

## **Magic Realism & Parental Love as manifested in Lyle Kessler's *Orphans***

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### **Abstract:**

Lyle Kessler is an American playwright and actor. His play *Orphans* premiered at the Matrix Theatre in Los Angeles in 1983. It achieved international success. *Orphans* tells the story of two orphaned brothers who are banished from the world. They live in a dreamlike world where Treat's, the older brother, overprotection leads to bringing up an adult, Philip, who is afraid of the outer world and prefers, unwillingly, to stay in the closet with his mother's clothes rather than go out and experience the world. The play belongs to magical realism genre. It instigates audiences' emotions in the 1980s, an era deeply influenced by prevalent capitalistic ideals. It moves from materialistic oppressive realities to magical dreamlike world, which gives hope and provides solace that lonely people will find someone who cares for them.

**Keywords:** Kessler, orphans, magical realism, reality, fantasy.

### **1. Introduction:**

Lyle Kessler is an American playwright and actor. His play *Orphans* premiered at the Matrix Theatre in Los Angeles in 1983. It achieved international success. It was revived in 2013 by the Steppenwolf Theatre. The play won Tony Award for Best Revival of a Play. It belongs to magic realism genre. It is set in Philadelphia where Kessler was born. He seems influenced by his birth place, and he believes that he cannot escape its impact on his writings. Before the revival of the play in Broadway in 2013, Kessler says, "As for Philadelphia, you know what it is like? Sink holes.... I'm never going to escape Philadelphia. I have to, in fact, embrace it because it's there and it's not going

away. It's who I am and where I came from" ("What Spurred Him to Write *Orphans*", n. pag.).

This paper deals with magic realism as a theatrical genre that is represented in Kessler's play. It attempts to discover how far magical realism is used as a valuable instrument in order to criticize social circumstances in the 1980s. The play sheds light on the atrocity of the real world. It criticizes social circumstances that forces two orphans to live their lives as social outcasts. It indicts the society, which contributes to their isolation. It suggests that the characters can find solace and redemption in a fantastic world beyond the boundaries of this materialistic world that is devoid of mercy and love. Ironically, this magical world collapses at the end of the play, leaving the characters with a fulfilling experience to live on. The play ends tragically, declaring the end of the dream. Therefore, it urges the audience to assess reality and their perception of the real and the fantastic.

Kessler took a long time to write *Orphans*. He wrote the first act of the play and waited for nearly six years to finish it. He says, "I wrote the first act and was unable to move to the second act....My wife, actress Margaret Ladd, and I moved to L.A. and six years later, when she gave birth to our twins, I gave birth to the second act of the play.... It was so kinetically a part of myself—not realistically but emotionally" ("What Spurred Him to Write *Orphans*", n. pag.). Kessler shares his experiences throughout the play. He somewhat relates to his characters. For example, Treat, the main characters in the play, reflect the tough side of Kessler's character. He represents the uncontrollable side of human beings' psyche. However, Philip is the child that exists in everyone and is afraid of the outer world. Harold is the means to unite conflicting personalities and give them hope of a better future full of love and care. Kessler argues:

*Orphans* reflects unconscious elements in myself that were, at the time, indigestible and butting up against each other in my psyche; issues I wasn't really in touch with but was trying to put into a dramatic framework. We all experience aspects of the play's characters: Phillip, who is hidden and scared, afraid to go out; Treat, with his underbelly of rage and anger when slighted. We keep our reactions within civilized boundaries, of course, but Treat doesn't. He has no impulse control, so when slighted, he hits back. Harold, obviously, is the man who brings them together and makes them whole. The "father" we all look for. ("Lyle Kessler on What Spurred Him to Write *Orphans*", n. pag.)

The play is action oriented and depends on characters' responses to life situations. Moreover, characters' relationships are identified according to these situations. The play instigates audience's emotional response. Kessler suggests, "the characters and the situation defines their reactions and relationships to each other. The characters and the audience should feel orphaned" (n. pag.). The play achieves wide success as it brings about different emotional feelings such as rage and anger while using its dreamlike atmosphere to prove that everything is possible. The play suggests that people can find solace in altruistic love . Even Kessler responds to characters' interactions during the writing process. He argues:

I never entered the world of the play intending to dramatize that. They weren't even brothers in the beginning. They were Treat and Phillip. They were characters in another situation, and it suddenly took form, the first act. Harold became this character who was in a dead end himself in Chicago. He was an orphan, so the three characters are all orphaned (the metaphor of the play). I think people must feel that way within themselves— orphaned.... It touched a chord in people. ("What Spurred Him to Write *Orphans*", n. pag.)

The play went through different phases until it reached its final stage. Extra changes took place when it was performed in Los Anglos. For example, the character of Harold did not die in L.A. performance. Later, Kessler realized that Harold must die. He explains, "It was only in Chicago where I rewrote the ending 20 times, that I realized I had boxed myself into a corner, and the only way out was the death of Harold. I must have been resisting the death unconsciously because I loved the character" (n. pag.). Kessler believed that doing that change helped him discover the play. He adds, "but when that happened, I actually discovered the play. Treat's terrible needs, his inability to let go of his brother and his longing for a father figure" (n. pag.). Through *Orphans*, Kessler presents a dramatic story with a comic touch that reaches the audience worldwide. However, Ben Brantley suspects that the play needed that change. He illustrates:

"Orphans" definitely does not benefit from a soft touch. Many of those who acclaimed the 1985 production suspected that the script needed all the visceral juicing-up it could get. (Mr. Rich tactfully described it as "theater for the senses and the emotions, not the mind.") As was widely

observed at the time, the setup of "Orphans" recalls that of Harold Pinter's groundbreaking "Caretaker" (1960) (n. Pag.)

Although Kessler is indebted to Harold Pinter, "Kessler's play is in many ways a minor work" (Marcus, Joan. n. pag.)

