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*Dead End Kids: Projective Identification and Sacrifice in Orphans*

by Donald L. Carveth

After decades of what theologian Hans Kung argues amounts to the repression of religiousness by psychoanalysts and of psychoanalysis by the religious, in recent years an increasingly interesting and sophisticated dialogue between psychoanalysis and theology has been developing. Since Lyle Kessler's (1987) play *Orphans* (and the film version directed by Alan J. Pakula for which Kessler wrote the screenplay) lends itself to both psychoanalytic and theological interpretation, the present essay is intended both as an exercise in applied psychoanalysis in the field of literary and cinematic studies and, at the same time, as a demonstration of the complementarity that may sometimes exist between hermeneutic perspectives often considered to be antithetical. It is my thesis that the contrasting psychoanalytic concepts of projective identification on the one hand and empathic identification on the other not only illuminate the central action and meaning of the play, but also provide psychoanalytic insight into the nature of sacrifice, in both its destructive and creative forms-- phenomena that are of fundamental significance in various religious traditions.

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***Dead End Kids: Projective Identification and Sacrifice in Orphans***  
**Donald L. Carveth**

Alleluia! not as orphans  
Are we left in sorrow now;  
Alleluia! He is near us,  
Faith believes, nor questions how;  
Though the cloud from sight received him,  
When the forty days were o'er,  
Shall our hearts forget his promise,  
"I am with you evermore"?  
--William Chatterton Dix, 1866

I

After decades of what theologian Hans Kung (1990) argues amounts to the repression of religiousness by psychoanalysts and of psychoanalysis by the religious, in recent years an increasingly interesting and sophisticated dialogue between psychoanalysis and theology has been developing (Homans, 1968, 1970; Lake, 1966; Leavy, 1988; Meissner, 1968, 1984; Rizzuto, 1979; Wyschogrod et al., 1989). Since Lyle Kessler's (1987) play *Orphans* lends itself to both psychoanalytic and theological interpretation, the present essay is intended both as an exercise in applied psychoanalysis in the field of literary and cinematic studies and, at the same time, as a demonstration of the complementarity that may sometimes exist between hermeneutic perspectives often considered to be antithetical.

The play opened in Los Angeles in 1983 and has subsequently been performed in Chicago, New York and London. Kessler himself wrote the screenplay for the film version directed by Alan J. Pakula and starring Albert

Finney as Harold, Mathew Modine as Treat and Kevin Anderson as Philip. Although faithful in most respects, the film differs from the play in a number of ways that provide significant evidence of authorial intention. To the original play on "lamb" and "lam" (pp. 64-5), Kessler adds film images of Treat contemptuously tossing aside a little toy lamb to which Philip is tenderly attached. I take this, together with other references to the theme of sacrifice, as evidence of an authorial intention to allude to Christ as the sacrificial Lamb of God (*Agnus Dei*). While the original scene in which Harold encourages Philip to open up the attic window (p. 70) contains no reference to water, in the film version Kessler elevates this into a scene of baptism: there is a downpour in which, held by Harold as he leans out, Philip is joyously drenched.

It is my thesis that the contrasting psychoanalytic concepts of projective identification on the one hand and empathic identification on the other (each of which is defined and discussed below) not only illuminate the central action and meaning of the play, but also provide psychoanalytic insight into the nature of sacrifice, in both its destructive and creative forms--phenomena that are of fundamental significance in various religious traditions. The former concept (projective identification) illuminates the pathological, essentially sado-masochistic, dynamic in the relationship between the orphaned brothers, in which Treat scapegoats Philip who masochistically sacrifices himself. The latter describes the redemptive psychology of Harold, their saviour, whose altruistic love transcends masochism in that in sacrificing himself for the "dead end kids" with whom he is empathically identified, he simultaneously realizes and affirms the pattern of values and ideals that constitute his core identity.

