aim is to remove the racially unjust policies of Equaland. Ravinen meanwhile, is also planning on emigrating if his long-awaited promotion goes to an Equa again. Through such examples within a targeted segment of society, Kee then depicts what he sees as the *dalang*⁷² or the master puppeteer of political events in Equaland. The portrayal of the *dalang* by Kee is much more complicated than it appears to be as the *dalang* is not just the narrator of the story but also the manipulator of the “puppets” (the ministers); however, nothing else is known about his identity. The other manipulator of political power in the country is the evil Chief Minister; he, in turn, gives instructions to the same puppets who hold ministerial positions such as the Minister without Portfolio, Minister of Information, Minister of Education, and the Minister of Home Affairs. Together, the common people represented by the main characters suffer from the diabolical schemes engineered by the ministers who would do anything and everything to remain in power.

The evil shenanigans of the Chief Minister, who oversees the political machinations of Equaland, range from orchestrating racial flare-ups in society to making subtle threats to other races by means of fanning racial sentiments and racial superiority. Such scaremongering has succeeded in creating a civilly obedient and subservient society. Trapped in this oppressive political system that creates a divisive society from the marginalization of minority ethnic groups and a propagation of policies that promote institutionalized racism, Kee aims to resist the superstructures of state hegemony by dismantling the false notions of nationhood highlighted in the play, that are based on the premise of ethnicity, race, and culture of the dominant race. Kee’s critique is therefore a

reflection of what he conceives contemporary politics and race relations in Malaysia to be.

The Big Purge foregrounds a satirical and polemical critique of characters working inside anti-democratic state-apparatuses who appropriate cultural discourse in order to establish an oppressive domination against minority claims to human rights and justice... Given Malaysia's repressive political climate, *The Big Purge* is indubitably candid in its criticism of an autocratic deployment of race, class, religions, and gender ideologies to demonise, oppress, impoverish, and aggrandise different segments of Malaysian society. (Lim, *Introduction to the Big Purge*, 6 - 7)

In view of the obvious political and social criticism directed against the country, Kee's *Malaysia Equaland* is also interesting. While *Equaland* literally means "land of the Equas", it could be deciphered semantically as the land of "Equals" or "Equal land" which would be a contradiction (perhaps a deliberate one) on the part of the playwright. As Kee has always written about racial discrimination, race-based national policies that discriminate against other races, and the suppression of the freedom of expression, his handling of this subject is nothing new. He has used his political plays as a showpiece of how the subject of race and religion is manipulated by the ruling political front⁷³ to maintain its position of power over a multi-racial and multi-cultural society with a divide-and-rule strategy similar to the British colonial policy prior to the independence of Malaya.

Kee has said that "I had to walk a narrow tightrope between depicting a society as it is and what it could be or would be in a totalitarian State. I am writing about things that

move me – racism, unequal opportunities, backwardness, our closing ourselves up, about curbs to freedom of speech and expression” (cited in Ten 95).

Having written *1984 Here and Now* as an allegorical political play that focuses on Malaysia, Kee takes things one level higher with *The Big Purge*. Kee portrays a dysfunctional political system that sustains its political power from the manipulation of issues concerning race and religion. Such manipulation is used to further divide the people while propagating a siege mentality syndrome to weaken national unity. A false sense of dependence of the people on the government is then formed and entrenched by the multiple race-based parties that further exacerbate the issue of national unity. Kee’s *1984* deals with this, and more specifically, with the issues of racially discriminatory policies of the power-hungry federal government that is corrupt, and intolerant of dissent.

Kee has maintained that his disillusionment at that time was great. The repercussions of the government crackdown could be seen at the socio-political level in Malaysia.

I was disillusioned because of Operasi Lalang⁷⁴. What Mahathir was also doing was to reinforce the culture of fear. A few newspapers were suspended, 100 over people were taken under the ISA, people were scared shit after that. That was one of the lowest points in our history I would say. A lot of people felt there was no more hope and that’s why a lot of them emigrated. It was a difficult time. (Kee, Personal Interview)

3.9 The *Big Purge* - Kee's Political Idealism

The Big Purge is thus a political play that forms the continuity of Kee's moral and philosophical stand against the evils of corruption, nepotism, racial discrimination, the stifling of dissent, the abuse of power by the state and the manipulation of racial and religious issues to further preserve the interest of the elite in the ruling government. It is only by writing political plays that Kee could further his crusade of creating a certain political awareness among Malaysians about the current situation afflicting the nation⁷⁵. However, Kee has not discounted the limitations of the reach and influence of traditional theatre in the 21st century.

It's more important now to try and provoke Malaysians to think about the political situation so that something might be done. But of course, when you do something like this you are preaching to the converted because such is the short reach of theatre that you don't go out to the people who need to reflect on the issue at hand. I guess one needs to come up with a kind of theatre that would go out to reach the masses; you have to take it to them. Take the theatre out of the auditorium, but we don't have that at the moment. (Kee, Personal Interview)

While traditionally-staged commercial drama in Malaysia has undergone a revival in the last decade⁷⁶, the audiences have remained relatively small. Kee sees the weakness of staged plays as they do not reach really the masses as compared to other media and genres of performing arts that are technologically associated and possessing a wider youth appeal. In the current setting of the 21st century, traditional drama that sets out to evoke thought and critical response is unfortunately losing out to the more diverse forms

of modern entertainment that utilize digital media and the web as their springboard⁷⁷. Nevertheless, Kee still sees theatre as providing an alternative view with its more thought-provoking content in relation to the current wide spectrum of performing arts entertainment presently available.

In some cases it can be seen to be a dying art but there is nothing to replace it. There is nothing like a real live show which presents things you can relate to immediately, which engages you in many levels and involves all your senses. I also think the theatre has been appropriated by people not from the theatre, appropriated by political leaders and for them now. An event to launch 1Malaysia⁷⁸ for e.g. is a theatrical event. It's staged and it can reach out to a lot more people because of the medium of television and the media. More and more of these events are so much larger and they impact more on people. The real theatre itself, the role that they play is in danger of being diminished. You still need to have that alternative. More so now. It's more than just providing entertainment. Theatre has to provoke, to make people aware of what is going on and to provide them with alternative experiences, views, and vision.

You see, we tend to think that if a country or a society were small, materially progressive, developed, you would see theatre flourishing. Yes, that's quite true but I think when society is too economically advanced, the people who go to the theatre are those who expect to see entertainment (clubs) and that is not necessarily effective. That is not the role of theatre; theatre has to be part of the community.

Sharing can be an experience. Then going to the theatre becomes a political experience. (Kee, Personal Interview)

Kee's view is that plays are more than a form of entertainment; they can and should convey a certain social message that transcends their basic entertainment value. Thus for Kee, his political plays are not only an art form but an artistic performance that blends a creative theatrical production with a clearly satirical and parodical stance that delivers a sharp political commentary as the main message of the play.

3.10 The Politics of *The Big Purge*

The play opens with a nameless Actor coming from behind a Wayang Kulit⁷⁹ screen and giving a prologue to the audience on the realities of Equaland. Immediately, the actor reassures the audience that whatever that is performed does not broach on any sensitive issues, and is not “seditious” or “obscene”, although it touches on issues concerning ethnicity, it is definitely not “racist” in nature. The Actor then reassures the audience once again that all that is presented is merely fictional, bearing no relation to anyone living or dead. The Actor almost divulges his name but checks himself for fear of “Special Branch” officers around. He then introduces his other actors-in-arms, all wearing hoods to remain anonymous as they enter the stage as an attempt to cover their identities.

Kee's presentation of the dramatic prologue to his play once again highlights his concern with socio-political matters such as religion, ethnicity, and politics. By constantly reassuring the audience that they should not be worried about their safety, the prologue, in fact, creates an air of apprehension, thus making them wary of their surroundings. Kee relates this atmosphere of apprehension to the Malaysian political scenario. From the

1970s to the 1990s Malaysians had to be cautious when speaking of “sensitive topics” concerning race, religions, politics and the special privileges of the Malay Muslim/Bumiputera majority in Malaysia. But Kee immediately discredits the prologue as having anything to do with Malaysia as the Actor states, all that is presented is merely “fiction.” Again, there is a contradiction when, in the second-half of the prologue, the Actor gives snippets of information regarding the OSA⁸⁰ (Official Secrets Act of 1972), the May 1969 racial riots in Malaysia, dubbed “Woeful Wednesday” in the play, and how the “new laws”, an obvious reference to the special economic privileges of the Bumiputeras, made other races feel like they were treated unequally as citizens of the country.

Thus, Kee deliberately masks everything to create an atmosphere of secrecy and anonymity. By subtly referring the events to Malaysia while maintaining all that is presented as “fiction”, the playwright makes a strongly-veiled critique of Malaysia’s autocratic laws by creating an atmosphere of fear and suspicion. Kee’s dramatic opening thus sets the mood of the play: the tone and setting of the performance which are obviously political and “sensitive” in nature. Kee reinforces the ambience by dropping terms in the prologue such as “SB” (Special Branch), “OSA” (Official Secrets Acts), “seditious or obscene”, “racist” and “racial riots”. Providing tiny snippets of information and then withdrawing or denying their links is one of Kee’s unique traits as a dramatist; this method actually and effectively frames the political context in the mind of his audience.

3.11 Hegemony, Power, and the Authoritative State in *The Big Purge*

In the play, we see instances of political power play, abuse of political power and the creation of a hegemony by the state to consolidate its influence and interests. In the discussion of power and hegemony, Gramsci in his theory of Hegemony⁸¹ elaborates that

there are two methods of political control, domination and ideological hegemony. Both are forms of ideological control by the political state⁸² which needs consent from its people in the long run to maintain its hold and power. Thus, by having popular support, the political state possesses legitimacy to govern. While the political state maintains its physical domination through its police and armed forces, ideological hegemony is maintained through a system of values that favours the ruling class which in turn forms a certain accepted consciousness in the masses; this is then accepted as a form of principle or general truth by the people. Domination and ideological hegemony by the state are thus two methods employed to uphold and maintain the power of the ruling elite and the spread of its governing philosophy. According to Gramsci, the state, while maintaining its sovereignty, has to:

...maintain a certain type of civilisation and of citizen (and hence of collective life and of individual relations), and to eliminate certain customs and attitudes and to disseminate others, then the Law will be its instrument for this purpose (together with the school system, and other institutions and activities). It must be developed so that it is suitable for such a purpose – so that it is maximally effective and productive of positive results. (Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks* 246)

For Gramsci, society, as a whole, was made up of three components, the relations in production, coercive and coercive institutions and civil society (non-coercive institutions). Gramsci further expanded on Marx's theory of power and its division of society that is represented by a superstructure and an economic structure by dividing the former into coercive institutions such as the government, armed forces and the police, and the non-

coercive institutions such as political parties, religious bodies, schools, trades union, clubs, and even the family unit. In Gramsci's view, the ruling class maintains its dominion over the rest by domination with the consent of the masses; coercive state institutions are used only as a last resort if the masses do not fall in line with the ideology of the ruling class. With such a power structure in place, control over society is maintained by ideological hegemony and regulated by domination. The inclusion of the influential power of consensus that forms the foundation of Gramsci's theory of ideological hegemony makes it deeper and more analytical than Marx's analysis of capitalism. In addition, Gramsci theorizes that with the ruling class maintaining its hold on the masses through consent, "organic intellectuals" (Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks* 4), average working class citizens who serve the ruling class are therefore important as a dominant force to revolutionize society and overthrow the ruling capitalist who exploit the means of production of the working class. The roles of "organic intellectuals" and "traditional intellectuals"⁸³ (academicians, philosophers, teachers and learned individuals who are independent and neutral) are therefore essential to counter the popular consensus of the bourgeois ruling class.

In *The Big Purge*, instances of power manipulations by the state are seen in such incidents as the one where an Equa is killed in Hill Road. The Chief Minister of Equaland instructs his political assistants to increase the tensions arising from that incident by relating it to a racial issue.

CM: I have a brilliant idea! Tell the police to treat this as something more serious than it is. Cordon off the Hill Road area. Make the issue into something fairly big.

MWP: Make it into a fairly big issue!

CM: That's what I said , dumbo! Spread the idea that something terrible is happening, but only the idea. Create an atmosphere of tension. Make the people confused, make them scared. Get me the Minister of Information. Quick!

(Kee, *The Big Purge* 26)

In a bid to consolidate political power in Equaland, the Chief Minister and his Cabinet Ministers turn a small incident into a nationwide panic that could potentially destroy Equaland. Preying on the insecurities of the people, the Chief Minister and his accomplices from the other race-based political parties manipulate the issue into a race-based conflict, striking fear and apprehension in the hearts and minds of the people who believe that the racial animosity between the Equas and non-Equas could erupt at any given time. They believe that the collapse of society is inevitable. By stoking the fires of racial conflict, the politicians of Equaland hope to achieve political domination over the country by the propagation of a siege mentality among the different races; by doing so, ideological control could be enforced and accepted by the people of Equaland.

Here, the state represents the coercive institutions in Gramsci's theory of Hegemony. The representative of the ruling class is none other than the Chief Minister. He is seen to be fully in control of the situation with various state coercive institutions such as the police and media organisations at his political disposal. Such institutions reinforce the domination of the ruling class and perpetuate the Chief Minister's hegemony of power. In the following scene after the Hill Road incident, the Chief Minister plans for his next course of action by alluding to it as a card game where he has to keep his "cards close to his chest" (Kee, *The Big Purge* 29) and not reveal his "trump card" (Kee, *The Big Purge*

29). Until then, he has to “strike while the iron is hot” and by this, the dalang provides a glimpse of the insidious nature of the Chief Minister’s plan in the following lines:

DALANG: (Sings)

Force the issue, get the tissue,
Soon the shit will hit the fan.
On the verge of one big purge,
Only one man knows the plan.
Then when the ciku turns ripe and brown,
Wipe them out, flush them down.
One bold sweep, one move, and znuuuup –
Only an idiot can screw it all up.
(Music builds up till blackout on screen.)
(Kee, *The Big Purge* 29)

The Chief Minister’s “plan” is further elaborated in scene two of the play. It involves the spreading of rumours of a riot by the state to create political instability and social unrest. In the scene, an “impressionistic tableaux” is set up, the stage is separated into three separate areas where a) a couple is having tea, (b) a news vendor is plying his trade, and (c) three women are chatting, one of them being Joan Thang. The Chief Minister’s plan is soon revealed when “a rumour-monger” enters and goes straight to the couple and “whispers” something to them. Soon, the “rumour-monger” spreads the news of the “riot” to a jogger, a couple, the news vendor. The false news, created to alarm the public and the whole of Equaland in general, travels quickly through the crowd. News of a “riot” and “curfew” in the city alarms all in Equaland and soon everyone panics at the thought of a possible racial riot. This anxiety is reflected in Joan and Rong’s relationship, with the

former being overly pessimistic at the political turn of events in Equaland. Scared, anxious, and confused at the possibility of a social collapse and an unstable future for their unborn child, Joan plans to leave Equaland for a better future in another country.

JOAN: I'm scared, Rong. They say there's going to be trouble. It won't be peaceful living here any more. I'm worried for the baby. And I'm worried for you too. You're getting so involved with H.O.P.E., saying all those things about the Government, you know the Government doesn't like it.

RONG: Things will be all right, JOAN.

JOAN: And what if there's a racial riot? I'm so scared. I want to get away from this country. Go somewhere safe.

RONG: You're safe here, Joan. *(no explanation)*

(He embraces her.)

(Kee, The Big Purge 35)

Joan's primary concerns centre on the possibility of a racial riot and the safety of their unborn child. Her reaction proves that the state's propaganda of fear is successful in creating instability and chaos in society with the sole intention of disrupting the opposition. Agents under the authority of the Chief Minister have spread the false news of a possible racial riot with the intention of clinging to power. It is through instability, turmoil and violence that the state has the legitimate reason and locus standi to step in and to act and curb any potential danger or threat to society and nation. By utilizing a "pre-emptive strike⁸⁴ strategy", the state can then move in to consolidate its hegemonic influence over society under the guise of maintaining law and order. In the next scene, when the truth of the killing is revealed to be a misunderstanding between individuals, the Chief Minister ignores the truth and seizes the

opportunity to take control over his political foes and further deepen total hegemonic control over the state by instructing the Minister of Information to suppress information about the incident and heighten public panic.

CM: Go and publicise that the suspects have been arrested. But don't let out the motive for the killing. Very important point. No one must know. Say that the police are still investigating. Keep the people in the dark, make the atmosphere more tense. Understand?

MOI: Certainly, Sran Ti.

CM: Now get me the Minister of Education.

MOI: Jolly good, Sran Ti.

(Kee, *The Big Purge* 37)

The above excerpt highlights how the Chief Minister has total control over the mass media of the state, the police, the Attorney-General, judiciary and other ministers with portfolios such as Education, Information and Home Affairs. All of these positions only serve to further the Chief Minister's interest in the state as the portfolios are important positions that affect the lives of the people as well as the important administrative aspects of Equaland. As an individual as well as the head of state, the Chief Minister himself is the key authoritative figure and his hegemonic influence and power surpass that of other individuals and state institutions.

The blatant abuse of power by the Chief Minister is even acknowledged by the Minister of Education in a condescending manner. The Chief Minister laughs sadistically when the Minister of Education mentions that he (the Minister of Education) seems to be "attending to matters other than education" (Kee, *The Big Purge* 38). His job scope includes heading

a “peeping-tom brigade” that “caught fifty couples for illicit close proximity in the state of Kruak” to training “secret mob squads” that stage demonstrations “to [banning] Inayahs from dancing the wadata makyam⁸⁵ in Temaju”. With the hegemonic influence of the state bearing down on the citizens of Equaland, the Chief Minister maintains order through what Foucault defines as “discipline” and “punishment” by the authorities to maintain order in society as well as to have control and power over individuals. According to Foucault⁸⁶, discipline:

...produces subjected and practiced bodies, ‘docile’ bodies. Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience). In short, it dissociates power from the body; on the one hand, it turns it into an ‘aptitude,’ a ‘capacity,’ which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection. If economic exploitation separates the force and the product of labour, let us say that disciplinary coercion establishes in the body the constructing link between an increased aptitude and an increased domination.

(Discipline and Punish 138)

Here, the state’s exertion of discipline on the people of Equaland controls their thinking and behaviour, making them “docile”, while at the same time, discipline also increases their level of obedience to the state. Individuals are compelled to follow the laws of the state and not break them, following which they will be punished. Thus, the effects of discipline are two-fold, making this strategy an effective tool for the propagation of state power and influence.

From the pervasive influence of the political power and ideology of the state, its conceived notion of nationhood and national narrative borders largely on a mono-ethnic culture that is similar to the colonial divide-and-rule policy. At the same time, Kee is making references to Malaysia's race-based politics that follow a similar divide-and-rule policy of the British colonial. Through this approach, individuals (Malaysians) are thus disciplined and organized through the dynamics of Malaysian racial politics. In a similar approach, the state in *The Big Purge* moves in to cement its dominance by disciplining and controlling society through the legislation and enforcement of state and federal laws, by-laws and statutes that favour the state. Ironically, the "discipline" exerted by the Chief Minister is a series of efforts that continuously break the law, while he justifies his reasons to stay in power. The play ends on a bleak note with a breaking radio broadcast of the news of the arrest of 250 dissidents under the "Homeland Security Act" further attesting to the powers of the Chief Minister to exercise his authority under the guise of maintaining law and order, an act which clearly does not justify the means.

Such discipline is also seen through several lawless tactics utilized by the Equaland state; these fear-mongering strategies are meant to result in the obedience of society and the individual to the state. This would also involve the handing over of consent to the state whereby such state-imposed discipline is internalised by individuals. Thus, such obedience to the laws of the state would be self-regulated without the need for the state to enforce the law. This is similar to the handing over of individual conscience in Miller's *The Crucible*) and the monopoly of political power by the "Equaland Equa Party", of which the Chief Minister has been head for "donkey's years" (Kee, *The Big Purge* 24). With unchecked political power, the Chief Minister's genius for conjuring plots to destabilize the country is further seen when he unashamedly proclaims to the Minister of Education how the Hill Road issue could be exploited to the hilt, and "if properly

handled,... [could] demonstrate a very educational point for everyone in the country”
(Kee, *The Big Purge* 39).

Thus, the culmination of such hegemonies and discipline seen in the rigidities of the social, economic, political, religious and cultural spheres in Equaland result in the oppression and marginalization of various communities (even between Equas and non-Equas). This is exemplified in several parallel stories that emphasize the superficial unity of Equaland and the extent of such pervasive policies that divide and rule society while further propagating the influence and power of the state and the discipline it enforces to ensure subservience. In one of the stories, Ravinen, an Inayah, is denied promotion to management level despite his dedication and seniority at the firm. This alludes to certain racially discriminatory policies at his workplace. Ravinen’s friend Runid, an Equa, is instead promoted but he refuses the promotion as he knows Ravinen is a better candidate. His refusal to accept the nomination shows Runid to be an individual with integrity, and is a person who does not believe in racial discrimination. He has no wish to take credit for the work done by others.

Interestingly, Kee takes the discourse of discrimination further by highlighting class discrimination as a common phenomenon prevalent in many middle-class societies. In the play, Kee also criticizes Chinese chauvinism and the strong patrilineal influences on the female gender and the economic disparities between the different economic classes. Rong, who is a non-Equa, is discriminated against because of his ethnicity due to the racial policies of the state. But he is further castigated and looked down upon by his father-in-law, Mr. Khiu, a status-conscious man, and extremely patriarchal in his views. When his daughter, Joan, suffers a miscarriage during a stampede at Hill Road instigated by agents of Equaland, Mr. Khiu immediately blames Rong for not being good enough for his

daughter. His insults to Rong are laced with derogatory remarks aimed at his social status, lack of filial piety, lack of wealth, and inability to provide material comforts for his daughter.

MR KHIU: It's your fault, and you're not even man enough to admit it. I always knew you were not good enough for my daughter. I never wanted her to marry you. Your father was only a lousy bank clerk.

MRS KHIU: How many times did you come and visit us after you were married? You are not even a good son-in-law.

MR KHIU: What did you have to offer my daughter? When I got married, I made sure I had everything ready for my wife. She had a house to live in, fully paid for. But the house you're staying in I had to lend you money for the down payment.

RONG: I didn't want to buy a house yet. You insisted.

MR KHIU: You ungrateful bastard! I lent you money and you talk like this. You dare to talk. You still haven't paid me back all the money – 50,000 and interest free. I could have invested the money and made some prof –

RONG: You bloody Chingchong, all you think of is money! You can take it and go to hell, go to Australia, wherever! Go! Go!

(Kee, *The Big Purge* 61)

Overly obsessed with a male heir to continue the family name, Mr. Khiu has plans afoot for his future grandson and even warns his daughter that all of his property will be given to charity if she does not produce a grandson. He constantly makes crude references to the female gender as being inferior and lambasts his children for being useless for not

producing grandsons. Such anxiety drives Joan into believing that by having a son, she will redeem her self-worth and make her father proud of her.

Kee thus demonstrates that the hegemony of the political state is not only evident in the manipulation of political power by the politicians but on a closer and more intimate level, the family as the most basic unit in society, practises gender discrimination that is as intense and repressive as in state politics. Class discrimination shown by the Khius towards Rong is more personal and emotionally damaging when it is used to discriminate against an individual's economic and social standing. Economic wealth, being a form of power, can then be used to dominate, control, and oppress individuals whose lack of it (in this example Rong) is the perfect reason for the perpetuation of class discrimination. This adds to the many types of discrimination already prevailing in Equaland. From highlighting such hegemonic power structures, I move on to the next section of my analysis of Kee and Miller's plays: how the State forcefully positions itself in this relationship and the counter strategies utilized by the playwrights in the power relations between the individual and the State.

Kee thus not only satirizes the state hegemony and its economic, social, cultural and religious oppression of the people that operates through "racist dynamics" but offers another perspective of domination, which is the rejection of hybridity and multiculturalism by characters such as Joan who desperately wants a son, with a Christian name and professes "a true religion" (Kee, *The Big Purge* 35). She rejects her husband's suggestion to give the child a unique name⁸⁷ that is reflective of the three major races of Equaland, thus rejecting the racial categorization of identities according to ethnic names. Joan is horrified at the idea and believes that their child will be "a laughing stock" with such a "one-kind name" (Kee, *The Big Purge* 34). Joan thus rejects the notion of

multiculturalism and hybridity, and remains entrenched in a conservative monolithic racial perspective. This further proves that the ideological hegemony of the state is successful in dividing the people according to fixed racial categories, and fostering the belief that anything that does not fit into such formal categories is deemed deviant.

