



HAL
open science

**Aspects of power in C. J. Koch's Year of living
Dangerously**
Geneviève Laigle

► **To cite this version:**

Geneviève Laigle. Aspects of power in C. J. Koch's Year of living Dangerously. Alizés: Revue angliciste de La Réunion, 1992, Pouvoirs et programme du CAPES, 02-03, pp.69-81. hal-02338445

HAL Id: hal-02338445

<https://hal.univ-reunion.fr/hal-02338445>

Submitted on 30 Oct 2019

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Aspects of power in C. J. Koch's *Year of Living Dangerously*

Geneviève Laigle
Université de La Réunion

Set in Java during the tragic events of 1965, Koch's *Year of Living Dangerously*¹ focusses on man's eternal thirst for power, on his unquenchable desire to hold sway over his fellow beings. Most of life, be it public or private, appears as a struggle for power, an attempt to assert oneself and assume a dominant position. Self-fulfilment seems to require the exercise of some form of control over the lives of others or, failing that, over one specific person's life. Two contrasted figures, a historical one, Sukarno, the then President of Indonesia, and a fictional one, Billy Kwan, a half-Chinese dwarf, feature different aspects of the same craving for power. At the end of the novel both are defeated and compelled to acknowledge their failure while the country, a prey to conflicting right wing and left wing factions, is left a shambles. Koch gives his readers food for thought with a novel which, in some respects, may be regarded as a parable on will-to-power, its underlying causes and its disastrous consequences. Can man, the author seems to wonder, free himself from the dangerous desire of asserting his ego at the expense of others? Can he ever learn from experience how precarious his hold on others and on life itself is doomed to be?

Just as the characters of the Indonesian puppet show wage war against each other, the PKI (Indonesian Communist Party) and the Right Wing Party are struggling for power when Hamilton, the hero of the novel, arrives in Jakarta in January 1965. In order to achieve their goals and submit the country to their will, both parties are prepared to resort to all possible means, and unfortunately the means they choose are horrendous. Scheming, plotting and savage killings are practised by both camps. Ruthless massacres seem to be the quickest and most effective way of getting rid of one's enemies and of asserting one's power over the terrified masses. On the night of 30th September 1965 the PKI killer squads march to the sleeping suburban villas of General Yani, head of the Army, and of General Nasution. The former is shot in his living-room in front of his young children; the latter flees from his would-be

¹. C. J. Koch, *The Year of Living Dangerously* (London: Grafton Books, 1986). All page numbers refer to this edition.

murderers, who shoot his five-year-old daughter. Before dawn, three other generals in pyjamas and bound with ropes are led to Crocodile Hole. There, they are delivered into the hands of a frenzied mob:

Rifle butts and knives rise and fall; blood finally flows; the generals cry out. And the women, fiercer than the men, struggle to get closer, in the ecstasy of this unique night: they will torment the generals sexually, and then castrate them; they will cut out their eyes with razor blades. (270)

Why, the reader wonders, should the women be fiercer than the men? Can it be because, living in a society in which they are traditionally downtrodden, they are only too glad to find themselves, for once, in a dominant position? Their ever-frustrated will-to-power may exceptionally give itself full play, and it does so in the most barbaric fashion. The narrator's incidental remark casts an oblique light on the reasons why power and cruelty often go hand in hand. When those who have been humiliated get hold of power they more often than not take unbridled revenge on their former oppressors — or on any representative of authority for that matter.

Anticipating events that will occur after his hero's departure from Indonesia, the narrator announces that the Wayang of the Right, undaunted in spite of its defeat, will soon raise its head. A few weeks after the massacre at Crocodile Hole, there will be a pitiless crackdown on the Communists:

First, the PKI will be hunted down; then, as the lust of Durga takes hold, the Indonesian Chinese; then, anyone with whom one has a score to pay — man, woman or child. [...] as the year ends, it will be said that half a million have died, perhaps more. [...] in the paddy fields at night, the cane-knives will chop and chop at figures tied to trees; and trucks will carry loads of human heads..." (293)

Whether in the hands of the Right or in those of the Left, power in *The Year of Living Dangerously* is always wielded with the same cruelty and utter lack of consideration for individuals. Persuaded that a bloodbath is the best way to secure power, neither the Right nor the Left balk at mass killings perpetrated without so much as a parody of judgment. Such power, founded on an unleashing of brutal force, leads to escalating violence and is bound to bring about ruin, terror and chaos.

