

The English Theatre of Hamburg

Established 1976

Presents

ORPHANS

(Waisen)

by LYLE KESSLER

Premiere on 8 September, 2016

Preview Performances at reduced prices on 5, 6 and 7 September

Weekly Performances Tuesday to Saturday at 19.30 Hours

Matinee Performances at 11.00 Hours on Tuesdays and

Fridays beginning 13 September

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Dear Teachers and Friends,

The English Theatre will premiere ORPHANS by Lyle Kessler on 8 September, 2016, with the usual preview performances at reduced prices on 5, 6 and 7 September. Bookings for this modern American classic have already started. See the cover of this study guide for dates and times of performances. The text of the play may be obtained at theatre@samuelfrench-london.co.uk or amazon.com Teachers interested in being invited to a dress rehearsal of the play should contact Jasmin Pose at marketing@englishtheatre.de

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lyle Kessler is an American playwright, screenwriter and actor whose Tony award winning ORPHANS (1985) has been a success all over the world. Born and raised in Philadelphia where the play takes place, he later studied at the Actors Studio in New York and appeared in a number of plays and films. His first work as a playwright, THE WATERING PLACE, was written in 1969 and had a successful run on Broadway. Other plays include POSSESSION, ROBBERS, UNLISTED, BURNING BRIGHT and COLLISION. His film scripts include ORPHANS, GLADIATOR, THE SAINT OF FORT WASHINGTON and TOUCHED, in which he also co-starred. He is a member of the Actors Studio and Labyrinth Theatre Company where he develops his new plays. Lyle Kessler has also served as Director of the Sundance Screenwriter's Lab. Along with his wife, actress Margaret Ladd, he developed the Imagination Workshop which brings in theatre artists to work with hospitalized psychiatric patients on artistic projects. It is the longest running arts and mental health program in the world.

ABOUT THE PLAY

New York audiences gave this play standing ovations when it opened there in 1985. Described as a theatrical thrill ride, it has been an international success throughout the world and joined the prestigious group of American modern classics. Performed in the past by leading actors such as Albert Finney and Al Pacino, the play was recently revived (2013) on Broadway to critical acclaim with Alec Baldwin.

Two grown-up boys, abandoned by their parents at an early age, are living alone in an old house in Philadelphia. One night the older brother meets in a bar and brings home what he thinks is a wealthy business man. He ties the drunken man up with the intention of robbing him and demanding ransom money for his life. But the hostage, in reality a Chicago gangster on the run, mysteriously frees himself and takes control of the situation. Recognizing the brothers for lost boys (orphans, just like himself at one time), he "adopts" and mentors them, becoming their long lost father figure. In a strange, both menacing and moving way, the man turns the brothers' lives upside down, with positive and tragic consequences.

The play, which lives from its theatrical intensity and light comic touch, deals with our need for love, recognition, sense of worth and strong supportive bonds.

"...funny one moment and powerfully emotional the next." New York Times

Summary of
Lyle Kessler's
ORPHANS

ACT I, Scene 1

An evening in spring, in the not too distant past. Two grown-up boys, abandoned by their parents at an early age, are living alone in an old house in Philadelphia. Now the two brothers are young adults, but as children were left alone without parental love, support and guidance. As a result, they have become abnormally dependent upon each other, and have developed some strange patterns of behaviour. The younger brother Phillip, although in no way brain damaged, still sees the world through a child's eyes. He is afraid to leave the house and often spends time in his departed mother's closet holding her clothes close to him for comfort. He idolizes Treat, thinking that his older brother knows best. Treat cares deeply about Phillip and is overprotective of him, but he also abuses him at times. He often leaves the house to rob people of their money and valuables in order to provide for himself and Phillip.

When the play begins, only Phillip (early 20s) is at home, watching TV. When he hears a noise from outside, he quickly turns off the TV and runs upstairs. Moments later, the front door opens and Treat comes in. Aware that Phillip is hiding from him, he calls out for his brother to come out of his hiding place. He then pulls from his pocket a handful of money and jewellery that he has stolen and drops it on a table.