In other parallel stories of the play, Kee's emphasis on the multiplicity of voices further emphasizes the anxieties of discriminatory policies that he was evidently trying to highlight as the downside of racial politics and stereotyping of races in Equaland. Such fragile unity maintained by coercive politics emphasizes the elements of colonialist divide and rule that is adopted by the ruling state as a means of power to administrate the masses while keeping them in check.

Power mongering and the creation of fear seem to be the common political strategy in Equaland. Kee firmly criticizes the state, its policies and the political wrangling in the corridors of power that do not benefit the citizenry. Kee's play cements his political criticism of the state of politics in Malaysia and his disdain for politicians who in his view are inefficient, inept and corrupt while constantly plotting to remain in power at the expense of the people.

3.12 Resistance in *The Big Purge*

Kee's play *The Big Purge* aims to dismantle the hegemonic discourse of race, religion and culture with a performativity that is satirical and parodical and located in an urban setting. Kee constantly depicts such political discourses in the urban-town setting, highlighting the possibility of such discourses being primarily urban-centric and affecting urbanites more deeply than rural people. In the play, the "national issues" discussed by the rulers of the hegemonic state are always contrasted to the hardship faced by the citizens of

Equaland who not only suffer from the inherent racially discriminatory policies but also socio-economic and socio-political oppression by the state. Kee's play is clearly pushing for a deeper understanding of the issues faced by Malaysians in real life and proposes a more liberal, politically enlightened democratic and egalitarian society. *The Big Purge* positions itself to challenge the hierarchical powers of the state as well as to question the direction and purpose of the ideology of the ruling state that emphasizes the discipline and control of structure via the status quo of race, religion and culture. Quite accurately according to Lim: "The play refuses the essentialising, stereotyping, demonising and division of Equaland (Malaysian) society into religious, raced and classed groups. It insists instead, that social and national solidarity must be performed on an intercultural, interracial field" (Lim, Introduction *The Big Purge* 12).

Kee achieves this by creating dissenting characters like Runid, Mawiza, and the protagonist Rong who go against the grain and question the state embodiments and ideologies of race, and religion as fixed definitions. The key characters are taking ownership of their actions and staking their claim on their rights as citizens of the state by dissenting and taking part in civil society and political groups in Equaland like "H.O.P.E". With the full arm of the state exerting discipline through its various agencies and trying to suppress and silence their "rebellion", the characters face the full brunt of the hegemony of the state and are plagued with many life-challenging and difficult issues such as racism, persecution from authorities, and economic marginalization and threats from the "national extremists, the racial extremists and religious extremists" (Kee, *The Big Purge* 79).

It is through such inhibitions that Kee also explores other means of resistance to the hegemony of the Chief Minister and his agencies. This is seen from the use of cultural and traditional performing arts/games that are a representation of Malaysia's cultural heritage.

The examples used for this analysis would be the role of the *dalang* in the traditional Malay shadow puppetry and the Malay *pantun* (poetry). This aspect of Kee's 'cultural resistance' will show the creativity of his approaches in *The Big Purge* to challenge the state's hegemony and power.

3.13 Traditional Performing Arts as Resistance

Kee begins by introducing the audience to an actor who takes on the role of a *dalang* or a traditional Malay puppeteer who controls five characters in the *wayang* or play. Kee's *dalang* in the play differs from the conventional *dalang* of the Malay performing arts who only performs the characters and narrates the story to an audience. The traditional *wayang kulit* plays in the Malaysian east coast state of Kelantan often perform adaptations of *The Mahabarata* and *The Ramayana*. They are steeped in religious and spiritual tradition and the stories narrated and performed always have a moral ending. At times the *dalang* might perform other contemporary tales with a local flavour, with the direction of the story dictated by the master puppeteer himself. In general, the *dalang* in traditional Malay shadow puppet theatre:

...is the genius behind the entire performance. It is he who sits behind the screen and narrates the story. With a traditional orchestra in the background to provide a resonant melody and its conventional rhythm, the Tok Dalang modulates his voice to create suspense thus heightening the drama. Invariably, the play climaxes with the triumph of good over evil. (*Wayang Kulit*)

But in Kee's play, the forces of good do not overcome evil as this would be too common and predictable. Instead, Kee presents the *dalang*⁸⁸ as an all-powerful figure who 'controls' his characters (the politicians) and manipulates the events and lives of people in the second performance. This speaks of the production as a multi-layered production interwoven into the storyline. Seen from a multi-layered angle, the storyline depicts another story teller (the *dalang*) who 'directs' another group of performers (the puppets or politicians like the Chief Minister, Minister Without Portfolio, Minister of Information, Minister of Education and the Minister of Home Affairs), and they in turn manipulate the events in Equaland.

This play-within-a play, with the live audience watching and the *dalang* narrating the events at Equaland is Kee's way of using the traditional concept of a puppet show that "deliberately transgresses and subverts the usual protocols that observe the boundary between the genre of play as textual production and commentary as interventionist socio-political production" (Lim, Introduction to *The Big Purge* 10). This is one key strategy that Kee employs as his resistance, by subverting and juxtaposing the more traditional method of narration in plays with a more unconventional approach. The portrayal and role of the *dalang* in *The Big Purge* clearly mark the shift from the conventional to the unconventional. More importantly, the *dalang*'s role as an "interventionist" marks his influence in matters pertaining to the state's affairs and society in Equaland. The *dalang* emerges from the confines of the traditional to the forefront of national interests in his present 'urban-storyteller' position.

Shirley Lim's analysis speaks of the characters controlled by the puppeteer as a "conceptualisation of Malaysian realpolitik and realisations"; they do not represent actual individuals or politicians but they signify "the workings of good and evil and of state

mastery in a culture-specific teleology” (Lim, Introduction to *The Big Purge* 10-11). Thus, the role of the *dalang* in the play is significant as the *dalang* is the master storyteller who creates the structures of a feudalistic political system. The “characters” that represent that system are merely representations of a political system based on the binary oppositions of good and evil. Lim concludes that Kee’s choice of the *dalang* as the master storyteller/narrator then displaces the playwright as “first producer of the play’s meaning” (Lim, Introduction to *The Big Purge* 11) rather than emphasizing the authority of the creator/playwright in the traditional context.

This approach by Kee seeks to challenge the conventionalities of the traditional drama to perhaps show how an older traditional art form such as the *wayang kulit* is an equally powerful purveyor of meaning and action as performance drama. The *dalang*, while emasculating the creative prowess of the original playwright, empowers Kee at the same time by transferring the context and meaning of the play to the authority of a Malay traditional *wayang*. It validates its role in the production of meaning, in this context, the socio-economic and socio-political landscape of a nation, thus staking its claim in the national narrative of the state. Prominence is thus given to the *dalang* and his way of dictating the overall message of the play. While this would also make Kee appear to be impartial in his depiction of the content of the play since his role has been relegated, the role of the *dalang* goes beyond the usual literal and metaphorical interpretation to that of a storyteller and manipulator who asserts himself in the national affairs of the state regardless of the affiliation. In the example below we see how the *dalang* maintains and propagates control and direction of the characters in Equaland.

(ACTOR PLAYING DALANG goes behind Wayang Kulit screen.
Music strikes up.)

DALANG: In the kingdom of Equaland,

The Chief Minister is king.

(He brings on the CHIEF MINISTER puppet.)

That is parliamentary democracy.

Oooeeeyy!

(The percussion punctuates parts of the following.)

The Chief Minister is a genius.

He has been chief Minister

And head of the ruling Equaland Equa Party,

For donkey's years.

He knows how to handle the ECP

- the Equaland Chingchong Party –

and he's got no problem with the EIP

- the Equaland Inayah Party.

He can put them in his pocket and they also
won't know.

Some more, they dare not say anything
against him.

Even if they don't agree with him,
they'll say, "OK, Sran Ti, you're right, Sran
Ti."

Now the Chief Minister is in his office toilet,
Sitting on his potty and talking to himself.

"What to do?" he is asking himself.

"What to do about those people who have
been criticising the Government?

Want to know whether the people's money

is going into the right pocket.

Left-pocket cannot meh?

And then that so-called reform group

H.O.P.E.:

they want to question the Equaland

Economic Policy and the Constitution,

make fuss about people who are not

qualified getting promoted...

(Kee, *The Big Purge* 23-24)

Kee's depiction of the *dalang*, complete with Malaysian colloquialism, satirical humour, quips, traits, and proverbs, pushes for a distinct and unique play that is creatively crafted using traditional and modern elements. Kee's portrayal of the *dalang* in one scene depicts the master puppeteer describing the Chief Minister planning to create havoc at Equaland by means of an insidious plan. The *dalang*'s narration is laced with descriptive imagery, allusions, metaphors, and even puns in the following scene when the Chief Minister is seen to be 'relieved' while 'relieving' himself in the toilet.

CM: Haaaaah, now I can pass motion in peace.

DALANG: (*Sings*)

Force the issue, get the tissue,

Soon the shit will hit the fan.

On the verge of one big purge,

Only one man knows the plan.

Then when the *ciku* turns ripe and brown,

Wipe them out, flush them down.

One bold sweep, one move, and znuuuup –

Only an idiot can screw it all up.

(Kee, *The Big Purge* 29-30)

The scene may be comical and wry in its humour but there are dark undertones to the proposed plans of the Chief Minister: he plans to execute the plans quickly and with the possible use of violence. The Chief Minister plans to amplify potential conflict so as to create panic and chaos. Since he is the mastermind, nothing can go wrong as he will only carry out the plan when the timing is right. The scatological use of the ripe *ciku* fruit and how it turns “ripe and brown” is likened to the perfect execution of his plan; now he only needs to “wipe them out” and “flush them down.” While some may consider the word “purge” and the image of the fruit with the Chief Minister’s act of defecating crude, the *dalang*’s third-person narration of the Chief Minister’s thoughts and action places the puppeteer as the central figure who has direct information of the main character’s thoughts and action, thus giving credence to the *dalang*’s narration that he is after all, the master storyteller who dictates the thoughts and action of his ‘puppets.’ The Chief Minister’s foul mind and actions are a direct reflection of his diabolical character, and here the *dalang*, like the playwright who writes the script of the play, through his exposition of the Chief Minister’s thoughts, engages the audience and reinforces the view of himself as the powerful omniscient narrator/creator of the text.

The *dalang*’s language is laced with elements of humour and sarcasm, and is parodic of Malaysian politicians and the immoral action they undertake to be in power. In one example, the *dalang* mockingly comments how “[the] Sran Ti CM is a brilliant man, if anyone can control the country, he can, he puts on his thinking cap just like that and lights up in a smile in thirty seconds flat” (Kee, *The Big Purge* 26-27). The *dalang* describes the Chief Minister pompously, saying “The Chief Minister is a genius” or “The Chief Minister

is king” of Equaland. In another example, the *dalang* makes fun of the politicians appointed by the Chief Minister saying “The most brilliant Minister that the CM hand-picked, is a hard-sneezing man with a nose like a prick” Kee, *The Big Purge* 37). Kee positions the play in the Malaysian context and perspective and presents the idea of the *dalang* as a critical commentator of the Malaysian socio-political scene; he is an ‘outsider’ with ‘insider’ views of the intricacies of Malaysian politics. He is the ‘director’ and also a vocal critic of the establishment; at the same time, he also embraces his role passionately and enthusiastically albeit with a certain dark humour. In addition, Kee’s use of the *dalang* of the traditional Malay theatre indirectly subverts and undermines authoritative constructions of power by the political state by revealing the diabolical nature of the Chief Minister and his less than capable ministers, who in reality, are nothing more than puppets under the control of the *dalang*. This brilliant subversion of the Chief Minister’s power as well as the perpetuated racial politics is done in a very subtle way, combining a distinct and authentic Malaysian flavour that is typical of Kee’s brand of humour (what I would term “Kee-ism”). It is a style of narration in dramatic form that draws its strength from the satirical and parodical style that makes Kee’s plays powerful tools in conveying dissent against what he believes to be corrupt, unjust and discriminatory.

Kee’s *dalang* then is an adaptation of the roles of the traditional Malay puppet master. The *dalang* of Kee’s play unites the traditional elements with Kee’s political narrative which amalgamates the old and the new for a fresher approach to an unconventional political drama performance. Kee has borrowed the form and function of the traditional *wayang kulit*, its performative element and manipulated it for his play as a narrative construct that re-creates the political landscape of Equaland, with the *dalang* as the master narrator and performer. Kee’s adaptation of the Malay art form of the *wayang kulit* is perhaps due to the similarities between the genre of drama and the traditional *wayang kulit*

with the element of performance being the main thrust of the two art forms. In addition, through the adaptation, Kee is also symbolically asserting his sense of belonging through the art form which resists the notion of the exclusivity of Malay culture and practice. With one being a modern art form and the other a traditional, Kee's combination produces a play within a play. *The Big Purge* is thus a distinct play that is layered in its production of meaning thus reflecting and reaffirming the complexity of the production of meaning within it.

Another example of the use of traditional performing arts as a form of resistance in *The Big Purge* is the traditional Malay poetry or *pantun*⁸⁹. In that particular scene, Mawiza and Runid take turns to recite a four line *pantun* each and share a *pantun* at the end. In a move to perhaps capture the love between the couple, Kee turns to the traditional Malay *pantun* to portray the intimate love and courtship between the couple as the prying eyes of religious authorities of the hegemonic state, could be monitoring their movement.

MAWIZA: Lipat kain bersimpul pulih
Mari ditaruh haluan perahu
Tempat main boleh dipilih.
Tempat jatuh siapa yang tahu.⁹⁰

RUNID: Orang mengail di lubuk batu
Dapat seekor ikan gelama
Hilang satu, berganti satu,
Masakan sama orang yang lama.⁹¹

RUNID and

MAWIZA: Asap api embun berderai,

Cacak galah haluan perahu

Hajat hati tak mahu bercerai

Kehendak Allah siapalah tahu.⁹²

(Kee, *The Big Purge* 61)

Viewed and analysed collectively, the *pantuns* highlight the personal dilemma and concerns faced by Runid and Mawiza as they struggle to adapt in a society that strictly regulates the moral code of conduct of its people.

The Malay *pantun*, being the traditional form of communication between the couple, is contrasted to the crude political human expression between the Chief Minister and his subordinates. Runid and Mawiza turn to traditional Malay poetry as a form of escape from the drudgery of politics and the rising religious and moral sentiments in Equaland. The Malay verse form offers a soothing respite of calmness and serenity as it depicts the tranquillity of home, nature (the river), and spirituality. Their poetic banter is contrasted to the crude and vulgar language of the Chief Minister whose constant references to faeces and his toilet habits are a reflection of his character and mindset. His debased self-interest is evident in his personal revelations that show him to be a power-mongering dictator who does not care for anyone and anything but fulfilment of his political ambition.

In another example of the use of the performing arts, we see Rong singing a Malay song as a means of expressing his intense emotions and feelings after the traumatic experience of losing his child⁹³. The chaotic and dangerous situation of Equaland, rife with rumours of an all-out racial riot, the possibility of leaving his country forever, and the political efforts of H.O.P.E are troubling Rong as he ponders his future. Feeling sad and dejected, Rong sings a Malay song to Mawiza:

RONG: (*Sings*)

Kapal belayar ke Pulau Pinang,
Singgah berlabuh di hujung tanjung.
Mana boleh hatiku senang?
Sangkarnya satu, dua burung.
Orang belayar lautan Ambun,
Patah tiang dengan kemudi.
Putus benang boleh disambung,
Patah arang sudah sekali.
(Kee, *The Big Purge* 77)

The Malay song can be divided into two parts/stanzas. The first four lines illustrate a journey at sea. The sad image of two birds in a cage suggests the loss of freedom. In the next stanza, a similar journey at sea is described but the ship is incapacitated by the loss of the rudder and mast. The song ends with the view that while broken threads could be attached again, a piece of charcoal that is broken is impossible to be made whole again. Rong here is also lamenting the loss of direction in his life.

The Malay *pantun* and song are thus a strong contrast to the debased language of the Chief Minister. Both activities are a means of providing an intellectual and aesthetic ‘refuge’ for the individuals who are persecuted. The grace and finesse of the *pantun* and song is also contrasted to the chaos and political uncertainties of the country; the verse form captures that subtle moment of personal communication that is intimate and touching; it is a medium that reconnects Runid, Mawiza, and Rong in the midst of the brutal and demeaning racial politics of Equaland. The aesthetics of such traditional modes of communication and the over-arching themes of love, nature, family, and unity are a stark contrast to the immoral actions of the

Chief Minister. By participating in such activities, the “resisting protagonists” in the play are also “...actively engaged through cultural work in contestations with state-ideological-apparatuses whose official culture constructs a race-dominant imagined community of the postcolonial nation” (Lim, *Introduction to The Big Purge* 16).

I would also like to highlight examples of traditional games/performing arts briefly mentioned in Chapter 2 in our discussion here. Kee’s example of the *mahjong* game and tiger dance in the previous chapter seems to suggest his emphasis on the social element of such performing arts/games. This is also seen in *The Big Purge*, where examples of the *dalang*, the Malay song, and the *pantun* are games/performing arts that engage individuals and the community in their interactivity and social involvement. Being one of the most common traditional games in a Chinese household, the *mahjong* is a social game and Kee cites the conversation between the Proles to reflect the political insecurities of the common people in society. The *mahjong* game is a game of strategy and could reflect, symbolically, the Proles’ mind set as characters who are politically conscious. This is reflected in their comments about Big Brother and the politics of the state. The social element is also seen in the parodic tiger dance performed by a group of individuals. Kee’s example of the tiger dance in that scene is demonstrative of the people’s initiative in staging a ‘hybrid’ cultural dance but this is thwarted by a policeman over permit issues. Such examples are demonstrative of the socially-driven moral resistance that is reflected strongly in Kee’s plays. The tiger dance in *1984 Here and Now* thus reflects this; it is a cultural activity that involves a multi-racial participation, and as such, we see the promotion of positive social values through its performance. This is essential for Kee who shows that such activities can be used to critique the state as well as stimulating social discourse.

This is also shown in plays such as *We Could **** You, Mr. Birch* when Mastura plays a game of *congkak* with her father, Datuk Maharajalela. The *congkak*, a traditional game commonly played in rural Malay villages, is a mancala (a board game) type of game with a ‘count-and-capture’ gameplay that is common in South Asia. Using mental calculation, a player would have to think a few steps ahead to have the winning advantage. In the game of strategy, Mastura outplays her father three times but tactfully compliments her father to placate him. Her mastery of the game is representative of her intelligence and her nimble thought. The *congkak* could symbolically represent ‘home’, thus it could also be associated with domestic life. Mastura, over time, excels in *congkak* and the game becomes too easy for her. The character Mastura refuses to take the easier path and settle into a life of domesticity symbolised by the *congkak*; she seeks independence beyond the boundaries and confines of her home.

In the same play, the traditional Malay art of self-defence, *silat*, is appropriated by Kee during Datuk Maharajalela’s speech against Birch, the British Resident of Perak. Speaking of how Birch has overstepped his boundaries and not showed respect to the local Malay chieftains and their tradition, Datuk Maharajalela launches a tirade against Birch that serves ultimately as a dramatic representation of resistance against the British.

LELA: He is kurang ajar. He wants to humiliate us before our people.

We are chiefs, the money must come to us. We must be seen to have the power. He wants to turn us into powerless beings. He will be brought down.

SAGOR: How, Datuk?

(Silat is performed to the following, accompanied by music.)

LELA: Our tradition will bring him down...In our society, every person knows his place. Every person knows the role he has to play as dictated by our tradition. That gives order to our lives.

(Kee, *We Could **** You, Mr. Birch* 32)

The insertion of the short *silat* scene is thus representative of the tradition that will “bring him down.” Datuk Maharajalela is not hesitant to use force, if necessary, on Birch who does not know his own position in society. The traditional Malay art of *silat* is salient to the Malay culture and tradition and symbolic of Datuk Maharajalela’s resistance to the colonial power that is represented by Birch. Though Datuk Maharajalela’s speech is metaphorical in this context, the *silat* performance is a foreshadowing of the physical threat/resistance that will be meted out to Birch should he continue to interfere with local politics, culture, and tradition.

Kee’s use of such traditional practices is also in line with his aspiration to produce work that is distinctly Malaysian. The use of the Malay *pantun* and Malay song in *The Big Purge*, for example, undermines the hegemony of the Chief Minister’s influence and transcends “...the state-manipulated apartheid-style structures of race divisions and so beyond the correspondences produced through the Manichean aesthetics of allegory...” (Lim, Introduction to *The Big Purge* 16) Indeed, *The Big Purge* is a play that Kee aspires to be “...robust, dynamic, emotionally and intellectually stimulating, and relentless in exposing truths” (qtd. in Lim, Introduction to *The Big Purge* 16). Thus, the use of such elements from the Malay performing arts can be seen to be a counter hegemony against the Equa/Malay hegemony of the Chief Minister. Its cultural and traditional elements are used as a symbolic representation of unity that ultimately resists the Chief Minister’s efforts to fracture the racial harmony of Equaland.

The Big Purge thus demonstrates the resistance of the individual who resists the hegemonic powers of the state. In the context of empowering the individual, Kee's resistance strategy is multi-dimensional, socially-driven, multi-layered, and creative because the play seeks to subvert the political state through the discourse presented to the audience. The traditional performing arts motif analysed in the play provides the platform for the counter hegemony of the state's political influence and demonstrates Kee's ingenuity in amalgamating the culture and the arts as a creative force in his play.

3.14 Conclusion: Persecution, Resistance, and Morality

Miller's *Incident at Vichy* once again demonstrates the playwright's emphasis on historical plays and moral action seen in an individual's moment of redemption. John Proctor and Von Berg's heroism offer a contrast to the cowardly depictions of the transgression of individual moral duty and societal responsibility in moments of state and institutional persecution. Similarly, Kee, through his protagonist Wiran in *1984 Here and Now* and Rong, Runid, and Mawiza in *The Big Purge*, directs his criticism to Malaysian racial politics and discriminatory policies, and governmental political persecution of dissenting individuals and political parties.

The political plays by Kee and Miller analysed in this chapter have also shown the power of individual resistance and dissent in their respective political, historical, and cultural settings. Kee's *The Big Purge* effectively uses parody, political satire, as well as dramatic creative elements of traditional Malay performing arts (the *wayang kulit*), the Malay *pantun*, the Malay *dalang*, to portray the dynamism of multi-cultural Malaysia in the wake of political oppression and persecution of dissenters. His dramatic techniques are also his method of imbuing the play with contrasts between the rational and the extreme, with a special emphasis on the enlightened individual. Kee's *The Big Purge* is a clarion call to

his audience to act against the system of oppression, culturally and nationally. Since it is a social and political critique against the oppressive powers of the state, it is therefore essential for the people to take political ownership and to rise against any forms of injustice perpetrated against the people. This must begin with the people knowing their rights and being fearless in the face of relentless persecution by larger political entities such as the state.

Miller's *Incident at Vichy* focuses on an individual's action to do what is morally right in a direst of circumstances. Miller frames a historical play on 20th century's worst atrocities on humankind into a play that not only has its focus on racism and persecution of the innocent but also a special focus on the ability for moral action,. With a thoroughly political and systematic system of oppression in play during the Second World War, Miller calls for the accountability of all individuals based on a universal moral responsibility.

Miller's *Incident at Vichy* is also unique in the sense that the playwright advocates that resistance and action are necessary against the brutal and dehumanizing powers of an oppressive regime. Von Berg's sacrifice at the end is not only a personal act of redemption or the saving of an individual's life, but heralds the transformation of Von Berg into a morally heroic individual who dares to defy a powerful state system that thrives on human inaction and conformity. Von Berg's resistance comes at the point when it is most needed, Christopher Bigsby sums it succinctly:

This is not a play that insists on the uniqueness of the event. Indeed, its *raison d'être* rests on Miller's recognition that the incubus lies within everyone. What he is concerned to do here, as in *After the Fall*, is to acknowledge this fact and identify the possibility of a

resistant spirit, even in the face of continual defeat. When the Old Jew is taken away, a pillow he is carrying explodes into feathers which fill the air. In the end Von Berg's gesture is merely one feather in the scales but, to Miller, the one feather is evidence of a possibility not yet extinguished, as guilt indeed is, indeed, transmuted into responsibility, as Von Berg himself and thereby his circumstances.

(*A Critical Study*, 257)

While Von Berg's action may be insignificant against the larger tableau of a civilization at war, it is his act of resisting that is exemplary, although it is an "arbitrary action" that is irrational and instinctive. What is paramount is that Von Berg has overcome the paralysis of fear, persecution and inaction, morally transcending the smallness of cowardice by an act that transmutes "guilt into responsibility and responsibility into action" (Biggsby, *A Critical Study* 259). *Incident at Vichy* according to Miller, is essentially not about the atrocities of war or Nazism but a historical dramatic work concerned only to address a historical phenomenon. It is about "us now", with "our individual relationships with injustice and violence" (Miller, *Echoes Down the Corridor* 70).