Before the struggle for power between the Wayang of the Left and the Wayang of the Right breaks out into the open, both parties are kept under control by Sukarno acting as the dalang or puppet master. The figure of the aging dictator — he is 63 in 1965 — is considered from various points of view: by a group of foreign newsmen quick to seize on the man's ridicules and foibles; by Kwan, the half-Chinese dwarf, both at the time when he hero-worshipped the Indonesian President and at the time of the events related at the

end of the novel when he is bitterly disappointed by Sukarno's handling of the situation; and finally by Cook, the narrator, who, with the advantage of hindsight, gives the reader his assessment of the dictator's personality.

Very little is said which casts a light on the emergence of Sukarno's will-to-power. If Kwan is to be believed, the young Sukarno was impelled by an earnest desire to accomplish great things for his people, he wanted to help them out of their miserable condition so that they might regain their self-respect. As for Cook, he describes up the figure of Sukarno at the time of the struggle against the Dutch, "a lone political prisoner on the island of Flores", watching the ocean surging "like the force within [him] [...] for which no outlet [would] ever be enough." (264) Before coming to power the dictator-to-be appeared as a romantic figure whose tremendous inner force needed release through action. It was this force which urged him to win power. Looking at a photograph of the President before his overthrow, Cook reflects that "[the] young man's hunger for the world was giant-size" (263). Of equal proportion was his desire to be loved and admired by his countrymen.

Sukarno's innate charm and charisma were undoubtedly remarkable assets in his conquest of power. At the beginning of the novel when the President gives a press conference in the palace reception room, the narrator draws attention to the ageing leader's "celebrated smile": "Despite his sixty-three years, the smile was an urchin's: part of the equipment that had made him so appealing to women, and could even win over people who detested him." (26) The "Asian Clark Gable" (26), as some foreign journalists had dubbed him, is said to have exerted an undeniable fascination on all those who approached him. Besides his good looks, he was an inspired orator who knew how to speak to the people, and this talent certainly helped him both to obtain power and to retain it. Billy Kwan remarks enthusiastically that whenever Bung Karno talks to his crowds "it's a mystical communion" (98) and he even goes on to add that in one of his speeches the President confessed "he was *possessed*" when he spoke to the people. According to Kwan — that is Kwan at the beginning of the novel — Sukarno was a mystic with a passion for the people, "a romantic, not a materialist" (98).

Although one may assume that the Indonesian President meant well, it cannot be doubted that the exercise of an almost boundless power over his countrymen perverted the compelling force which had brought him to power. The orator who hypnotises the crowds at the great rallies held almost every week at the Jakarta Sports Stadium in 1965 does not sound like a mystic or a romantic with a passion for the people, rather he calls to mind the image of an actor performing on the stage, creating for his audience an illusory world bearing little resemblance, if any, to the real one. The dictator seems to live in a fictitious world of his own into which he draws his people, relying on his oratorical genius to make them adhere to an illusion:

He had made for himself and his people a sort of theatre (at the Jakarta Sports Stadium); a theatre of romantic-revolutionary euphoria in which they were spellbound. And he had created a strange propaganda world of paper and capital letters..." (8)

If the young political leader was inspired, brimming over with energy and a desire to restore the Indonesians' self-respect, the elderly statesman, though still endowed with youthful charm, appears as a parody of his former self. His speeches evince a taste for theatricals and exploit his people's naivety: the Bung knows that he can trust in his physical seduction to win their support for his absurd economic management of the country. And he succeeds indeed in concentrating upon himself his people's blind love and admiration, though there is something ominous in his "dictatorial attitudes from Europe's nineteen thirties" (9) which does not escape the eye of a clear-sighted observer and betrays the man used to having his own way and who will accept no argument. His behaviour during his speeches at the rallies is defined by Cook as "a baffling mixture of menace and playboy appeal." (9) The secret of Sukarno's power, then, would rely on this uncommon combination — or skilful alternation — of seduction and menace.

