

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Jessica Campbell, Ph.D.

The Year of Living Dangerously (1982)

Peter Weir

OVERVIEW

Director Peter Weir (1944-) is one of the best-known Australian filmmakers. He participated in what has been called the Australian New Wave in the 1970s, directing distinctive films like *The Cars that Ate Paris* (1974), *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975), and *The Last Wave* (1977) that made use of Australian settings. Weir's global status grew with *Gallipoli* (1981) and *The Year of Living Dangerously* (1982), the latter of which won an Oscar. Weir then made several Hollywood movies, including the acclaimed *Witness* (1985), *Dead Poets Society* (1989), and *Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World* (2003). The recipient of numerous awards, Weir began making films less frequently in the 21st century but has maintained an international reputation.

Film *The Year of Living Dangerously* was based on a 1978 novel of the same name by C. J. Koch. It has a real-life historical backdrop, taking place during a period of political turmoil in Indonesia in the 1960s. As President Sukarno seems to be losing his grip on power to the opposition communist party (called the P.K.I.), a young white man from Australia arrives in Jakarta as a foreign correspondent for the Australian Broadcasting Service (A.B.S.). But the film ultimately focuses less on the real political situation than on a love story between the journalist and a young British spy.

Background The film was shot on a large budget and featured young stars Mel Gibson and Sigourney Weaver. The third crucial character, a man named Billy Kwan, was played by a woman, Linda Hunt. This happened because the male actor originally cast as Billy did not work well with Gibson when shooting began, so Weir had to find a replacement immediately. A casting agent suggested Hunt, and they gave her a try. Hunt went on to win an Oscar for best supporting actress, making her the only person to win an Oscar for playing a cisgender character of the opposite sex.

CHARACTERS

Billy Kwan – Chinese-Australian news photographer and cameraman; has dwarfism
Guy Hamilton – young Australian journalist in Indonesia on his first foreign assignment
Jill Bryant – young Caucasian woman who works at the British Embassy
Colonel Ralph Henderson – Jill's colleague
Kumar – Indonesian man who works for A.B.S.
Tiger Lily – Indonesian woman who works for A.B.S.
Hortono – Indonesian man who works for A.B.S. as a driver
Pete Curtis – Caucasian journalist
Wally O'Sullivan – another Caucasian journalist
Kevin Condon – another Caucasian journalist
Ibu – Indonesian woman to whom Billy brings food and money

SYNOPSIS

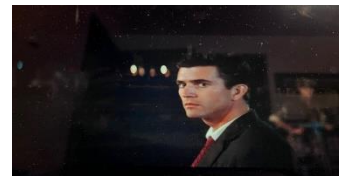
A young Caucasian man named Guy Hamilton arrives in Jakarta, Indonesia, on his first assignment as a foreign correspondent. He immediately sees that the city is full of poverty and that the political situation is tense. He soon meets Billy Kwan, a half-Australian, half-Chinese cameraman with dwarfism, and begins a professional partnership with him. But even as Billy secures access to high-profile interviews, he simultaneously keeps a file on Guy containing photographs, biographical information, and personal musings on his character. Billy keeps files on many people, including Jill Bryant, a young Caucasian woman who works at the British Embassy. Billy is deeply concerned about the poverty in

Indonesia but prefers personal rather than political action: he frequently gives food and money to a poor woman named Ibu and her son, and he shares his contacts with Guy because he thinks Guy is a good man. He also encourages a romance between Guy and Jill.

Guy and Jill are clearly drawn to each other, but Jill expresses hesitation about their relationship because she will soon be returning to England. They spend time together anyway, eventually consummating their relationship. Days before her planned departure, Jill intercepts a coded message indicating that the opposition communist party will be receiving a weapons shipment from overseas. She shares this classified information with Guy in order to give him the opportunity to leave before the outbreak of civil war and likely killing of Europeans. But Guy puts his profession first and reports the story, though only after having independently verified it. Billy, saddened at the recent death of Ibu's son, hangs a banner from a tall building that reads "SUKARNO FEED YOUR PEOPLE," essentially inviting his own death at the hands of the police. The communist coup takes place but is short-lived; ultimately, though, Guy changes his mind and joins Jill in boarding a plane leaving Indonesia.