In both plays, we find similarities such as the persecution of the individual and discriminatory state policies based on race, religion, and class to be the over-arching concerns of both playwrights. The 'purging' of the non-Equas in *The Big Purge* and Jews in *Incident at Vichy* bring to light the importance of social and moral resistance. The act of resisting is therefore crucial in the struggle against the degradation of humanity and moral bankruptcy. As my analysis of *Incident at Vichy* and *The Big Purge* demonstrates, resistance in its various forms, dimensions, and dramatizations are the responses by Kee and Miller, in their shared complicity, to invoke and provoke social action and

responsibility among their audiences. It is through the staging of their work that dissent and resistance are dramatized and visualized with the aim of empowering the individual in the political, social and moral arenas of their time.

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CHAPTER 4: THE ARCHBISHOP'S CEILING AND WE COULD **** YOU, MR. BIRCH: RESISTING THE POLITICAL STATE BY MEANS OF 'CREATIVE RESISTANCE'

4.1 Introduction

My previous chapter discussed Arthur Miller's *Incident at Vichy*⁹⁴ and Kee Thuan Chye's *The Big Purge* from the perspective of resistance evident in the two plays highlighted. In this chapter, I will discuss Miller's *The Archbishop's Ceiling* and analyze Kee's *We Could **** You, Mr. Birch*⁹⁵ (henceforth known as *Birch* in all references to the play) to further validate my thesis that the political plays of both Miller and Kee are used by the dramatists to forward an act of resistance against the hegemony of the state. In addition, the plays have moved from being plays about persecution and resistance into political plays that incorporate elements of what I call 'creative resistance', or plays that experiment with elements of performativity, for Miller, and the fantastic for Kee.

This chapter will continue with a critical analysis and study of Miller's *The Archbishop's Ceiling* and Kee's *We Could **** You, Mr. Birch*. In my previous chapters, both playwrights and their plays highlighted the allegorical, historical, parodic and satirical elements; in this third comparison between both dramatists, we see a major change in the dramatized form that now sees Kee incorporating a mixture of creative dramaturgy and Miller utilizing elements of performativity. The two chosen plays have strong thematic concerns and there seems to be a greater emphasis on the central concern of power, resistance, and performativity in this group of selected plays than their earlier political plays. But it must be stressed that both plays still embody the dissenting and reactionary voices of the playwrights against the abuse of power by the hegemonic state and its equivalent agencies. We therefore see a linear progression in the earlier political plays of Miller and Kee that first embody a reactionary stance and now a change in performance style in the third wave of their political plays. Thus this chapter will analyse the two plays

and how this change in style is seen to be departing from their earlier plays to be adopting a more varied diversity of approaches in their political oeuvre that subsequently demonstrates their desire to experiment with alternative methods of dissent in a traditional theatre performance.

4.2 *The Archbishop's Ceiling* by Arthur Miller

Miller's play, *The Archbishop's Ceiling* (henceforth *TAC*) takes place in an unnamed eastern European city⁹⁶ in the 1970s. The characters in the play are Sigmund, a 50-year-old author who fell out of favour with the state authorities over his dissenting political views and now has to decide whether to stay or defect to the West. His fellow writer and compatriot Marcus, who is now a darling of the regime, and Adrian, a close American friend and visiting writer, persuade Sigmund to choose the second option. Thrown into the mix is Maya, a poet and actress who has had an affair with all three individuals. The play charts the developments of the characters as they struggle with the suspicion of the apartment being bugged by the state's regime. As time passes and tension builds up, the individuals grapple with the strains of their verbal 'performance' versus the realities of their situation.

The Archbishop's Ceiling presents a new paradigm never before attempted in all of Miller's political plays. In *The Crucible*, the moralist streak in Miller was seen largely from his experiences resisting the McCarthy trials which resulted in the creation of the play. Inspired by the Auschwitz trials where former Nazi officials tried for offences committed during the Jewish Holocaust, *Incident at Vichy* was a reminder of human complicity and the need to resist forces greater than the individual itself. *The Archbishop's Ceiling* arrived at a time when Miller, since 1965, began experimenting with his plays and had taken a deep interest in international politics since with America's

involvement in the Vietnam War. Miller himself was involved in protests against the persecution of dissident writers in the Soviet Republic and in many other countries.⁹⁷

The United States was heavily engaged in the international political scene of the 70s which also saw major protest marches happening at home. From America's incursion into Cambodia and the subsequent related violent protests at Kent State University to the fall of South Vietnam and the resignation of President Nixon due to his involvement in the Watergate⁹⁸ scandal, such political situations motivated Miller to write three plays in the 70s that dealt with immediate social ills, human failings and loss of truth. They moved away from his traditional plays of realism and emotional intensity. Miller's *The Creation of the World and Other Business* (1972) has the playwright presenting his version of the "mythology" of the biblical Genesis which was a parody of the creation of the world. *The American Clock* (1980) sees Miller staging a play⁹⁹ (his third after *Death of a Salesman* and *After the Fall*) about the Great Depression.

4.3 Performance as the New Resistance

Miller's *The Archbishop's Ceiling* was not a commercial success but it was definitely better than *The American Clock* and *The Creation of the World and Other Business* in terms of overall story, plot, performance, and dramatization that emphasizes a paradigm of psychological performance and the nature of the real and unreal. We find this theme of the real and unreal manifesting itself even in *The Archbishop's Ceiling* and also in Kee's *We Could **** You, Mr. Birch*.

At a time when political scandals were rampant and espionage was common in both communist regimes and democratic nations, the title of the play indirectly forms the premise of the play which sees a group of liberal pro-democracy writers reacting to what

they think might be a wiretapped apartment which belonged to the former Archbishop. Miller describes the place as having a religious charm that is benign, rustic, and mysterious.

Judging by the depth of the casement around the window at Right, the walls must be two feet thick. The room has weight and power, its contents chaotic and sensuous. Decoration is early Baroque. The ceiling is first seen: in high relief the Four Winds, cheeks swelling, and cherubims, darkened unevenly by soot and age. (Miller, *TAC* 3)

Deep within the baroque beauty of the ceiling, might be hidden state-approved surveillance equipment that is monitored by the state's communist regime. The individuals living there speak in suppressed dialogue and highly stylized speech patterns that highlight the verbal restrictions imposed by the "microphones". The title of the play, *The Archbishop's Ceiling*, thus alludes to the "listening ears" of the state regime that is "eavesdropping" on the daily conversations of the dissenters. Perhaps it is ironic that the former Archbishop's stately residence, a residence of God's representative, though now rundown, is currently a place of possible espionage, and is a trap to ensnare individuals who oppose the political state. Seen from another perspective, Miller's religious reference has its link with *The Creation of the World and Other Business* where he experimented with the pre/postlapsarian world of Lucifer and God. In that world, Lucifer has taken over the world, and his pervasive evil is manifesting itself everywhere. In the play, his presence is manifested in the existence of the "bugs". Miller scholar, Demastes, says that there is an explanation beyond the literal in the God versus Lucifer dichotomy in *The Archbishop's Ceiling*.

Miller's use of the microphone is ingenious, serving the play at various levels. At one level, the microphone represents the violation of privacy instituted by the totalitarian regime. Beyond this literal level, the insertion of this microphone into the ceiling's soot-covered relief is an invasion of Lucifer into God's former domain and the manifestation of the thing that has come to replace the moral world that the archbishop's ceiling once represented. In both cases, it is the manifestation of the "other" to be resisted. (*Miller's 1970's "Power" Plays* 146)

The idea of resistance in *The Archbishop's Ceiling* which is against the political state and its agencies therefore takes on a different form of dissension than *The Crucible* and *Incident at Vichy*. In the former, the dissent shown by John Proctor would mean his refusal to obey the state theocracy while in the latter, the concept of resistance is epitomized by Von Berg's action of stepping up and sacrificing himself by giving his pass to Leduc in defiance of the German authorities.

According to Bigsby, *The Archbishop's Ceiling* represents an exploration of the metaphysical¹⁰⁰ and represents "a metaphysical anxiety in the play which moves Miller closer to Beckett and Pinter than ever before" (Bigsby, *A Critical Introduction* 237). This does not mean that Miller's play is absurdist in nature but the dialogue of the play moves closer to what Hammond notes as Beckett's distinct "punctuating silences of spontaneous discourse" and Pinter's trademark "strangeness, power and profundity" (B.S. Hammond). While Miller scholars have noticed this "metaphysical" streak in the play, I would like to argue that the play's two levels of performance (the verbal and the non-verbal) are used as a form of resistance against the hegemony of the state, and mark the development of

Miller's political drama from resistance to the incorporation of aspects of performativity as the new 'creative' resistance. With *Vichy*, Miller has shown that he is capable of experimenting with bold, creative dramaturgical strategies. Miller's experimentation with such approaches could be his way of acknowledging the ever-changing diversity of moral resistance to cater to a more critical audience in the 1970s. *Vichy*'s unique representation of resistance (politically as well as morally) is one of the most unconventional approaches ever seen in Miller's plays.

4.4 The Microphones as a Representation of State Hegemony

Miller confronts the audience with the perennial issue of fiction and reality; in *The Archbishop's Ceiling*, we have a sense that the truth itself is as elusive as the microphones. The lack of verifiable information and obscurity of details further add to the severity of the situation. There is also the issue of trust as to whether Marcus is really an agent of the regime or whether Maya is also part of the charade to entrap gullible democracy writers. Are there really microphones in the apartment in the first place? The only certain conclusion one can reach is that the thought of "bugs" being present (whether or not they are) has shaped and influenced the characters' actions and responses. Scholar George P. Castellitto¹⁰¹ also emphasizes this in his comparison between A.R. Ammons¹⁰² and Arthur Miller when he notices how both often place their characters in a setting where inanimate objects define the characters. Thus, the characters move in "metaphysical microcosms" where "imagistic objects" often become the focal point of the microcosm. The potential microphones or "bugs" in the play become an obsession in the minds of the characters. Castellitto further emphasizes that the microphones are more than just "bugs"; they are essentially:

an object that characterizes the behavior of the room's individuals. This reliance on the presence of "things" to demarcate the particularity of each character's psyche occurs noticeably in Miller and Ammons while objects in a Williams or O'Neill play function differently in the confines of the metaphysical construct that those plays postulate. (Castellitto, A.R. *Ammons and Arthur Miller: Unexpected Metaphysical Concerns*)

The "bugs" also represent, symbolically, the oppressive government that constantly feeds on the fears and insecurities of its people. The microphones conjure the notion of state surveillance and authoritative control. The state will continue to be an ever-present "bug" in the minds of the characters. Just like Miller and Kee's other political plays that have hegemonic representations of power in the form of individuals such as the "evil Chief Minister", "Big Brother", "Judge Danforth", "J.W.W. Birch", the Vichy police and German military, the microphones in *The Archbishop's Ceiling* play a similar role in representing and reinforcing state political power and control over the populace despite being mere objects. Miller's "objectification" of power in the play is therefore distinct and exceptional from his other political plays as it forces the characters to deal with a new form of hegemony that is unlike any other.

The microphones on their own are not evil since they are merely man-made and emotionless recording devices whose sole function is to record sound. But when their function is used for a larger and more sinister purpose, the characters learn to fear them. Being small and easily hidden makes the microphones a looming threat to the individuals seeking refuge. Just like Bentham's Panopticon penitentiary model, the idea of being under surveillance is sufficient to instil a forced disciplined behaviour on the observed

individuals. The ability of the microphones to record every spoken word only enhances the characters' fear and apprehension of the "bugs", signifying that the association of power between the state and the microphones is inseparable and distinct. The invisible microphones represent a form of power which is stifling and overbearing in the minds of the characters.

Used as a form of surveillance on individuals, the object exerts a certain influence on the behaviour of the characters involved. In what Foucault terms a "disciplinary coercion" (138) the microphones indirectly enforce a form of disciplined behaviour among those it affects: "Discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, docile bodies...it dissociates power from the body" (138).

The "body", as Foucault theorizes, is directly involved in the "political field" as power relations would influence the body itself: "they invest it, mark it, torture it, force it to carry tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (Foucault 25-26). The microphones thus exert this influence; the "discipline" of the "docile bodies", forcing them to conform to a certain mode of behaviour, is the power of the "system of subjection" that has control only on "...a productive body and a subjected body" (Foucault 25-26). Marcus the possible agent, Maya the party worker, Sigmund the dissident, and Adrian the aspiring writer are seen to be useful to the regime as long they conform to the political will of the state. Their subjection to this environment has made them subservient to a conformity that is overwhelmingly and utterly rigid.

This forced conformity marks the power of such "discipline". In Foucault's view, it is a power that eventually seeks to perpetuate a distinct subservience to this power. The characters are thus subjected to the power of the microphones as they react and behave

differently when placed in a context they find surreal and distressing. Faced with many questions that have so far yielded no concrete answers as to the reality of unseen dangers, the characters in the play are caught between performing for an imaginary audience, being true to one another or lying outright among each other. As such, the metaphysical anxieties of the unseen dangers of play can only be met with a form of resistance by the individuals in the play. The microphones, whether they exist or not, have triggered tremendous constraints in the individuals in terms of verbal communication. The individuals engage in several aspects of performativity to negate the perceived threat of the microphones. Aspects of such a resistance include a wide variety of non-verbal strategies such as deceptive glances, sign languages, facial expressions and verbal cues incorporated into such a performativity.

4.5 Performativity as Resistance in *The Archbishop's Ceiling*

Miller scholar Jeffrey Mason remarks that in *The Archbishop's Ceiling*, “[the] prospect of the hidden microphones transforms all interaction into performance, so no moment is completely spontaneous” (*Stone Tower* 132). Thus, by negotiating the extremely perilous condition of political conformity and persecution, the individuals have chosen to evade the recordings of the microphones by ‘performing’ their responses to one another. There are thus two levels of performance; the first level is one that is verbal and done consciously in the presence of the microphones, and the second happens simultaneously as the first. This second is non-verbal and is only done when the characters think that their conversation could potentially get them into trouble. The second level performance is thus the more truthful representation of meaning and intention than the first as the former is a mere verbal guise for the benefit of the powers listening behind the microphones.

I shall analyse *The Archbishop's Ceiling* by citing key concepts of Judith Butler's theory of performativity¹⁰³ to show how Miller has incorporated two levels of performance (the verbal and non-verbal) linked to performativity as a new means of dissent. *The Archbishop's Ceiling* differs from his earlier political plays which are reactionary and incorporates a more physical/verbal element in the characters' resistance. I will start by describing the influence of the microphones on the characters and how the individuals resist this entity by communicating with one another via the verbal and the non-verbal form of communication. The performativity of the verbal and non-verbal are thus acts of resistance against the hegemony of the microphones, and are seen to be aspects of creative resistance employed by Miller, thus proving the playwright's experimentation with creative dramaturgical strategies in *The Archbishop's Ceiling* that differs from *The Crucible* and *Incident at Vichy*.

The Archbishop's Ceiling in its core contains elements of performativity that are unseen in any other of Miller's plays. The nature of performativity, according to Butler, is continually manifested in our social reality "...through language, gesture, and all manner of symbolic social sign" (*Performance Acts and Gender Constitution* 519). Butler's view is that linguistic constructions create our reality through our daily conversations. Such speech acts thus reinforce the reality through our constant repetition of such conventions and ideologies. According to Butler, performativity then becomes a reality in the perpetuation of such social conventions over time:

It would seem imperative to consider the way in which this gendering of the body occurs. My suggestion is that the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time. From a feminist point of

view, one might try to reconceive the gendered body as the legacy of sedimented acts rather than a predetermined or foreclosed structure, essence or fact, whether natural, cultural, or linguistic.

(Performance Acts and Gender Constitution 523)

Aspects of performativity are manifested in the verbal/non-verbal performance of Act One when Adrian, an American writer, visits his fellow dissident writers for the sole reason of collecting information for his novel. With the intention to capture the mood of the totalitarian regime and its insufferable conditions, Adrian tries to tap on the experiences of the writers in that country for his latest novel. He meets Maya, who was a poet and who has now accepted a broadcaster's position as a non-political talk show in a state-run radio. Their conversation soon dwells on politics and focuses on Marcus, Maya's former lover who is now seen as "benefitting" from the state's regime. Adrian concludes that "Resistance is impossible anymore...the government's got the intellectuals in its pocket, and the few who aren't have stomach ulcers" (Miller, *TAC* 16). The conversation grows spirited when Adrian reveals that he has been talking to Allison Wolfe, a writer, who told him that the house is wire-tapped, and that both Maya and Marcus are working with the state to entrap dissident writers. Maya denies this and explains that the state is not as bad as it is perceived, and "...things are improving all the time anyway". Adrian refuses to believe this and cites the example of Sigmund, who fell out of favour because he had embarrassed the regime and how once, he (Adrian) was harassed, together with Otto and Sigmund, by two plainclothes policeman from the regime. They soon part on strained terms and Maya reiterates how dissident writers such as Sigmund always do "...these stupid things" and "One can live as peacefully as anywhere" (Miller, *TAC* 18).

What may be seen as an end of a conversation soon takes a dramatic turn when Adrian decides to leave but not before saying, unintentionally: “Still, it’s not every country that writers keep a novel manuscript behind their fireplace” (Miller, *TAC* 19). As Adrian leaves the apartment after his last remark, Maya immediately calls for his return and a very confused, perplexed, and angry Adrian is then told of the possibility of the apartment being rigged with microphones. His reaction only reveals his initial disbelief that such incidents occur and the situation now compels him to be part of the ‘performance’. From being a comfortable outsider, he is ‘forced’ to be part of an unwilling cast of actors in a drama that takes place under the Archbishop’s ceiling.

This first scene thus highlights the dynamics of a non-verbal performance where the individual is at the crossroads between speaking or performing for an imaginary “audience” (the microphones representing the regime) or performing to a real crowd.¹⁰⁴ The mere mention of the microphones makes Adrian confused and insecure. Adrian then chooses his words carefully and takes long pauses to ponder his responses. Every word and phrase has to become a careful construct of the mind and not a fluid or spontaneous verbal response. Adrian is thus forced to comply with the uncomfortable idea of forced surveillance. Based on Foucault’s theory of power, Adrian is thus disciplined, and like a script that is suddenly rewritten, Adrian has to enact an appropriate performance for the benefit of those sitting behind the microphones. The situation he and the others find themselves in necessitates a performativity that is unnatural and extremely rigid.

ADRIAN: (*he hesitates in the corridor, then enters the room. He stands there in silence, glancing*)...All right. Thanks.

He stands there silent, in his fear.

MAYA: Yes?

ADRIAN: Incidentally.

He breaks off. A long hiatus. He is internally positioning himself to the situation.

...that manuscript I mentioned.

MAYA: Yes?

ADRIAN: It's in Paris by now. I...gave it to a friend who was leaving this morning.

MAYA: Oh?

ADRIAN: Yes.

(Miller, *TAC* 20-21)

In what should come across as a natural conversation is now a perfectly orchestrated dialogue where each uttered word is premeditated to the extent that the boundaries between truth and lies, are difficult to be interpreted. But such an imposed discipline is only temporary, thus suggesting the failure of discipline because the characters will soon find ways around such a surveillance and perform different 'meanings' hidden from the state.

Adrian has a hard time trusting Maya and he even admits that what he perceives as fiction in espionage novels has now come true. True to form as a writer, he realizes that this experience could be a source of material for his work. He confesses to Maya how he even has a made-up character that reminds him of her:

...an agent who screws all the writers and writers and blackmails them so they'll give up fighting the government...I finally decided it was too melodramatic, the characters got lost in the plot. I invented

it and I didn't believe it; and I'm standing here looking at you and I still don't believe it! (Miller, *TAC* 24)

Is Maya putting on a performance and should he go along with this act and by doing so, collate information for his book? The possibility of such a scenario ironically excites Adrian who sees an opportunity for a potential best-seller regardless of the danger he could potentially face. Most importantly, do the microphones, the source of their anxieties, exist? Such are the initial assumptions and possibilities that Miller has constructed at the beginning of the play. As it slowly unfolds, its internal and external conflicts unravel and set the tone for the underlying performance of the characters as they struggle with the dualities of their conversations with one another. I will now discuss how the verbal and non-verbal performativity of the dissenting characters resist the political state and whether such acts of creative resistance could be sustained throughout the play.

4.6 Performativity and Resistance

The nature of this performance can be further seen when Marcus and Sigmund arrive at the apartment after bumping into one another at the airport. Marcus is accompanied by a Danish girl, Irina¹⁰⁵, who speaks very little English. They decide to have a small party and Marcus leaves to call for some female company. Soon the conversation drifts into politics and before long, Adrian reveals to Sigmund in a subtle way that the apartment is bugged. Sigmund is indifferent about the warning and reveals to Adrian that the manuscript he has worked on for the past five years has been confiscated. Adrian is shocked, thinking that this happened because of his earlier conversation with Maya. But when Sigmund reveals that it happened in the evening, it rules out Adrian's assumption that it was confiscated because of what he had said.

The two levels of performance in the play, incorporate aspects of the verbal and the non-verbal. The non-verbal aspect blends sign language, body language and the ingenuity of facial expression as part of the ‘communication’. When Adrian and Sigmund try to exclude as much incriminating information as possible from their conversation, the comprehension of meaning has to go beyond the verbal. Instead, Adrian and Sigmund rely on non-verbal communication to understand one another’s real meaning. Thus the dialogue between them goes beyond the literal and into another level of meaning that is beyond the comprehension of senses (the sense of hearing). Such communication between Adrian and Sigmund in this short dialogue that consists of verbal and non-verbal cues highlights the importance of a coding. Sigmund¹⁰⁶ explains to Adrian how his wife, who is a chemist, is only allowed to work as a cleaner at the airport, and subsequently the “conversation” leads to how influential Marcus was in helping Sigmund’s wife.

ADRIAN: What were you doing at the airport?

SIGMUND: To tell my wife. She works there.

ADRIAN: I thought she was a chemist.

SIGMUND: She is wife to me – they don’t permit her to be chemist.

She clean floor, the windows at the airport.

ADRIAN: Oh my God, Sigmund...(Pause.) Is there anything you can do?

SIGMUND: I try.

ADRIAN: Try what?

SIGMUND *thumbs upstage.*

Could he?

SIGMUND throws up his *chin – tremendous influence.*

Would he?

SIGMUND *holds a telephone to his mouth, then indicates the bedroom doorway.*

Really? To help?

SIGMUND: Is possible.

ADRIAN: Can you figure him out?

SIGMUND *extends a hand and rocks it, an expression of uncertainty on his face.* (Miller, TAC 30)

Sigmund acts out his 'answers' to Adrian, who is reluctant to mention Marcus' name because it could potentially cause trouble for both of them. Sigmund's performance reveals his intention of asking for Marcus' aid in helping his wife. Adrian verbally questions Marcus' ability to help through questions such as "Could he?" and "Would he?" The microphones are not only seen to be influencing Sigmund's replies but also Adrian's verbal questions. This clearly demonstrates the discipline and the hegemonic influence imposed by the microphones on the behavior of these two men. The perceived threat of the microphones has reduced their conversation to a performative interplay of fragmented sentences and rudimentary sign language to escape the possibility of the conversation being recorded.

At this point, Adrian then hand gestures to Sigmund about his next idea. He wishes to say that the circumstances and political developments in the country are not conducive for a liberal writer like him. But with the apartment being bugged, Adrian is unable to say it directly, hence the use of symbol and mimicry. His actions are like a child's:

ADRIAN: You don't think it's time to seriously consider...

(He spreads his arms wide like a plane, lifting them forward in a take-off – then points in a gesture of flight.) What I mentioned at dinner?

SIGMUND *emphatically nods 'No', while pointing downward – he'll remain here.*

(Miller, TAC 30-31)

Miller thus shows how effectively resistance could take a non-physical form. Both examples given above thus show the element of performativity in the natural course of their conversation. Perplexing, difficult to comprehend and at times banal, the play on human emotions and body language are part of an 'alternative performance' that is part of a larger scope of implicit performance. Bigsby views such instances in the play as having qualities of a "metaphysical anxiety" due to the nature of the real/unreal it posits. Perhaps such qualities of the metaphysical and the performativity has made the play into a hybrid resistance play that adds to the complexity of representation and reality that is equally compounded by the elusive nature of the microphones.

In perhaps one of the best scenes from the play that best exemplifies the incongruities of emotion and passion as well as the two levels of performance between the verbal and non-verbal is seen in the following scene. The dual modes of verbal and non-verbal performance and the display of emotions underlie the true meaning of the conversation that Adrian, Maya, and Marcus conduct. It is a bland conversation that functions as a façade for an emotional showdown taking place between past lovers and their present political predicament.

ADRIAN (after the pause). The cops took his manuscript tonight.
She inhales sharply with a gasp, nearly crying out. SIGMUND continues to eat. She goes to him, embraces his head, mouth pressed to his hair.