## II

In brief outline, the story concerns two adolescent brothers who have been living together in a ramshackle old house in Philadelphia ("The City of Brotherly Love") ever since their father deserted the family and their mother either died or disappeared. The older boy, Treat, having frustrated attempts by the child-welfare authorities to take them into custody, has been providing for his brother Philip and himself through petty crime. The film, unlike the play, opens with Treat mugging a man in the park, but apparently only after he has concluded that his victim is a former family man who has, like the orphans' father, abandoned his wife and children.

The younger brother, Philip, convinced by Treat that he once almost died from a severe asthma attack on leaving the house, is terrified of the outside world. He spends his time watching game shows and reruns of old movies on TV, playing out fantasy adventures of the Errol Flynn variety, and secretly reading and improving his vocabulary, an activity proscribed by his older brother from whom all evidence of this interest in "the word" must be hidden. In an early scene, Treat returns home with the booty from his day's work and searches for Philip who, as the text of the play makes clear, has been hiding in a closet containing their mother's coats. Treat wants to get rid of these reminders of their mother, but Philip is attached to them, as well as to a woman's shoe which Treat throws out of the window but which Philip later retrieves, despite his terror of the outdoors. In the film, Philip is also attached to a little toy lamb which is contemptuously tossed aside by his older brother. Into this unusual domestic scene stumbles Harold, an aging Chicago gangster "on the lam" from his former mob associates who seek to retrieve a briefcase full of "stolen securities" with which he has absconded. (In both cinematic and dramatic texts [pp.64-5] there is an interesting play on Philip's verbal confusion of "lam" and "lamb".) Intending to steal the drunken Harold's briefcase, Treat lures him back to the house and, concluding from its contents that Harold is a VIP, decides to kidnap him.

While Treat is at work attempting to contact Harold's associates in the hope of obtaining a "ransom," Harold, with the skill of a Houdini, "miraculously" frees himself from his bindings before the very eyes of an amazed Philip who readily becomes his devoted disciple. Before long, Harold not only succeeds in creating order out of the chaos of the house, but also in persuading Philip to open the attic window and breathe in the night air. The film depicts Philip, with Harold's encouragement, leaning out of the window, overwhelmed with joy as he becomes drenched in the falling rain.

By means of a combination of loving authority, worldly wisdom, financial incentives, and the judicious use of his revolver and his fists, Harold also succeeds, against considerable resistance, in turning Treat into his "personal bodyguard and all-around man" (p.53). At one point (p.59), Treat even goes so far as to boast of his willingness to "sacrifice" himself for Harold's sake. But despite his mentor's best efforts to train him to control his anger and his grandiosity and to teach him prudence and self-control, Treat's impetuosity indirectly leads to Harold's "betrayal" to "the mob" and ultimately to his death.

## III

It is certainly possible to interpret *Orphans* as a story of deprivation of fathering and its belated provision by Harold as a kind of substitute father, healer, teacher, therapist or saviour. A Freudian perspective might focus upon the oedipal themes evident in Philip's idealization of Harold, Treat's consequent resentment at his displacement as the object of Philip's dependence, his resistance to Harold's authority, and the fulfilment of his death-wish toward the father represented by the latter's murder at the conclusion. A Lacanian (1977) interpretation might centre on the emancipation of the orphans from their sado-masochistic enmeshment in the pre-oedipal, narcissistic universe of the Imaginary through the oedipalization or triangulation effected by Harold, whose entry disrupts the pre-existing dual union, turning the dyad into a triad. In this view, Harold performs the hitherto missing "paternal function" of registering *le nom-du-père*, the "name-of-the-father," homophonic with *le non-du-père*, the No (i.e. the law) of the father. Both these Lacanian terms are, to me at least, verbally evocative of the ritual invocation of the Trinity: "In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."

On the other hand, while such paternal themes are prominent in the play, *Orphans* is equally a story of the deprivation of mothering. Father deserted the family, but mother also disappeared, albeit leaving such traces as a red shoe and a fur coat. And if Harold fathers the two orphans, he certainly mothers them as well.