SCENES

Entering the country – A small man sits at a typewriter. As he types, a voice says, "Dossier H-10: Hamilton, Guy" and proceeds to list off information, including the fact that Guy is a journalist from Australia on his first assignment as a foreign correspondent. As the voice speaks, we see a young Caucasian man walking off a plane and entering an airport. Everyone else is Asian. The young man is met by an Asian man who addresses him as Mr. Hamilton, then introduces himself as Kumar, a colleague, and says, "Welcome to Indonesia."



Introductions – Kumar and Guy drive away from the airport. They enter a bar where there are men of different ethnicities. The man who was typing in the first scene is there; he comes over to Guy, seeming already to know who he is, and introduces himself as Billy Kwan, who has done film work for Guy's predecessor. Kwan introduces Guy to three other Caucasian men with whom he had been drinking. They are journalists named Pete Curtis, Wally O'Sullivan, and Kevin Condon.



The real Indonesia – Guy walks out of the bar, Billy close behind him. They observe the scene as they walk through Jakarta. They walk through many clusters of obviously poor people living in unsanitary conditions. They discuss the difficulty of alleviating poverty. Billy argues that it is most important to focus on fixing things right in front of you. Billy goes home and types more in his dossier on Guy.



First assignment – On a sunny day, Guy gets out of a car and walks toward a building identified as the Presidential Palace. Guards check his papers and allow him to pass. He joins the other Caucasian journalists he had met the night before, all of whom are waiting just outside the palace for President Sukarno to finish breakfast. Finally, they are allowed to enter, but Guy is unable to get any palace official to answer his questions.



Not good enough – Guy sits in a broadcasting booth and says into a microphone, "In short, Jakarta is a city where the questions outnumber the answers." A voice on the other end of the line criticizes Guy's report for being insufficiently detailed. Guy looks discouraged.



Partnership – Guy enters an office and sits at a desk. A shadow passes the window; Billy appears. He asks whether Guy got an interview, and Guy says no. Billy says he'll have a hard time because the government is unfriendly to western journalists. Guy responds that after ten years working in Sydney, he won't let this chance pass him by. Billy promises to get him an interview with the leader of the opposition Communist Party. Guy promises to give Billy film work if he can indeed get him this interview. They agree to become partners, with Billy taking photos and Guy writing.



Exclusive interview – Billy and Guy run down a hallway, smiling and carrying recording equipment. Guy then sits again in the broadcasting booth and announces his interview with the leader of the Indonesian Communist Party.



Jealousy – The three other Caucasian journalists read parts of a newspaper article about the Indonesian Communist Party and lament the fact that their own bosses want them to get stories like this. Guy and Billy enter the bar, and the other journalists congratulate Guy grudgingly. But Pete challenges Guy, suggesting that the interviewee was probably lying and taking advantage of Guy's inexperience. Billy protests. Guy and Pete fight, briefly.

Exploitation – The same group of men sits at a restaurant, eating and looking at nude photographs. Pete offers to take Guy to his favorite spot for prostitutes; others express concerns about sexually transmitted diseases. Pete brings over a man who he laughingly says is a dwarf he has bought for Guy; Billy, who is the same height, looks very uncomfortable as man sings and dances.

Shadow-Puppet Play/Wayang kulit – Billy and Guy walk off together outside. They enter Billy's home, which Billy says is authentically Indonesian in every way except the air conditioning. Guy looks around, seeing a picture of Sukarno. Billy explains why he admires Sukarno. Guy also notices a collection of puppets; Billy says that that to understand Indonesia, Guy must understand the *wayang kulit*, the traditional form of shadow puppetry. He observes that westerners always want clear answers to define what is right or wrong, good or bad, but that in the *wayang*, these answers do not exist. Billy introduces three specific puppets to Guy: Prince Arjuna, the hero; Princess Srikandi, whom Arjuna loves; and Semar, a dwarf, who serves the prince. Guy picks up a framed picture of a woman, whom Billy identifies as "Jilly."



Meeting Jill – Billy and Guy approach a crowded pool on a sunny day. Billy introduces Guy to a British military attaché named Ralph Henderson and to the woman from the picture, Jill Bryant. She says that she works at the British embassy but does not say in what capacity. All four sit at a table. They discuss the fact that Jill will be returning to London in three weeks. Ralph challenges Guy to a swimming race; Ralph wins, barely. Billy asks Jill what she thinks of Guy; the answer is "cheeky."