Phillip slowly comes back into the room from upstairs. As he feared, Treat forces him to play a childhood game called "tag". Phillip hates the game because he always has to be "it", the one who must chase his brother around the room until he can catch and tag (touch) him. After the game, Treat checks the amount that is still left of the Star Kist tuna and Hellman's mayonnaise, the only foods that Phillip eats on sandwiches for lunch. Then he scares Phillip by threatening to get rid of their mother's clothes in the closet. "No!" Phillip pleads. "I like it in there. It's warm."

When Treat discovers that Phillip has been reading and underlining words in the newspaper, he blows up and hits him. He has forbidden Phillip to read anything because he is afraid that Phillip will educate himself and, as a result, become less controllable and dependent on him. When Phillip swears that it wasn't him who underlined the words, Treat teases him by suggesting that someone else must have come into the house and done it, someone who could still be there somewhere. He gives Phillip his knife and tells him to go upstairs

and search for the man. Phillip obediently ascends the stairs with the knife.

After a few moments, the sound of Phillip crying out in pain is heard from above. When he comes downstairs he is holding his arm, which has a scratch on it—obviously self-inflicted. Phillip claims that there was a man upstairs who tried to stab him and then escaped by jumping out the window. Treat, indulging Phillip's game-playing, asks what the man looked like. "Errol Flynn....the movie actor," Phillip replies. This answer is too much for Treat. "I know Errol Flynn!" he shouts, putting an end to Phillip's made-up story. Then, suddenly becoming the loving older brother, Treat insists on applying some hydrogen peroxide to the scratch on Phillip's arm to keep it from getting infected. Phillip backs away, afraid that the medicine will burn. "Come here, Phillip," Treat says. "Let your big brother Treat take care of you."

ACT I, Scene 2

Late that night. The front door opens, and Treat and Harold enter. Harold is drunk and singing:

*"If I had the wings of an angel,
Over these prison walls I would fly,
Straight to the arms of me mutter,
And there I'd be willing to die."*

Harold is a middle-aged man wearing an expensive suit and carrying a briefcase. Treat met him in a downtown bar and has brought him home with the intention of robbing him. In his drunken stupor, Harold confuses Treat with one of the Dead End Kids (street children who were the subject of some early Hollywood films). He swears he loves those Dead End Kids because he grew up in an orphanage and, like them, didn't have a "mommy or daddy". Harold soon falls asleep from too much alcohol. Whereupon Treat removes the money from Harold's wallet and opens his briefcase.

Phillip, who has been observing the scene from the stairs, comes slowly into the living room. Treat shows his brother the thousands of dollars in stocks and bonds that he has just found in Harold's briefcase. Assuming that the man must be a wealthy industrialist, Treat decides to kidnap Harold and demand ransom money for his life. He finds some rope and ties Harold up. While he is searching for some tape to cover the man's mouth, he finds a red high-heeled shoe that Phillip hid from him earlier that evening. Treat wants to know where the shoe came from. Phillip claims he doesn't know, then says he found it under the sofa and wants to keep it. "Maybe it was Mom's shoe," he says. Treat insists that their mother would never have worn such a shoe, and he accuses Phillip of having a woman and other strange people in the house during his absence. He

throws the shoe out the window and then orders Phillip to go to bed.

ACT I, Scene 3

The next morning. Harold is tied up in a chair, tape covering his mouth. Phillip is looking out the window. The woman's red shoe lying on the ground outside is driving Phillip crazy. He tells Harold he wants to bring the shoe back into the house, but Treat told him he would die if he went outside due to a terrible allergy he has had since childhood. Then it occurs to Phillip that he can wrap a scarf over his face and hold his breath while outside. He asks Harold if he will promise not to tell Treat about it. Due to the tape on his mouth, all Harold can say is "Mmmm" and nod his head yes. As soon as Phillip has left the house, Harold begins freeing himself with expertise from the rope and tape.