He draws her hands down, apparently warding off her emotions and continues eating. She moves and sits further away from him, staring ahead, alarmed and angry. MARCUS enters from the bedroom, a bandage stuck to his cheekbone.

MARCUS (to ADRIAN). Have you taken something?

ADRIAN. Not just yet, thanks.

MAYA rises to confront MARCUS but, refusing her look, he passes her, a fixed smile on his face, picks up his drink from the marble table and comes downstage and stands. First he, then ADRIAN, then MAYA turn and watch SIGMUND eating. He eats thoroughly.

IRINA is also eating, off by herself. Pause.

MARCUS goes to his chair, sits and lights a cigarette. ADRIAN watches him.

It's like some kind of continuous crime.

MAYA. You are so rich, Adrian, so famous – why do you make such boring remarks?

ADRIAN. Because I am a bore.

(Miller, TAC 38)

Here, the two levels of communication are clearly shown. The verbal communication (the dialogue) and the non-verbal communication show the dual-performance running concurrently. The dual-performance shown here differs from the other 'microphone-

influenced' scenes as it is dealing with Maya's personal emotions and her display of muted passion for Sigmund of whom she is fond.

Maya's emotional outburst only confirms the feelings she has for Sigmund, and her resentment towards Marcus who seems indifferent to her. In the scene, Adrian watches Marcus because he suspects him of being a spy for the state. Although he is the main focus of the entire debacle between the regime and persecuted writers, Sigmund remains indifferent to the rest and continues eating. This reveals his acceptance of his fate and realization that he will never be published if he remains in the country. Adrian believes this is then a "continuous crime", highlighting his disillusionment of the political system that he believes is victimizing a great literary talent. The display of emotion here reveals the inner workings of the central characters in relation to the tension and turmoil of the state. This underscores the point that meaning could go beyond the literal and the metaphorical and what is left unspoken is sometimes more powerful and poignant than a declarative statement. In this example, it is the non-verbal display of emotions that is the conduit of meaning and sentiment.

The dual modes of communication continue when Sigmund finds out that Marcus has decided to invite another guest over, a female poet by the name of Alexandra. This has everyone on the edge of their seats, especially when Maya explains in a matter-of-fact tone, "Her father is Minister of Interior. (*Pointing at the ceiling.*) He is in charge..." (Miller, *TAC* 41). Trying to cool things, Maya speaks positively of Marcus' invitee, proudly proclaiming that women's poetry is now acknowledged widely, thanks to Alexandra's efforts. Sigmund, though disdainful of Alexandra, reveals that there is more to Alexandra's "talent" than meets the eye, saying: "She is collecting the dead for her father. She arrange for writers to go before the television, and apologise for the

government. Mea Culpa¹⁰⁷ – to kissing their ass” (Miller, *TAC* 43). Sigmund does not care if his statement is recorded because he believes that it is time for such ‘performances’ to end. Assuming that the microphones are there, this marks the performative failure of state surveillance because it has failed (to a certain extent) to achieve its fundamental goal which is to record contentious verbal conversations and to ‘control’ individuals like Sigmund. Sigmund is indifferent to the consequences of his actions. His fundamental belief is that everyone must eventually be forthright and honest in their communication with one another.

From here we see more of such dualities of performance between Marcus and Sigmund. In the scene highlighted below, we see Sigmund soliciting Marcus’ aid to highlight their plight in an international socialist conference but Marcus is reluctant to do so. His non-verbal answers are not encouraging, and signify the potential outcome of Sigmund’s request. Marcus’ reply signifies that he is, at best, non-committal and perhaps suggests his frustration at Sigmund’s request. His refusal to say it aloud means that he does not want his statement to be recorded.

SIGMUND: You can speak of us there?

MARCUS (*turns to him, silent, unable to answer*).

SIGMUND: No?

MARCUS. We’re not on the agenda.

MAYA. It’s difficult, dear...

SIGMUND. But perhaps privately – to the Italian comrades?...French? Perhaps they would be interested for my manuscript.

MARCUS *nods positively, but turns up his palms – he'll do what he can.*

(With the slightest edge of sarcasm.)

You will see, perhaps.

He chucks his head, closes his eyes with his face stretched upward, his hand frustratedly on his chair arm, his foot beating.

So-so-so-so.

(Miller, TAC 63)

The dual performance shown here touches once again on the two levels of interpretation and meaning shown in the conversation, and the eventual manifestation of the dissenting voice in Marcus' non-verbal performative dialogue that at times provides a cover for the characters who are not telling the truth. The performativity of meaning (seen in the non-verbal acts) resists the ability of the microphones to implicate the characters. Such acts of performativity are alternative acts that challenge the existing hegemonic conventions. While such a performativity constitutes a form of resistance, Sigmund, however, is resigned to the fact that such means of verbal and non-verbal communication cannot be 'genuine' and therefore it remains an artificial way of conveying one's thoughts, emotions, and feelings. Even the non-verbal form of communication is found to be lacking because it is made under duress and lacking the immediate and natural response of a real conversation. In addition, errors in interpretation could occur in sign language and this could lead to further miscommunication between individuals. Thus, the authenticity of emotions is paramount to Sigmund. It is tied to his conceptualization of how a 'real writer' should be, and nothing is more authentic than the genuine expressions of human emotions, feelings, and words than in an intimate and personal encounter between individuals who must be forced to confront the "realities of their performance."

While the performativity of the non-verbal is a form of resistance to state hegemony, such 'acts' cannot be sustained to the end. And here, in the following section, we witness how Miller is possibly advocating a return to a more natural form of communication via Sigmund's performative actions towards the end of the play.

4.7 Sigmund: On Resisting State Hegemony and Performativity

Butler in her theory of performativity concludes that gender is merely "...a corporeal style, an 'act,' as it were, which is both intentional and performative..." (Butler 521) and "If the 'reality' of gender is constituted by the performance itself, then there is no recourse to an essential and unrealized 'sex' or 'gender' which gender performances ostensibly express" (Butler 527). Such hegemony/social conventions could then be challenged by 'alternative acts' since they have no truthful basis in the beginning. Sigmund believes this must be done because the existence of the microphones and the repeated mention of the devices have become a pervasive hegemony of thought. Over time, the image of the microphones becomes an accepted 'reality' for Adrian, Maya, and Sigmund. Their continuous verbal and non-verbal performances soon create an identity which is "instituted through a stylized repetition of acts" (Butler, 519). Sigmund rejects such an identity that he considers to be false and not a true reflection of their feelings and actions. He worries that such prolonged 'performances' would create a false reality and thus such "constituting acts" are detrimental for they not only "constituting the identity of the actor, but as constituting that identity as a compelling illusion, an object of *belief*" (Butler 520)

Thus, in the second half of *The Archbishop's Ceiling*, we see Sigmund trying to convince his friends that their resistance via the non-verbal performativity is unsustainable, and it is essential that they liberate themselves from the potentially depressing environment of the microphones as well as their inability to express themselves. Sigmund's 'alternative

act' at the end thus confirms the possibility of a 'counter performance' based on Butler's performativity theory.

Sigmund rejects both hegemony of the microphones as well as the 'false dialogue' and the non-verbal performativity of his friends. Even though such 'performances' were reactionary and made to escape entrapment, they depressed Sigmund. Sigmund is thus overwhelmed with disillusionment because as a person who has fought to have the 'truth' revealed in his political writings, such 'performances' contradict his personal stand that nothing is more essential than emotions and feelings that are genuinely expressed. But in a setting where every word and phrase has to be crafted and minted to avoid antagonizing the regime, Sigmund finds this extremely stifling and meaningless.

Sigmund feels that the emotional detachment that goes with the utterances is as empty and illusory as the "slot machines" plying the "Las Vegas casino strips" (*TAC* 69) that offer slivers of false hope to knowing patrons. This is incomprehensible here where the cold hard truth that resistance is futile cannot be ignored. The alternative thus exists when lying (done by Marcus, Adrian, and Maya) is now a form of escapism from the debilitating powers of surveillance such as the hidden microphones. While it could be a form of verbal manoeuvring to evade arrest and to resist the political state, too much avoidance of the truth would reap dire consequences where nothing is what it seems. To him, this is unbearable.

The Archbishop's Ceiling thus speaks of the art of negotiating between the boundaries of reality and deception, the verbal and the non-verbal, each countering and negating the other for a certain truthfulness that is often obscured in the dramatic intensity of speech and performance of the characters. In this case, Sigmund's statement is that "lying" is an

art form so well-perfected that Adrian might have difficulty deciphering reality from fiction. His book would thus only be an extension of another “lie”. As a political writer who is bent on writing only the truth about his country and the regime, Sigmund acknowledges passionately that lying is a way of life in his country. Like a slot machine that symbolically represents hope, lying is escapism redefined in the modern context of political freedom that Sigmund deeply abhors.

We must lie, it is our only freedom. To lie is our slot machine – We know we cannot win but it gives us the feeling of hope. It is like a serious play, which no one really believes but the technique is admirable. Our country is now a theatre, where no one is permitted to walk out, and everyone is obliged to applaud. (Miller, *TAC* 69)

Thus, Sigmund, Adrian, and Maya’s performativity cannot be sustained till the end. At one point, out of exasperation, Sigmund proclaims to Adrian what the crux of the issue is: “But with us, is impossible to speaking so simply, we must always making theatre” (Miller, *The Archbishop’s Ceiling* 69). It is this theatre and the performance that it produces that Sigmund finds hard to reconcile; in part, such a performances reminds him of the propaganda and ideology of the regime. Sigmund finds it difficult to comprehend reality from fiction (and vice-versa), and thus he laments: “I believe everything but I am convinced of nothing” (Miller, *TAC* 69).

Sigmund realizes that he needs to know that the truth as nothing could sustain him more than the reality of the situation. Caught in a situation that he now thinks is entirely made up, Sigmund concludes that the microphones do not exist. He throws the gauntlet down to the rest, challenging them to resist their inner fears, and tries to deconstruct the entire

“lie” by giving himself the benefit of the doubt. Sigmund concludes that the regime is not hunting him, the microphones are non-existent and his confiscated manuscript could be the work of an overzealous official. This analytical reasoning infuriates Marcus and to a certain extent Adrian and Maya. All three individuals have personal reasons for why they want Sigmund to stay or leave the country. But for Sigmund, there is no reason why he should leave. He does not wish to leave the country for any other reason but the truth, and to do so because of imaginary microphones would be unthinkable.

Refusing to be a part of this uncertainty, Sigmund thus tries to encourage real meaning in a conversation, telling Maya in Shakespearean terms: “We are like flies to little boys, they kill us for their sport”¹⁰⁸ (Miller, *TAC* 78). Sigmund’s craving for the reality of the moment intensifies and when he receives a phone call about his manuscript being returned, Sigmund is overcome by the thought that he is right: “SIGMUND *enters, halts, shakes his head uttering an almost soundless laugh, his eyes alive to something incredible.*” Maya reacts in a similar way and “...*clasps her hands together, then crosses herself, her face between explosive joy and some terror, rigid, sobered.*” To Sigmund, the failure to articulate properly one’s thoughts and feelings symbolizes the stifling of genuine human emotions. Thus he declares wholeheartedly his passionate plea to everyone in the lucidity of the moment:

SIGMUND (*with a certain laughter*). Is like some sort of theatre, no? Very bad theatre – our emotions have no connection with the event. Myself also – I must speak, darling – I do not understand myself. I must confess, I have feelings of gratitude; before they have stolen my book I was never grateful. Now I am grateful – (*His*

laughter vanishes.) I cannot accept such confusion, Maya, is very bad for my mentality. I must speak! I think we must all speak now! He ends looking at MARCUS; his anger is open. (Miller, TAC 79)

Sigmund's cry tells us of the desperation and frustration he is facing being manipulated by the regime and now by the inability to express his feelings. He does not find any solace in the performance put up by the rest, either. His earlier reference to Shakespeare's *King Lear* aptly summarizes his condition that he deems to be hopeless and which epitomizes the misery of human existence. To speak and not mean what one says is being dishonest, but to be prohibited from communicating in the sincerest of occasions makes emotional intimacy and expression a torturous experience for him.

The manner in which Adrian, Maya, Sigmund and Marcus manipulate their emotions and speech to resist the "bugs" of the regime is an act of defiance and resistance, but for Sigmund, their dual performances cannot continue forever as they must confront the reality at one point or another. He feels that their performances for the microphones are false, and they are being insincere.

The attempt to resist the influential powers of the regime and to seek the validity of their existence while seeking the truth intensifies. Upon receiving news of his released manuscript, Sigmund again declares on the perplexity of their stifled emotions: "But you know you are sad! I am sad, Maya is sad – if was some sort of mistake... why we are not happy?" Maya turns to leave, but Sigmund, tired of the characters' refusal to face reality, cries out: "No! We have tremendous good news, we must have correct emotion" (Miller, TAC 81).

To Sigmund, correct emotions must be tied to correct actions. With no one coming out openly to be truthful about their emotions because of the microphones, Sigmund's last desperate act to break this deadlock of emotional rigidity and pretentiousness is also his most dramatic. Butler maintains that performativity could be challenged by "alternative acts"; Sigmund makes a symbolic action that is perhaps meant to break the gridlock of illusion surrounding them.

SIGMUND (*moving toward the piano*). One time very long ago, I have read in American detective story...that criminal has placed revolver inside piano.

He sets the pistol on the strings, and comes around the bench.

Then someone is playing very fortissimo¹⁰⁹...something like Beethoven...(*Raising his hands over the keyboard*)...and he is firing the pistol.

ADRIAN. What the hell are you doing?

SIGMUND (*smashes his hands down on the keyboard*). Ha! Is not true.

ADRIAN (*stands*). What the hell are you doing?

SIGMUND. Wait! I have idea...(*He reaches over, takes out the pistol and cocks it*.)

MAYA. Marcus!

SIGMUND (*replacing the cocked pistol in piano*). Now we shall see...

ADRIAN (*rushing MAYA away from the piano*). Watch out!

SIGMUND (*crashes his hands down – the gun explodes, the strings reverberating*.) Is true! (*Reaching out and taking the revolver*.) My

God, I am so happy...(*Holding up the revolver.*) The truth is alive in
this country, Marcus!

He comes and sits near MARCUS.

Is unmistakable, no? – when something is true?

(Miller, *TAC* 81)

Sigmund's logic in choosing a fictional detective novel to establish the very existence of "truth" in his country is rather ironical. His use of fiction to determine reality by firing a pistol is his way of breaking the deadlock. It is Sigmund's ultimate performativity, his alternative act to resist the falsity of emotions that he feels is overwhelming them. In his equation, if a gun could fire when a piano is played in fiction¹¹⁰, then it could happen in real life, unless of course, such a thing could never happen at all and the writer had lied about it. For Sigmund, the firing gun shatters the illusion around them. In his mind, it is the one single action that is real and is not compounded by the falsity of masked emotions and feelings. His existence is validated when he feels that the "truth" is indeed alive; there is yet hope for his country.

In the closing moments of the play, as Sigmund gets everyone to own up to their feelings, Maya seems to be moved and says that "...we must begin to say what we believe. Somewhere, we must begin! (Miller, *TAC* 85). It remains unconfirmed, however, whether Maya and Marcus are agents of the regime, but it seems that Maya's intention in persuading Sigmund to leave is for his own safety, though she would rather have him stay. Marcus seems intent in helping Sigmund but at the same time he could be an apparatchik of the regime. His disdain of Sigmund begins to show when he calls Sigmund "a moral blackmailer" who, in order "[to] build his monument... has to prove that everyone else is a coward or corrupt" (Miller, *TAC* 83). To Marcus, Sigmund is someone

who has benefitted from the oppressiveness of the regime and is now basking in the international limelight as an oppressed dissident. This is a contentious point, but Maya maintains that everyone stands to gain something from this episode. Sigmund benefits from the international publicity from his “oppressed condition”. Perhaps his refusal to leave is tied to him benefitting from this symbiotic relationship. Adrian benefits from the sale of his writing based on resistance to the country’s administration while Marcus and Maya seem to receive favours from the government. Maya asks a pertinent question: “Is love not love because there is some profit in it? (Miller, *TAC* 88). In wanting everyone to confront their real feelings and emotions, Sigmund in the end must also realize that his existence and self-worth are tied to the existence of the regime. In this revelation of sorts, Sigmund’s confrontation with “bugs” reveals the reality of such a “metaphysical anxiety”. As Miller puts it:

The occasion, then, of the Archbishop’s Ceiling is the bug and how people live with it, but the theme is something different...And that is when things become interesting, for something like the naked soul begins to loom, some essence in man that is simply unadaptable, ultimate, immutable as the horizon. (Miller, Introduction to *Conditions of Freedom: Two Plays of the Seventies*¹¹¹ ix-x)

The end of the play sees Sigmund reading a long list of letters received from various famous international writers with whom he has corresponded. Names such as Malraux, Julia Ilyesh, Heinrich Böll, Kobo Abe and Saul Bellow are mentioned by Sigmund. Miller in an introduction of the collected plays has said that Sigmund’s act of bowing to the arts has made him transcend the chaos around him. It is an act of surrendering and acceptance that Sigmund, in Miller’s view, must confront “... a sublime force beyond his ego, to

sustain him in his opposition to that arrogance; for him it is the sublimity of art, in whose life-giving, creative essence he partakes and shares with other artists whose works he bows to, and in the act transcends the tyranny” (Miller, Introduction to *Conditions of Freedom: Two Plays of the Seventies* x). In resisting the political state in ways that are beyond the conventional means of resistance, Sigmund, Maya, Marcus and Adrian had to confront the persecution of the individual by the state, the self-discovery of the individual and the attainment of a moral transcendence from the struggle which is imperative to the core existence of the individual. To do so requires great courage and a will to transcend the deception and the reality of the ‘performance’ itself.

Moving on, I will now discuss Kee’s *We Could **** You, Mr. Birch* and how the play, like Miller’s *The Archbishop’s Ceiling*, exemplifies Miller’s thematic concerns such as the concept of power, resistance, the political and the performative. In addition, I will also analyse the change in dramaturgical strategy in *Birch* and how this development (like Miller’s *Vichy*) marks the play’s development from a common political play into one that experiments with the Fantastic and other various dramaturgical strategies as a form of creative resistance.

4.8 An Introduction to *We Could ** You, Mr. Birch***

To begin, Kee’s *Birch* is very different from his earlier two political plays. While *1984* and *The Big Purge* were deeply allegorical, parodic and politically satirical, Kee’s next play, which was staged in 1994, experimented extensively with elements such as the juxtaposition of the past and present, the extensive use of Brechtian¹¹² epic theatre, and the alienation effect such as characters speaking out of character. All of these were used repeatedly in Kee’s *Birch*, a “historical” play that had as its central premise the fact that the assassination of James Wheeler Woodford Birch¹¹³ was due to his interference with

the Malay customary rights and inhibition of the rights of the Sultan of Perak¹¹⁴. Kee questions this “historical fact” and in view of history’s subjectivity, he stresses that history is therefore merely fiction.

4.9 Dissecting the Plot of *We Could ** You, Mr. Birch***

One of the most interesting questions that was posed to Kee Thuan Chye was the meaning of the asterisks in the title of the play. When asked about this in an interview, Kee responded that the word “kill” was part of the title of the play; hence “*We Could Kill You, Mr. Birch*” was the intended name of the play. The word “kill” was considered too strong and negative by the publishers and as a result, it was replaced with the asterisks, but this only made the new title very suggestive as it could very well refer to a swear word. Nevertheless, Kee thought that the new title of his play was apt precisely because of its suggestive nature; audiences could interpret the asterisks in any way they liked, adding to the nature of open interpretation that Kee advocated as one of the directions of the play. Such liberty was one of Kee’s ways of not forcing his audience to accept his views. They could arrive at their own conclusions from what was performed for them. Kee has often adopted this style in his plays to show the relevance and timeliness of his work in current affairs.

The play was first staged at the Experimental Theatre, Kompleks Budaya Negara (KBN) on 20th June 1994 and boasted a star-studded cast which included Eric Roslee as Birch, Mano Maniam as Sultan Abdullah, Ahmad Yatim as Dato Sagor and The Mantri, Faridah Merican as Kuntum and Chris Ng as Tan Kim Cheng, Chee Yoon and the British official among others. The play begins with the opening scene with a little background history on the state of political affairs in Perak. A “voice-over” narrates to the audience how with the demise of the late Sultan Ali of Perak in 1871, the ministers or “mantri” had chosen

Raja Ismail as the new ruler over the expected successor, Raja Abdullah who was the “Raja Muda” (crown prince) at that time. In a bid to fortify his position, Raja Abdullah cunningly involved himself in the Chinese triad wars¹¹⁵ over tin-mining rights in Larut and requested that the British intervene in the political affairs of the state. While not wanting the local conflict to disrupt British interests in the Straits Settlements, and seeing an opportunity for political and economic gain for the British, Sir Andrew Clarke, who was the Governor of the Straits Settlements, decided to aid Raja Abdullah in his quest to be the new ruler of Perak.¹¹⁶

In Kee’s version, a group of modern actors is staging a play on Birch. The dramatist focuses on the events leading to the interference of the British officials in Perak. His play is interwoven with several plots that are connected to the main event of Birch’s assassination. At several junctures of *Birch*, the actors speak out of character and comment on the accuracy of historical facts as well as socio-political events past and present. This technique, which distances the audience from the action in the way advocated by Brecht’s Epic theatre, gives the play a certain objectivity and criticality on matters pertaining to the historical assassination of J.W.W. Birch. *Birch* has several plots running concurrently with the main plot, among them the relationship of Mastura with her father, Datuk Maharajalela, the rivalry between Datuk Sagor and Birch for a female slave named Kuntum, and the political shenanigans of the court involving Sultan Abdullah, Raja Yusuf, Tan Kim Cheng, Sir William Jervois and Sir Andrew Clarke. Thrown into this mix is the introduction of a group of modern-day characters from Kuala Lumpur with very western perspectives who then interact with the characters from the past. The play ends with a narration of the fate of the conspirators to the assassination and a cacophony of “Buy” and “Sell” commonly heard in the stock market filling the air as the curtain descends on the stage.

4.10 *We Could **** You, Mr. Birch* and The Element of the Fantastic

My discussion of Kee's *Birch* will utilize Todorov's theory of the Fantastic as the framework for the play's discussion. Kee's seamless control of the narrative time also sees the creation of characters (present, historical, modern) traversing the different timelines of the play, further adding to the Fantastic element. The diversity of performances and characters create an added depth to the already multi-dimensional *Birch*. At times, the discussion overlaps on some of the points but nevertheless it provides a comprehensive understanding of the overarching strategies employed by Kee in the play. By resisting the historical narrative and incorporating elements of the Fantastic with the traditional elements of Brechtian theatre (such as epic theatre¹¹⁷) Kee has created a historical dramatic work with a strong discourse framework and social observation, making *Birch* his most compelling play. Kee's employment of the fantastical elements is distinctly unique, and to begin, we should acquaint ourselves with the term "Fantastic". Tzvetan Todorov, a Franco-Bulgarian philosopher and famed literary theorist, has defined the fantastic in his ground-breaking work, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* as:

...an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination – and laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality – but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us... The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event. (Todorov 25)

In *Birch*, the elements of the Fantastic are seen in the introduction of the characters from the future or the “modern characters” in the play. This group of individuals includes Sofea, Ashburn, Chee Yoon, and Sal who make their appearances immediately after Kuntum’s dramatic monologue. The group is described as “young” and dressed in “contemporary dress, very smart” (Kee, *Birch* 44) while dancing to the “...strains of a joget¹¹⁸ number.” Their appearance is not justified in the course of the play by Kee nor is there any explanation in the notes about their existence which is rather peculiar considering their sudden appearance in the middle of a feuding political state in the throes of a war in colonial Malaya. This sudden appearance is indeed telling: on one hand, we have characters in *Birch* embroiled in societal and courtly upheaval that ranges from the personal to the political; and on the other hand, there is a group of modern characters whose internal conflict derives from whether they should buy another lot of shares and capitalize on insider information from a “*Datuk*”.

The inclusion of the 20th century “yuppies” versus the 19th century characters in *Birch* thus corresponds to Todorov’s definition of the element of the Fantastic which requires the fulfillment of the following 3 standards:

The fantastic requires the fulfillment of three conditions. First, the text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described. Second, this hesitation may also be experienced by a character. Third, the reader must adopt a certain attitude with regard to the text: he will reject allegorical as well as “poetic” interpretations. These three requirements do not have an equal value. The first and the third

actually constitute the genre; the second may not be fulfilled.