The Bung could afford to be threatening in January 1965 because at that time he was still in control of the situation, but when he addresses the crowd in the same stadium on September 30th 1965, Cook notices his "faintly erotic stance" which suggests "a pop singer rather than a dictator." (266) Sukarno's position as Head of the country being now precarious, the Bung relies on the only power of which no one can deprive him: the "magic power" (282) of his charismatic appeal to the masses. There is nevertheless something ludicrous in a Head of State calling to mind a pop singer, a playboy or an actor. Such comparisons lead the reader to believe that the undeniable and almost absolute power he held depended not on any serious capacity in the political field but merely on his ability to create an illusion. Even Billy Kwan, Sukarno's former admirer, bitterly underlines the leader's hollowness when he writes in his entry for September 1st: "Sukarno continues to strut, in his mask-like props-the sunglasses, the pitji — a rotting kernel inside the clean husk of his uniform." (242)

Egocentrism, a desire to attract attention and a craving for adulation were no doubt fundamental traits in Sukarno's psychological make up and played an important part in his rise to power, but the exercise of power in turn developed the leader's narcissistic trend to such an extent that he apparently came to think of himself as a divinity. The President became the object of a cult. was regarded as a God or as some mythical hero, so much so that when he arrived in a village in his white helicopter the villagers took him for Vishnu coming down from heaven in his magic car (12). The dictator undoubtedly enjoyed being idolized since, far from pointing out the incongruity of wor-

shipping a mere human creature, he encouraged the people's naive belief in him as a godhead.

Not only did the exercise of almost boundless power develop the leader's narcissistic trend, it also led him to adopt a sadistic attitude towards those he held under his sway and whom he treated as playthings. Cook tells the reader about "the nightmare game devised by Bung Karno" (53): the Ministers were summoned to his palace at Bogor and he made them watch the wayang, the classical Indonesian shadow-show. When a Minister recognised himself, "his corruptions and deviations ruthlessly caricatured" (53), in one of the silhouettes, it meant that his fall from grace had been signalled, and then, if he did not want to be imprisoned or exposed to an enigmatic death, he had no choice but to sleep away from his home at night.

Power still had another striking effect on the Indonesian leader: it turned his initial aspiration to greatness into a form of delirious megalomania. Intoxicated by the worship of his people, Sukarno apparently came to believe in his own invincibility and confronted the whole western world and India as well. The narrator underlines the gap between reality and the impossible dreams of glory which the dictator offered to his people as a substitute for tangible economic realisations:

Bankrupt Indonesia was to rule the waves; the Indian Ocean had recently been re-named the Indonesian Ocean and a vast ship-building programme launched on paper. The zero meridian had been transferred from Greenwich to Jakarta. And Indonesia, aided by China, was to produce its own nuclear bomb... (222)

According to the narrator, and also to Kwan who finally comes to share his point of view, the elation of power was too much for Sukarno and got the better of whatever generous aspirations the young man might have nursed. Forgetting the impoverished peasants who made up the bulk of the Indonesian population and had put their hope and trust in him, he ultimately thought of nothing but his own prestige. Huge amounts of money which could have been used to relieve the innumerable poor of the kampongs were spent on monuments deemed necessary to the nation's — or rather to its leader's — glory. While children were starving and dying in appalling sanitary conditions, the fourteen-story Hotel Indonesia "rode like a luxury ship in mid-ocean" (15) with its own power supply, its own purified water and its restaurants whose food was flown in from San Francisco and Sydney, or grown on the Hotel's own farm. On the showpiece highway built at great cost to connect the Hotel to the Old City, the traffic consisted mostly of converted jeeps, bicycles, and betjaks (17). In front of the palace, Sukarno had erected the highest of all his monuments, an obelisk topped with a flame of solid gold (54) whose sole purpose seemed to be the celebration of his glory as a Javanese god-king.