When Phillip returns with the shoe and sees what Harold is doing, he is terrified that Treat will blame him for it when he gets home. "He's gonna slap me around. Treat's got a violent temper," Phillip tells Harold. Free now of his ties, Harold assures Phillip that he will never let Treat hurt him again. He learns from Phillip what he already suspected – that the brothers are orphans, just like he was at one time, and therefore desperately in need of help and parental guidance. He instinctively knows that Phillip needs some affection and encouragement, so he puts his arm around the young man's shoulder and gives it a gentle squeeze. "How's that feel?" he asks. Phillip answers that it feels good, that he has missed that. "You got it now, forever and ever, Phillip. I would never leave you," Harold swears. Phillip is worried about how Treat will react to all of this. "Let me worry about Treat," Harold says. He then goes upstairs to the bathroom to make himself "presentable" before Treat comes home. As he climbs the stairs he sings, "If I had the wings of an angel...."

Phillip goes to the window and sees Treat approaching the house. He runs around the room in panic. Moments later, Treat comes in. He notices immediately the empty chair and rope. Grabbing Phillip violently around the neck, he asks where Harold is. Singing is heard from above. Harold comes downstairs. He greets Treat warmly and says that meeting up with him in the bar downtown was the best thing that has happened to him since he left Chicago and came to Philadelphia. Treat, however, is suspicious that Harold is not what he seems. While Treat was out, he made some calls to a few people in Chicago whose phone numbers he found in Harold's wallet. The people he called all said that they were indeed looking for Harold, but laughed when Treat demanded a million dollars for his life.

Harold is relieved that Treat did not reveal his whereabouts to the men, who are apparently dangerous criminals. He offers Treat a thousand dollars to be his

bodyguard, which Treat refuses categorically, saying that he doesn't work for anyone. When Harold takes the thousand dollars from his sock, Treat assumes that the man has even more cash hidden on him. He takes out his knife and demands that Harold give him any additional money on him as well. "That's a mistake," Harold says. He goes on, however, to offer Treat a packaged deal for his services, including lifelong security for him and Phillip, a pension plan, new clothes, fine food and all the women they can handle. He asks Phillip if he likes breasts. Phillip replies enthusiastically that he does and says, "Let's do it, Treat!"

Treat is furious that Phillip has turned against him and is agreeing with Harold. He advances on Harold with his knife, threatening to cut out the man's heart. Harold pulls out a small gun. Treat stops. Harold says he realized at the bar downtown that Treat was violent and therefore useful to him. That is why he came home with Treat, to train Treat to be his bodyguard. "I'm going to tame you, Treat, I'm going to make you my very own!" he says. In a rage, Treat leaps at Harold. Harold sidesteps and hits him on the head with the gun. Treat drops unconscious to the floor. Phillip, who has run into the closet during the violence, peeks out. Harold calls for Phillip to come to him for some more comfort and encouragement. The young man slowly approaches and stands next to Harold, who puts his arm around Phillip's shoulders, stroking him.

ACT II, Scene 1

Late afternoon, two weeks later. Under Harold's supervision, the living room has been cleaned up. There are new curtains, some plants and pictures, and a liquor cabinet with bottles and glasses.

Phillip comes downstairs. He is wearing the new clothes that Harold promised to buy for him. He looks at himself in a mirror on the closet door. Then he goes to a large box resting on the sofa. He opens the box and takes out a brand new pair of loafers (also from Harold). He takes off his old tennis shoes and tries to squeeze his feet into the loafers. When he hears a noise from outside, he rushes upstairs carrying the loafers.

Treat comes in through the front door with a new air of confidence and self-worth. He is dressed in a stylish new suit which he bought with Harold's American Express Card. Treat carries a Chicago newspaper for Harold and a small paper bag containing a bottle of mayonnaise for Phillip. He puts these things down and then admires himself and his new suit in the mirror.