For the purposes of the essentially object-relational analysis offered here (Klein, 1986; Fairbairn, 1952; Winnicott, 1965, 1971; Guntrip, 1968; Kernberg, 1975), it is unnecessary to enter the vexed debate over what constitutes mothering as opposed to fathering for, in this perspective, *Orphans* is considered really to be about caretaking in a broad sense that includes both of these conventionally differentiated functions. It is about the terrible emotional consequences of deprivation of essential care, such as, for example, the delinquent child's hostility and conflict with authority which, as the play suggests, are rooted in deprivation rather than in any innate aggressive drive.

The play depicts a symbiotic union maintained by mutual projective identification between two emotionally wounded individuals who externalize in their relationship the split and sadomasochistic structure of the schizoid self. Finally, it portrays the healing or cure of such deficiency diseases, or the redemption of such states of dereliction, exemplified in the orphans, Philip and Treat, and in Harold himself. For Harold too is an orphan. At the Chicago orphanage in which he grew up, a cook ("that big German son-of-a-bitch") inexplicably took a liking to him and dispensed extra servings of food to his favourite. As a result Harold not only managed to survive his deprivation, but also to develop a capacity to empathize with the deprived and even to love and give everything he has for the salvation of these "dead end kids."

#### IV

While *Orphans* may be read as a depiction of the psychopathological consequences for the individual of deprivation of mothering and fathering, it may also be interpreted from the sociological and theological perspectives as addressing the subject of separation, loss, abandonment and the agony of dereliction on the historical and existential levels as well. According to an extensive sociological literature on the so-called decline of paternal authority in modern society (Marcuse, 1970)--a thesis that would seem to be supported by the prevalence of the theme of the absent father in the history of American cinema--we in the West exist, like Philip and Treat, in a "society without the father" (Mitscherlich, 1970).

But such a fatherless, or rather parentless society (since one can also posit a relative failure of the maternal and more generally familial functions) is likely to be experienced as a godless one as well, the sense of abandonment by any caring authority spreading beyond the horizon of the family to include the universe as a whole. While secular and religious thinkers may differ on whether the sense of existential emptiness or anomie is a metaphysical projection of our social condition (Durkheim, 1897; Berger, 1969), or whether the social condition itself may be a consequence of metaphysical doubt, they share a large measure of agreement that in either case the result is a widespread threat to both individual identity and social order.

I think the play suggests that, in an important sense, we all, at least at times, and especially in our culture's current "epoch of homelessness" (Buber, 1938), experience ourselves as orphans, "thrown," in Heidegger's (1927) sense, into a world we never made. In this situation, feeling abandoned by our Creator and Caretaker, we can react in either of two ways. Like Philip, we may succumb to anxiety, inhibition, arrested development and dependence upon (and often abuse by) some apparently stronger substitute attachment figure, some leader or Fuhrer like Treat. Or, like Treat himself, we can harden our hearts, split off our pain, helplessness, separation anxiety and longing and, adopting what Ian Suttie (1935) called a "taboo on tenderness," live out a facade of tough independence and aggressive self-sufficiency which masks our repressed (and frequently projected) emotional pain, anxiety, depression, loneliness and longing.

In a seemingly parentless world, or a godless one if you prefer, abandoned children seem to sort themselves into one or the other (or both, on different levels of a single, split psychic organization) of the two types represented here by Philip and Treat. On one hand, with Philip, we have the hysterics, depressives and masochists, individuals who, losing any sense of themselves as effective subjects, experience themselves as objects--slaves or victims of fate or the whims of others (a position conventionally occupied by women in patriarchal society). On the other hand, with Treat, we find the obsessive compulsives, narcissists and sadists, those, in other words, who attempt to usurp the allegedly absent deity's position as an omnipotent subject or master (a strategy customarily adopted by the patriarchal male).