Nonetheless, most examples satisfy all three conditions. (Todorov 59)

This group of individuals is from the present, clearly from the 1990s in accordance with the timeline of this production. Judging from the content of their conversation and dressing, they could be described as “yuppies”, a 1980s term that refers to affluent young urban professionals. There is no logical explanation for how such characters were transported back in time. There is a possibility of time travelling or perhaps the existence of a parallel universe suggested, but there is no real explanation given by the dramatist for this inclusion of these new characters who are from a different time. The 19th century characters however, exist on two planes. They are modern-day actors but when they meet the modern characters, they do not switch back to being contemporaries of Ashburn and his friends. Shalan Kailsah sheds some light on this, explaining that:

The juxtaposition of the two different realities – the historical play and the rehearsal play – creates the impression of a future time. The effect is now of the melding of past, present and future with ease and freedom...Kee has created a three-dimensional chess game of sorts, whereby the characters/chess pieces, locked in a game of power, can traverse the boards of past, present and future with ease and freedom.

(25)

This thus fulfills Todorov’s first condition that compels the reader to ponder on the element of the supernatural and natural. Kee’s reason for bringing this group of people into the play is to create an element of contrast between the past and future generations

of Malaysians and their value systems which Kee firmly believes have been eroded in terms of morality and mental reasoning. To Kee, the present generation of youths is too obsessed with conspicuous consumption and materialistic needs bordering on a meaningless hedonistic lifestyle. Kee's creation of such modern characters from the future, whose lifestyle seems to be based on a senseless culture of consumerism, as shown by the groups' lunches at "Hilton", very smart "contemporary dressing" and the ability to purchase "twenty lots" of shares, thus creates a sharp contrast between the past and the present. Their presence evidently creates an impression on Siputum (a slave character) who is puzzled when he first sees such bizarre individuals. This fulfils Todorov's second condition of a "hesitation" (which is optional) experienced by a character in the story to qualify it as being one of the traits of the Fantastic.

Todorov's third condition is also fulfilled when we decipher the reason behind the introduction of such characters (as explained above). The audience might be puzzled at first but the political overtones and thematic proximity of the play with power and corruption would clearly point to the significance of the discussion in *Birch* centring on the idea of constructed history and its socio-economic and political concerns.

Kee's *Birch* ends with the past struggles of nationalistic heroes like Datuk Maharajalela forgotten amid cries of "Buy" and "Sell". Like Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman*, whose belief in the American Dream had failed him, Datuk Maharajalela's strong patriotism in *Birch* was misguided and undermined by corrupt individuals and weak leaders like Sultan Abdullah, Raja Yusuf, Tan Kim Cheng and Datuk Sagor. *Birch* as a play is also a statement and a consideration of local history¹¹⁹ that could be interpreted and dramatized for an analysis of national history and a discourse on national politics. Incorporating the Brechtian with the fantastic, Kee's didactic approach in his earlier

political plays has shifted in *Birch* where he explores and experiments with elements of historical drama to present his finest political play on Malaysian politics. From *1984 Here and Now* which is an allegory of Malaysian politics to the fictionalized Equaland in *The Big Purge*, *Birch* marks Kee's mastery of Kee of the dramatic elements, presenting thus a stronger hold on structure, flow and technique, all of which I will discuss in the following sections. In *Birch*, Kee uses them as creative dramaturgical techniques to challenge and resist the political state and its ideologies.

4.11 Creative Resistance: The Alienation and the Hesitation Effect, and the Deconstruction of the Historical Narrative

In this section, I will discuss how Kee incorporates Brecht's alienation effect and the element of the Fantastic to produce a type of creative resistance that questions the idea of state-sanctioned history.

Utilizing the alienation effect that Brecht defines as: "A representation which alienates is one that allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar" (Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 192) Kee also deconstructs the historical master narrative of *Birch* at the same time. A moment of "hesitation" (Todorov's notion of disbelief) is also created, allowing the audience to ponder and think. I will thus be discussing these points together in this section as both are related and essential to the playwright's dramaturgical development in *Birch*.

The alienation effect, the Fantastic element, and deconstruction of the historical narrative are not seen in *1984* and *The Big Purge*. Kee's experimentation here in *Birch* has made it dramaturgically distinct from the earlier plays. Kee's play, in fact, exists in three dimensions, the present (involving modern-day actors), the past (the historical characters)

and the future (modern-day characters). This then proves how *Birch* marks the shift in strategy, direction, and approach by the playwright in his political plays.

According to Kee's view, the theatre is a platform for political discourse, and like Brecht, he believed that the dramatic art form was a critical medium in informing society of the moral and social injustices plaguing humankind. Brecht often used the technique of "detaching" his audiences from drama because he believed that the "real action" was in the real world and what was performed on stage was merely fiction. Hence, what was seen on stage was to provoke a reaction in the real world. According to Brecht: "We need a type of theatre which not only releases the feelings, insights and impulses possible within the particular historical field of human relations in which the action takes place, but employs and encourages those thoughts and feelings which help transform the field itself" (Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 190). Thus, audiences watching Brecht's plays might be entertained by the performance, but Brecht also wanted them to know the moral message behind the play and to work out their moral reactions in real time.

At the same time, Kee also believes that "history is fiction", and contests the notion of national history. Kee deconstructs the historical narrative of the assassination of J.W.W. Birch. His intentions are two-fold. George Watt elaborates that plays such as Robert Yeo's *The Eye of History* and Kee's *Birch*, in fact, deflate "...colonial historical centrality and the grand narratives that have served it,..." and "...question the metanarratives expounded by their own largely benign but controlling postcolonial governments" (Watt, *De-mastering Historical Narrative in Robert Yeo's The Eye of History and Kee Thuan Chye's We Could **** You, Mr. Birch* 89). This stems from his conviction that historical facts are subjective and depend on interpretation by historians. This, coupled with one-sided interpretations, bias and influence from influential stakeholders (such as politicians

and the ruling government) could jeopardize the accuracy of such “facts”. Building on this perspective, Kee cleverly adapts a historical event from Malaysia’s history, the assassination of the first British Resident of Perak in 1875, and turns it into a discourse on many aspects of power, ranging from political to economic and from the individual to the state.

While the element of humour is certainly stronger here than in Kee’s previous two political plays, Kee also emphasizes history as a discursive medium and reflective matter in social discourse. This is connected to his view that history should not always be voluminous, incomprehensible and difficult. Kee comments:

The theme in *Birch* is very serious too but the approach is certainly more lighthearted, more playful and I am taking a heavy subject, which is History and making fun of it in a way and one of the underlying messages was that we cannot take ourselves too seriously as a people. We cannot be looking at things indifferently. We have to question things. For example, if so and so is held up to be a cultural icon, it doesn’t mean that we have to revere him/her. We have to look at it more deeply and see what would come afterwards. (Kee, Personal Interview)

Thus, Kee sees history as a medium which he can use as a platform for learning, debate, scrutiny, discussion, exposition and self-examination of one’s conscience. All of this is interlaced and woven with Kee’s doses of humour, irony, satire, alienation, and parody that result in a final creative product blending history with imagination, a combination that is meant to debunk the notion of history as dull, listless or dead. At the same time,

Kee challenges the dominant national narrative with sharp commentaries on society using multiple approaches including Brecht's alienation effect, to be specific, historicification, which distances the individual from the subject matter, in this case, national history. According to Brecht: "...if we play works dealing with our own time as though they were historical, then perhaps the circumstances under which he himself acts will strike him as equally odd; and this is where the critical attitude begins." (Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 190). Thus, according to Brecht's historicification, contemporary society will not be emotionally attached when they watch the play and will be capable of making connections between the depicted history and the present. In Kee's *Birch*, Brecht's historicification is seen in the subjectivity of its history integrated with scenes of "...seduction, intrigue, conspiracy, murder, recalcitrance and even a love triangle..." (Lim, 3). Nevertheless, Kee does not lose sight of his intention to stage the play. For Kee, the play is less didactic and more relevant to the present than the past. At the same time, while the actors jump out of character, and constantly question, probe and provoke aspects of socio-political issues and notions of history, the audience may experience the moment of "hesitation" between "...a natural and supernatural explanation..." (Todorov, *The Fantastic* 33) of events in the play. Through the character detachment and moment of " ", there is a possibility that the distancing is able to deconstruct the master narrative and provide alternative perspectives. This is very much in line with Kee's method of allowing his audiences to arrive at their own conclusion. The audience is thus given the opportunity to reflect on and to question the validity of history facts, the moral decadence of political leaders and the superficiality of materialism.

In the first scene, which employs the Brechtian style/technique of staged performances, the "voice-over" suddenly stops and the stage lights go out to give an impression of a technical glitch. Soon, the main actors come on stage and act awkwardly, gesturing to one

another to start acting. The actor playing Sir Andre Clarke then orders that the music be turned on. The music is too loud, and he immediately orders it to be brought lower. But the opposite happens. The actor then motions for the music to be stopped and then, he commences with his opening line, “What this place needs is some efficiency” (Kee, *Birch* 25).

The awkwardness of the character, Sir Andrew Clarke, visibly outlines the British Empire’s underlying colonial perspective of the region as one of backwardness and lacking the modernity, efficiency, and progress of native England. Such an effect is used for dramatization purposes, and Kee thus demonstrates his awareness of the socio-political issues in Malaysia past and present, and his sharp evaluation and interpretation of the “historical episode”. In the next short scene, Kee tries to present an alternative perspective to history as he sees it by using the Brechtian technique of character detachment and the element of hesitation in the Fantastic, to emphasize how “history is fiction” because it is interpreted and written from one’s personal perspective. In this short banter between the actors playing the role of the Mantri and the Sultan, the idea of “history is fiction” is once again addressed, engaging the audience with a straightforward probe on the validity of history.

(ACTOR PLAYING THE MANTRI comes back in. he is not in character.)

ACTOR/M: WAIT A MINUTE. Is this how it really happened in history?

(Silence as everyone looks at each other. ACTOR PLAYING SULTAN drops out of character.)

ACTOR/S: History? What history? We are creating history Yatim.

This is fiction. History is fiction.

ACTOR/CLARKE: Excuse me, I have to go and prepare for my next role.

ACTOR/TAN: Me, too.

(*ACTOR PLAYING CLARKE and ACTOR PLAYING TAN EXIT.*)

ACTOR/M: What about historical truth, Mano?

ACTOR/S: Truth depends on who is telling the history and what he is trying to get across, who his audiences are. History can even be manipulated to convey opposing truths. You can screw around with history laa. (Kee, *Birch* 27-28)

Kee's use of characters speaking out of their roles has created outcomes for the audience to take in. The first is the effect of the Brechtian epic theatre which, according to Brecht:

To make these transactions intelligible the environment in which the people lived had to be brought to bear in a big and "significant" way. This environment had of course been shown in the existing drama, but only as seen from the central figure's point of view, and not as an independent element. It was defined by the hero's reactions to it. It was seen as a storm can be seen when one sees the ships on a sheet of water unfolding their sails, and the sails filing out. In the epic theatre it was to appear standing on its own. (Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 70)

In short, by doing so, this Brechtian technique used by Kee thus detaches the audiences from the world of theatre in order for the individual to be grounded in reality. Secondly, the characters' emerging and speaking out of their roles provokes a rational self-reflection and a critical analysis of the discourse highlighted, which is, "History is fiction". This is a staged play by a group of present-day actors/individuals whose performance provides critical insights to understanding the issue. The third effect achieved is the element of transparency that Kee desires to create by virtue of his play and this is attained by having the characters/actors probing the audience on history being the undisputed source of information of the past. By doing so, Kee wants the audience to decide on the truth of the premise. Fourthly, this could again indirectly result in the audience experiencing the moment of hesitation which, as I have already explained, is a feature the Fantastic. This is evident in the actors' confusion when "ACTOR/M" starts to question the legitimacy of "history". Considered the second (optional) condition of the Fantastic, "this hesitation may also be experienced by a character; thus the reader's role is so to speak entrusted to a character" (Todorov, *The Fantastic* 33). From the moment of hesitation, the audience is then compelled to ponder over the significance of the issue. Kee thus achieves much by such performances that enable his characters to depart from the conventional spoken dialogue to one that is humorous, interactive, and provoking of thought and discourse during the course of the performance. An example of this can be seen when an out-of-character actor poses a question to the audience regarding the government's observance of the rule of law.

ACTOR/DS: Who ensures that?

ACTTOR/L: What?

ACTOR/DS: Who ensures that the government does not abuse its power?

ACTOR/L: (Indicating the audience). Ask them.

(ACTOR/DS: goes to a few members of the audience and asks them the question, “Who ensures that the government does not abuse its power?”)

(Kee, *Birch* 37-38)

From the passage, the characters break out of character and ask the audience questions such as, “Who ensures that the government does not abuse its power?” (Kee, *Birch* 38), thus highlighting the moral imperative and importance of a check and balance system in the government. Kee moves on to show how political power is constantly manipulated by those in power to convey certain ‘perspectives’ that benefit the ruling elite. Drawing from one example of the actors stepping out of their roles and speaking up, the audience obtains snippets of information regarding the legitimacy of news reporting and efforts by the ruling government to intimidate the judiciary and the press. This highlights the unique performance of character detachment in the play that provides the space for audience interaction.

ACTOR/DS: Do you believe everything you read in the newspapers?

ACTOR/S: Don’t you?

ACTOR/L: Listen to this, Yatim.

ACTOR/s: More history.

(ACTOR PLAYING SULTAN goes.)

ACTOR/L: (Reads.) A Cabinet Minister once said, quote: “The media must be given freedom to express opinion freely, even the right to be wrong. But if it abuses its right, then the authorities have

a duty to intervene.” Unquote. In 1987, three newspapers had their publishing permits withdrawn.

ACTOR/DS: I’m glad I’m not a journalist.

ACTOR/L: The same minister said, quote: “The judiciary must be free to discharge its duties but it cannot have 100 percent freedom or it will lose its sense of responsibility and do something wrong.”

Unquote. In 1988, the Head of All Judges and four very senior judges were sacked.

ACTOR/DS: I am glad I’m not a judge.

ACTOR/L: The minister also said, quote: “Everyone must realize they cannot abuse their power. No government should be allowed to have the freedom to do exactly as it pleases.” Unquote.

ACTOR/DS: who ensures that?

ACTOR/L: What?

ACTOR/DS: Who ensures that the government does not abuse its power?

ACTOR/L: (Indicating the audience.) Ask them.

(ACTOR/DS goes to a few of the audiences and asks them the question, “Who ensures that the government does not abuse its power?”

(Kee, Birch 36-38)

In the “Author’s Note”, Kee stresses, “The content of the foregoing speech can be changed accordingly to accommodate a happening topical to the time of the production, as long as that happening reflects the theme of power” (*Birch* 36). This would also correlate to the first and third conditions of Todorov’s “hesitation” experienced by the

audience and the rejection of the "...allegorical as well as 'poetic' interpretation" (*The Fantastic* 33). Here we also see Kee's tendency to associate the comparative examples from the mainstream press with examples from Malaysian politics because Kee himself is a political playwright. Politics is the fodder that Kee feeds on and his actors who speak out of character enable him to historicize and address social and political issues of his day, thus creating a discourse that highlights political awareness and instances of power abuse by the state.

Again by showing how his characters speak out of character, Kee also reinforces the idea that he is the master and creator of his play. While "History is Fiction" and may be manipulated to convey misleading 'truths', Kee can offer resistance and rewrite history' to present his version of events. In addition, Kee places equal importance on the aspect of historicity because the writing of history itself is a political act. With history being manipulated by the powers that be, Kee thus resists the hegemonic discourse of national history by producing his version of history that gives its audience an alternative reading of the events. By doing so, the notion of history becomes fluid and is open for interpretation. National history thus belongs to everyone and not just a select few gatekeepers of the field. This removes at once the rigidity of history and allows individuals to come to terms with the historical narrative.

Another example of the Fantastic in the first scene is Sir Andrew Clarke's first line which is symbolic and representative of Kee's approach in merging the past and present. Robert Yeo in his introductory essay¹²⁰ to the play says the loaded first line of the play was not only symbolic but was meant to infuse the past and the present with references to the British official's first interference in the politics of the Malay archipelago, and at the same time, referring to an ex-prime minister of Malaysia who curtailed the powers of the Malay

sultans¹²¹ in 1988. Thus, according to Yeo, Kee seamlessly “...fuses time past and present and deftly makes one statement critical of the two historical periods thereby connecting the two narratives” (Yeo, Introduction to *Birch* 13). Thus, the introduction of the modern characters from the future would be one of the Fantastic elements co-existing with Kee’s alienation technique, which provokes and repeatedly reminds his audiences of the integral message of *Birch*: History is fiction and the abuse of power is perennial.

In yet another scene, Sir Andrew Clarke is debating on the issue of the rights of succession with the Mantri who insists that Raja Abdullah is a poor choice for a ruler of the state. Midway through the discussion, the narrative flow is disrupted when the actor who plays the Mantri exits the stage and returns to ask the question, “Wait a minute. Is this how it really happened in history?” Later, the actor playing Sir Andrew Clarke drops out of character and says he needs to change before the next scene: “Excuse me I have to go prepare for my next role” (Kee, *Birch* 28). This is followed by a short discussion on “history” and “truth” when the actors compare notes on the authenticity of history. The short discussion soon becomes inconclusive in Kee’s trademark “...short, seemingly naturalistic representations of historical events...” (Watt, 93); it is a performance that leaves the audience to ponder and think about the gravity of the discussion.

ACTOR/M: So how do we tell what is the real truth?

ACTOR/S: Now, you know of course that the man sent to be British Resident of Perak was James W.W. Birch.

ACTOR/M: Yes, that is historically true.

Listen to what his colleague Frank Swettenham wrote about him.

(*He produces a book and reads from it*) “In Mr Birch the British Government has lost one of its most courageous, able, and zealous

officers.” How about this? (*He produces another book*) Written by his successor, Sir Hugh Low: “Mr Birch was violent, drunk, and he did some high-handed things.” Mmm, is this true too?

(*ACTOR/S shrugs, throw the book away and exits, followed by ACTOR/M*)

(Kee, *We Could **** You, Mr. Birch* 28-29)

The throwing away of the history book, according to Watt, is “...both symbolic and actual and it is typical of the comedy employs at key moments in the action” (Watt, 93). Robert Yeo, in his introduction to *Birch*, has noticed that this is the strength of the play as it demonstrates Kee’s strategic positioning of perspectives that move and engage the audience of the play towards an understanding of the subjectivity of history. Yeo explains further:

This extract makes evident about the medium being the message. The message, clearly, is that “History is fiction” and that the actor who says it questions the character he is playing – the Sultan. By stepping out of character he technically reinforces the notion that history is fiction. The real person subverts the created persona, deconstructs him but in a self-aware manner; at the same time, this scene is itself a construct, a truth...The abolition of the old theatre of illusion...frees the critical faculty of the audience and absolves the playwright from being cramped by narrow and rigid conventions that the pretence of presenting real happenings imposes.

(Introduction, *We Could **** You, Mr. Birch* 15)

Kee's approach is to emphasize the subjectivity of history that he presents using the multiplicity of voices and incorporating the Brechtian character detachment approach and the Fantastic element through interactive performances. Both these elements intersect and create moments of reflection and criticality when performed. Kee himself has constantly reminded the members of his audience that they are not passive consumers of the art, but in fact active participants who are challenged to think and to question the presented narrative. The use of history then is merely a tool for Kee to challenge our assumptions of what is fixed and pre-determined by the political state and its agencies, and this view is even extended to his own version of history. Thus, Kee's *Birch* offers a perspective of history that is written under the lens of the playwright who is a 'manipulator' himself, for Kee has said that "Birch itself is a work of manipulation, it manipulates facts, and it manipulates history. It is not to be trusted as well; you have to look at Birch with great suspicion (Yeo, *The Writer as Activist: An Interview with Kee Thuan Chye* 18). By extension, such 'manipulation' would also cover the hesitation that is generated when the audience reacts to the characters speaking out of their roles. The Brechtian character detachment and the effect of the hesitation of the Fantastic offer a deconstructive view and a certain criticality to the audience. Both approaches offers an amalgamated perspective of history and fiction. Such techniques are intended to provoke the consciousness and imagination of his audience. Through the emphasis on the subjectivity of history and the deconstruction of national history, Kee offers his audience multiple views on the matter.

By destabilizing the notion of national history, which in his view is biased, inaccurate, and sometimes manipulated by the state, Kee presents a rewrite, asserting and inserting his view that nationalist heroes and colonialists are the same. Even the modern-day people from the future share negative values such as materialism, greed for power, and obsession

with wealth. By juxtaposing the past and present, the present predicament of the country is what it is because of its leaders who are as corrupt, manipulative, and oppressive as the colonist. This is seen in one scene where an out-of-character actor reads a contemporary newspaper highlighting instances of corruption in the government and the misrepresentation of the news by the media. Citing current information, Kee creates a moment of hesitation, a Fantastical moment, and through the characters' questioning of one another, Kee also questions the accuracy and validity of the 'truth' presented in mainstream media. As such, if mainstream newspapers are suspect in their reported news, then the notion of an 'historical truth' could be further questioned.

ACTOR/DS: Ei, Mano, what is that all about?

ACTOR/S: History

ACTOR/DS: According to whom?

ACTOR/S: The newspapers.

ACTOR/DS: Do you believe everything you read in the newspapers?

ACTOR/S: Don't you?

ACTOR/L: Listen to this Yatim.

ACTOR/S: More history.

(Kee, *We Could **** You, Mr. Birch* 36-37)

As *Birch* is not an entirely historical play, Kee uses history as a tool to illustrate the message of his play. It is rarely historically accurate because like the history play genre that Kee emulates, the medium of history is used to illuminate the present rather than the past. The dramatist's use of history is also a subterfuge for his list of concerns about contemporary Malaysian society which includes everything from culture, history, race,

class, economics and politics. Kee has also said that the play is more about individuals and pressing issues of the present:

The play talks more of the present than of the past. It's about us today, some of the features of people today and indirectly comparing it to the past. Self-interest takes high priority in a lot of people's lives. It seems to be the case now as it used to be before. In a sense it is also giving the idea that things really haven't changed. (Al-Attas 23)

The merging of past and present and the dissection of history as a form of manipulation of truth in this Brechtian-influenced play prove that history is Kee's springboard for discussion about these pressing issues of the present:

We are all recipients of manipulated truth and are manipulators ourselves. Everyone lists it down the way they saw it and when it comes to interpretation, it will always vary. It happens every day. You hear some rumour and you don't know if it's fact or fabrication...The play takes the piss out of a lot of people, but it is self-mocking at the same time, so no offence can be taken. It gives the idea that any dramatization of history is open and vulnerable to manipulation by the people who do take the dramatization. By the same token, it suggests that reality itself can be very much dramatized – except that in reality the people who dramatize it are, in the main, politicians.

(qtd. in Abishegam 15)

Kee has reiterated that he is not bothered by accusations by historical purists¹²² that he is distorting history. Instead, he stresses that he is unperturbed by these accusations and that his play should enlighten and entertain rather than indoctrinate and preach. When asked about the message of the play and what he hoped his audiences would learn from it, Kee answers:

Well, I'd like them to leave with the feeling that history is not sacred. They should be cheered by the laughter, think about issues brought up by the play, reflect on what happens in everyday life and how reality is manipulated in order to send out certain messages. (qtd. in Abishegam 15)

Kee does this effectively in *Birch* by depicting the British colonial administration as inefficient, corrupt, and scandalous, to say the least. The character of Birch, being the representative of the British Empire, epitomizes the problems associated with the administration; his values and morality are questionable and his sexist views of women make him no better than the local chieftains such as Datuk Maharajalela.

Kee thus dissects national history and performs it via its alienation and Fantastic themed performance. By doing so, the playwright re-examines not only the historical figure Birch, but also takes part in the deconstruction of history as the master narrative in nation-building. The deconstruction of history aspires to prove how the metanarratives in history are always fluid and there is always an opportunity for history to be examined further. Kee accomplishes this by providing multiple perspectives on the characters and situations that shape the historical episode of Birch's murder.

Birch is thus Kee's platform for a "renegotiation" of the past where he recreates his version of Malayan history for a creative take on the struggle for power and portrayal of the characters embroiled in the saga. Kee's style of making characters speak out of their character reinforces the concept that history is debatable. Their commentaries seek to provoke the audiences to think about concepts of power and the desire for it. Power, whether it is political or social is thus a trademark of the political state and individual alike, past and present.

Birch marks the departure of Kee's bleak and pessimistic political plays to a return to the more unconventional form of theatre influenced and inspired by Brecht, and experimentation with the Fantastic, seems to be Kee's new way of historicizing and deconstructing history as the master narrative in nation-building.