While walking with Billy Kwan through a Jakarta shanty settlement where the people live in a frightful state of destitution, Hamilton aptly remarks

that Sukarno could distribute some of the money there instead of spending it on monuments and on his many wives for whom he has built houses (21). In his entry for 29 August, Kwan is even more aggressively critical of the way Sukarno used the power concentrated in his hands. Returning from the funeral of little Udin, a baby boy of the kampong who died of gastro-enteritis, Billy writes: "I say Sukarno killed him, as surely as though he were a Herod. He builds his futile monuments, instead of drains which would rid the city of disease! He starves and kills, with his egomaniac foolishness, the children of his people." (240) Kwan's words highlight the perverse effects of power on a man who was not, at the outset, basically corrupt. Wielding power turned him into a dictator who squandered his country's resources to satisfy his own thirst for glory and his taste for women, yet wanted his people to love him. "But this love had to be one-way", the narrator remarks when he addresses the President's photograph, "it had to come up to you in waves, while you stood high on your dais, and bathed in it." (264).

Assessing the dictator's personality, Cook almost comes to the conclusion that, because he had everyone at his beck and call, Sukarno could not develop on a spiritual level any more than a spoiled child. Even at sixty-three, he remained an adolescent "shamelessly in love with (himself)" (263). As a result, when the Bung was deprived of his power, he completely collapsed: "stripped of the Presidency, stripped of the uniforms, shuffling about in a singlet and crumpled trousers" (264), the former dictator was reduced to a pitiful figure for whom life had lost its meaning since he was no longer the god-king worshipped by his people. In the portrait he draws of the Indonesian President, Cook definitely points out a link between the exercise of power and affective immaturity. Holding a nation under one's sway would inevitably inflate to dramatic proportions the already hypertrophied ego characteristic of those who seek power, and narcissism in its most extreme form can hardly be regarded as the mark of the mature man.

Billy Kwan, the half-Chinese dwarf, offers another example of will-to-power, but, unlike Sukarno's, the cameraman's aspirations to power find no fulfilment in a political career. It is worth noticing that the two men whom Kwan hero-worships — at least at one point in his life — are the Indonesian President and Guy Hamilton the tall, handsome young journalist who has just arrived in Jakarta. The former is for obvious reasons a figure of power, a man on whose decisions the destiny of a people depends; the latter, although he does not play any political role, nevertheless represents in Kwan's eyes another potential figure of power on the one hand because he is endowed with physical qualities of which the dwarf is deprived, on the other hand because Kwan realizes that Hamilton has enough ambition and dynamism to become an outstanding reporter.

At the time when Kwan still considers Sukarno as a God he once confides to Cook, the narrator: "Sukarno and I are the same astrological sign, you know. Sometimes I almost feel we share the same identity. [...] I could have been him." (98-9) When the dwarf utters these words, Cook notices on his face a sudden expression of "extraordinary, grandiose arrogance" (99). Billy Kwan identifies with Hamilton in exactly the same way. "You're everything he wants to be" (115), Jill once confides to the journalist. And after the cameraman's death, Cook discovers, scribbled on the dossier Billy kept on his friend, the following words added like an afterthought: "He is myself! I should have been him. Why not, God? Why not?" (186). Kwan's desperate questioning reveals the secret suffering that lies behind his arrogance and his desire to identify with figures of power.