In this light, the domestic situation of Treat and Philip is a caricature of traditional marital sex roles: Treat is the phallic, sadistic, narcissistic breadwinner who, repressing his own anxiety and dependency, projects (or, more accurately, projectively identifies) these unwanted parts of the self upon his insecure, depressive, masochistic partner who remains shut in at home, agoraphobic, the object, recipient or container of Treat's projection of his nightmare images of castration and helplessness. This containment is maintained (as it is in the stereotypical patriarchal marriage) through Philip's complementary introjective identification with his brother's projections and his projective identification on to Treat of his own disavowed active capability, assertiveness and aggression.

This analysis is in no way contradicted by the fact that although Treat abuses Philip in various, often playful, ways he at the same time takes care of him, saving them both from the clutches of the child-welfare department, bringing home the Hellman's mayonnaise he loves, even putting hydrogen peroxide on Philip's cuts with a maternal tenderness (for Treat represents a binding or symbiotic mother as much as a domineering husband/father). Abusive husbands are not infrequently protective and tender towards the objects of their abuse, expressing toward them all the contradictory impulses of love and hate, tenderness and violence, which a child inflicts upon its teddy bear.

While fully supporting the demands of women to be treated as more than stuffed toys existing for the amusement and soothing of men (that is, their demand to be treated as personal rather than transitional objects as Winnicott (1971) referred to the soft toy), we must also insist that--as the play reveals--for such positive change to take place it is not sufficient for the Treats among us to integrate their projected pain, dependence and helplessness. Since a bipersonal, interactional or symbiotic system is in play here, it is at the same time essential for the Philips to find the courage to overcome their masochism through the integration of their projected and retroflected sadism, to leave their

prisons (which are also their nests or refuges) and acquire the capacity to stand on their own feet--but hopefully not by identifying with their erstwhile oppressors, for there are already too many muggers in the park.

## V

The concept of projective identification (Klein, 1986; Sandler, 1988) is notorious for having many conflicting, vague and overlapping meanings, so let me clearly define the sense in which I wish to use it here. By projective identification I mean the unconscious process in which split off and/or repressed feelings, self-states and self- and object-images are projected by a subject on to an object who not only comes to be seen by the subject as containing the projected elements of the self, but who actually is unconsciously manoeuvred into having and even enacting the feelings, states and characteristics that have been projected. Having thus subtly influenced the object into actually feeling or enacting the projected part (i.e. introjectively identifying with it), the subject now seeks to control it actively or passively. In this way, the subject comes to feel a spurious sense of mastery over unacceptable, denied or disowned parts of the self: through a peculiar sort of "empathy" or identification with the object that now contains them, the subject feels relief, for now the disturbing contents are no longer felt to be in the self but in the other whom he has unconsciously (but not necessarily "intentionally") manoeuvred into embodying them.

I am indebted to a colleague (Rodin, 1990) for the following illustration of this process. A mother unable to contain her own distress and anger would come home and, with her baby with her in the kitchen, start loudly slamming the kitchen cupboards until the baby was screaming, at which point the mother herself relaxed and became a competent soothing adult, soothing herself vicariously through the baby who was now enacting her own split-off and projected distress. The Freudian concept of identification with the aggressor in which, for example, the abused child later becomes an abusing adult, or to take another example, the dominated woman subsequently becomes a domineering bully, comes close to the idea of projective identification, but in many discussions of the former process an essential element of the latter is missed. While the victim's repression of his or her helplessness and trauma and defensive identification with the power and mastery of the aggressor is highlighted, the interpersonal or intersubjective process through which another is unconsciously manoeuvred into actually feeling and playing the part of the helpless and traumatized victim tends to be missed.

An example of identification with the aggressor would be that of the little girl who got over her fear of ghosts by pretending to be one: "There's no need to be afraid in the hall,' she told her little brother, 'you just have to pretend that you're the ghost who might meet you'" (Freud, 1936, p.111). But while this is a good illustration of identification with the aggressor, it misses the essential feature of projective identification, which in this case would be the unconscious process (again, not necessarily "intentional" in any ordinary sense) through which another person is actually made to feel they have seen a ghost.