*Orphans* puts into focus realistic events in a magical way, calling for audiences to reconsider their attitudes and impressions about reality. It is an overwhelming experience that shocks the audience compellingly. It evokes audiences' emotional response. It represents logical events that develop illogically, adopting magic realism approach. It portrays reality in a way that engages audiences' senses, presenting deeper understanding of reality.

## 2. Theoretical Background:

Magical realism is a term used to describe works that deal with reality in a fantastic way. These works create a new reality, using fantastic elements. This genre presents a blurry image of the distinction between real and imaginary worlds. It blends reality with fantasy. It describes a dreamlike world, where everything is possible. Jackie Craven states, "magical realism is not a style or a genre so much as a way of questioning the nature of reality" (n. pag.). The term "magic realism" was invented by Franz Roh in 1925 to "describe the work of German artists who depicted routine subjects with eerie detachment. By the 1940s and 1950s, critics and scholars were applying the label to art from a variety of traditions" (Craven, n.pag.). However, Alejo Carpentier, Cuban writer, introduced the term "the Marvelous Real" in literature which was approved later by Angel Flores, literary critic, in 1955 to refer to Latin American writers work of art. Craven argues:

In literature, magical realism evolved as a separate movement, apart from the quietly mysterious magic realism of visual artists. Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier (1904-1980) introduced the concept of "*lo real maravilloso*" ("the marvelous real") when he published his 1949 essay "On the Marvelous Real in Spanish America." Carpentier believed that Latin America, with its dramatic history and geography, took on an aura of the fantastic in the eyes of the world. In 1955, literary critic Angel Flores (1900-1992) adopted the term *magical* realism (as opposed to *magic* realism) to describe the writings of Latin American authors. (n. pag.)

Later, magical realism was used by other writers around the world . Fabulism and surrealism were used to constitute the genre of magical realism. Emma Allmann illustrates:

As more and more authors around the world took their cue from the authors of Latin America, the genre has become blended and conflated with other genres. Surrealism, which is more concerned with upending the accepted realities of the mind and inner self, and fabulism, which is known for putting fables and myths into a contemporary setting, are two of the more easily recognized genres that have become part and parcel of the magical realism mode. (Allmann, n. pag.)

Magical realism represents reality differently. It uses elements that trespass people's perception of what is real or possible. However, it differs from fantasy and science fiction, as fantasy presents a world that is different from reality while science fiction shows assumptions about future changes or advances. Allmann states, "magical realism uses magical elements to make a point about reality. This is as opposed to stories that are solidly in the fantasy or sci-fi genres which are often separate from our own reality....The realities being questioned can be societal, familial, mental, and emotional, just to name a few" (n. pag.).

Magical realism is often judged according to people's perception of reality. However, Gabriel Garcia Marquez suggests that public perception of what is real could be flawed, as reality incorporates miracles and the supernatural. Lois Parkinson Zamora states, "García Márquez implies that our notions of reality are too limited—that reality include s magic, miracles and monsters, and that we don't need to go around inventing special terms to describe it" (n. pag.). Instead of questioning what is credible or what is real, magical realism encourages the audience to reconsider reality itself. Zamora adds, "Magical realism undermines our certainties, and we eventually accept...the fusion, or co-existence, of contradictory worlds—worlds that would be irreconcilable in other modes of fiction. Magical realist fiction is not 'either/or' but 'both at once'" (n. Pag.).

Magical realism brings opposites on stage to shed light on reality in an unconventional way in order to astonish the audience and force them to question reality and their perception of it. Lindsay Moore states, "The plots of magical realist works involve issues of borders, mixing, and change. Authors establish

these plots to reveal a crucial purpose of magical realism: a more deep and true reality than conventional realist techniques would illustrate” (n. pag.). Magical realism undermines audiences’ expectations, by imposing new certainties/beliefs. Magic realism deal with different themes that are related to terror, torture, cyclical time and carnivalesque theme. Moore argues:

Characters rarely, if ever, realize the promise of a better life. As a result, irony and paradox stay rooted in recurring social and political aspirations. Another particularly complex theme in magical realism is the carnivalesque. The carnivalesque is carnival’s reflection in literature....“Carnival” refers to cultural manifestations that take place in different related forms in North and South America, Europe, and the Caribbean, often including particular language and dress, as well as the presence of a madman, fool, or clown. (n. pag.)

Kessler uses the theme of torture as represented by Treat who sometimes abuses Philip, manipulates his mental status, and forces him to suffer the boredom of solitude and loneliness all day long. Treat terrorizes his brother Philip and satirizes his innocent trials to reach a real perception of the outer world. Kessler incorporates cyclical time in the play. He presents repeated oppressive scenes, where Philip is abused by his brother. Although Philip is presented as a narrow minded adult, he shows surprising intelligence and wit in learning. Moreover, he cleverly distinguishes between deception and truth.

In fact, *Orphans* succeeds internationally because it shows the effect of emotional fulfillment on characters’ lives. Although the audiences belonged to different cultural backgrounds, the play was faced with great success. Magical realism negates cultural differences and builds on humankind emotional reactions to humanitarian parables. Zamora argues:

García Márquez also suggests that cultures and countries differ in what they call "real." It is here that magical realism serves its most important function, because it facilitates the inclusion of alternative belief systems. It is no coincidence that magical realism is flourishing in cultures such as Mexico and Colombia, where European and indigenous cultures have mixed, with the result that ancient myths are often just beneath the surface of modernity. (n. pag.)

### 3. Discussion and Analysis:

*Orphans* is a take on capitalistic ideals and profit-driven economy in the 80s. It describes the harsh economic circumstances that are endured by lower classes. It portrays characters' struggle against social and economic oppression. It also sheds light on the debilitating effect of destructive, possessive, repressive love that encourages Treat to prison his brother Philip in the house, preventing him from communicating with other people. The relationship between the two brothers could best be described as oppressor/victim relationship.