Phrases like: "we share the same identity", "I could have been him", "He is myself! I should have been him", which apply now to Sukarno now to Hamilton, betray Kwan's deep-seated frustration and give the reader a hint of the secret torment underlying his will-to-power. What Kwan has in common with both men is his life-force, his energy, his passionate intensity. "Billy's intense about everything" (115) Hamilton incidentally remarks, thus pointing to one of his friend's essential traits. The problem is that this intensity can find no satisfactory outlet: unlike Sukarno, Kwan does not hold the reins of power; he can never relieve the people's misery nor can lead the country on the path of greatness. Unlike both the President and Hamilton, he has no physical charm and Jill, the woman he loves, merely likes him, enjoying his company but falling for his tall and handsome friend. Through his identification with two figures of power Kwan can live, so to say, by proxy and find some sort of fulfilment for his own will-to-power. Without these projections he would have no means of escaping from the grotesque body Nature has afflicted him with: shortened legs and arms, powerful chest and shoulders, a head which appears large in relation to the body. When Kwan drops from his stool to meet Hamilton at the Wayang Bar on the evening of the journalist's arrival in Jakarta, Cook notices that the dwarf's spiky black head only just reaches Hamilton's elbow (7). To the handicap of his size, is added that of a wide frog-like smile which obviously lacks the appeal of Sukarno's urchin's smile.

The man who has been so ill-treated by Nature has hardly been treated more generously by his fellow men. Billy tells Hamilton that after graduating at Sydney University he applied for a job as a secondary school teacher and had his application turned down for no other reason than because "[his] appearance was against [him]". "That was a step forward in the education of a young Chinaman", Kwan goes on to add, and the narrator comments: "it was as though he pulled back a flap of skin to show Hamilton a wound" (19). Given the humiliations repeatedly inflicted upon him on account of his physical appearance and, in his native country Australia, on account of the colour of his skin, no wonder that an intelligent man should wish for some means of ex-

pressing the repressed energy which threatens to suffocate him. Because he carries "a double load with the problem of his physical size and his hang-up about being half-Chinese" (68), Kwan feels the need not only to assert himself but also to exert a form of mental domination over the world he lives in.

From the moment of their first meeting at the Wayang Bar, Kwan's attitude towards Hamilton appears ambiguous: he certainly wants to help the young journalist who knows no one in Jakarta, but his behaviour also evinces his desire to shape the young man's life and personality as a sculptor shapes clay into a figure of his own choice. The very first evening, when Billy Kwan accompanies Hamilton on his walk from the Hotel Indonesia towards the outskirts of the town, he already seems "eager to establish himself as guide, even as expert adviser" (14). Kwan puts his new friend in touch with people like Aidit, the leader of the PKI, with whom Hamilton gets an interview shortly after his arrival in Jakarta. The dwarf undoubtedly plays an essential part in getting the journalist started, but his motivations are not purely altruistic. At the thought that without his help the young man's career might have been ruined or at least would have taken a much slower course, he most probably experiences an elating sense of power. Cook is struck by Kwan's frequent use of Hamilton's first name: Guy, "as though", he comments, "to establish possession" (16). At times Kwan even tries to play the part of a spiritual guide for Hamilton: he lends him a book by Teilhard de Chardin and asks him what he thinks of the idea of the Noosphere (71), but he has to give up since Hamilton confesses that he did not manage to get through the book. Later Kwan attempts once more to mould his protégé's mind and launches on an explanation of the meaning of the wayang puppets that hang from the walls of his room (81-2), but here again his efforts do not get much response: Hamilton is certainly a man of action but he is no great thinker.