Billy considers Guy – Billy, at home alone, cuts out a picture of Guy. He comments, in voiceover, that he and Guy are both divided men because while both are half-Australian, each has a father from a different nation: Billy's from China and Guy's from the United States. "Could you be the unmet friend?" he muses.

Kumar's challenges – Kumar, Tiger Lily, and Guy are in the Australian Broadcasting Service office. Kumar and Tiger Lily converse in a language other than English; Guy asks what they are talking about. Tiger Lily reveals that Kumar needs money for payments the military regularly demands in exchange for not closing down his father's shop; Guy gives it to him despite Kumar's initial protests.



More journalistic success – Billy rushes in and announces that the PKI, the Communist Party, is demonstrating outside the American Embassy. The journalists drive off together and end up driving slowly through a parade of demonstrators. Billy happily films through the car window. The procession advances and arrives at the American Embassy, where demonstrators begin to throw rocks at the windows. Then they begin to attack the journalists' car. Billy and Guy get out of the car but are attacked when they do; they get back in the car and manage to drive off. Guy is injured, but he laughs with glee when Billy says he shot some good footage.



Dossier discovered – At Billy's bungalow, Billy bandages Guy's leg. They discuss Jill. Billy admits that he once proposed to her but was refused. Guy discovers Billy's dossier on him and is visibly upset; he asks Billy who he is working for. Billy insists that he only keeps the files on people for his own use, but Guy is skeptical. Billy gives Guy some penicillin tablets.



Billy's charity case – Billy types alone. Then he leaves his bungalow and walks off into the night. He ends up at a ramshackle building on the side of a river; he enters and greets a woman. He gives her a bag of rice and presents a toy to a little boy lying down. The boy, sweaty, does not smile. Billy feels his forehead, frowning, and tells the woman, Ibu, that she must take him to a doctor. He hands her money.



Billy on poverty – Back home, Billy writes alone. In voiceover, he says that Ibu does not understand that her water source carries disease. He says that in any other country, she would have a respectable life, but that in this country, she is poor and suffering.

Wally's housewarming – The four Caucasian journalists are at the bar. Wally announces that he has purchased a bungalow. All ride off together in rickshaws to celebrate, then arrive at Wally's new home for a party. Billy, Jill, and many others are also present. All drink, dance, and talk. Billy looks on smilingly as Guy and Jill interact. Wally sits outside on a chair by himself as the party continues. A young Asian man brings him a drink. Wally strokes the other man's head and shoulder. When Billy appears in the doorway, Wally and the other man hastily move away from each other.

"Melodramatic" – The party continues, though Ralph has announced that curfew is approaching. Ralph, Billy, Jill, and Guy discuss one of Guy's recent pieces, which Jill says she found a bit melodramatic. All leave to get home before curfew.



Billy's set-up – Guy, Kumar, and Tiger Lily are in the office. Jill appears, saying she has a lunch date with Billy. But Billy, they say, has not been at work all day. Guy offers to drive her to look for him. Kumar reminds Guy of the interviews he must conduct that afternoon; Guy instructs him to cancel one and promises to get to the other one on time.

Getting acquainted – Guy and Jill drive off together. She apologizes for offending him by criticizing his piece; they discuss what she found melodramatic about it. Jill asks why Guy let Ralph win the swimming race; Guy responds that perhaps it was because Ralph reminded him of his father. "He was killed in the war," Jill remarks and then explains that she knows that because Billy told her.

Discussing Billy – Jill and Guy arrive at Billy's home; he is absent. They discuss Billy. Guy expresses his suspicion that Billy might be a communist agent; Jill disagrees. She tells him that Billy gives Ibu and her son food and money even though the child is not his. Guy invites Jill to accompany him on his interview; she accepts.

In the rain – Guy and Jill have a drink. He asks what she does at the embassy; she is evasive. He asks whether she is a spy, to which she does not provide an answer. It begins to rain torrentially; Guy and Jill smile as they get wet and run to the car. They laugh and joke.



No second date – Guy drops Jill off at the British Embassy. He asks her to dinner; she says she is busy all week and that she will be leaving soon anyway. Later, Guy, alone, listens to a recording of the broadcast deemed melodramatic.

Not at home – A young woman answers a phone, addresses the caller as Mr. Hamilton, and says that she is sorry, but “she’s out.” Jill looks on as the woman hangs up. The woman asks, “Are you sure?” Jill nods.