Kee's play differs from his earlier plays as he interrupts the traditional linear plot with such dramaturgical intersections of past and present with the Fantastic. Kee's deconstruction of history in this sense also involves the deconstruction of time, as evidenced by the continuous performativity by modern and historical characters in the play that enables the playwright to highlight pervasive motivations afflicting both 19th and 20th century societies such as "...greed, hunger for power, and self-interest, to the exclusion of all else" (Philip, *The Use of the Historical Narrative in Kee Thuan Chye's We Could **** You, Mr. Birch* 25). The ease with which the past and present characters encounter and interact with one another, and at times step out of character (though only the present-day characters do this) gives creative space for Kee to comment on what he views as the degradation of society and its values, past and present. The manipulation of time and the deconstruction of history serve to highlight "...historiography, twisting, questioning and manipulating..." of our fixed views of national history, the perceived

notion that history is irreproachable, the abuse of political power, and how little difference there is between people, past and present.

4.12 Historical and Modern Characters

Kee's creation of a multiplicity of characters ranging from historical to fictional, past and future is one of his finest multicultural and multi-dimensional representations. The creation of the future/modern characters in *Birch* is related to Todorov's first and third conditions of the Fantastic genre and one of the creative dramaturgical strategies employed by Kee as a critical voice against hegemonic ideologies of the state and society. Its creation compliments the Fantastic element in *Birch* as it integrates past and present narratives into a dramaturgical performance of resistance and discourse.

Kee's earlier plays have often been criticized for their one-dimensional characterization but in *Birch*, this is not evident. Kee's portrayal of characters, from male and female leads to minor characters has improved significantly and realistically in terms of their depth and dialogue. In *Birch*, the dramatist's trademark multicultural representation¹²³ also continues but what is strongly evident is the play's performative portrayal of women as strong and intelligent. This is clearly reflected in characters such as Kuntum, wife of Siputum the slave, Mastura the daughter of Datuk Maharajalela, and Sofea, Ashburn's girlfriend. The female characters are equally matched with the more aggressive but not necessarily more intelligent male characters of Sultan Abdullah, Raja Yusuf, Datuk Sagor, Birch, and Ashburn, all of whom are cowardly, ignorant, immoral, and indecisive. The minor character of the opportunistic businessman Tan Kim Cheng however, stands out from the rest of the major male characters as he seems to be the most intelligent (cunning) and successful character in the political power tussle in Perak. In *Birch*, Kee's introduction of such a multiplicity of dissenting female characters is therefore meant to

challenge the many facets of culture, tradition and practice as well as the political and social issues past and present, which also include the male-centric dominance in state administration.

Mastura, Kuntum and Sofea are the strongest ever portrayals of female characters in all of Kee's staged plays¹²⁴. Kee uses Mastura, the fictional daughter of Maharajalela, to question and challenge the position of women in feudal Malay society. He portrays her as intelligent, quick-witted and strategic. She beats her father three times in a row at a game of strategy, the *congkak*¹²⁵, but when he praises her, she deflects the praise back to him, saying "Because you taught me the game, each time I win, you surpass yourself" (Kee, *Birch* 30). She is still playing a game, pandering to her father's male ego as expected of women of her position. But when her father says, "You have even acquired a quick tongue. I hope the man you someday marry will be deserving" (Kee, *Birch* 30), it quickly becomes apparent that she objects to the idea of being married, and questions the confined and limited role of women in this society.

Her objections to being married, and her questions as to why women are not allowed to travel and explore foreign lands, seem to fall on deaf ears of her father. The limits of her life's experiences and ignorance of worldly matters is unacceptable to the logical Mastura. She is even more baffled that women cannot even be elected as village chiefs, a notion that her father finds hardly worth entertaining though amusing.

Mastura's queries about culture and custom are clearly against the grain, but seem to provide a platform for Kee's probing and questioning line. His portrayal of Mastura challenges the societal norms of gender, the patriarchal values of society and the power to define, all of which are associated with the universal concept of power. Here, Kee

strategically provides an example of a negotiation and questioning of gender roles between a daughter and her father within the confines of a small family unit. The foregrounding of family affairs in the midst of a homely *congkak* game points to the serenity and tranquility of village life and the traditional values commonly associated with a woman's role at home. This is cleverly placed in the foreground with the political upheaval in the background.

Via Mastura, Kee is able to critically question the patriarchal structure of the past. By using this forward-thinking character who is located in the past, he successfully draws together past and present. Thus, our critical reaction to the past is extended to the present –we begin to question the patriarchal, controlling authorities of the present. Kee's incorporation of Brecht's historicization technique, which Yeo sees as Kee's trademark of fusing past and present narratives, is done to produce a critical statement that connects both periods. What is brilliantly achieved here is the critique of patriarchal leadership and the debunking of popularly-held beliefs such as gender superiority. Most importantly, by highlighting dissenting female characters such as Mastura, Kee intends to generate a critical discourse on the socio-political and socio-economic issues affecting Malaysia and dispelling the notion that "...the leader is always right" (Kee, *Birch* 67).

Mastura questions and challenges her destiny and symbolizes change because she is a contrast to the traditional way of thinking. This is a subtle idea that Kee proposes to the audience so that they will do likewise, that is, so that they will ultimately be critical and politically aware of issues affecting Malaysia. Mastura is a symbol of resistance; she can be contrasted with men who are supposed to be gate keepers of tradition, knowledge and wisdom but in reality lack reason. In a subsequent scene that sees her serving tea to her father, she questions him on matters pertaining to tradition and their community's way of

life such as owning slaves, which contradicts the notion of equality among individuals. Datuk Maharajalela finds her probing a little “too direct” and silences her with a slap because, as he says, “There are things that cannot be questioned” (*Birch*, 58). In addition, her questioning stance is perceived as a challenge which could potentially disrupt as well as interfere with the chieftain’s power base which includes lucrative gains derived from the revenue and collection of taxes from slave trading. Caught in a bind over her logic, he expresses his regret to have “...let a female learn so much” (*Birch*, 58). Her father’s justification is that everything must always fall into a certain structure to enable stability and order, and this includes dealing severely with runaway slaves because they have broken the social structure and rules imposed on them. The highlighted conversation below demonstrates her father’s dismissive nature and his views of how “order” is paramount at all times for uniformity and conformity. This is superficial, of course, considering that the chieftains have a hidden agenda in resisting such a power challenge to their authority.

MASTURA: But why must some men have masters? In the eyes of God, are we all not equal?

LELA: Mastura, your speech is too direct. That is not what we are used to.

MASTURA: Would not a slave seek to be equal and escape to a life of freedom?

LELA: Enough of this foolish talk!

MASTURA: If they run away, must they be tracked down like animals?

LELA: (*Slaps her.*) Enough! I did not bring you up so you can talk back to me! (*Pause.*) Yes, if they run away, they are behaving like

animals and must be tracked down. They are disrupting order.

Without order, we will be less than human. (Kee, *Birch* 58-59)

Mastura is challenging tradition, culture, and gendered roles because she believes they should not be rigid or static, and Kee is doing precisely the same thing. Kee's *Birch* is therefore challenging the hegemony of state-sanctioned history and the fixed notions of historical facts that are determined by historians.

Another example of a female character in *Birch* who is empowered and rises beyond her social station to eventually manipulate her manipulators is Kuntum¹²⁶, the wife of Siputum, the slave to Datuk Sagor. Datuk Sagor is one of the noblemen embroiled in the political tussle for power in Perak. Owing money to Datuk Sagor and being unable to pay him back, Siputum and his wife became enslaved to him. Taking a liking for Kuntum, Datuk Sagor tries all means to take her as his own. He even tortures Siputum and forcefully separates them in the hope that she will fall for him, but such strategies fail to endear him to her. In her most important monologue, her thoughts on morality, religion, and human compassion are revealed together with her sense of desperation and hope for a better future with her husband. It is this *mélange* of thoughts and emotions that propels Kuntum to take desperate measures to emancipate herself from the shackles of the abusive system that preys on feudalistic loyalty and is premised on human bondage.

KUNTUM: My husband borrowed money to start a business. But the business closed down and he couldn't pay back. He became a slave to Datuk. I also became Datuk's property. But he doesn't own me completely. He wants something from me which I will not give him...My husband is my lord and master, that is what I have been

brought up to believe. I give myself only to my husband, my religion teaches me. How can Datuk ask me to go against tradition and religion?...Datuk puts me in another room so he can come to me. But I will not let Datuk touch me. And he will not take me if I do not give myself willingly. I know that and I resist. My husband tells me to give in. He says that way maybe Datuk will then let us be together sometimes. But I cannot do it. My duty is to resist. I long for my husband's touch and he tells me he longs for mine. I make believe he is touching me when I touch myself...Datuk says it will take another ten years for my husband to pay back his debt. I cannot wait. There must be a better life than this (Kee, *Birch* 44)

Kuntum's heartfelt plea for a better life underscores the evils of slavery and the human greed for power and control. This is a point that Kuntum finds puzzling considering how such an individual of authority such as Datuk Sagor could ask her to act against the tenets of their religion which forbids human torture, adultery, and coercive sex. Kuntum is determined to end her misery and the cycle of violence against her person. Her resistance is similar in essence to Mastura's challenging the traditional limitations imposed on women on the basis of their gender.

Mastura's resistance is intellectual. This is largely attributed to her education. Here we see two individuals resisting two different hegemonies: Mastura resists the cultural and religious restrictions that restrict her freedom and individuality while Kuntum runs away from sexual and economic exploitation. Both are victims of a conservative patriarchal society that grounds women based on their gender. Kuntum's exploitation is more physical and brutal as compared to Mastura's, and therefore, Kuntum's act of resistance

is more pronounced in nature than Mastura's intellectual resistance which seems less effective. When Kuntum takes matters into her own hands and runs away, she is not only safeguarding her life but making a stand for her own beliefs and resisting an ideological and hegemonic system of entrapment that is vicious and brutal. Kee shows that discriminations are not only based on class but gender as well. Females such as Kuntum, who are economically impoverished, are discriminated against and preyed on by those in power.

Kuntum and Mastura thus symbolize the resistance to the old system of values entrenched in the layered patriarchal structures of society. Their resistance to such ideals imposed on them speaks of their refusal to be merely pawns in the power play of men in the domestic as well as public spheres of influence. Susan Philip's article, "*Dismantling Gendered Nationalism in Kee Thuan Chye's We Could **** You, Mr. Birch*" has pointed out that the portrayal of stronger women characters as compared to their emasculated male characters in *Birch* has effectively dismantled the notion of the nation as a male centric domain. It has also empowered women to break through barriers of traditional definitions and to rise above sexual objectification in society.

In *Birch*, Kee also seeks to undermine the male/mind-female/body dyad, thus simultaneously destabilising the common masculine tropes of nationalism. What is interesting about Kee's portrayal of women in *Birch* is that he avoids or rethinks this focus on the body, to position women as questioning, rational beings who resist commodification as physical/sexual objects or, if thus commodified, turn their physicality to their own advantage. The male characters, on the other hand, are sometimes "de-masculinised," thus unfitting

them for their assumed roles as leaders of this “male” nation. Kee also gives voice and body to marginalised nineteenth century women, positioning them as questioning, challenging individuals, thereby not only reclaiming women’s lost histories but also undermining monocular views of the nation as a purely and solely male province. (Philip, 88)

By refusing to be mere commodities to men, the women in Kee’s *Birch* are thus dissenting individuals who will not toe the line in the societal expectations imposed on them. This has indirectly, according to Philip, disrupted as well as deconstructed “...the mythology of the male-identified nation as a center of integrity, masculinity and autonomy. The playwright questions the whole nationalist myth through self-centered, greedy male characters, with the female characters functioning as the rational, ethical voice that is so lacking in the men...Kee’s play reverses this assumption, affirming instead the strong positive power of women vis-à-vis the divisions and weaknesses apparent among the men” (Philip, 88).

Kee’s *Birch* is thus a form of critique against the system of political governance as well as the social and moral fabric of society. In this play, the male characters in their privileged positions of power and responsibility cannot be relied on to make sound judgements. Their inability to do so puts them in an extremely negative light despite their call for social, moral, and political cohesiveness in maintaining stability according to the traditional system of values. The failure to adhere to this system, as Datuk Maharajalela emphasizes, would mean that society itself would be jeopardized and the whole feudal system of subservient loyalty destroyed should women not fulfil their destined roles as

homemakers, and institutions of human bondage, that is, state-sanctioned slavery, be dismantled.

The women characters in *Birch*, especially Kuntum, thus embody this “strong positive power” in expressing defiance to the male-centric power structures in the play. Kuntum’s empowerment and liberation is achieved because of her fortitude and intelligence in manipulating her oppressors who are emotionally weak, sexually deprived, and incapable of logical reasoning. Kuntum’s character is thus made more “masculine” and worldly, hence breaking the stereotype of the weak female. Escaping from Datuk Sagor, Kuntum finds safe refuge in the arms of Birch, the British Resident officer. Her monologue however, reveals how she is using Birch for her own selfish reasons of wanting “a better life” that is surely a stark improvement from her life of captivity. Using Brecht’s character detachment method that Brecht defines as “...attempts to act in such a manner that the spectator is prevented from feeling his way into the characters. Acceptance or rejection of their actions and utterances was meant to take place on a conscious plane, instead of, as hitherto, in the audience’s subconscious” (Brecht, *On Chinese Acting*, 130), “ACTOR D/S” breaks out of character and questions why Kuntum must give in to Birch’s seduction. Perhaps it is because he is a foreigner, a *Mat Salleh*.¹²⁷ Kuntum steps in to explain herself in the most direct way.

KUNTUM: Is it wrong for me to want the nice things in life? Even if it’s for a short time? I didn’t do this for anything else. That man was kind to me, he took care of me. I have not been treated like this for so long. My husband couldn’t, the Datuk kept us apart. Anyway, I resisted as long as I could. I was scared. But I felt good. I am only a human being. (*Drops out of character and, playfully*) it’s not true,

you know, that the *Mat Salleh*'s one is always bigger. (Kee, *Birch* 57)

Kuntum's explanation of her sexual tryst with Birch and revelation of his "inadequacies" shows that he is her conquest. She has made her sexuality the means to achieve her goals of self-fulfillment, and in the postcolonial perspective between the colonizer and the colonized, Philip remarks:

...Kee uses this scene to utterly deflate Birch; after the seduction, Kuntum bursts onto stage, justifying her actions in terms of her self and her own enjoyment. She evinces no admiration for Birch, no sense of him as the dominant, powerful figure...She thus reduces Birch to a sex object, the subject of snide speculation, easily denigrated. Birch's manhood is completely discredited, and with it, the notion of the colonizing nation as strong and masculine. (Philip, 91)

Kee's highlighting of Kuntum's perseverance and strong will in fighting for personal liberation and satisfaction is contrasted to the weak and indecisive male characters such as Datuk Sagor and even Birch, both of whom are portrayed as lustful and irrational men in their pursuit of Kuntum.

Kee also introduces Sofea, a character from the present who suddenly appears in the past. Her appearance from the play's future forms part of the fantastic in *Birch*. In a way, Sofea's character is made to be a contrast to the historical and modern-day male characters. Coming from the future, Sofea reflects the modern values of her society and

seems to be more rationalistic in her attitude. She cautions her boyfriend, Ashburn, on buying stocks that is based on insider information. Ashburn tries to justify his actions, since after all, it is all part of “enterprise”, and all the “Ministers and Mentris Besar” are encouraging of such a practice (*Birch* 47). Kee’s portrayal of Ashburn signifies the rejection of the female voice of reason by the male characters in *Birch*. Kee also takes the opportunity to comment on the issue of political corruption in Malaysia at the time by using a third-person narrative. Ashburn gives credence to the perception of corruption in the country. Shocked by his moral indifference, Sofea warns him of the unwarranted optimism over the stock market. Ashburn, who himself is a speculator, is part of the opportunistic breed of individuals that Sofea describes in her warning on the lack of moral imperative when investing.

SOFEA: Yes, optimism will keep the market going up and up. I swear, everybody is thinking of getting rich quick these days, they’ll go into anything. Nobody remembers the stock market crashes of the past or the deposit taking cooperatives fiasco¹²⁸ of some years ago. (Kee, *Birch* 46)

Unperturbed by Sofea’s warning, Ashburn tries to reassure her and justifies his actions by adding that his inside information is “very reliable” because it was received from “...some Datuk who’s very well connected” (Kee, *Birch* 47). Again, the suggested view here is that corruption pervades every stratum of society. The well-connected individuals are privy to “information” which is used (or manipulated) for their own material gains.

In contrast to the female characters, Birch, the legally appointed representative of “Her Majesty the Queen”, is not depicted to be a man of reason and calibre despite his actions

in opposing slavery. Birch comes across in the play more as a character who has vested interests than a person who safeguards the political and economic interests of the British crown. His speech on his administrative vision for the state and the importance of maintaining a "...clean, efficient, and trustworthy government..." with the necessary "order" and "discipline" to guide a new generation of workers who are "...farsighted, innovative, ambitious, industrious" (Kee, *Birch* 33) is contrasted with his longest speech (37 lines), which reveal his debauchery and seduction of Kuntum. His speech is also a reflection of his colonial mindset and stereotypical as well as showing condescending views of the colonized female native.

BIRCH: All your years of slaving and yet your touch is delicate. You people are blessed with a gentleness I was not conscious of till now. Do you understand me? I'm afraid I don't speak your language, but surely you understand the tone of my voice. And you understand the language of the body as I understand the delicateness of your hands. Give me your hand...Here, perhaps you understand this language better. (He takes out money.) Take it, it's for you...Take it. (She diffidently takes the money without looking at him.) Your hand is as smooth as I imagined it to be. I find your brown skin inferior yet attractive...There's radiance in your eyes. I sense you are a woman who can think for herself. (She moves away and has her back to him.) You are very capable of taking care of yourself...(he takes her shoulders and turns her face to face him.) There is fire in you. Show it to me. Share your strength with me. (Kee, *Birch* 55-56)

Contrast this with Datuk Sagor's monologue about his feelings for Kuntum and we have Kee's contrasting portrayal between the incompetent male characters of the play with the dominant female personas such as Kuntum. Kee dedicates 20 lines to Datuk Sagor's monologue which is the character's longest lines in the play. We get a glimpse of Datuk Sagor's emotive monologue full of blatant male chauvinism as he blames everything from black magic, the "lowly as dust" Kuntum and even his fate, for distracting him from his courtly duties. Here, he blames Kuntum's husband, Siputum, for failing to provide for her, highlighting his failure as her husband, and on this pretext, reveals his motives as well as desires to have her as his own.

DATUK SAGOR: You have no right to her! You can't even provide for her, give her a decent life! You expect me to provide for both of you. What do I get in return? Hnuh? What do I get? (He stops, collects himself. Moves away from the gunny sack.) I am cursed. My wife gives me daughter after daughter, I have no son to call my own...The slave woman can give me what I need. But so can any other woman. So why do I want this slave so much? I can't even take her into my family. In the eyes of everyone, she is lowly as dust. What is it about her that has made me weaker than a child? I must have swallowed some charm to have become like this. Or it must be my fate. (Kee, *Birch* 51-52)

While Datuk Sagor is portrayed to be a brave and patriotic leader in one instance, in another he is seen to be a lovelorn and sentimental individual¹²⁹ who is indecisive about what he wants. In showing the failures of the men in society, Kee is debunking the notion of male superiority as well as the state of Malaysia's proud history of colonial resistance

in this fictional representation of events. Seen in this light, even Kuntum's husband is portrayed as an individual who has failed to live up to his responsibilities as a husband. His failed business dealings has led both of them to be enslaved. The central male figures in Kee's *Birch* are constantly blinded by greed for power, lust for women, incompetency, and constant plot-hatching ranging from the most obscure to the grandiose. They are failures, disillusioned and ridiculed in the light of the women's higher sense of morality and intelligence in *Birch*.

Another example of a weak male figure of authority is the unintelligent, dense and effeminate Sultan Abdullah, the ruler of the state of Perak. Kee's derisive portrayal of Sultan Abdullah is meant to provoke laughter and ridicule of the head of state who is corrupt, incompetent, power hungry, and exceptionally feeble as a leader. This is in line with Kee's criticism of the past and present political governance that is riddled with the abuse of power and corruption at the expense of the majority.

Sultan Abdullah in *Birch* is portrayed to be also childish and immature, often switching between possible redemptive moments in the play and moments of utter hopelessness and immaturity. Being the comic character, Sultan Abdullah is portrayed as a fickle ruler who is incapable of making important decisions befitting his stature. He is guided by the shrewd Chinese businessman and opportunist, Tan Kim Cheng, for advice on most occasions. In one example, faced with the growing influence of Birch, the sultan is clueless about his next course of action. Sultan Abdullah is then swayed by his advisors' views. They influence him to call a vote on whether they should kill Birch. This is done after much debate on whether they are a democracy, upon which Sultan Abdullah promptly declares that they are a democracy and calls for a *kenduri*¹³⁰ after the decision on the assassination of Birch is reached. In another instance, after the patriotic Datuk

Maharajalela volunteers to assassinate Birch, Sultan Abdullah demands that Datuk Maharajalela keep the plan confidential. To prove his loyalty, he is told to cut off his middle finger of his left hand. After he does so, he is told later that the Sultan was only jesting with him. The Sultan then faints upon receiving the severed finger from Datuk Maharajalela and has a recurring nightmare of how “I keep seeing that finger pointing at me. I close my eyes and it’s pointing at me. I even see it in my dreams. Yesterday I ate fish and it tasted like finger...There’s a finger haunting me. The spirit of that finger. I have to see a *bomoh*”¹³¹ (*Birch* 75). At times, Sultan Abdullah has to be reminded that he *is* the current Sultan, but he seems to be more interested in “...chasing his own women” (*Birch* 54) in the words of Datuk Sagor. Even Datuk Maharajalela calls him a “weakling” who has not done anything with regard to Birch who “...has no right to meddle with our customs” (Kee, *Birch* 53). Thus Sultan Abdullah’s character is akin to that of a court jester who faints at the sight of blood. Philip comments that Sultan Abdullah’s “...squeamishness and delicacy undermine his role as leader/father” (*Dismantling Gendered Nationalism* 92) which is undoubtedly true. Towards the end of *Birch*, as the curtain draws, the other characters join in what could be described as a hybrid scene of past and present, parodying the excesses and trivialities of material pursuits. The scene is as follows:

CHEE YOON, SAL and SOFEA enter, each with a handphone.

KUNTUM gets a handphone and joins in. As the music builds, all five join in a chorus of “Buy! Buy! And Sell! Sell! It all ends with everybody dancing to the beat.

(Kee, *Birch* 81)

The scene unites all the characters together in a confluence of time and narrative that ultimately stresses Kee's viewpoint of how nothing has changed in society. The materialistic values of the past and the present are still dominant, and the greed for power and wealth has superseded societal concerns in the play. The scene is demonstrative of Kee's convergence of the dramaturgical elements, and the 'fluidity' of the scene is similar to Kee's view of history as a fluid narrative that is often influenced by state power and politicians. It is a scene that is demonstrative of Kee's ingenuity in amalgamating the narrative, the characters, and dimensions into a creative and timeless play.

Thus in *Birch* we see how Kee incorporates the elements of the Fantastic and the Brechtian Epic theatre into the narrative. Kee's use of characters speaking out of character and the introduction of female personae such as Mastura, Kuntum and Sofea were created to incorporate a montage of scenes and situations whereby the characters could question and dismantle the hegemonic discourses that are ingrained in Malaysia's socio-economic and socio-political structures. With the Fantastic being the adhesive for the creative dramaturgical elements, the characters' performance of the Fantastic elements in *Birch*, attest to Kee's *Birch* as a well-rounded play, and is a testament of the playwright's ability to adapt and innovate various strategies to produce a resilient political play that questions and resists existing state ideologies.

4.13 Conclusion: Miler and Kee's Political Plays – A Blend of the Fantastic and Performativity

What Miller and Kee have shown us through *The Archbishop's Ceiling* and *We Could **** You, Mr. Birch* and is that the theme of power is central to the playwrights' third wave of political plays. The notion of power is centrally manifested in the political state

but can also exist in social institutions such as the family unit where gender plays a crucial role in the continuous manifestation of that power.

This can be seen from Kee's *Birch* where the concept of power exists in various social layers in society. From the family unit to the master-slave hierarchy and courtly institutions, the sultan and the local chieftains hold tremendous influence on the individual which is typical of a feudalistic social system of the Malay states. In Miller's *The Archbishop's Ceiling*, the political state, represented by an oppressive regime, is the central core of political power. Other representations of power which are extensions of the former include the microphones hidden in the former apartment of the Archbishop. One may also conclude that the residence, as a former bastion of religious power, has now been eclipsed by the modern state wielding a political ideology as the new 'God'. In essence, the social and political symbols of power in *Birch* and *The Archbishop's Ceiling* speak of the power of the state to exert control over the individual and extensions of its identity. When one entity subsumes political power, the other entity would have to relent and lose some capacity of that contested power¹³².