The play puts into focus two types of sacrifices; sacrifice for the wellbeing of the other and sacrifice to subordinate the other. Both types are represented by Treat and Harold's sacrifices. However, the play gives hope that hard times will be over. It offers a promise that dreams can be realized through altruistic love. It relates to every human being, as it depends on audiences' emotional response. It instigates sympathy while giving emotional fulfillment at the same time. Thus, it provides a cosmopolitan message that stresses the importance of love in our life.

The story of the play is simplistic. It tells the story of two orphaned brothers; Treat and Philip. They live in an old home in Philadelphia. Due to Treat's fear of desertion, he deprives his younger brother, Philip, from living an ordinary life and sentences him to live in isolation. Treat convinces Philip that he suffers from a rare illness that makes him incapable of breathing fresh air. He also stifles Philip's attempts to learn to read or keep in touch with the outer world. Sadly, Philip spends most of his time in his mother's closet. Regardless of Treat's attempts to suppress his brother's trials to learn, Philip manages to teach himself by underlining words in newspapers and old books.

Philip, the younger brother, is at the beginning of his 20s, but he has the mentality of a 7 years old child. He is abnormally dependent on his older brother although he has sound mental health. His brother convinces him that he suffers from some kind of a deadly allergic disease, and he will die if he goes outside the house. Normally, Philip spends his day looking out of the window. Whenever he hears Treat coming, he runs upstairs frightened and confused because of Treat's tough behavior. After that, he recites and mimics what he sees from the window. He is fascinated by the fact that street lamps light together at the evening. Treat mocks him, destroying his self-confidence and the symbolic beauty he sees in trivial things. Throughout the play, Treat "is the

overprotective, dominating, insecure, controlling and cruel provider, while Phillip remains chained to the irresponsible world of dependence and subservience” (Niland, Rose n. pag.). Philip shows special interest in a high heel red shoe, as he suggests that it belongs to his mother. Deliberately, Treat throws it away, and Philip retrieves it back. Later, Treat declares that he will get rid of their mother’s coats. Philip pleads, “I like it in there. It’s warm.” It seems that it compensates Philip for his mother’s existence. Therefore, he spends long hours in the closet whenever he feels afraid. Philip asks Treat about his mother. Treat replies that he does not remember her. Although Philip was a baby when she died, he still remembers her touch. Philip says, “I remember her holding my hand. It felt real nice and warm” (p. 29).

Although Philip occupies the role of the victim, he has the strength, patience, and motivation to change the current situation. He overcomes his fear and goes out earlier to retrieve the red shoe Treat threw from the window. Moreover, he tries to educate himself to read by underlining words in newspapers and books. Actually, “Philip's very weakness is in a sense the source of his greater strength” (Carveth, p. 4). Later, Treat discovers that Philip underlines words in newspapers. He seems terribly annoyed that Philip will educate himself and become an independent individual. He asks Philip if he underlines the words in the newspaper. Feeling frightened of Treat’s reaction, Philip denies. He claims that someone breaks into the house and underlines the words. Treat tries to keep up with Philip in order to discover the truth. He gives Philip a knife and asks him to kill the intruder. Philip goes upstairs. After a while, Philip cries out in pain. Later, he appears with his arm wounded, a self-inflicted wound, claiming that the intruder stabs his arm. Treat asks Philip to describe the man. Philip says that he looks like “Errol Flynn...The movie star” (27). Treat shouts at Philip. Then, he sees Philip’s injured arm and tries to treat him by applying hydrogen peroxide. Philip is afraid that the medicine will burn, Treat replies, “Let your big brother Treat take care of you” (28).

Treat works as a thief who robs people to support himself and his brother. He is violent and proves unable to control his violent temper. He kidnaps a middle-aged man named Harold, a Chicago gangster. He thought that he is a wealthy businessman. Therefore, he believes that he can kidnap him and demand a ransom for his life. Treat brings him home and ties him up to a chair. Treat asks Philip to watch Harold. Then, he goes outside to call some of Harold’s friends to ask for the ransom. Harold is the first person Philip meets in

years. He asks Philip to untie him, but he is not permitted to touch Harold. Therefore, Harold tries to initiate a conversation with him:

HAROLD: what's your name?

PHILIP: Philip.

HAROLD: Philip, mine's Harold. Please to meet you. (*He stands tied to the chair, wiggles his fingers.*)

PHILIP: I better not.

HAROLD: You don't want to shake?

PHILIP: Treat said not to touch you.

HAROLD: Not ever?

PHILIP: I don't know.

HAROLD: Or did he mean just now, just today?

PHILIP: I didn't ask him.

HAROLD: Because that would be a shame if we could never touch. I mean, if I could never put my arms around your shoulders and give them an encouraging squeeze. How come you walk around with your shoes untied?

PHILIP: I don't know how to lace 'em?

HAROLD: You don't know how to lace a tie knot?

PHILIP: I try, but they get all tangled up. They get impossible to unknot.  
(35)

Not only does Philip's childish language arouse Harold's sympathy, but it also provokes audiences' compassion toward this lovely mind. In a moving scene, Harold asks him, "Anybody ever give your shoulders an encouraging squeeze?" Philip replies, "I don't think so" (37). Normally, Philip's ordinary routine is restricted to setting at the window, watching passers-by. He imagines that they carry bags that contains peanuts butter and bread. As Philip only eats tuna sandwiches for years, he craves for other types of food he sees on TV commercials. He is afraid of everything, believing that he is allergic to everything including plants, pollen, grass and trees.