Billy’s next plan – Billy and Guy are at Billy’s home. Billy plays an opera record for Guy. Guy looks at pictures of Jill on the wall. Billy offers Guy the use of his bungalow for a few days because he will be out of town.



Tea – Billy and Jill have tea together. They discuss the fact that she will leave in ten days. Billy asks whether she has any regrets. She says no.

Party – At the office, Billy asks Guy if he is going to the British Embassy party. He says no. Billy says that Jill will be there. At the party, which is very formal, Ralph plays bagpipes. A man announces that the curfew is approaching so those going back to Jakarta should leave now. Guy is just arriving; he spots Jill and looks at her fixedly. He goes over to her and leads her out of the room to a sort of verandah; they kiss. “I’m leaving in less than a week,” she says. He stops, and walks away, but soon Jill follows. Ralph runs after her, saying, “Jill, what are you doing? The curfew!”



Living dangerously – Jill and Guy kiss in the car as he drives away. They approach a roadblock and a group of soldiers; Guy blasts through; the soldiers shoot at them but they get away, laughing. We then see the car with bullet holes, parked at Billy’s bungalow; a man who turns out to be Billy himself runs his hands over those bullet holes and slowly approaches the door of the bungalow. He smiles and walks away.



Happy – Jill walks into her office, smiling. Ralph is not smiling. “I hope you know what you’re doing,” he says. She sits down across the desk from the woman whom we previously saw as her roommate. “I must be mad,” she says, as both laugh.

Won’t kiss and tell – The four Caucasian journalists sit at the bar. The other three laugh at Guy; Pete tries to talk about Jill’s sexual proclivities, but Guy shoves him in the face.

Jill is worried and reveals a secret – At her office, Jill writes down a series of letters and numbers on a notepad. She leaves and walks through the rain. She arrives at Guy’s office; he comes out into the hallway, and they kiss. She appears very concerned. Jill and Guy are in bed. He rubs her head with a towel. She tells him that her office intercepted a coded message saying that an arms shipment will be arriving soon for the PKI. “Civil war,” Guy responds. She says that she has told him so that he can leave, because all Europeans will be in danger. But he says that he will stay because the story he can report will be so important.



Guy's plans – Guy arrives at his office and finds Billy, whom Jill also told about the arms shipment. Guy expresses his intention to verify the news independently and then broadcast it; Billy protests that everyone will know it came from Jill and that if the communists learn he is asking around about their plot, they will kill him.

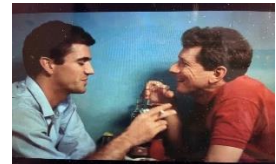
Guy investigates – Guy asks an Asian man in a warehouse about the shipment. The man replies that there is no shipment. Guy offers money. The man takes it and tells him to come back in two days; he also tells him to be careful.



Kumar is a communist – Kumar and Guy are talking. “You’re PKI, aren’t you?” Guy asks. Kumar replies that he wants his country to be saved from poverty and corruption. He tells Guy to stop asking about the shipment, saying that he is already on a list of people the party wants killed.



Pete – Pete appears and gleefully announces that he has been posted to Saigon. Guy and Pete are at a bar full of Indonesians. They discuss their rivalry. Pete gets up and starts dancing to the music that is playing; other people join him. A soldier pulls out a gun and tells them to stop. They leave. Pete takes Guy to the prostitutes he had mentioned earlier, but Guy drives away alone.



Ibu's son – Billy walks to Ibu's home. He finds that several people are chanting and crying around the dead body of Ibu's son. Billy watches sadly, then leaves. Billy looks up at a huge poster of Sukarno above the street. Then we focus on a crowd of people gathering around several large bags of rice. Someone stabs one bag with a knife; people shout and gather the rice as it pours out.

A fight – Billy enters the bar and joins Wally, Kevin, and Pete, who announce that they are celebrating Pete's transfer to Saigon. Billy chastises them for being happy about situations of great human suffering. He begins to criticize Sukarno for betraying the people. Wally adds that Sukarno's only interest in his people is going to bed with them. Billy shouts back that Wally does that, too, only he does it with boys. Pete goes after Billy, saying, “They will throw him out of the country!” Guy appears but immediately leaves to follow Billy as he runs out. Wally says, “I’ll have my bags packed tonight.”