The young journalist who, according to the narrator, is "often calmly unaware of [other people's] true natures, intensities, and needs, floating and dissolving around him" (38) does not suspect that the dwarf is slyly taking possession of him and that his own lack of psychological insight makes him, as Cook retrospectively realizes, "the perfect vessel for Billy Kwan's purposes." (38) What Kwan's purposes are is never clearly stated but the perceptive spectator-narrator induces the reader to believe that the dwarf dreamt of an association with Hamilton so perfect that they would no longer be two but one single creature: he himself would supply the thinking element, the spiritual energy; Hamilton the body and physical energy. Together they would make up a remarkable individual endowed with almost boundless power. Through Hamilton, Kwan, whose life had been a succession of bitter humiliations, would at last rise to a dominant position. Exchanging his own distorted frame for Hamilton's tall, handsome body, he would cease to be "the black goblin" (3), the constant butt of the newsmen's silly jokes. What Kwan wanted, perhaps without being clearly conscious of it, was ultimately to invest Hamilton's

mind, control his thoughts, prompt his actions and have him live the life he himself could not live.

By introducing Jill, the woman he loves, to Hamilton whom he commissions to talk on his behalf after his marriage proposal has been turned down, Kwan may be using his friend as a middleman, but his move is more likely a clever means of bringing the young people together and of having them meet, from the outset, in a climate of intimacy. When Kwan guesses that Jill is falling in love with Hamilton, he pushes her at him and dogs their affair from the beginning. At Priok where the journalist and Jill kiss for the first time in the car that shelters them from the pouring rain, Kwan is discreetly watching the couple whom he has followed on his scooter. This invasion of the lovers' privacy must be both heart-rending and exhilarating for the dwarf: heart-rending since it is not his mouth which meets Jill's, exhilarating because at the moment when he watches Hamilton kiss the woman they both love he identifies with his "big brother". When, back in Jakarta, Hamilton pulls up, not far from Jill's place, Kwan suddenly reveals his presence and starts horsing around cheerfully. Hamilton notices under Billy's "airy manner" "something new and frantic" (118); according to him Kwan is "acting like a maniac" (119). What Hamilton certainly did not suspect was the kind of delicious torture the dwarf experienced when he saw that his plan had worked. Thanks to Hamilton, this dissimilar extension of himself, he would become Jill's lover; having put them in touch, thus deliberately influencing their fate, he could think of them as his creatures and of himself as a sort of puppet-master or even of god. Reading Kwan's diary after his death, Cook is struck by the dwarf's obsessive "strange, proprietary interest" (134) in the affair between Hamilton and Jill. At that time Billy truly led a vicarious love affair through the man he often refers to as his giant brother.

By lending his bungalow to Hamilton for his trysts with Jill, Kwan tightens his grip on the two lovers. The fact that they make love in his room which, after their passage, is pervaded with Jill's perfume, makes him feel even more intimately involved in their affair. But Kwan probably goes one step further than just imagining Hamilton and Jill making love. In Billy's file on Jill, Cook discovers certain highly intimate passages concerning the young woman's relationship with Hamilton, passages which may not be the product of the cameraman's imagination but the result of direct observation. Hamilton, the reader has been told, noticed that, surprisingly enough, the bathroom of Kwan's bungalow was invariably locked each time he and Jill met there. Although the narrator prefers to believe that the most intimate passages merely reveal Kwan's extraordinary insight, he does not rule out the possibility that the dwarf may have been hiding in the bathroom when he knew that Hamilton and Jill had a tryst. The narrator never says explicitly that Billy may have been peeping through the keyhole, but the idea is clearly suggested. If such was

really the case, Kwan certainly enjoyed the dubious pleasure of holding in his power two creatures whom he possessed and who could not escape his control.

Yet, becoming Jill's lover by proxy must also have been a bitter experience: through Hamilton, Kwan achieved physical possession of the woman he loved, but he could not come to terms with the idea that there might be something deeper than mere sensuous bliss between his two creatures, something which took place on a spiritual level and in which he had no part. When Kwan writes in his diary: "He holds you, my giant brother. His big body masters yours: you arch to meet him. [...] No. He masters what he thinks is you, but he can't hold you, though you beg him to! You are abandoned [...] yet not to be held." (145), his words may testify to his remarkable insight, as Cook thinks they do, they may be the proof of an acute sense of observation, but they may also be sheer wishful thinking and betray his refusal to face the idea that Hamilton and Jill may know a form of relationship which leaves him out.