Harold manages to free himself of the ties and take over of the situation. As he grew up in the orphanage, Harold "has a tender spot for other motherless boys. And he morphs from the brothers' hostage into their mentor and employer" (Brantley, n. pag.). As an orphan himself, he helps the two brothers discover the real world, giving them a job, money and love. He becomes a surrogate father and mother at the same time, giving them the care and love they

lack for years. When Harold enters the boys' life, he compensates the orphans' emotional need for a father who teaches, criticizes, tolerates, and supports in a world full of injustice. The juxtaposition between Treat's violent character and Philip's humane vulnerability, sensitivity and kindness motivates Harold to be the healer of these tormented souls.

The play portrays the effect of abandonment and deprivation of love on human psychology. Moreover, it challenges the idea of trust among family members who oppress their relatives based on alleged love claims. It underlines a suspicious attitude toward Treat's so-called sacrifice which poses a threat to Philip's behavioral development. He usually uses threatening behavior to keep Philip under control. He takes care of Philip and exploits him at the same time. As it belongs to magical realism, the play suggests that strange things can happen. It blurs the dream and the real. It provides a dreamlike world that is more real than worldly life.

During Harold's conversation with Philip, he recognizes that he is talking to a depressed person who lacks the basic knowledge needed to live life independently. He adopts a paternal role in his discussion with Philip about tying knots and wearing loafers. He teaches him that lack of knowledge is not the end of the world. Harold argues, "don't need to learn how to tie laces either, wear loafers instead. No one'll, know the difference. What color you like?" Philip replies, "Whadaya mean?" (36). Harold is the genie of the lamp that Treat stumbles on. He enters the lives of the two boys and turns it upside down. He accomplishes their wishes; however, he is doomed to die when his mission is over. He gives them lessons to live on. He offers them the experience he gains in life as an orphan and a businessman. He teaches them that nothing is impossible as long as they have love. Life is not frightening; it depends on their view of it. He teaches Treat that discipline and economy is needed. He instructs Philip to trust his instincts and move forward. He gives them hope, confidence, trust, happiness, and passion. Simply, he gives them life and the enthusiasm to discover it.

Kessler uses language to help the audience discover the characters' personalities. In the case of Philip, language and physical movements illustrate his inability to communicate with others as a normal person. Language is also used to illustrate his innocence and vulnerability. Philip's language highlights his isolated, lonely life that prevents him from recognizing colors. He is a grown up but with the mentality of an innocent child. Sometimes Harold sings, "If I

had the wings of an angel, Over these prison walls I would fly” (41). Philip mimics Harold and sings the same song. Harold turns out to be Philip’s wings that enables him to escape his imprisonment. Thanks to Harold’s unselfish love, Philip becomes a normal person, especially when he shows that he has the required intelligence to learn.

*Orphans* is full of contradictions such as violence and abandonment versus harmony and peace. It resembles Harold Pinter’s *The Caretaker* in the way the characters fight over authority. This is clear when Harold overpowers the older brother and takes control of the orphans’ life. Both *The Caretaker* and *Orphans* tell the story of two brothers and an intruder. However, in *Orphans* “Mr. Kessler varied the formula by making the interloper a rich gangster instead of a shabby homeless man. But the dynamic of both dramas comes—or should come—from the shifting and blurring of power within a triangle” (Brantley, n. pag). Harold’s main role is to support Philip to stand against Treat in order to gain his freedom. In fact, Philip has the courage and motivation to resist. He tries to learn by underlining words in newspapers. He accepts Harold’s job offer regardless of Treat’s refusal. However, he is not strong enough to stand against Treat’s violent temper alone. He needs that supportive hand to show him the way to freedom. He needs a loving person to reveal the truth of his brother’s narcissism which confines him in this difficult life.

During the play, the characters react differently to the deprivation love. Philip takes on the role of the victim and succumbs to Treat’s abuse and aggression, while Treat chooses to ignore his pain and need for care. Treat wipes out his needs for compassion and tenderness. On the other hand, Harold, an orphan himself, chooses the other way around. He decides to give. He chooses to be involved in a paternal role that gives him redemption and fulfillment. He helps Philip to resist Treat’s aggression as Philip fails to do this earlier for fear of failure and inability meet the challenges of the outer world.

Treat calls Harold’s friends to ask for a ransom. However, they laugh at Treat’s threat to cut off Harold’s ring finger if they refuse to cooperate. Ironically, Harold turns out to be a gangster on the lam. He recites how he survived a cruel life in an orphanage. Sometimes, he uses lifesaving tricks to stay alive. He argues that the orphans are the only family he has. He still remembers the orphans crying “mummy, mummy.” He survived life at the orphanage because of the German chef who gave him additional servings of food. Harold spots light on the miserable life of the orphans. He says, “Orphans

always hungry, orphans love to come down in the middle of the night and raid the refrigerator. German slept there, one eye open, break your back if he caught you, break every bone in your body” (p. 23).

Harold feels obliged to help the two brothers, giving them what he lacks as an orphan; love, care and little encouragement. He easily manages to create a parental bond with Philip. However, it is quite difficult to do the same with Treat, as he resists Harold's trials to overpower him. He needs a careful father who can contain his furious temper and physical hostility that are manifested in a fight between Treat and Harold later.

Like the orphans, Harold suffered from loneliness and emotional starvation. However, he does not adopt Treat's aggressive stance, nor does he take the role of the victim. Although he did not receive the same amount of care Philip receives from Treat, he chooses to give care and love. He recalls his desperate life and finds fulfillment in giving rather than receiving altruistic love. The play represents heartbreaking situation. It leaves the audience convinced of the importance of unselfish love. Niland believes, “the importance of parental love cannot be diminished but this love can also come from non-biological parents. Lyle Kessler has written a play that is both funny and heartbreaking but rings unmistakably with the clarity of universal truths” (n. pag.).

Harold offers both brothers a monthly payment, lifelong security, pension plan, new clothes, fine food, and all women the two brothers can handle. He offers Treat a job as a body guard. He thinks that being violent makes him a good choice. Harold's job requires special abilities like patience and discipline; the same traits Treat needs. Treat refused the job, as he hates to take orders. He argues, “I don't work for nobody, you understand me! They tried to get me to work in a department store once, only trouble is I burned it down.” Harold replies, “I like it” (51).