Billy disappointed – Billy, at home alone, flips through his dossier on Jill. Then leafs through his file on Guy, then types. “Is it possible I was wrong about you? Why can't you learn to love?”



Betrayal – Billy runs down the street, Guy in pursuit. They stop. Billy accuses Guy of having made the broadcast; Guy insists that it cannot be sourced back to Jill, but also says, “How far are my loyalties to Jill supposed to go?” Billy responds, “I would have given up the world for her. You won't even give up one story.” He adds, “I gave her to you and now I'm taking her back.”



Disappointment – Billy goes home alone and paces, looking at his wall covered in photographs. He sits at the typewriter and puts his head in his hands. “Oh, my God,” he says, beginning to cry as he focuses on the picture of Ibu and her son.



Billy's provocation – Billy enters a hotel room, turns the light on, and locks the door. The two suited men from the elevator knock on another man's door and say when he opens it that they are doing a “security check.” Billy opens the window and hangs a banner from it. Outside, we see that it says, “SUKARNO FEED YOUR PEOPLE.”



Billy's plunge and death – Guy, now outside but some distance away from the building, sees the banner as a soldier begins to shout. Soldiers on motorcycles and suited men with guns congregate and run into the hotel; Guy begins to follow them. Billy, still in the room, turns away from the window as running footsteps can be heard from the hallway. He stands still as men with guns burst through the door. Guy, still running outside, sees Billy's body fall out the window. Soldiers hastily remove the banner. As people exit the hotel, Jill sees Billy's body and shouts his name. Guy gets to Billy's body. Billy smiles and sinks back, now clearly dead. Guy sighs.



Hotel meetings – People wearing the traditional clothing of various countries congregate in the lobby of a hotel. Billy appears and asks for the key to a certain room; the receptionist gives it to him. He rides up the elevator with two serious-looking men in suits. Back in the lobby, Guy and Kevin drink. Guy sees Jill walk in and goes over to her. He begins to justify his broadcast; she interrupts him by saying that she made the decision to tell him knowing he was a journalist. She walks away.



Rapprochement – Jill turns on a light in Billy's bungalow. Guy appears in the doorway, sees her, and tells her she should not be there because security men are all over. She says that she does not want them to get Billy's files. They sit at a table and discuss Billy's death. Jill looks at a picture of Guy and Billy. Guy asks when she is leaving; she says tomorrow at 2:00. Guy says that he did not want to hurt her by broadcasting the story and that he does not want to lose her. They hear barking dogs and hastily leave the bungalow. "I'll be on that plane," Guy says as he leaves.

Coup d'état – In the A.B.S. office, Hortono listens to the radio. Guy comes in and says he has to get to the airport. Hortono protests that the government has been taken over and that the radio broadcast instructed people to stay home; Guy insists on going, however, so they leave.

Guy's gamble – Hortono drives the car as Guy furtively takes a photo from the passenger seat; they are surrounded by soldiers. Guy gets out when they arrive at the Presidential Palace. He shows his credentials to a guard and says he is with the foreign press. He walks past the guard even though the guard is speaking angrily. The guard follows Guy and hits him in the face with his gun.



Guy hurt – Guy sinks to the ground. The guard drags him back to the car, where Hortono helps him get in the backseat as he clutches his bloody face and breathes heavily. He asks to be taken to Billy's. At Billy's bungalow, a man treats Guy, saying that his retina is detached. Guy lies on the bed as the man leaves. Hortono says he has to go back to his family; they say goodbye. Guy continues to lie on the bed and appears to have a dream; Billy's voice is heard describing the characters of the *wayang kulit* as before.



Coup failed – Kumar appears in the room with Guy. He says that the PKI has failed, having been overcome by the Muslim generals, and that he, Kumar, will be killed. He asks about Guy's eye. They both have a cigarette. "Why should I live a poor man all my life while stupid people in your country live well?" Kumar asks. Guy says it's a good question. "Then why do you condemn those in my country who try to do something about it?" Kumar continues. "Westerns do not have answers anymore." Guy asks whether the airport is closed yet; Kumar says no, but that there are roadblocks all over. He questions Guy's desire to leave since the defeat of the PKI means that his life is no longer in danger, so he could continue working as a journalist in Indonesia. Guy insists, however, and packs a bag.