In addition, the concept of identification with the aggressor captures only one of the dual dimensions of projective identification. For while a subject may certainly identify with the aggressor and project the role of the victim onto someone else, it is equally possible to reverse roles, identify with the victim, project the role of aggressor upon another and unconsciously manoeuvre the other into actually feeling and enacting sadistic impulses.

Not infrequently psychotherapists encounter patients who shift rapidly back and forth between these two forms of projective identification in ways that are, initially at least, most confusing to their therapists (Kernberg, 1975). At one moment the therapist is unconsciously made to feel like an intimidated child before the patient who seems all-powerful and frightening. But, in the next, he finds himself feeling angry and inclined to be cruel and rejecting towards the patient, who has shifted into the role of the threatened and intimidated child.

The process of projective identification is at the root of very many chronic marital, interpersonal and intergroup conflicts. Typically, the narcissistic and sadistic subject (Treat) projects his split-off anxiety, helplessness and dependency into an object whom he (often with society's and the victim's own collusion) gets to play the anxious, masochistic, depressive and dependent part (Philip). The subject (master) then begins to regard the devalued object (slave) as an albatross around his neck, so he breaks away.

Once free of the subject's constant projections, the object typically, like Philip, begins to recover its disavowed subjectivity and agency. But, while the former object grows stronger and more independent, the erstwhile subject begins, like Treat, to fall apart. Without his depressed or anxious object to contain them, his projections begin to fail and the disowned parts of the self start to return and he becomes increasingly anxious and depressed. A complete reversal of roles may even occur and, like Philip toward the end of the play, the liberated slave may make her or his former master "it." Hopefully, however, the emancipated one will not merely reverse the roles but, again like Philip, declare that the old sado-masochistic game is over.

## VI

An important truth, understood by experienced analysts, conveyed in *Orphans*, is that people like Philip (and those depressed and anxious wives) who on the surface appear so disturbed, may often turn out to be far stronger, healthier and more intact than those who, like Treat, possess a narcissistic shell or "false self" (Winnicott, 1965) that enables them, initially at least, to appear to possess far greater ego strength. Despite his confinement to the house, his terror of the outside world, his living in a fantasy world, and his marked dependence upon Treat for basic provision, Philip's very weakness is in a sense the source of his greater strength. Philip does not have radically to split-off his dependency feelings and related elements of his emotional life, precisely because he can depend on Treat (who, of course, secretly depends on him in a different way but to an even greater degree). Like the mothers of so many so-called borderline patients who undermine their children's efforts towards independence because of their unconscious need to maintain a symbiosis with them in order to sustain their own precarious identities, Treat is an abusive parent.

Paradoxically, however, his very availability to Philip as a parent-figure, albeit in many ways a bad one, nevertheless enables the latter to remain in touch with core aspects of his true self. Under Treat's protection, however sadistic, confining and controlling, Philip is able to retain a capacity for imaginative play: he does little else all day but play and also teach himself to read, in this way getting himself the education that Treat, like a patriarchal husband, seeks to deny him in order to keep him dependent and controlled. Not having totally to split off and deny dependency, Philip is able to remain sufficiently in touch with his attachment needs to use transitional objects--the little toy lamb (the theological significance of which we may speculate about) and the mother's shoe--objects that represent a link to his childhood attachment figures, primarily the mother.

Treat, on the other hand, having no one to depend on but himself, has had to split off his child self altogether in order to become a prematurely (pseudo) self-sufficient adult, capable of providing for himself and his younger brother. Treat's attachment needs and his separation pain have had to be massively dissociated and projectively identified into Philip and, hence, Treat has only hostility and contempt for the transitional objects that threaten to remind him of his child self and his attachment longings and separation pain. Something of the above dynamic was represented long ago in Hegel's (1807) discussion of the master-slave dialectic whereby, over time, the slave comes to occupy the stronger position through the master's very dependence upon him or her. But contemporary psychoanalysis has an important addition to make to the Hegelian analysis in its recognition that a central element of the slave's paradoxical advantage lies in the fact that his or her very domination at the same time constitutes a kind of protection, thanks to which he or she is able to avoid the extremes of dehumanization to which the master has been driven.