Miller and Kee's political plays thus seek to resist such superstructures of state power and to reclaim one's position in the political landscape of the nation. Kee's political stand and awareness of Malaysian racial politics is represented by his strong statements on current political events. His dramatic nuances are sharply satirical. *Birch* remains up to this day, his best political play in terms of cohesion, structure and performance. It is from these positive points that *Birch* also emerges stronger and more well-rounded than Kee's earlier plays that appear more didactic and one-dimensional in terms of characterization and dialogue.

Birch offers a new take on the interpretation of Malaysian history. Kee's subversion of nationalist historians' view of Malaysian history is his creative resistance to what he views is subjective and biased (written history) in nature. Aiming to dispel and resist elements of state-sanctioned history, Kee's strategy boils down to his creative license to stage a play that uses an episode from the country's history as a means of reinterpreting 'official' state history.

In *Birch*, Kee masterfully reinterprets the murder of J.W.W. Birch, the first British resident of the Malay protectorate states and launches a criticism of Malaysian history, its politics, policies and politicians. Juxtaposing past and present, Kee's *Birch* is also a social commentary on political and current issues that are woven in-between the lines of the characters and in the context of staged play. Through *Birch*, Kee not only questions and creates political awareness but he also spearheads the social dimension by means of contrasting the moral values of past and present Malaysians who evidently share the same senseless culture of consumerism and materialism. Characters such as Mastura, Kuntum, and Sofea are far from being the epitome of femininity and weakness; they are, in fact, the paradigm of strength, intelligence, and perseverance. Their weak male counterparts, on the other hand, are portrayed to be the mere shadows of their perceived masculinity.

Resistance has always been a keyword used to describe Kee's political plays, which seems to be the case with *Birch* as well. However, the play's uniqueness seems to be the experimentation by the playwright to infuse it with elements of the Fantastic, a return to Brechtian techniques, the deconstruction (manipulation) of history and the creation of modern and historical characters. Past and present, old and new, the modern and the traditional come together in *Birch*. This is a departure that is uncommon in Kee's political oeuvre. It is a risk well taken because through this experimentation, Kee's *Birch* has

produced an appealing and unconventional play that sees Kee moving progressively forward as a political playwright to seek new strategies in bridging the audience-staged performance gap. In all, the strategies discussed in this chapter have thus made *Birch* the most well-written (and critical) political play by Kee that sees the performance as an excellent blend of dramatic strategies that propel the playwright's social and moral agenda forward.

Miller, on the other hand, has very similar motivations as Kee albeit coming from a more universal outlook. His social and moral streak is an inevitable focus in his plays which are dramatically intensive and powerfully charged with human emotions aimed at capturing the plight of the individual caught in the web of a moral dilemma. What would that individual do at such a threshold of personal and moral anxiety? Can the individual redeem himself when besieged by powers that are far greater than himself?

Miller's third chosen play on the persecuted individual(s), *The Archbishop's Ceiling*, starts off on this premise. It is in *The Archbishop's Ceiling* that Miller's political plays have transcended to a new paradigm never before experimented with in his political plays. *The Archbishop's Ceiling* deals with performativity and that is beyond the physical and moral constructs that characterize his earlier political plays. Resistance has now been taken to a new level and Miller explores this through the character's 'dual-performance' to resist the power of the regime. The play is not a straightforward play in the sense that it is shrouded in ambiguity of what exists and what does not and what is true and what is false. Miller has said that "One has learns to include the bug in one's mind, and the calculus of one's plans and expectations, and this is not without effect" (Introduction, *Conditions of Freedom: Two Plays of the Seventies* ix).

Miller has thus crafted a play that explores both boundaries of realism and illusion and a merger of both dimensions with a single-minded objective of discovering the individual's identity in a world where public and private fictions collide, the "...role of the artist becomes central" (Biggsby, Afterword¹³³ to *TAC* 94) and the need to make a moral stand is more imperative now than ever before. *The Archbishop's Ceiling* therefore succeeds in bringing together the political and the performative, and Castellitto notes that "Miller's accomplishment is his consistent ability to use the expressive and poetic to discover that metaphysical sphere suspended between a culturally valid reality and a potential cosmological 'other'". *The Archbishop's Ceiling* clearly demonstrates this "other" as Miller's social, moral, and universal bond between action and consequences. Miller focuses on the individual once again to make the difference, for it is the individual who makes all the difference in the end. Kee and Miller's two plays have shown that it is the individual in the end who must rise above himself and redeem his sense of self in the pursuit of an exemplary moral code of living.

In essence, Miller's *The Archbishop's Ceiling* and Kee's *Birch* have remained consistent with their earlier politically-themed plays. From a strong defensive political stance, their plays have now moved to a level of experimentation with performativity and creative dramaturgical strategies, both necessary in treading the narrow but necessary path of negotiation between resistance and the art of performance. Miller and Kee's political plays now rarely tread the path of didacticism but incorporate instead, elements of the performative that seek to fulfil their moral, social, and political agenda. Nevertheless, this transformative approach has not diluted the playwrights' consistent stand that their politically-themed plays are always about the individual and the fight against injustice and the pervasive use of power against the helpless and downtrodden. It is to Miller and

Kee's credit that they have adopted a newer and more creative approach to resistance to continue spearheading their moral and political agenda in their plays.

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CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.1 Political Injustice, Morality and Resistance in Kee's and Miller's Political Plays

My analysis of Kee's and Miller's six political plays has shown the different stages of their personal involvement with the state; and their reactions to the national politics of their time. Both playwrights show contempt for the dominance and influence of the state in exerting its political control over the common individuals who at times, have no option but to conform to the hegemony of the state.

Kee and Miller's plays have shown a clear disdain for the abuse of political power by the politicians and the state; this is clearly reflected in their plays such as *1984 Here and Now*, *The Crucible*, *The Big Purge*, and *Incident at Vichy*. Both playwrights succeeded in fulfilling their roles as social and moral dramatists to create (and re-create) plays that bring to light social and political injustices inherent in the societies of their time. In addition, all of Kee and Miller's selected plays are based on real political/historical events. This is reflective of the urgency and importance of their plays as referencing points/social commentaries of such political/historical events. Their selected political plays also reiterate the same socio-economic and socio-political struggle between the individual versus the state as well as the concept of resistance evident in the protagonist's struggle against the hegemony of the state.

From the 'Red Scare' of the McCarthy era in America to the crackdown on political dissidents in *Operasi Lalang* in Malaysia, Kee and Miller's political plays are a testament to the need for a dissident voice against the oppressive political climate of America and Malaysia in the 1950s and 1980s. In what Grace Chin describes as the "anxieties of authorship" (*The Anxieties of Authorship In Malaysian and Singapore Writings in*

English, 15) playwrights like Kee (and perhaps Miller) are conscious of what they write because there are limitations to what a writer could actually write, especially if it is political critique of the state. Nevertheless, this has never stopped Kee or Miller from producing plays that engage with contemporary socio-political issues of their time. In fact, Kee and Miller's plays are proof of the growing dissatisfaction of not only the public but individuals from the performing arts industry who are cognisant of the groundswell of public discontent towards the state as the reason for political and social turmoil afflicting the general population.

Kee and Miller's political plays are then instruments of criticism directed at the politicians and the state for their failure in safeguarding the interest of the individual. From the highly allegorical 1984 *Here and Now* to the political satire of *The Big Purge*, Kee's criticism of the state of Malaysian politics has focused on corruption, abuse of power, and greed of the politicians of the ruling National Front and the perpetuation of race-based politics in the country. Notwithstanding this, Kee also critiqued "repressive mechanisms such as the Internal Security Act", "communal politics" and "racial antagonism" (Lo, *Political Theatre in Malaysia*, 55) perpetuated in Malaysian politics, which he viewed as detrimental to national unity.

In addition, his plays are also a social commentary directed at the unfair race-based policies of Malaysia that are discriminatory in nature to the rest of the ethnic groups: "It is a system that lends itself to, indeed actively engenders, the politicisation of issues such as race, language, culture, and religion" (Kee, *Sharing A Commonwealth in Malaysia*, 5).

While Kee is not against affirmative economic policies for the disadvantaged, he is against the abuse of this economic policy in Malaysia where the ruling political parties

and politicians use this policy to shore up political support and to reaffirm the politics of race and religion for the consolidation of political power.

Similarly Miller's *The Crucible* and *Incident at Vichy* speak of political oppression, the persecution of the innocent, and why it is an individual's civic duty to be moved to action against atrocities that strip humanity of its compassion and morality. Miller clearly pleads with the human consciousness through the two allegorical plays that are about a tumultuous political incident that saw innocent individuals victimized by political power struggles between political factions, self-serving politicians, and wartime nations. Miller's personal political struggles during the era of McCarthyism in the 1950s had helped shape his understanding of the importance of political consciousness, the need for the individual to be morally guided in his/her actions and, the sacrifice of one's own life for another. Personal sacrifice is the ultimate selfless act an individual can perform in a world that is slowly becoming devoid of moral consciousness.

Viewed collectively, Kee and Miller's selected plays are overall very didactic; the protagonists of the plays are often the moral compasses of the plays. From Wiran, Thang Rong, Proctor, and Von Berg, these moral heroes are not without their flaws and misgivings. They are individuals with their own shortcomings, but it is through the trials and conflicts presented in the plays that they are confronted with the opportunity to redeem themselves morally.

Kee's and Miller's main characters often undertake tasks or responsibilities that are more than they could bear. This often comes at a great cost as the consequences of resisting the political state are often deadly. From Wiran's and Thang Rong's fight against the diabolical Big Brother and the evil Chief Minister to Proctor's and Von Berg's resistance

against the Salem theocracy and the systematic persecution of Jews by the Nazi military respectively, Kee and Miller's protagonists are often forced to make a vital moral decision that signals irretrievable losses to themselves. This sacrifice usually happens at the end of the play in order for the playwrights to re-emphasise the meaning and significance of the act. The singularity of the moral act itself is always done without compulsion. Such action forms the decisive moral victory that is the core concern of Kee's and Miller's plays. The moral act must be visibly shown to demonstrate its importance, and is done only after much contemplation and overcoming of the self-interest of the individual. At times, it entails the sacrifice of individuals, as clearly shown when John Proctor refuses to confess to false charges in return for his life or when Von Berg risks his own life to save the life of a Jew.

The moralistic and didactic themes of the political plays and the equally determined moralistic action by the male protagonists is contrasted to the immoral, decadent, and authoritarian political/religious leaders of the state whose main concern is the perpetuation of their influence and consolidation of their political power. All of Kee's and Miller's selected plays pit the individual versus the state by focusing on the contestation and negotiation of power between the two entities. Thus, Gramsci's theory of hegemony and Foucault's theory of power are applied in the analysis of Kee's and Miller's political plays because these plays exemplify the traits, structure, and qualities of such theories and demonstrate the dynamics of state power, influence and dominion over the individual and the general population.

Kee's and Miller's political plays have thus clearly shown how the ideological hegemony of the state that Gramsci describes as "domination" (through physical coercion) and "hegemony" (ideology and consent) coupled with popular support and legitimacy, are

perpetuated and reinforced through the “superstructures” or state institutions, and the “consent” that is needed for the continuity of state rule. Thus, my second chapter covers this aspect of Gramsci’s ideological hegemony as it is presented through Kee’s *1984 Here and Now* that posits Kee’s view of how the hegemony of the state is perpetuated through the hegemonic construct of nationhood, the hegemony of language and culture, the patriarchal system, and Big Brother’s political hegemony. To challenge and resist such ideological power structures, Kee has used a structured cohesive social discussion, parody, and the creation of what Gramsci defines as “organic intellectuals” or individuals who “have developed organically alongside the ruling class and function for the benefit of the ruling class.” These organic intellectuals could create a counter-hegemony (Burke, *Antonio Gramsci, Schooling and Education*) such as Wiran and Yone to debunk, subvert, and deconstruct such ideological and hegemonic constructs of the state.

Similarly, in *The Crucible*, the “organic intellectual” is definitely John Proctor who personally undertakes a crusade against the Salem theocracy, led by Judge Danforth. The latter represents the coercive superstructure of the state such as the government, police, legal system, and armed forces, and in this second half of the second chapter, I have analysed how Miller’s use of the figurative/hegemonic/manipulative language is used as a ‘weapon’ to persecute, subjugate, and crush any form of dissent to the ruling Salem administration. Language that is used to persecute is also used as a means of resistance by Proctor to dismantle the theocratic hegemony perpetuated by Danforth and the witchcraft accusations by Abigail Williams. Proctor’s character, like Wiran and Yone, is thus an antithesis to the hegemonic theocratic state and represents the moral voice of conscience that resists the ridiculous firestorm of accusations besieging the people of Salem.

The antagonists in Kee and Miller's political plays are all-powerful individuals who hold high positions in the government, the military or the state theocracy. Kee and Miller posit the conflict in their political plays between the common individual and powerful individuals and their agencies whose hegemonic influence and power dictate and rule over the fate of the common individual. The manner by which the hegemony of the state exerts its control and influence on the individual would be what he describes as a form of "discipline" that is meant to create "docile bodies" by using the methods of torture, punishment and discipline that Foucault views to be the definitive methods by which the political state achieves its dominance over the individual. It is by subjugating the individual to a series of punitive measures that the state is able to control the "body", which is:

...directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs. This political investment of the body is bound up...with its economic use; it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination...a system of subjection in which need is also a political instrument meticulously prepared, calculated and used; the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 25-26).

Kee's 1984 *Here and Now* and Miller's *The Crucible* are political plays that show that hegemonic powers of the state (that is also symbolically represented by objects such as microphones) have tremendous vested interest in the consolidation of state political

power and influence in the creation of subservient and docile individuals whose role is defined, controlled, moulded, and demarcated by the state. In *1984 Here and Now* and *The Big Purge*, we see Wiran being tortured physically and forced to admit to accusations of treason and espionage by the state authorities, while *The Crucible* has John Proctor being hanged for his failure to confess to witchcraft, and *Incident at Vichy* sees the systematic bodily inspection of individuals suspected by the German military and Vichy police of being Jews. The abuse of power by the state, the perpetuation of its hegemony, and the gross abuse of injustice goes against the moral consciousness of Kee and Miller, both of whom who seek to address such political wrongdoings simply because it is their civic duty as responsible individuals living in a society where indifference and apathy are commonly subscribed values.

In relation to such concepts of ideological hegemony and the discipline exerted over docile bodies, the third chapter of my thesis examines Kee's *The Big Purge* for aspects of resistance against the state superstructures thus demonstrating the modes and methods of resistance as presented in their diverse performances. Using Gramsci's theory of Hegemony, Kee's *The Big Purge* is not merely a political play about political persecution and injustices in society; it is a play that uses the concept of moral resistance as a method of contestation between the state and the individual. The play itself is a dialogical space voiced by the oppressed and Kee achieves this by creating dissenting characters that continuously dismantle such hegemonic power structures by means of social discourse, and decentralizing the hegemony of race, religion, and politics with a performance that is satirical and parodical. Kee also juxtaposes the Malaysian traditional performing arts/games depicted in the play such as the *congkak*, *gamelan*, *puisi*, and *wayang kulit* to be symbols of cultural resistance against the impersonal and indifferent state authorities

led by the evil Chief Minister whose greed and insatiable thirst for power are often contrasted to the community-inspired traditional performing arts/games.

In addition, the second half of my third chapter analyses Miller's *Incident at Vichy* for the underlying theme of power and persecution of the individual based on racial, religious, and economic factors. In analysing this concept of power, I have drawn on Michel Foucault's theory of power and knowledge as a form of societal control and have shown how power is used by the state, and even among individuals, as a form of control, to regulate, to define, and to persecute individuals while maintaining their hegemonic position. This correlates with Foucault's definition of the "coercion of bodies" as a means of social control. In the play, this concept is seen from the systematic selection and persecution of Jewish individuals in Vichy, France. The play has shown that the coercion strategies such as the arrests of individuals, their imprisonment, and examination of characters such as Bayard, Lebeau, the Gypsy, and the Jew, are largely based on religion, race, and economic class, thus validating Foucault's theory of power as the underlying thematic concern of the play. The moral act by the Austrian prince, Von Berg, to sacrifice himself to save another individual is the ultimate resistance against the hegemonic state and is again demonstrative of Miller's emphasis on the need for moral action against the tyranny of human persecution by the state.

From the first and second waves of Kee and Miller's political plays that demonstrate resistance and dissent to the hegemonic political state, the third wave of their plays shows a shift in their resistance plays. The fourth chapter of my thesis examines this development in such plays as *We Could **** you, Mr. Birch* and *The Archbishop's Ceiling*. Both plays demonstrate a change in the dramatized form that sees Kee incorporating elements of the Fantastic and Miller utilizing elements of performativity

which instil a very political and strong dissenting tone in their plays. In Kee's *Birch*, the playwright exploits an episode of Malayan history, the assassination of the first British Resident of the Federated Malay States, Mr. J.W.W. Birch, and transforms that historical episode into his own adaptation of history. Kee questions the accuracy and reliability of historical facts/data by staging a powerful parodical play that mirrors the past with present political issues of Malaysia, and juxtaposes the play with the creation of modern characters from the future who question the moral and ethical concerns of both societies, past and present.

Miller's third political play used for this analysis is *The Archbishop's Ceiling* which also sees a change in the dissenting strategy employed by the playwright. The play largely centres on a group of political writers and individuals staying in an apartment in an unnamed Eastern Europe capital. The apartment was formerly the residence of the past Archbishop. The group of individuals believe that the residence is being bugged by the state authorities who are out to monitor the dissidents of the state. For fear of having their own conversations recorded, the individuals then communicate in a two-layered mode of communication (the verbal and non-verbal), each with its own meaning and intention. The dual-layered communication is performed with the intention to safeguard their own interest and to deceive the state authorities recording the conversations. Since identity is "instituted through a stylised repetition of acts" (Butler, *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory* 519), the individuals in *The Archbishop's Ceiling* struggle to maintain their perceived identity with a verbal and non-verbal performance that is submissive and dissenting at the same time. In the attempt to decipher who is telling lies or the truth, Miller again raises the notion of morality and personal accountability in one of his most intriguing and unconventional plays ever.

In *Birch*, Kee asks the question: “How accurate is History?” For Miller, the question is: “To what extent is a performance genuine if it is being recorded?” In essence, Kee’s questioning of the accuracy of Malayan history and Miller’s examination of identity in *The Archbishop’s Ceiling* have a striking similarity; their plays question the dichotomy of fiction and reality, and emphasize the dynamics of aspects of performativity as a means of resistance and as a means of discourse. Through the subversion of the hegemonic discourse in history and the deconstruction of the state’s influence, Kee and Miller also seek to dismantle such ideological state narratives by proposing their own discourses as a form of counter hegemony through the dramatic art form of political theatre.

5.2 Concluding Remarks

We therefore see a linear progression in the earlier political plays of Kee and Miller that first embodies a reactionary stance and now a change in performance style in the third wave of their political plays. Thus, Kee and Miller’s third wave of political plays is seen to depart from their earlier plays in their adoption of a more varied approach in their political oeuvre. From the more traditional political plays of resistance and dissent, Kee and Miller experimented with and incorporated new creative dramaturgical strategies. From merely adhering to the more conventional physical resistance stand adopted in their earlier political plays, Kee and Miller transcended the political turmoil of their time by such experimentation in their third wave of political plays. This resulted in the creation of an interesting mélange of dramaturgical strategies that empowered the dissenting qualities of their political plays.

Kee and Miller’s earlier ‘persecution plays’ evolved to incorporate such creative approaches into their political plays, marking the need for the playwrights to change and incorporate different dramaturgical strategies according to the changing times. Drama as

an art form for protest and dissent has to evolve to stay relevant and effective. Miller and Kee's success as political playwrights of their times is due to their ability to consider new approaches in their political plays. Their ability to experiment and infuse their political plays with elements of Performativity and the Fantastic is necessary in treading the risky but necessary path of negotiation between resistance and the art of performance crucial for today's complex audiences.

Kee and Miller's strategy of a newer and more creative approach of the Fantastic and elements of Performativity has helped spearhead their moral and political perspectives in their plays. This does not however, distract from Kee and Miller's central message that it is the individual in the end who must rise above himself and redeem his sense of self in the pursuit of an exemplary moral code of living. Such newer strategies have in fact enriched Kee and Miller's plays and have made them into power plays that continue to resist state hegemony with a bold new approach that further deepens and intensifies the audience's understanding.

The selected political plays of Kee and Miller evolved to become power plays in their own right, signifying how resistance and dissent can be as powerful and intense as the pervading ideological hegemony and the political power of the state. The development in Kee and Miller's plays is a distinct change from their traditional resistance plays as it marks the progression and transformation in the portrayal of the element of resistance/dissent and the playwrights' own resistance to conform to their own styles. It is through this experimentation that Kee and Miller remain the quintessential political and moral playwrights of their time. Their plays may well be the best examples of how resistance, dissent and moral responsibility will eventually triumph over socio-political/economic injustices prevalent in the society of our times.

In terms of contribution to nation building, the political plays of Kee and Miller have contributed to critical awareness being raised on the state of political affairs in America and Malaysia. Such awareness raised on socio-political matters and the political rights of the individual is crucial in promoting essential moral values to the citizenry and society. Both playwrights advocate the idea of moral obligation and that it is crucial for the individual to fight against injustices and abuse of political power. By promoting such ideals such as resistance, morality and empathy (for the persecuted and marginalised), Kee and Miller actually empower the individual to recognise how the power of moral action, sacrifice, and resistance is integral for change to occur. Through the plays of Miller and Kee such ideals and values propagated by the playwrights would ultimately create a community of thinking individuals who are not only committed to societal and political issues but also on the development of the nation as a whole.

5.3 Future Research

Future research on Kee and Miller's political plays could yield research potential from the aspects of thematic analysis, characterization, and symbolism, and comparative theatre analysis.

Both playwrights' plays could be researched from the perspective of how they deal with the theme of reality and illusion, and how this theme is effectively presented in the overall story arc of a play, as well as its influence on the respective playwright's overall direction of the play.

As both playwrights have very different approaches to the use of symbolism in their plays, with Kee's strong use of cultural elements in his plays and Miller's usage of objects to

convey emotions and values in his plays, an analysis of symbols used in the playwrights' work could be an interesting research angle.

Another consideration could be an analysis of both the playwrights' plays post-1980 for Miller and post-1995 for Kee to analyse the possible differences in terms of style, direction, and thematic consideration of their future productions. In addition, a comparative analysis of all the protagonists in both the playwrights' plays from the perspective of morality and personal action of individuals in times of political and societal conflict would make a good scholarly research.

With the decline of interest in theatre productions due to the advent of technology and the internet, further research could be done to compare the dissenting/resistance plays of Kee and Miller's era to the political theatre of the present. In doing so, researchers could compare and examine the political theatre of the past and present and determine the similarities/relevance of political plays in the present era.

END NOTES

¹ Arthur Miller was born on the 17th October, 1915 and he passed away on the 10th of February, 2005.

² While Miller was hauled up by the HUAC, Kee has mentioned that during his tenure as a reporter with New Straits Times, he received numerous memos from his editor not to write on “sensitive issues” in Malaysia. In addition, Kee’s column in 2001 called *Playing The Fool* only ran for two installments before it was shelved. According to Kee, this was due to his column being too forthcoming on social, political, and racial discrimination issues in Malaysia.

³ Please refer to Chapter 2 and the end notes for further elaboration on “Operasi Lalang.”

⁴ Senator Joseph Raymond “Joe” McCarthy was a US Republican Senator who served the state of Wisconsin from 1947-1957. He was eventually censured by the United States Senate for failing to substantiate his claims of communist subversion in the US.

⁵ Miller later switched majors to English and was inspired by Prof. Kenneth Rowe who taught Miller playwriting.

⁶ The Malay name would be Universiti Sains Malaysia (Science University of Malaysia) or more popularly known as USM.

⁷ Despite his top grades and winning the Chancellor’s Gold Medal, Kee was not offered a tutor’s position when he applied for his postgraduate studies. Kee has said that this was his first brush with the probumputera economic policy that sees the government favouring the largely ethnic Malay race over the non-Malays in securing government jobs, education, and financial help.

⁸ Kee was awarded a British Council Fellowship for his postgraduate studies in England.

⁹ A British Resident is a high administrative position created by the British crown and in the present day context; it is similar to the position of a chief minister. According to the 1874 Pangkor Treaty, a British Resident was an adviser to the Sultan of Perak, and the Resident’s decisions were binding in all matters in state administration except for matters pertaining to Malay customs and religion.

¹⁰ According to Kee, his novel is titled *A Sense of Home*.

¹¹ A review was done by Vernon Adrian Emuang, “Talent Crosses the Causeway” *The Sunday Star*, *Starmag Arts*, Page 24, 31 August 2008.