Harold, singing, comes in from the kitchen. Treat makes them each a drink, and they settle down on the sofa. Treat is eager to be given his first assignment as Harold's bodyguard, but Harold says he must first learn to control his emotions. As an example, Harold points to an incident on the street the other night in which Treat

attacked a man for accidentally stepping on one of his new shoes. Treat insists that he has changed. He assures Harold that he would gladly take a bullet for him should one of those Chicago fellows try to shoot him. But Harold is not convinced that the young man is ready for an important assignment.

After Harold goes into the kitchen, Phillip comes downstairs, walking joyfully in the new loafers that Harold bought for him. Treat is jealous of his brother's growing affection and enthusiasm for Harold, and he resents Harold's lack of trust in him. He tries to convince Phillip that Harold is a thief on the run from some Chicago gangsters, but Phillip refuses to believe him. He also turns up his nose at the bottle of Hellman's mayonnaise that Treat has brought home for him, saying that he now prefers to eat the delicious meals that Harold cooks.

ACT II, Scene 2

Evening, two weeks later. Phillip is at the table eating a bowl of soup that Harold has prepared for him. Harold has perceived that Phillip is actually an intelligent young man who has simply been deprived of an education and contact with the outside world. He opens the window and persuades Phillip to put his head outside. Phillip is amazed that he is not gasping for breath, as Treat warned him would be the case. However, he still resists taking a walk outside because he is afraid of never finding his way back home, or of a person slitting his throat, as Treat told him might happen. Harold takes from his pocket a map of Philadelphia, which Phillip has never seen before. On the map he circles where Phillip lives on Camac Street. The young man is overjoyed that he now knows exactly where he lives and that, with the map, he will never get lost. He embraces Harold enthusiastically as Treat comes in through the front door.

Treat is carrying a briefcase full of stocks and bonds worth thousands of dollars that Harold asked him to pick up in town. He took Harold's pistol along with him in case of any trouble. Treat assures Harold that no one followed him home. He proudly relates an incident on the bus in which a black man refused to move over on the seat so that Treat could sit comfortably. Treat therefore threatened to shoot the man with Harold's pistol. Fortunately, the man got up and ran off the bus at the next stop. Harold wants to know what Treat would have done if the man hadn't moved. "I blow the bastard's brains all over the Broad Street bus!" Treat exclaims. Harold is disappointed that Treat again failed to control his emotions, and tells him he is not ready for another assignment. The young man begs Harold to give him another chance to prove himself. So Harold makes him improvise the same scene on the bus, this time with Phillip playing the man who refuses to move over on the seat. Once more, Treat fails miserably to

control his temper. Frustrated and humiliated by Harold, he runs out of the house into the night.

ACT II, Scene 3

An hour later. Phillip is looking out the window, waiting for Treat to return home. Harold has decided it is time for Phillip to venture outside. While encouraging the young man to trust his own instincts rather than what Treat tells him, Harold helps Phillip into a jacket and puts a cap on his head. He then opens the front door and waits. With the map in his hand Phillip slowly goes to the door and walks out. Harold, following him, turns off the light and closes the door.

Moments later, Treat comes in. He is unsteady on his feet because he has been drinking. After downing a swig of liquor at the living room bar, he calls out for Phillip to come out of his hiding place. He searches in the kitchen and upstairs for his brother. Not finding him there, Treat looks in the closet which contains their mother's clothes. Realizing that Phillip has defied him and left the house with Harold, he feels betrayed and alone. He takes one of his mother's coats from the closet and sits down with it. Treat holds the coat close to him and calls out softly, "Phillip."

ACT II, Scene, 4

Two hours later. Treat is sitting in the exact same place, still clutching the coat tightly to himself. When Phillip comes home, Treat drops the coat and wants to know where Phillip has been. Phillip reports that he and Harold took a walk. While they were walking, Harold noticed that some men were following them. He told Phillip to keep on walking, that he would see him later at home. Then Harold turned a corner and disappeared.