An important implication of this analysis is that any hope for mitigation of the chronic violence, exploitation and scapegoating to which humanity is heir lies, as Suttie (1935) realized, in the revaluation and recovery of those qualities of sensitivity, tenderness and vulnerability commonly associated with childhood and femininity. In the play, these qualities are embodied, albeit in a masochistic distortion, in the gentle personality of Philip and, in a healthier fashion, in Harold's empathic (rather than projective) identification with the orphans, an identification that makes possible his acts of creative self-sacrifice on their behalf.

In our culture, these qualities are symbolically associated with the figure of the lamb, a frequent object of sacrifice, as in the case of the *Agnus Dei*. Hopefully, any attempt to realize these values will be moved by a compassionate and forgiving awareness of the painful dilemma of the Treats of this world (among whom, after all, we are all included to some degree). Granted, they are no treat to live with because of their chronic insistence that their pain be experienced by those they depend on as scapegoats rather than by themselves. However, merely to scapegoat them is to become rather than to heal them.

## VII

But we must have no illusion that the healing that is necessary can be achieved short of a radical psychosocial transformation, turning or conversion. For surely today, even apart from theological doctrines of the "fall of man" and "original sin," few can doubt that our enmeshment in the sado-masochistic disease, if not a defining feature of our human nature, is to say the least profound. Our destructiveness towards one another, ourselves and our environment appears so pervasive that, as the film suggests, without the unsolicited, unexpected and seemingly fortuitous intervention of a powerful helper, the situation would indeed appear to be hopeless.

But Harold's arrival has changed everything. At the beginning of the film, Treat displays a fleeting look of panic when he comes home and is momentarily unable to find his brother. However, at the conclusion, thanks to Harold's encouragement, a newly confident Philip actually leaves the house. When Treat discovers that, his aggressive narcissistic shell, already weakened by Harold's loving authority, shatters completely. He is found by Philip crumpled at the top of the stairs in an almost foetal position, clinging to his mother's coat. However, as psychoanalysts know only too well, the profound resistance to cure is never so easily overcome. Treat quickly tries to reestablish the old projective-identification system but, due to Harold's gracious intercession, a redeemed Philip is now strong enough to refuse the projections. Having once been lost, Philip now is found. He knows where he is. Harold has given him a map.

In a desperate attempt to force Philip back into his control, Treat, as if possessed, tears up the map (an allusion to Holy Scripture and its revelation of who we are?) and attacks, almost killing his brother in a final demonic attempt to turn him back into his object or creature so that Treat can sustain his illusory sense of himself as an omnipotent subject or creator. This effort is bound to fail, for if Philip were killed, then as Sartre (1943) following Hegel (1807) understood, the victory would at the same time amount to a defeat. For Treat would in that case find himself alone with no one to reflect and support his spurious grandeur by containing and thus obscuring his actual brokenness (Vanier, 1988).

The moral of the story can be stated in both psychoanalytic and theological terms. To the extent that we refuse to integrate our own childhood pain, we visit it upon others through projective identification. To the extent to which we refuse to take up our own cross, we crucify others. In Philip's case matters are a little more complex, for here the failure to take up one's own cross results, if not in a sort of self-crucifixion, then at least in a masochistic sacrifice of the self to an idol as an escape from the more frightening demands of life (or of the living God).

But while Philip's masochistic dependency rather easily gives way to healthy self-assertion with Harold's encouragement and the instruction he provides in the art of living, Treat's sadism and schizoid self-sufficiency yield only in the face of Harold's personal exemplification of the art of dying. In the final scenes of the play it is not only Harold who is crucified but, witnessing and in a sense identifying with this crucifixion, Treat himself undergoes the painful but liberating disintegration of his false self and the tentative emergence of his true self--a death and resurrection through which he is finally able to recognize and acknowledge his identity as one of the community of

"dead end kids."