The play puts into focus characters' struggle to gain power or to maintain their authority over others. Treat retreats from his position as an omnipotent oppressor into a follower/ oppressed. He asks Philip to decline Harold's offer. The unexpected twist is that Philip insists to accept the job offer. For the first time, he disobeys Treat in a trial to gain full independence. From this moment on, Treat gradually loses his control over Philip. Instead of giving orders, yelling at Philip and forcing him to stick to strict code of behavior, Treat begs Philip to reconsider Harold's offer. Although he continuously looks down upon

Philip's mental abilities, he uses common sense to convince him of staying at home and refusing the job offer altogether.

When Treat fails to send Harold away, he leaps at Harold who sidesteps and hits his head with a gun. Treat faints, while Philip hides in the closet. Harold declares that he will tame Treat. He says, "I'm going to tame you, Treat, I'm going to make you my very own!" (53). Philip watches the quarrel from the closet. Harold calls for Philip to give him encouragement squeeze. Philip approaches slowly. Harold puts his arm around his shoulders. Although Harold is a stranger, he and Philip develop a father-son relationship. He becomes the father who adopts two distinctive ways; tenderness and violence, to tame both brothers.

Harold manages to make perceivable changes to the orphans' life. Now, they have a new rug, television, curtains, and a cart with bottles and glasses. Philip gets new clothes and loafers. He looks amusingly at himself in the mirror. When he heard noise outside, he runs upstairs hurriedly, carrying his loafers. Treat enters the house. Likewise, he gets a stylish Pierre Cardin suit, shoes, silk shirt and tie that he buys by Harold's American Express card. He buys other formal and sports outfits, but he craves for more. Harold advises him to do things in moderation. It seems that this is really what Treat needs in his life. Treat brings Chicago newspaper. Also, he brings Philip Hellman's mayonnaise. However, Philip does not like it anymore. He is now more interested in the meals Harold cooks for him. Treat perceives Philip who is walking gladly in his new outfit. He seems jealous and raises up the fact that Harold is a thief running away from some Chicago gangsters. However, Philip does not believe him.

The two brothers develop father-son relationship that is based on violence rather than emotional fulfillment. It takes the shape of the oppressor and oppressed relationship. Marilyn Stasio indicates:

In their horrifying way, the two creepy brothers are a family. Orphaned when their mother died and their abusive father deserted them, the brothers have constructed a relationship that's a parody of a normal father-son bond. The disturbing thing about their rituals and games is that they are warped versions of that bond: erratic and cruel and edged in violence—exactly the kind of behavior that the brothers learned from their father. (n. pag.)

Both brothers are portrayed as uncontrollable and unpredictable but in a different way. It is quite difficult to foresee how they will react to Harold's existence in their life. Philip develops an independent character and surprises the audience by his capacity to resist Treat's control. However, Treat resorts to using physical violence when things get out of his hand. Stasio illustrates, "because Treat's personality is so volatile, and his brother's so unpredictable, there's the constant threat that someone's behavior will get out of hand. Which is exactly what happens when Treat comes home with Harold" (n. pag.).

The major dramatic twist in the play is Harold's transformation from a complete stranger into a loving father and a patient mentor. Stasio states, "this hard guy sizes up the situation, recognizes the brothers for the lost boys they are— indeed, orphans like himself — and takes over the parental role with a vengeance, 'adopting' the boys and turning their household upside down" (n. pag.). Harold successfully tames Treat and encourages Philip to trust his instincts. He helps Philip overcome his fears and discover the outer world. He feeds his intellectual curiosity with simple facts that prove astounding grounds to help him gain independence which turns out to be Treat's greatest fears. He presents a model of parental love that is totally different from Treat's model. He nurtures and cares for the two lads who survive a dangerous world that deprives them of their basic needs of love. Ironically, life grants them short-term happiness that fades away by Harold's death at the end of the play. Not only does the two brothers lose a friend or a mentor, but also they lose a surrogate father who is able gain their love forever.

As the play progresses, the characters develop new personalities. Harold adopts a paternal role. He turns into a healer who uses his tricks and experience to help the two orphans face the world. Treat occupies the role of the son as Harold takes the role of the father. Philip gradually overcomes his fears from the outer world. However, the relationship between Treat and Philip starts to break down. Treat loses his role as a protector/ oppressor and experiences rejection for the second time. David Rooney believes, "As the action progresses and his big-brother/protector role gets undermined, the cracks begin to appear in Treat's posturing tough-guy act. When he disappoints Harold and then feels the familiar wounds of loss and abandonment reopen he's heart-wrenching" (n. Pag.).

Treat and Harold initiate a materialistic relationship that is based on money gain. However, it grows into an entirely emotional relationship. Sylvie

Drake maintains, “what Treat wants is Harold’s money, perhaps even a ransom. What he gets is entirely different. Call it an awakening” (n. pag.). Treat’s agonizing experience as an orphan and his inability to cope with the feelings of loss, forces him to suppress his need for love and care. Harold’s existence in the life of the two brothers marks the beginning of a new life that carries hope for happiness and love. Raised as an orphan, Harold has a deep understanding of the two brothers’ emotional needs. He gives them what he yearns for as a child.

The play highlights the power of love that helps Harold tame Treat and Philip. Ironically, the orphans lose this hope when Harold dies, which motivates them to find solace in each others’ company. This time, they have a fulfilling experience to live on. Drake explains, “The truer issue is the galvanizing power for change that “a little encouragement” has on these wild creatures. Something is forever altered and forever *healed* in them by the care and firmness Harold dispenses along with the use of his American Express card” (n. pag.).