Roadblock – Kumar drives Guy. They arrive at a roadblock. While waiting in line, they see soldiers shoot a group of people. Both Guy and Kumar begin to breathe heavily. When the soldier in charge gets to their car, Guy says that they are journalists who must get to the airport. The soldier looks at Guy's credentials for several seconds. Eventually he smiles, says, "OK!", and lets them pass.

Airport – Kumar and Guy arrive at the crowded airport. They say goodbye. Guy rushes in, pushes past crowds and soldiers, saying, “I’ve got a ticket!” and “I’ve got no bags!” At the counter, an official stamps his passport. Guy thanks him and walks toward the door. Guy is stopped at the door. Soldiers take his recording device and begin to examine it. Guy walks off without it. He runs out the door and begins to walk toward a plane with “Royal Netherlands” on the side. There are no more soldiers or crowds; he takes a deep breath and smiles. Guy walks up the steps to the door of the plane, where Jill appears, looks surprised, and embraces him.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Billy Kwan Billy is a half-Australian, half-Chinese man with dwarfism, who works as a cameraman. He becomes partners with Australian journalist Guy Hamilton. Billy covers his walls with pictures of people he knows and also keeps files on these people, but only for himself; he is not an informant to any larger organization.

Loving –Romantically, Billy loves Jill, and they remain close friends even though she rejected a marriage proposal from him in the past. More broadly, his decisions tend to be motivated by love rather than, say, professional ambition. For example, he offers his contacts to Guy because he likes him, and his most “political” act is to give food and money to a poor person.

Manipulative – Billy’s interest in other people can sometimes become manipulative. He keeps files on many people and puts pictures of them on his walls. He imagines their fates, calling himself a “puppet-master”; however, he also tries to influence those fates in reality, as he sets Guy up with romantic and professional contacts. He says, “I created you!” when he gets angry with Guy late in the film.

Generous – Despite those manipulative tendencies, Billy’s actions toward others clearly come from generous impulses. He suggests Guy as a romantic partner for Jill even though he loves her himself, for example. Meanwhile, it is clear that his financial support for Ibu and her son is of long standing.

Curious – Billy is a journalist by trade and a curious observer at all times. He takes photographs for work but also for himself, and his walls are covered in them – especially photographs of people. He also records information about people he knows and keeps them in dossiers. Billy does all this for himself, not in order to report to a political party or other organization.

Guy Hamilton Guy is a Caucasian journalist who comes to Indonesia from Australia for his first assignment as a foreign correspondent. He is tired of working at the news desk in Sydney. Although ambition is one of his major characteristics, Guy also seems to be more sympathetic than the other journalists.

Ambitious – Being a journalist always comes first for Guy, at least until the very end of the film. He arrives in Indonesia desperate to succeed in order to avoid going back to covering domestic news. Despite the dangers, he works hard at his investigative reporting of Indonesia’s politics. His stories are successful, getting reprinted in other newspapers.

Open – Despite his professional ambition, Guy is also interested in and open to other people. Guy does not adopt a superior attitude when he first meets Billy despite Billy’s dwarfism and half-Asian heritage. He is disturbed by Jakarta’s poverty and gives Kumar money without being asked for it. He falls in love with Jill and ultimately prioritizes that relationship over his career.

Bold – As the film’s title suggests, Guy is willing to live dangerously. For his reporting work, he puts himself in danger by going to violent demonstrations and pushing past guards at the presidential palace. In order to spend a night with Jill despite curfew, he drives the car right through a military roadblock.

Jill Bryant Jill works for the British Embassy in Jakarta; only late in the film do we learn that she is a spy. She has been in the country for some time and is about to return to London when the film takes place. Jill is good friends with Billy, who once unsuccessfully proposed to her.

Prudent – Jill clearly likes Guy, but she frequently states that starting a relationship is a bad idea because she is about to leave the country. Ultimately, Jill does embark on a relationship with Guy and even shares a classified secret with him; however, she does this after weighing the consequences and making a calculated choice.

Insightful – Jill observes people keenly and understands them well. When Guy shares his suspicion that Billy's files may be shared with an organization like the communist party, Jill tells him he does not understand Billy; she is proven right. In addition, though Guy's initial response to the classified information is not what she expected, he ultimately does what she had hoped he would do.