As soon as Kwan realizes that he cannot direct Hamilton's actions and his way of life, the relations between the two men quickly deteriorate. Instead of just advising his friend on what he thinks he should do, he picks up a quarrel with him about Vera, the cultural attaché at the Russian embassy whom Hamilton has agreed to meet in a Bandung Hotel during his projected trip to Central Java. Jill is pregnant, Kwan argues, she needs him whereas Vera is only interested in worming out as much information from the ABC reporter as she can. During the drive to the airport where Hamilton and Kwan are to meet Jill on her return from Singapore, the dwarf who has failed to persuade his friend to stay in Jakarta insists that at least he take him on his trip. Kwan probably thinks that his presence would stop Hamilton from getting involved in an affair with Vera; being near the journalist he would act as his conscience. Confronted with Hamilton's firm refusal, Kwan abruptly jumps from the car, taking advantage of a traffic-jam. By this gesture, the dwarf lets Hamilton know that he has decided to break off relations with him forever. Since the journalist refuses to conform to the line of action Kwan has chosen, and wants to have his own way, Billy will henceforth have nothing to do with him. The puppet rebels against his master's authority and the master, resenting this deprivation of power immediately responds by rejecting him. Before merging into the crowd, Kwan warns Hamilton that should he go and see Vera, he would be finished with Jill (193), thus informing the journalist that his relationship with Jill depends on his former partner's good will. Here again the dwarf oversteps the bounds of friendship, his threatening attitude is not that of a disappointed friend but rather that of a spiteful sovereign whose subjects would suddenly claim their freedom.

Barely one month later in Pasar Baru, when Kwan's eyes unexpectedly meet Hamilton's, his face suddenly takes on a frozen tautness and, determined not to talk to his former friend, the dwarf attempts to flee. Hamilton overtaking him and blocking his way, realizes that Billy is ready to fight though he has no

chance of defeating his adversary. Kwan will have no relations whatsoever with a man whom he regards as a traitor because he refused to act in accordance with his wishes, thus frustrating him of self-fulfilment by proxy and compelling him to admit the limits of his power. Hamilton has rebelled instead of living up to Kwan's expectations and must be punished as are punished those who transgress God's commands. It is indeed the role of God that Kwan assumes when he contemptuously answers back to Hamilton who has just expressed his intention of marrying Jill: "I gave her to you. I took her back. I decided you weren't worthy of her" (235). Kwan is so blinded by resentment and frustration that he does not realize how ridiculous his boasts about deciding of other people's fate are. Before leaving Hamilton, the dwarf launches into a passionate speech reminding his former friend of what he owes him. "I put you on course; I made you see things, I gave you the woman I loved, who loved you [...] His voice rose to a flat shout. '*I created you!*'" (237) The last three words which he disdainfully hurls at Hamilton clearly reveal the desire he had entertained to exert absolute power over the creature whom he had elected to live in his place and carry out his plans.

The break with Hamilton seems to have thrown Kwan off balance. His frustrated will-to-power has led him to retire into himself and the dwarf cannot bear the solitude his own behaviour has doomed him to. Entering Kwan's bungalow after the cameraman's death, the narrator discovers that three of his wayang puppets lie broken on the floor "as though they had been flung down in a rage" (254); they are King Kresna, Arjuna and Princess Srikandi with whom the dwarf undoubtedly identified Sukarno, Hamilton and Jill. By destroying his three favourite puppets, Kwan symbolically expressed his disillusionment and his resentment for the loss of his ill-founded hopes, but at the same time he reasserted his power over those who had tried to escape it. Since they had failed to accomplish his secret purposes, he felt entitled to sentence them to death and to execute them without appeal.

In fact Kwan's attitude in the affair between Hamilton and Jill is only one particular aspect of his will-to-power. The narrator repeatedly mentions the files that the dwarf kept "on every subject under the sun". "It was Billy's chief obsession — as though he wanted to file the world! [...] Kwan was 'a Peeping Tom on life'" (108) In Cook's opinion, these papers "chiefly chart the shoals of Kwan's own torment"; they are "the compensations of an outraged ego" (109).