The death of the mother and father’s abandonment maximize the orphans’ feelings of loneliness and insecurity. Although they lead the same life, both brothers experience things differently. Treat adopts a dominating, cruel character who abuses and punishes his brother whenever he shows signs of willingness to learn or get independent. On the other hand, Philip is confined in the role of the victim who is banned from his basic right to learn. Niland says, “The tension and fear created by the appearance of the menacing older brother sets the components of a co-dependent relationship that is grounded in physical and emotional abuse” (n. pag.).

The play underlines the importance of compassion for human beings. Therefore, both brothers seem defenseless in front of Harold’s words, “you need some encouragement.” Niland argues, “throughout the play the attributes of “encouragement” resonated with the truth that everyone needs to feel the touch of the human hand and the warmth of a loving heart” (n. pag.). Although Treat longs for such encouraging touch, he stands aloof, trying to suppress his emotions. At the end of the play, Treat bursts into tears, regretting the fact that he does not hold Harold’s hand even once. The play conveys a moral message that people need love and they can be changed by it as well. Drake maintains, “the boys are subtly and gradually transformed, with Philip gaining self-assurance where Treat begins to doubt himself, and both of them becoming at once stronger and more fragile by, unwittingly at first, opening themselves up to this stranger’s benevolent control” (n. pag.).

Harold occupies different roles in the life of the orphans. He is a mentor, a mother and a father. He teaches Philip about the evolution of living creatures on the planet of earth. He cooks delicious soup for Philip who does not even know how to drink the soup. After that, he takes Philip in a walk to help him discover the world. At first, Philip is afraid. With Harold's encouragement, he opens the window and puts his head outside. Philip discovers that he is not ill. However, he still believes that he will not find his way back home. Harold gives him a map to help him find his way back. He assures that he will never get lost again. He tells Philip that ignorance is not a huge mistake. He convinces Treat that his violent temper is justified. He helps the boys, who lack basic skills of communication with the outer world, to regain trust in themselves and the world.

Although Treat hates to take orders, he awaits patiently to take a new assignment from Harold. He boasts that he is ready to sacrifice his life for Harold's life. He says, "Harold, I'd place myself between your body and that bullet" (59). Harold insists that Treat is not ready yet. He thinks that he should control his temper first. He reminds him of an accident in which Treat attacks a man who steps on his shoe. Treat always presents excuses for his rage outbursts. He does not know how to control his temper. He explains, "these feelings rise up in me. What am I supposed to do with them!" (61). Harold likens Treat to an orphan called Fred who used to sell newspapers in Chicago. Harold recites how newsboys survive cold days selling newspapers in the streets of Chicago. He recites, "We were newsboys together, south side of Chicago. Little Motherless newsboys standing in the cold, yelling "EXTRA! EXTRA! READ ALL ABOUT IT!"...That's the free enterprise system, Treat. That's Capitalism!" (61). Harold portrays the misery of the orphans who are born in a merciless world that is driven by profit while neglecting orphans who die on the streets. Fred died of pneumonia after selling the paper that covers his chest and back. Therefore, Harold believes that moderation is important to survive hard life.

Apparently, both brothers have different needs. Philip needs to be trained to communicate with the outer world, while Treat needs to overcome his anger bursts. Now and then, Harold encourages Philip. He says, "You're doing real well, Philip. I'm proud of you" (64). Treat looks jealous and asks Harold, "What about me, Harold, How am I doing?" Harold replies, "I'm not sure, Treat....Why don't you come over her, son. Let me give you some

encouragement” (64). Treat does not move and declares that he does not need encouragement.

When Harold convinces Philip to open the window to get some air, Philip opens the window for an unknown world, a world yet to be discovered. Harold uses simple logic to convince Philip to go out. Harold says, “You can’t keep out the night. It slips in through the door. It comes in through the cracks. All of North Philadelphia is covered by the night, Philip” (69). Philip argues that he will get lost. Harold shows him their location on the map. Philip puts the map under his shirt. He rejoices, “I know where I am now, Harold!” (72).

Later, Treat comes home, carrying a briefcase and Harold’s pistol. Harold reprimands Treat for not taking a taxi to avoid being followed. Then, he lectures Treat about “economic realities.” Harold explains:

HAROLD: That cab driver was working on a commission, Treat. This is the free enterprise system, individual initiative, et cetera. You took money out of that poor cabbie’s mouth, but you didn’t put it in the mouth of the bus driver.

TREAT: Whose mouth did I put it into?

HAROLD: That bus driver works for the Philadelphia Transportation Company. He has a fixed income. He doesn’t give a flying fuck whether the bus was filled or empty. (74)

The play touches upon a deep analysis of capitalist economy in the 1980s. It analyzes the effect of these circumstances on the poor. It implies that capitalists are the major criminals who sacrifice the lives of young orphans, depriving them of their rights to receive needed care. The characters of the play are a direct byproduct of a selfish society. The play suggests that there are two possibilities for these children. They can join a gang or live victimized for the rest of their life. Therefore, Harold decides to support both brothers to escape the same destiny he faces at the end of the play; death. He gives both brothers what he and other orphans lack; care and love. He encourages them to discover a new world, a world full of challenges and hardships in order to escape the perils of being cut out of the world. The play implies that the society is responsible for the death of the miserable newsboy who sacrifices his life to gain the price of a newspaper that could have saved his life. It suggests that rapport is not built on family ties or mutual interest; it is built on characters’

similar experiences. It asserts that the people who share the same agony and misery in life tend to have strong bonds that help them survive life.