THEMES

Love *The Year of Living Dangerously* portrays various forms of love, and it ultimately endorses Billy's stated belief that loving relationships are the most important thing in life. No political entity seems to be able to alleviate the poverty in Indonesia; Billy, however, regularly gives some of his own money to a poor woman and her son. Of course, Billy's loving act does not solve every problem: the little boy still dies of disease. But there is no suggestion that therefore his generosity has not been worth it. Meanwhile, love motivates Jill to share a state secret with Billy and Guy in hopes that they will use the information to save their lives. Billy dies anyway (for a different reason than the one she was hoping to forestall), and Guy is ultimately able to remain in the country safely because the coup does not last more than a day. Again, though, the film suggests through Billy's words that all we can do in the face of systemic conflict is try to help and love people right in front of us. And it does make a difference for Guy: he does leave the country with Jill.

Loyalty Near the end of the film, when Jill must decide whether to share the contents of a coded message with Guy in order to save his life, she is struggling with conflicting loyalties: to her country and to the person she loves. She chooses personal rather than patriotic loyalty. This is the type of loyalty most favored by Billy; he is furious about Guy's decision to use the secret information for professional purposes even though Jill could be blamed. Guy says to Billy, "How far are my loyalties to Jill supposed to go?" Billy responds, "I would have given up the world for her," which is to say that he would have been loyal to her ahead of anything and anyone else. For Billy, personal loyalty based on love is much more important than professional or political loyalty. This is also evident when Ibu's son dies and Billy is forced to accept that Sukarno's policies have not helped poor Indonesians. Billy states that Sukarno has betrayed his people, and he acts on this belief by hanging a banner from a tall building that reads "SUKARNO FEED YOUR PEOPLE." His personal loyalty to Ibu trumps political loyalty to Sukarno.

Friendship Strong friendships are presented in the film. Billy is friends with both Guy and Jill, and he clearly values friendship a great deal. Billy is able to maintain a strong relationship with Jill even though he also has an unreciprocated romantic interest in her. Billy and Jill's friendship involves spending time together (we see them going out for tea, for example), as well as having each other's best interests at heart. For example, Billy encourages Guy to pursue Jill romantically because he respects him; and Jill shares the classified information with Billy because she wants him to be able to leave the country before civil war breaks out. Billy and Guy's friendship evolves concurrently with their professional partnership. Billy seems to want to educate Guy in various ways; he plays his favorite opera music for Guy in addition to helping him understand the Indonesian context of his work. More casually, all of the western journalist characters behave like friends in that they often drink together. However, we never see any acts of generosity or assistance among those men; they are friends only on the surface.

Rivalry One of the other journalists, Pete Curtis, emerges as the clearest professional rival for Guy. Obviously jealous of the interview Guy secures with the leader of the Indonesian communist party early in the film, Pete confronts him with a barrage of criticisms (no experienced journalist would have printed it; he was probably lying; he only gave you an interview because he thought he could fool you, and so forth).

Guy does not seem particularly interested in having any relationship with Pete, rivalrous or otherwise, but Pete often seeks more interaction with Guy. It is Guy to whom Pete first comes with the news that he has been transferred to Saigon. They go out to a bar together to celebrate and have a mocking discussion about their rivalry. Ultimately, though, the relationship between Pete and Guy is unimportant to the film; there are not, for example, any instances of sabotage. The other situation of potential rivalry—romantic rivalry between Guy and Billy over Jill—does not materialize: Billy and Guy are simply friends. In *The Year of Living Dangerously*, rivalry exists but is not a major driver of events.

Journalism Guy's professional status as a journalist is central to the film. Journalism brings him to Indonesia in the first place and provides most of his social connections. This work puts Guy in risky situations, such as violent political demonstrations. It also creates conundrums, as when Jill gives Guy classified information about the incoming weapons shipment and he must decide whether to use the information in his reporting. Guy does choose to use it, thus prioritizing his professional identity. At the end of the film, though, he reverses course, abandoning his chance to continue reporting in Indonesia in order to leave the country with Jill. Ultimately, this is neither a pro-journalism nor anti-journalism film: Guy's reporting does not result in any negative consequences for Jill, nor does it have any fantastically positive consequences for the lives of the Indonesians he is writing about. Rather, journalism is part of the film's broader interest in observation. Billy, in addition to being a professional photojournalist, is a full-time observer of other human beings, as evidenced by his wall of photos and the files he keeps on many of the people he knows.