¹² The *Sejarah Melayu* or *Malay Annals* is a 600 year old record of the genealogy, history, and tradition of the Malay rulers in the Malay Archipelago. The *Malay Annals* was edited by Tun Sri Lanang in the year 1621 when he was in captivity in Aceh

¹³ The Red Menace or Red Scare refers to the panic created by anti-leftist proponents on the fears on the fears that communism or radical leftism could overthrow a democratic government or country. In the US, the Red Scare took place from 1947-1954 and was largely led by Republican Senator Joseph McCarthy who made claims that communist insurgents, sympathizers and Soviet spies have infiltrated the US State Department.

¹⁴ The 9-11 tragedy refers to the September 11th 2001 attack by the al-Qaeda on New York City and Washington D.C. area.

¹⁵ The New Straits Times organized several competitions which included the NST (*New Straits Times*)-Shell Short Story Competition in 1986, 1989, 1990, 1992, and 1994; the NST-Shell Poetry Competition in 1992 and 1995; and the NST-Esso Playwriting Competition in 1993 and 1995.

¹⁶ The *Asiatic* is an international online journal published by the International Islamic University of Malaysia that is published bi-annually since December 2007.

¹⁷ *Living Arts Malaysia* issue 62 (March 2009) has a three-part series on The History of Malaysian Theatre. The first issue was written by Sabera Shaik.

¹⁸ A good webpage would be the entry on Kee, written by Mohammad A. Quayum for *The Literary Encyclopedia*. http://www.litencyc.com/php/printer_format_people.php?UID=2455

¹⁹ Several excellent interviews were done by Jacqueline Ann Surin (“*Kee-ping the Faith : An Interview with Kee Thuan Chye*”) for *The Sun Daily* and Michelle Woo (“*Kee Thuan Chye: Vorpall Pen, Actorly Aspirations*”) for *Kakiseni.com*. Another insightful interview was done by Mohammad A. Quayum titled “*Confessions of a Liminal Writer: An Interview with Kee Thuan Chye*”. This was published in the journal *Kunapipi* XXVII.1 (2005): 130-39. BFM (89.9) radio station also did an interview with Kee and it is currently available on YouTube.

²⁰ *Discipline and Punishment* was published in 1975, and citations in this chapter will be from Alan Sheridan’s translated version from the French, Vintage Books, 1976.

²¹ Foucault states that discipline creates “individualated” individuals who are suitable to perform tasks in the military, factories, hospitals, schools, and economy activities.

²² Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) was a British philosopher, social reformer, jurist, and was regarded by many as the founder of modern utilitarianism.

²³ Todorov also counts dreams, madness, illusion, and drugs as part of the fantastic uncanny experience.

- ²⁴ Todorov views most fairy tales as belonging to the fantastic marvellous as well as works by authors such as Horace Walpole, Maturin, and M.G. Lewis.
- ²⁵ Miller's *The Crucible* was inspired by Marion Starkey's *The Devil of Massachusetts: A Modern Inquiry into The Salem Witchcraft Trials*. A. Knopf: New York, 1949.
- ²⁶ The dogs were thought to be the accomplices of the suspected witches.
- ²⁷ *1984 Here and Now*. Singapore: Times Edition, 2004.
- ²⁸ The National Economic Policy (NEP) was launched in 1971 with two objectives. Its first objective was to eradicate poverty irrespective of race while its second objective was to restructure society to correct the identification of race with economic function. The NEP (1970 – 1990) was replaced by the National Development Policy (1990 – 2000) and later, the National Vision Policy (2000 – 2010). Both the NDP and NVP essentially reflect the NEP.
- ²⁹ Article 89 and 153 of the Malaysian Federal Constitution.
- ³⁰ The play was staged from the 12th to 16th July 1985 and performed by The Five Arts Centre. Krishen Jit directed the play.
- ³¹ Other policies include the Police Act (1967), the Official Secrets Act (1989), the Printing Presses and Publications Act (1984), the University and University College Act (1971).
- ³² The term *Bumiputera*, which literally means "Sons of the Soil" was initially reserved for the indigenous people of Sabah and Sarawak but it was later used extensively to refer to Malays and other indigenous people in the two states.
- ³³ See Kit Lee's introduction "Big Brother Lives" in Kee's *1984 Here and Now*. PJ: K. Das Ink, 1985.
- ³⁴ Agit prop or agitation propaganda is "a political strategy in which the techniques of agitation and propaganda are used to influence and mobilize public opinion. Although the strategy is common, both the label and obsession with it were specific to the Marxism practiced by the Communist in the Soviet Union." Definition by Britannica online encyclopedia.
- ³⁵ The term has now been changed to Bahasa Malaysia in an apparent move to be more inclusive.
- ³⁶ See Tham Seong Chee's article, "The Politics of Literary Development in Malaysia," *Malaysian Literature in English: A Critical Reader*. Eds. Mohammad A. Quayum and Peter C. Wicks. Longman: Selangor, 2001.
- ³⁷ The Malaysian 'Sasterawan Negara' (National Laureate) award only recognizes works written in Bahasa Malaysia or the Malay language. [...' needed?]
- ³⁸ See Krishen Jit's comment in Jacqueline Lo's article "Early Malaysian Theatre in English," *Malaysian Literature in English: A Critical Reader*.
- ³⁹ The three plays were Chin San Sooi's *Yap Ah Loy* (1985) and J. Ash Kaher's *Semalu* (1986)
- ⁴⁰ A crucible is a container that can withstand tremendous heat and is used in a laboratory to melt glass, metal and pigments. The title of Miller's play thus refers to the intense heat and purification process of the Salem witchcraft trials that has killed many innocent people.
- ⁴¹ The lilac has its origins from Greek mythology (Syringa and Pan mythology). Purple lilacs are traditionally associated with the emotions of early love while white lilacs represent youthful innocence.
- ⁴² The Sabbath for the Puritan is considered the first and the eighth of a seven-day week.
- ⁴³ At the end of Act Three, Proctor confesses that he had an affair with Abigail. Danforth demands that Proctor prove this by calling Elizabeth to testify but she denies the affair in open court to save Proctor's reputation. Danforth then condemns Proctor as a liar; hence Proctor's emotional outburst here.
- ⁴⁴ In Orwell's *1984*, this is an activity where Party members must watch a propaganda film and express their hatred for the 'enemies' of the Party depicted in it.
- ⁴⁵ Here, Kee describes the Kloots as "...a soldier in jungle green, carrying a rifle, marching to anthem" (Act 1, Scene 1).
- ⁴⁶ One such example is during the end of Act 11. During the Intermission, the actors gave out pamphlets that read: "There is no resolution to this play. You, the audience, will have to provide it. If there is any hope, it lies with you. You can make things happen. You can make the end of this play the beginning. So, if you are moved to participate, please do not hesitate, do not hold yourself back...In you lies the seed of positive change."
- ⁴⁷ In 1979, Home Affairs Minister Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie incensed the Chinese community by saying that the community should instead develop a "tiger" dance because there were no lions in Malaysia.
- ⁴⁸ Loga Baskaran wrote an interesting article on the three Malaysian English sociolects, "*Indigenization of English (Malaysian English – Its Development and Features.*"
- ⁴⁹ Malaysian colloquial English is also known as Manglish.
- ⁵⁰ "Newspeak" is the fictional language in Oceania; it is a deliberately simplified language promoted by the state so as to hinder critical thinking and thought which are deemed a crime.
- ⁵¹ The term refers to the musical ensemble from Indonesia, specifically to the instruments.
- ⁵² *Wayang Kulit* is a traditional cultural activity that is found predominately in the East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia, namely the states of Kelantan and Terengganu.

⁵³ Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman's *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. New York: Pantheon Books, c1998 discusses the role of the mass media in generating consensus for the ruling powers through the Propaganda Model.

⁵⁴ In the play, the Kloots are depicted as Communists and allegorical to the communist insurgency in Malaya from 1948-1960.

⁵⁵ *Incident at Vichy* was a companion play to Miller's *After the Fall*, staged in New York City, 23rd January 1964. The play was actually based on Miller's marriage to Marilyn Monroe.

⁵⁶ The government of Vichy, France collaborated with Germany from 1940 to 1944. It was headed by Marshall Philippe Pétain who supported the Nazi regime in return for autonomy and self-rule.

⁵⁷ The 1973 television drama was directed by Stacy Keach and was 72 minutes long. René Auberjonois, Harris Yulin and Richard Jordan were among its notable cast.

⁵⁸ Miller visited Mauthausen with Inge during the Nazi trials in 1964 and later the Nazi trials in Frankfurt for the New York Herald Tribune.

⁵⁹ Mauthausen concentration camp is located in Austria, near the town of Gusen and had in January 1945, up to 85000 inmates. The camp was also the last to be liberated by the Allies in World War II.

⁶⁰ In the 1964 production of the play, there was no escape attempt being made while in the 1966 staging, the escape attempt was thwarted by the Major. Critics said that the escape attempt might undermine the play's overall concerns.

⁶¹ This edition of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of The Prison* is translated by Alan Sheridan and published by Vintage Books, New York (Second Edition), 1995.

⁶² See Harold Clurman's directing notes that were analysed in detail by Christopher Bigsby in *Arthur Miller: A Critical Study* by Cambridge University Press, UK, 2005. Pg 250.

⁶³ The other two conditions are "It introduces...the constraint of a conformity that must be achieved" and "It refers individual actions to a whole that is at once a field of comparison, a space of differentiation and the principle of a rule to be followed" (Foucault 182-183).

⁶⁴ In Britain, Gypsy and Traveller communities (Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers) are recognized as ethnic groups and are protected from discrimination by the Race Relations Act (1976, amended 2000) and Human Rights Act (1998).

⁶⁵ The ideology of a master race is what Hitler propagated as part of the Nazi doctrine and to denote the superiority of the German race. This belief was also an ideologically motivated racial propaganda to justify Hitler's brutal atrocities against the Jews.

⁶⁶ See Lowenthal's "Arthur Miller's *Incident at Vichy*: A Sartrean Interpretation," in Martine (ed.), *Critical Essays on Arthur Miller*, pp.143 – 154.

⁶⁷ The full quote from Orwell's *1984* is: "If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face—forever."

⁶⁸ Miller was an ardent admirer of Freud and was influenced by him significantly. Miller scholar Enoch Brater remarked that "Miller's indebtedness to Freud is particularly evident in the psychoanalytic structure of his Holocaust play." (Brater, *A Student Handbook to the Plays of Arthur Miller: All My Sons, Death of a Salesman, The Crucible, A View from the Bridge* 232). There could be a possibility that Leduc's character was modelled after Freud who escaped Vienna to escape from the persecution of Nazi controlled Vienna.

⁶⁹ Terry Otten in his article "The Temptation of Innocence in the Dramas of Arthur Miller" said that he doubts Leduc's innocence as Leduc "...had asked Von Berg to tell his wife about the furnaces, but not his children. Yet he bitterly admits later that he did so only to punish her: "God, at a time like this – to think of taking vengeance on her!" What scum we are!" (Miller, *Incident at Vichy* 63). Yet even his expression of "great contempt" is compromised by his willingness to sacrifice another to gain freedom" (Otten 142).

⁷⁰ The different races in Equaland are called "Equas", "Chingchongs", and "Inayahs."

⁷¹ *Operasi Lalang* or Operation *Lalang* was the Malaysian government's crackdown on the opposition on 27th October 1987. Refer to the introductory chapter for further information.

⁷² A *dalang* is a term in the Malay language for a master puppeteer who orchestrates the traditional shadow play, a popular community entertainment in the east-coast states of Malaysia, namely Kelantan and Terengganu.

⁷³ The ruling political front/ruling alliance or *Barisan Nasional* or BN (National Front) has been the ruling government in Malaysia for the past 58 years.

⁷⁴ A total of 106 individuals were detained in this operation, the second biggest since May 13 1969 racial riots in Malaysia. Most detainees were from political parties aligned to the opposition, individuals from non-governmental organizations as well as several government politicians.

⁷⁵ Kee has so far published three books on Malaysian politics, namely *March 8: The Day Malaysia Woke Up* (2008), *March 8: Time for Real Change* (2010), and *No More Bullshit, Please, We're All Malaysians* (2012). All three were published by Marshall Cavendish .

⁷⁶ An interesting read would be Carmen Nge Siew Mun's article "Theatre in Malaysia: The Contemporary Situation" dated 30th October 2003. This article was commissioned by the Goethe Institute and has appeared in the Kakiseni.com website.

⁷⁷ Present modern entertainment examples include stand-up comedy acts such as MACC (Malaysian Association of Chinese Comedians) and Comedy Court who tend to use comedy as a medium of criticism. Another example would be controversial Malaysian rapper and movie director Wee Meng Chee aka Namewee who utilizes YouTube and Twitter as a platform to vent his frustrations on issues such as racism. His movies such as *Nasi Lemak 2.0* (2011) and *Hantu Gangster* (2012) promote the ideals of national unity.

⁷⁸ 1Malaysia is the tagline for national unity adapted by the administration of the present Prime Minister of Malaysia, Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

⁷⁹ A *Wayang Kulit* or shadow play is a traditional performing arts performed in Southeast Asia. There will be a white screen erected with a light source (usually kerosene lamps) behind the screen. The shadows of the puppets will then be cast onto the screen from the lights. A master puppeteer of *dalang* is responsible for the entire play. The master puppeteer orchestrates the entire show with a host of characters from a chosen epic. He is the master storyteller and is responsible from the narration to the dialogue of each character in the story. This traditional performing arts is popularly performed in the East Coast states of Kelantan and Terengganu and usually depicts mythology stories of the Ramayana and Mahabharata. This art form is always accompanied by a small musical ensemble playing 8 traditional instruments.

⁸⁰ The OSA (Act 88) refers to a statute that prohibits the dissemination of any information that the government of Malaysia classifies as an official secret. The OSA was modelled after the Official Secrets Act of the United Kingdom.

⁸¹ Gramsci's *Selections from the Prison Notebook*, edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Goffrey Nowell Smith, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1971 is the main reference for Gramsci's Hegemony.

⁸² The government falls under the category of "coercive institutions" and together with other examples of coercive institutions are regarded as the "state" or "political society."

⁸³ Gramsci saw the potential of organic intellectuals and traditional intellectuals coming together to challenge the dominance of the ruling class. What is essential is that the working class should also produce its own organic intellectuals as part of the revolutionary struggle; hence his assertion that "All men are intellectuals, one could therefore say: but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals" (Gramsci, SPN 9). What Gramsci is actually emphasizing, is the individual's ability to think, and in a revolution, the ability to think is crucial to counter ideological hegemony.

⁸⁴ President George W. Bush's administration first coined the term "pre-emptive strike" in 2002, in response to the 9th November 2001 incident. Pre-emptive strike is largely a military strike or operation launched in advanced against an aggressor or potential enemy of the United States.

⁸⁵ This refers to the MBPJ (Petaling Jaya City Council) disallowing a Bharatanatyam dance to be performed at its public hall due to the dance's Hindu elements.

⁸⁶ Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punishment and the birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage-Random House, 1978.

⁸⁷ Kee Thuan Chye named his daughter Soraya Sunitra Kee Xiang Xin and his son Jebat Arjuna Kee Jia Liang. The names of his children reflect the three major races in Malaysia. His action was attributed to his vision of a united Malaysia free of the shackles of racial identification based on ethnicity.

⁸⁸ An interesting additional read would be "Malaysian Shadow Play Performance: *Wayang Kulit* Filled with Lights and Shadows." This short write-up in PDF format focuses on Hamzah Awang Mat, a *dalang* from Kelantan and his troupe. The epic stories they perform as well as a detailed elaboration of all the traditional instruments used in a traditional shadow play troupe, are explained.

⁸⁹ The *pantun* is a Malay traditional oral form of expression. The basic traditional form has a quatrain which uses the "a, b, a, b" rhyme scheme which contains 8-12 syllables.

⁹⁰ In the first *pantun* (stanza) Mawiza describes how one would never know where one's fate would bring the individual.

⁹¹ Runid then replies and describes how change is constant but an individual may never change in the second stanza.

⁹² In the third stanza (recited by both of them), both express the desire not to be separated but they surrender their fate to God as only the Almighty would know what the future holds.

⁹³ Rong's wife, Joan Thang had a miscarriage as a result of a stampede during a riot in town.

⁹⁴ *The Archbishop's Ceiling* first premiered on 30th April 1977 at the Eisenhower Theater, John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington D.C.

⁹⁵ The play was first performed at the Experimental Theatre, Kompleks Budaya Negara, Kuala Lumpur, on 20th June 1994.

⁹⁶ Scholars have commented that the country was actually the Czech Republic and Milan Kundera was the inspiration for the character of Sigmund but this is not substantiated. Miller later clarified that the Eastern bloc city was Prague and Václav Havel was credited for the story on the microphones.

⁹⁷ Miller wrote an antiwar allegory titled *The Reason Why* which infuriated Russia in 1969. As a result, all his works were banned in Russia in 1970. Miller also protested on the treatment of writers in Iran in 1975 and had appeared in the US Senate to support the freedom of writers worldwide. In 1977, Miller wrote an appeal letter to the Czech Republic protesting the treatment of writers there and in 1978, Miller took part in a protest over the arrest of Soviet dissidents in Russia.

⁹⁸ On 17th June 1972, the break-in of the Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate complex by 5 men was found to have links with President Nixon's Republican Party. Leaked White House tape recordings later found President Nixon to be involved in the cover-up of the scandal. President Nixon subsequently resigned in 1974 and became the only President to have ever resigned while publicly in office.

⁹⁹ Miller's *The American Clock* was based on in part of American author and historian Studs Terkel's book, *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression*.

¹⁰⁰ The term metaphysical used here correlates to the idealism relating to the transcendence of some reality beyond what is perceptible to the senses. The term could also refer the notion of an abstract idea or thought.

¹⁰¹ Read George P. Castellitto article "A.R. Ammons and Arthur Miller: Unexpected Metaphysical Concerns" which is available online at <http://www.thefreelibrary.com>. In hardcopy, this article was published by the American Drama on 1 January 2006.

¹⁰² A.R. Ammons (18th February 1926 – 25th February 2001) was an American poet who won the National Book Award for poetry twice in 1973 and in 1993.

¹⁰³ Please refer to my chapter one for further elaboration on Judith Butler's theory of Performativity.

¹⁰⁴ Interestingly, in Kee's *Birch*, the audience refused to participate when the actors came out of character and asked them questions pertaining to Malaysian politics and governance. The idea of self-censorship was evident and this could be due to the belief that the Malaysian special branch was constantly 'watching' over individuals, thus drawing a parallel idea with the notion of "listening" microphones in *The Archbishop's Ceiling*.

¹⁰⁵ Irina, a Danish ingénue picked up by Marcus has less than 5 spoken lines in the play. Her role seems to be that of an observer, and she seems to be more interested in drinking and dancing than anything else. She does however, have the honours of saying the last line ("Now, Music?") of the play before it ends.

¹⁰⁶ It must be stressed that Sigmund's command of English is far from being proficient. His lines in the play might then sound grammatically incorrect; this is done intentionally by Miller and is not an error in typing or quoting.

¹⁰⁷ A phrase in Latin that originated from the Catholic mass which means "Through my fault."

¹⁰⁸ A line from Shakespeare's *King Lear* in Act 4 scene 1, the exact line being: "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods. They kill us for their sport."

¹⁰⁹ To be playing in a very loud manner.

¹¹⁰ An interesting read would be Edmund Wilson's piece on crime fiction, "*Why Do People Read Detective Stories*." Written in 1945, his article explains the incredulity of a revolver as a murder weapon in a piano. This article is available online at http://www.crazyoik.co.uk/workshop/edmund_wilson_on_crime_fiction.htm.

¹¹¹ Miller wrote this short introduction in an article titled: "Conditions of Freedom: Two Plays of the Seventies. This introduction could be found in the introduction of his compiled two plays: *The Archbishop's Ceiling* and *The American Clock: Two Plays* (New York: Grove Press, 1987).

¹¹² Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) was a renowned German dramatist, poet, and theatre director. A steadfast Marxist, Brecht's style was modernist and he made major contributions in dramaturgy through his *avant garde* approaches that included the "defamiliarization effect", which was Brecht's way of disassociating the audience from the 'reality' of the play. Brecht's "Epic Theatre" as it was called, was intended to ensure that audiences knew that the play was merely a representation of reality and reality was therefore changeable.

¹¹³ Otherwise known as J.W.W.Birch (3rd April 1826 – 2nd November 1875), he was the first British Resident or political advisor to the Sultan of Perak in all matters pertaining to the administration of the state except in matters pertaining to culture and religion (Islam).

¹¹⁴ The Sultan of Perak at that time was Sultan Abdullah. Perak was a British protectorate state after the signing of the Pangkor Treaty on 20th January 1874 which also marked the entrance of British influence on politics, economy, and administration of the Malay Peninsula.

¹¹⁵ The Larut Wars were four wars fought between two Chinese triad groups, Ghee Hin and Hai San, over tin mining rights. The Perak royalty used the conflict as a proxy war between Raja Muda Abdullah and Ngah Ibrahim. The wars started in 1861 and lasted till 1873 with the signing of the Pangkor Treaty and the acceptance of a British Resident in Perak.

¹¹⁶ *Perak* in Bahasa Malaysia means silver/the silver state. The term is believed to be coined from the abundance of tin ingots found in the state which is silver in colour, hence the term *perak*.

¹¹⁷ References on Brecht's work will be from John Willet's *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*. (1974, London: Methuen.)

¹¹⁸ The *Joget* is traditional Malay dance from Malacca that was influenced by the Portuguese dance, "*Branyo*."

¹¹⁹ In the interpretation of local Malaysian history, the legend of Hang Tuah, and Hang Jebat could be taken into consideration. From loyalty to the Sultan to the betrayal of a friend, the story's moral emphasis has shifted over time inconsideration of the modern perspectives.

¹²⁰ Robert Yeo, in 1994, wrote the introduction for Kee's *We Could **** You, Mr. Birch* which was included in the 2004 edition of the play, published by Times Editions-Marshall Cavendish, Singapore.

¹²¹ The constitutional crisis here refers to the 1993 "constitutional crisis" where the prime minister of Malaysia at that time, Mahathir bin Mohammad, amended the constitution, thus making the monarchs accountable for their actions. Read Professor Mark L. Gillen's (Faculty of Law, University of Victoria, Canada) 1994 paper, "The Malay Ruler's Loss of Immunity."

¹²² Professor Datuk Khoo Kay Kim in his article "Bored with Western Cynicism" criticized Kee and his play as "imitating the West by fooling around with symbolism and indulging with cynicism." This piece appeared in the History Alive column of *The Sunday Star*, 11th December 1994, page 24.

¹²³ The production of *Birch* has a multicultural cast and crew, Mano Maniam played Sultan Abdullah, Eric Roslee was Birch, S.Subramony was Maharaja Lela, Ahmad Yatim acted as Datuk Sagor and The Mantri, Faridah Merican played the role of Kuntum, Azmi Sharom as Raja Yusuf and Ashburn and Chris Ng took on the roles of Tan Kim Cheng, Chee Yoon and the British official.

¹²⁴ Kee's first political play *1984 Here and Now* had Yone as the female persona who was not two-dimensional and *The Big Purge* saw the characters of Joan Than and Mawiza, with the latter making a stand to resist against the authorities only towards the end.

¹²⁵ *Congkak* is a Malay traditional game (a *mancala* game) which is played in many Southeast Asian countries in the region. Often played by girls, the objective of the game is for the opponent to capture more items (seeds, stones, or marbles) than your opponent.

¹²⁶ *Kuntum* in Bahasa Malaysia means bud (numeral coefficient for flower) in the English language. It is quite ironic as the character Kuntum with her strength, intelligence, is in contrast to the qualities of a small bud (of flower).

¹²⁷ The term in colloquial Malaysian means "white man" or Caucasian.

¹²⁸ The DTC (Deposit Taking Cooperatives) scandal erupted in 1986 involving 522,000 depositors and RM1.5 billion. A total of 22 directors of DTCs were charged in court from 1986-1987, RM600 million was refunded to depositors via soft loans from Bank Negara Malaysia.

¹²⁹ In one scene Datuk Sagor was seen caressing Kuntum's clothes when news of her "death" was reported by his henchman. This was evidently untrue as Kuntum made her escape into the arms of Birch. This occasion later flamed the feud between Birch and the Malay chiefs.

¹³⁰ A *kenduri* means a big feast in the Malay language.

¹³¹ The term *bomoh* refers to a medium or medicine man that at times uses elements of magic to heal.

¹³² An interesting read would be Rousseau's *The Social Contract* where the philosopher explains on the concept of power between the state and the individual.

¹³³ This very interesting and critical afterword by Christopher Bigsby is in the 1984 edition of *The Archbishop's Ceiling* (London: Methuen).