The play rejects Milton Friedman's claim that greed was good which was prevalent in the 1980s (Holden, Richard. n. pag.). In an essay by Milton Friedman in 1970, he denounces the fact that business has social responsibilities. He suggests that companies should only concentrate on making money. He says, "The discussion of 'the social responsibilities of business' are notable for their analytical looseness and lack of rigor. What does it mean to say that business has responsibilities?" (Friedman, n. pag.). He maintains that the sole role of business is to "use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits" (n. pag.). His main point "was that businesses serve society best when they abandon talk of 'social responsibilities' and solely maximize returns for shareholders" (Holden, n. pag.). According to Martin Lipton, senior partner at Wachtell, Lipton, Rosen & Katz, the era that followed the essay witnessed "a new era of short-termism, hostile takeovers, junk-bond financing and the erosion of protections for employees and the environment to increase corporate profits and maximize value for shareholders" (qtd. in Ross. n. pag.). Friedman's essay defended "shareholder primacy" in the 1980s and denied the fact that capitalists had a duty toward societal issues.

Instead of focusing solely on making money, the play suggests that capitalists have a role toward the society. They should participate and sacrifice some of the profit to improve the world. In 2018, Steve Pearlstein writes a book titled "Can American Capitalism Survive? Why Greed Is Not Good, Opportunity Is Not Equal, and Fairness Won't Make Us Poor." He writes the book because he thinks that capitalism "has become too unfair, too ruthless, and rewards too many of the things we think of as bad" (Illing, Sean. n. pag.). Likewise, the play urges businessmen, the government and the society to bear responsibility toward the poor and the downtrodden by standing against selfish capitalism. The play underlines the social responsibility of individuals toward the deprived.

Treat tells Harold about an incident that happens to him in the bus. He describes his quarrel with a big black guy who refuses to shift over and squeezes the life out of the passengers. Treat decides to retaliate for all the passengers. He threatens to shoot the black man if he does not shift over. The black guy leaves the bus. Harold inquires what he would have done if the man does not move. Treat maintains, "I press the trigger, Harold" (77). Harold is

upset. He figures out that Treat cannot control his temper. He asks Treat to give him the gun. Treat hands the gun to Harold and asks for another chance. Harold improvises a scene to test Treat's capacity to control his emotions. They mimic the same situation in the bus. Philip acts like the black guy who refuses to shift over. Philip starts to sing Harold's favorite song, "If I had the wings of an angel, Over these prison walls I would fly" (79). Treat struggles to restrain his anger. He tries to nudge Philip to have more room for himself. However, Philip does not move. Harold puts more pressure on Treat. He plays the role of a previous soldier in Vietnam war whose testicles are blown during the war. He asks for a seat. Treat gives him his seat. The soldier complains that there is no room for him to sit down. Treat tries to solve the situation, begging Philip to move. Philip refuses. Treat loses control over himself and faints. When he restores his consciousness, he leaves the house. This scene undermines the fact that Treat is a strong character. Actually, he is too weak to control his angry emotions in trivial situations. This stresses the fact that Treat is victimized by social circumstances that affect his ability to restrain his anger.

Both brothers experience shocking revelations about each other. Treat discovers that Philip manages to deceive him for a long period, as he tries to learn to read by underlining words in books. Meanwhile, Philip discovers Treat's lies about his fatal illness, which encourages him to resist Treat's trials to regain authority over his behaviors. Treat declares that he wants Harold out of their house. However, Philip objects. Treat notices for the first time the changes that occurred to Philip since Harold's arrival. Philip is now sure that he has been shut out of the world thanks to his brother's overprotection.

Now, Philip is out of control. Desperately, Treat falls to his knees, holding his mother's coat, and slamming it against the floor. He reminds Philip that he takes good care of him over the past years. However, Philip asserts that he has rights according to the American Declaration of Independence, as he is taught by Harold. In a trial to gain Treat's confession of his sins, Philip faces his brother with all the lies that keeps him imprisoned all these years. He discovers that his brother deceives him to lead a life of solitude and misery because of unjustified fear of loss. Consequently, he declares that he is going to see places using Harold's map. At this moment, Treat takes the map and tears it up into pieces. The play reaches its climax when both brothers wrestle. Treat almost strangles Philip. Then, he pulls away. Philip picks the pieces of the map and puts them in his pocket. He packs up his books to leave the house.

Throughout the play, violent scenes are used side by side with sentimental scenes. Violence is used to highlight characters' reactions at current situations. Violence scenes abreact characters' rage and hurt. The characters (characters') resort to violence in order to project their anger and psychological humiliation on others. Treat identifies himself as a trouble maker to eliminate or veil his vulnerable side. Moreover, his faulty and narcissistic decision to imprison Philip owes a lot to his feelings of fear to be abandoned.

Later on, Harold comes home injured. There is a bloodstain on his shirt. He has difficulty walking. He sits on the sofa. When Philip tells Harold that the map is torn up, Harold tells him that he can get another one from any gas station. Philip asserts, "Maybe one day I won't even need a map" (95). Harold tells the two brothers that he will leave. He asserts, "I'll always be with you. You can count on me" (96). Harold recites how orphans escape from the orphanage. Although they are punished later for this incident, they do not regret breaking out of the orphanage. Likewise, the two brothers break free of their prison. Unlike the orphans in the orphanage, Treat and Philip will not get back because they see what they have to see. Then, Harold affirms:

HAROLD: You just needed a little encouragement, Philip. (*Looks over at TREAT.*) How about you, son? (*Reaches out his arm.*) Come on over here. Let me give you some encouragement. |(TREAT *doesn't move.* HAROLD *smiles at him.*) You're a Dead End Kid, ain't you? (TREAT *stares at him.*) I know a fucking Dead End Kid when I see one! (Harold *dies. A long pause.*) (97)

Earlier, Treat denounces Harold's trials to establish a father-son bond. Whenever Harold calls him my son, he retorts "I'm not your son'. Now, he is in pain for losing the only one who cares for him in his entire life. He takes Harold's hand and presses it to his cheek. He discovers that he touches Harold's hand for the first time. Here, he involuntarily delivers a sorrowful cry, "NO! NO! NO! (*Trying to hold it back.*) DON'T LEAVE ME! DON'T LEAVE ME, HAROLD!" (98). Treat experiences that agonizing pain of the loss of the father for the second time. He misses the affection of a caring father who does his best to support his sons. Now, the taming process is completely achieved by Harold's death. The play ends by Philip embracing his brother. Harold manages to change the orphan's life for good. He gives the two orphans affection, encouragement, protection, care and money.