Poverty When Billy and Guy first meet, they walk through the streets of Jakarta and discuss the poverty that is so visible there. Billy repeats the question: "What then must we do?", originally from the Gospel of Luke and repeated by Leo Tolstoy. By frequently showing Guy walking through slums, the film presents poverty as a ubiquitous problem in Indonesia. The character Kumar, Guy's Indonesian assistant at A.B.S., has insufficient funds to pay off corrupt military officials, and he explains to Guy late in the film that he has joined the Communist Party because they are trying to do something about the country's pervasive poverty. The implication is that the sitting president, Sukarno, is not doing enough – a view which Billy also comes to hold by the end of the film. The acute example of poverty that we see in the film, through Billy's eyes, is that of Ibu, who lives in a shack by an unhealthy river and struggles to support herself and her son. Her son dies because of a disease caught in this river (and because of the lack of medical care). Billy cares deeply about this, and he chastises the Western journalists other than Guy for failing to report on ordinary people's struggles with poverty.

Politics The political situation in Indonesia is very important to the film's events. Guy arrives in Indonesia and immediately starts learning about the major players on the national scene, chiefly President Sukarno and the opposition communist party, the P.K.I. The film does not really take a stance on this conflict or encourage the viewer to do so. Early in the film, Billy articulates some pro-Sukarno sentiments, but later he changes his mind and argues the opposite. Meanwhile, people involved with the P.K.I. take part in a violent demonstration and threaten to kill western journalists if they come to power; on the other hand, Kumar is a very sympathetic character who has joined this party; he explains clearly to Guy his reasons for doing so and his hope that they will ultimately improve the country. In general, political conflict is portrayed in the film as a dangerous phenomenon, though also one that is necessary to facilitate change. The specifics of people's political beliefs are presented as less important than what they do to further those beliefs.

Power *The Year of Living Dangerously* portrays power from various perspectives. One central aspect is political power. President Sukarno holds power in Indonesia at the time during which the film takes place, but his time in power is almost over. To hold on to power when the people are no longer sure they want to give it, Sukarno is employing strongman tactics like stifling speech, controlling citizens' movements with roadblocks and curfews, and killing dissidents (including Billy and the PKI members who are shot). Meanwhile, the PKI is trying to gain power via a violent coup; they succeed, but only very briefly. They seem, however, to have the power of public support. More important, though, is the film's portrayal of how ordinary people are affected both by a regime's attempts to cling to power too long and by the violence of another group's attempt to gain power. Lives are risked and lost. Meanwhile, the film also portrays power dynamics on a more personal level. Billy gains power from the information in his

dossiers, Guy from his handsomeness and bravery, and Jill from her position as a spy. All three have the power as non-Indonesians to leave the country, though Billy does not use it. All three also have emotional power over each other.

Choices All the major characters make hard choices that come with trade-offs. Some are irrevocable, while others are not. Kumar chooses to join the PKI, even though they plan to seize power violently, because he feels that something must be done to address the poverty in Indonesia. Wally, one of the other Western journalists, chooses to have a clandestine affair with another man; when Billy exposes him (an uncharacteristically mean choice on Billy's part), he immediately plans to leave because otherwise he will be thrown out, as homosexuality is not tolerated in Indonesia. Billy spends the whole film talking about his decision to focus his efforts on personal rather than political efforts, and we see him frequently donating money; ultimately, though, he chooses to make a political statement after all because his loyalties have changed. He does not look at all surprised when he is killed for this. Jill makes a couple of risky choices: to embark on the relationship with Guy at all, and to share classified information with him. She expresses no regret about either choice. Guy, though, initially chooses to prioritize Jill and his own safety lower than his work, but ultimately reverses course. This switch to a different choice is the conclusion of the film. The film ultimately suggests that hard choices pervade all areas of life, and that no one can tell anyone else how best to make those choices.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Billy is a complicated character; he comes across as everything from vaguely menacing (due to the dossiers) to Christ-like (due to his death). How do you feel about him as a character? Is he different at different points in the film?
2. Do you agree with Billy's argument for responding to suffering with individual acts of generosity rather than political action? Why or why not?
3. Because it was made in 1982 for predominantly western audiences, the film operates on the assumption that many viewers will be anti-communist. But the character Kumar gives a speech justifying his choice to join the Communist Party. Do you find yourself taking a side on the political issues in the film? Why or why not?
4. Some reviewers criticized the film for focusing more on the love story than on the political background. What do you think about this criticism?