Treat explodes at the thought of Harold returning. He shouts that he wants Harold out of the house permanently. Phillip, whose world has opened up enormously since Harold has been there, finally stands up to Treat. He insists that he has the right to "Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness", which Harold told him is written in the American Declaration of Independence. Phillip points out that on his walk with Harold he didn't die of an allergic reaction, as Treat said he would. He shows Treat the map of Philadelphia that Harold gave him, so that he would always know where he is and never get lost, and asks why Treat never told him about that. Treat grabs the map and tears it up. Phillip frantically picks up the pieces and tries to put them together again. He says he is going to leave Treat and travel to different places. Treat is beside himself at the thought of being left alone. He reminds Phillip of all the things he has done to protect and provide for him over the years. Wandering around the room in a daze, Treat finally falls to his knees in despair, picks up his mother's coat and begins slamming it against the floor.

The front door opens and Harold comes in. He has difficulty walking and is holding his arm tightly across the front of his jacket. He tells the brothers that he is going to leave them, that he cannot involve them in his dangerous activities any longer. Phillip wants to go with him, but Harold refuses to take him along. "Don't worry, though," he tells Phillip. "I'll always be with you. You can count on me." Harold moves to get his briefcase on the table. He has a pain. As he sits down on the sofa his jacket opens, revealing a bloodstain from a gunshot. Phillip moves quickly to the sofa and comforts him. Harold reaches out his arm to Treat, saying what he earlier said to Phillip, "Come over here. Let me give you some encouragement." Treat doesn't move. Harold becomes delirious. He confuses the two brothers with the Dead End Kids in the old Hollywood movies, and

with the orphans he played with as a boy in the orphanage. Then, in a state of delirium, Harold quietly dies. Phillip, crying now, reaches over and takes Harold's arm and puts it around his shoulders. Treat, finally moved by the man's genuine desire to help them, goes to Harold and picks up his other hand. He kneels down and presses Harold's palm against his cheek. His face contorts in pain. Feeling again the familiar wounds of parental loss and abandonment, he sobs and cries out, begging Harold not to leave them. Phillip, realizing that he and Treat are alone in the world once more, moves to his brother. He cradles Treat in his arms as the stage lights fade.

Multiple Choice Exercise

1. Phillip and Treat (a. were raised by their grandparents, b. grew up in an orphanage, c. survived on their own after being abandoned by their parents).
2. The two brothers now live (a. in a foster home, b. alone in a house in Philadelphia, c. with relatives).
3. Phillip never leaves the house because he is (a. ill, b. physically handicapped, c. afraid to go outside).
4. Treat brings Harold home to (a. show him the house, b. introduce him to Phillip, c. rob him and demand ransom money for his life).
5. Harold is a (a. former policeman, b. bankrupt industrialist, c. Chicago gangster on the run).
6. Harold has sympathy for the brothers and helps them because (a. he, too, was an orphan at one time, b. is a trained social worker, c. lost two sons in a car accident).
7. Harold wants Treat to be his (a. driver, b. bodyguard, c. personal assistant).
8. Treat cannot be trusted with an important assignment because he (a. cannot control his violent temper, b. is not physically strong enough, c. does not have the criminal instinct).
9. Phillip gains the confidence to explore the outside world (a. with Treat's help, b. by talking to a neighbor, c. through Harold's encouragement and guidance).
10. Harold is shot by (a. Treat, b. a police officer, c. criminals trying to find him).

Answer Key:

1. c, 2. b, 3. c, 4. c, 5. c, 6. a, 7. b, 8. a, 9.c, 10. c

Interpretative Exercise

1. Describe what Harold does to improve the household and life-style of Phillip and Treat.
2. As Phillip gains confidence and independence from Treat under Harold's influence, Treat loses power and control over his younger brother. Give some examples of this happening in the play. How does this affect the brothers' relationship and produce their very different feelings about Harold?
3. The message of the play seems to be: We all need someone who cares about us. Do you agree with this? What can happen to a person without close, supportive and affectionate bonds?