Actually, Philip and Harold draws support from previous fulfilling experiences. For example, Philip recollects his mother's tender touch when he was an infant. Meanwhile, Harold gets emotional fulfillment when he recalls Dead End Kids movie, as he sees that lady cooking for the orphans. It can be assumed that both characters' imagination gives them the power to survive life without love. It motivates them to search for fulfillment. Both Philip and Harold find fulfillment in giving. Harold finds solace in parenting the two brothers while Philip finds relief in forgiving his brother.

The play presents compelling characters; however, the story is plain. It does not set out a clear objective. Malcolm L. Johnson argues, "Kessler's play is a gimmicky performance piece without much on its mind" (n. pag.). The most memorable moments include the violent scenes between Treat and Harold. Without Treat's rage outbursts, the play would seem dull. Johnson believes, "When the gymnastics end, however, the production becomes increasingly hollow, illustrating just how thin a play "Orphans" is" (n. pag). Sometimes, the dialogue is repetitive, as the play only focuses on orphans and economic circumstances.

As *Orphans* belongs to magical realism genre, its main aim is to criticize the society. It is dedicated to the marginal and the poor. It puts into focus the story of two human outcasts. It gives hope that love exists, but it does not mean that it will last forever. It suggests that people can live on the reminiscence of a fulfilling experience for the rest of their lives; however, they cannot cope with existing reality that is devoid of love and care. It urges the audience to imagine a world where suffering is rewarded by beautiful, surprising encounters that cherish the weak and comfort the needy.

The play instigates the audience's emotions and sympathy for two abandoned orphans. It depicts human beings' need for compassion. It presents a mixture of the real and the absurd. Still, it is a mysterious story that leaves the audience with unanswered questions; is this a real story? Does it happen? Can this happen to anyone? It describes reality in a mysterious way that leaves the audience shocked but in a sensational, wonderful way. It is a dreamlike play that blends reality with magical elements, leaving the audience with a profound understanding of the events of the play. Nevertheless, the audience is bewildered of the logic of events that seem different from real world's common sense. Ramona Ausubel argues, "In a magical realist story... we are in a mundane, familiar place that is inhabited or imbued with something not of this

world” (n. pag.). The play defies the audience and characters’ expectations. It asserts that altruistic love can make miracles.

The play deals with the effect of social and economical factors on the life of the orphans. It underlines the effect of capitalist economy of the 1980s on the life of the poor. Like David Mamet and Tracy Letts, Lyle Kessler focuses on “profane antiheroes on the fringes of urban America, seeking to climb the slippery economic ladder while searching for absent parental figures” (Kubersky, n. pag.). However, watching Philip “blossom from frightened fragility into fierce independence is one of the few rays of sunlight in this otherwise bleak fable about how Darwinistic capitalism always undermines justice and empathy, despite our efforts to connect with each other”(n. pag.).

#### 4. Conclusion:

*Orphans* delivers a simple message that stresses the fact that everyone needs love. It suggests that affectionate bonds can make a difference. Everyone needs support from a close friend, a brother or a father. Human beings cannot flourish without affectionate bonds. Harold, a stranger, manages to improve Philip and Treat’s lifestyle because he is a loving, kind person who decides to provide help when he is capable of it. However, Treat, the older brother, imprisons his younger brother as a result of limited understanding of love. He is incapable of fatherly love that supports and nourishes others. His selfish love hinders and obstructs Philip’s life. Due to both brothers’ different characters, they develop different relationships with Harold. Philip needs a father who teaches and cares, while Treat needs a strict father who tames and disciplines. However, paternal love is the driving force that works like magic, changing characters’ life for good. They go through a taming process that is accomplished by Harold’s death.

*Orphans* puts into focus realistic events in a magical way, calling for audiences to reassess their attitudes about reality. It is an irresistible experience that shocks the audience and evokes their emotional response. It represents logical events that develop illogically, adopting magical realism approach. It portrays reality in a way that engages audiences’ senses, presenting deeper understanding of reality.

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## المستخلص

لايل كسلر هو كاتب مسرحي وممثل. عُرضت مسرحيته "اليتيمان" للمرة الأولى على مسرح ماتريكس في لوس أنجلوس عام ١٩٨٣. حققت المسرحية نجاحاً عالمياً. تسرد مسرحية "اليتيمان" *Orphans* للكاتب لايل كيسلر قصة يتيمان يعيشان بمعزل عن العالم. يعيش الأخوان في عالم كالحلم، حيث أدت الحماية المفرطة من الأخ الأكبر إلى تربية شخصاً بالغاً مثل فيليب وهو يعاني من الخوف من العالم الخارجي، ويفضل-رغماً عنه-البقاء في دولااب الملابس الخاص بوالدته خشية من مواجهة العالم الخارجي. تحاول المسرحية إثارة عواطف المشاهدين في الثمانينات، وهو عصر تأثر بالمثل المادية. تنتقل المسرحية من المادية المستبدة إلى عالم حالم سحري، يقدم الأمل والعزاء إلى الأشخاص الذين يعانون الوحدة، ويبشرهم بأنهم سيجدون من يهتم بهم. تجسد المسرحية أحداثاً واقعية تتطور بشكل غير منطقي، حيث تتبنى المسرحية الواقعية السحرية. تصف المسرحية الواقع وتقدم فهماً أعمق للواقع بشكل يجذب الجمهور ويشجعه على أعمال الحواس لفهم الحقيقة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** كيسلر، اليتيمان، الواقعية السحرية، الواقع، الخيال