Billy takes himself to be descended from the race of dwarfs mentioned in Celtic mythology whose kingdom, below the earth, was filled with precious metals, and he yearns to wield the same secret power as his mythical ancestors. When he puts down on paper all the information he has gathered on the people he knows, friends like Hamilton and Jill, mere acquaintances like Colonel Henderson or public figures like Aidit or Sukarno, Kwan takes his revenge for a life of humiliation; holding the files in his hands he has the

feeling that he controls all these people's lives. "I can shuffle like cards the lives I deal with [...] Charting their blind course on paper, I OWN them, in a way!" (110) Through his intellect, then, Kwan achieves the mastery of the world which his grotesque appearance seemed to have denied him. Hamilton is not mistaken when, discovering the file on Jill, he exclaims: "The little bastard's playing God!" (150). Kwan was playing God indeed, but he probably did so because it was not given to him to lead a normal man's life. What could a superior mind imprisoned in "a joke of a body" — his own words—do but try in some way or other to find an outlet for its pent-up will-to-power?

What Kwan had taught Hamilton, quoting the words of wisdom Krishna addressed to Prince Arjuna in the *Bhagavad-Gita*: "Greedy lust and anger: this is the enemy of the soul. All is clouded by desire, Arjuna: as fire by smoke, as a mirror by dust" (81-2), he himself proved unable to put into practice. His vision was distorted by the frustrated desire to exert his power over those whom he regarded as his creatures. His judgment was so clouded by resentment against the friend who had dared to escape his control that he refused to take the hand held out to him. Driven almost mad with anger and disappointment, he rejected someone who really loved him but whose unforgivable sin was to act according to his own free will, not in conformity with Billy's purposes.

Although he lacks Billy's intellectual brilliance, Hamilton is nevertheless the only character who comes to understand the fragility and vanity of all forms of power. After the shock of Kwan's death and the physical and moral ordeal he himself undergoes when his left eye is almost shattered by a rifle butt, Hamilton becomes aware of the fact that power, whatever aspect it may assume, is but an empty—though fascinating—bubble. Sacrificing friendship on the altar of his own pride and will-to-power led Kwan to the verge of madness; Hamilton realizes that if he sacrifices Jill to the same gods—ambition being his own form of will-to-power—he may succeed materially, but from a spiritual point of view he will be a failure: a glittering husk with a rotten kernel inside. When he was younger, Hamilton sacrificed a girl to his will-to-power, a girl who loved him and committed suicide because she could not face the cruel truth that he was giving her up, and that not she but his career as a reporter was what really mattered to him (143). In the closing chapters of the novel, Hamilton appears as a regenerated man who has understood the wisdom of what Kwan taught him but failed to implement in his own life. To allow will-to-power, pride and ambition to take the first place in one's life ineluctably cuts man off from his fellow beings; it walls him up in his self-centredness so that the only relationship with others that remains possible is one of dominance. Such an attitude rules out genuine friendship and love which both imply mutual acceptance and are incompatible with any pattern of authority. Although he is aware of Jill's shortcomings — she would always "sway between

the sweetness and unreliability of the weak" (294) — Hamilton accepts her as she is without any hope of moulding her to fit in his romantic dreams. Unlike Kwan he realizes that, despite their imperfection, love and friendship, when free from the desire to possess, will unite human beings as no form of relations based on a pattern of dominance will ever be able to do. Because the experiences he went through compelled him to take a more realistic and humble view of himself and of life, Hamilton finally enjoys a measure of peace and harmony which was probably always denied to people like Kwan or the dictator he once hero-worshipped. There is, Koch's novel suggests, more wisdom in humility than in will-to-power since the former leads to an admission of one's limits and to respect for others whereas the latter seems to lead nowhere but to madness, despair and spiritual failure.