### VIII

If much of the foregoing has concerned the pathological process of projective identification, in Harold's capacity for empathic identification we see a positive alternative. For Harold too belongs to the community of orphans. His movie heroes, the Dead End Kids, had a little, "top-o'-the-mornin'" Irish mother to cook them corned beef and cabbage. But Harold and the others at his orphanage "didn't have no mommy or daddy" (p.20). According to Harold:

Orphans always hungry . . . orphans always coughing up blood, orphans dropping dead all the time, terrible mortality rate at an orphanage! . . . Motherless orphans, middle of the night Chicago, orphans on a big hill facing Lake Michigan. Wind come through there making a terrible sound . . . Orphans pulling their blankets up over their heads, frightened orphans crying out. You know what they were crying ? . . . Mommy! Mommy! Honest to god! Motherless orphans don't know a mommy from a daddy, don't know a mommy from a fuckin' tangerine! (pp.23-4).

Throughout the film Harold continually sings or whistles:

If I had the wings of an angel,  
Over these prison walls I would fly,  
Straight to the arms of me mudder,  
And there I'd be willin' to die!

In the middle of the night the hungry orphans would sneak downstairs 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). But, "Thank god for that bloody fucking German son of a bitch," for he took a liking to Harold for some unfathomable reason and gave him "big heaping plates of meat and potatoes" which enabled him to survive. In other words, Harold, like Philip, did receive some caretaking, however limited. In Philip's case it came from Treat; in Harold's from the German. Hence, despite becoming a gangster, Harold never entirely identified with the aggressor. He also identified with the good aspects of the German as a caretaker, as well as with the positive images of family life that he glimpsed in the movies.

Like Philip, who watched old Errol Flynn movies on T.V. while Treat was away during the day, Harold retained a capacity for imaginative and cultural experience: "I loved that woman. Corn beef and cabbage cooking day and night. I used to work up a hearty appetite just sitting in them dark Chicago movie houses watching those Dead End Kids" (pp.20-1). One of the words which the autodidactic Philip has underlined in a magazine is "dispensation" (p.15), a term defined as the "ordering, management, esp. of the world by Providence" (*Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 1982, p.276). It is his identification with the kids who are fed and with the mother who feeds them, as well as with the German cook who fed him, that leads Harold to "dispense" hearty meals of corned beef and cabbage and everything else he possesses for the benefit of the orphans.

I will refrain from further comment on such "oral" themes, except to point to their association with a mother's giving of her own bodily substance in the act of nursing her children and with the Holy Eucharist as the ritual re-enactment of the Lord's Supper, in which those who believe in Him symbolically feed on Christ's body and blood.

The capacity to utilize abstract attachment figures or fantasize significant others to sustain identity and self-esteem in the absence of positive response and affirmation, or in the presence of hostility and negation in one's current milieu, has been insufficiently studied by social scientists and psychoanalysts (including attachment theorists themselves). And yet we know something of the important supportive function performed by imaginary playmates for lonely or unloved children; of the role of fantasies of future appreciation by posterity in enabling innovative artists to keep working despite deprecation of their art by their contemporaries; of the importance of memories of previous experiences of acceptance in helping people to cope with current rejection; and of the role of religion in enabling concentration camp inmates to resist the overwhelmingly dehumanizing forces of their environment through faith in the sustaining love of a transcendent God (Frankl, 1946).

All of these are instances of the creative capacity possessed, to a greater or lesser degree, by many people to employ the symbolic function of the human psyche to generate images of consolation and affirmation with which to resist current adversity, devaluation and negation of the self. It goes without saying that adherents of different philosophical and religious world-views, even while agreeing on the existence and importance of such images as components of psychic reality, will disagree regarding the status of the extra-psychic reality to which such images are sometimes felt to correspond.

Unlike Freud (1927, 1928, 1930), who was prone to denigrate such phenomena as regressive or infantile illusions based upon wishful thinking, Winnicott (1971) appreciated the crucial adaptive functions of such uses of the imagination. For Winnicott, they belong, with play, art, religion and human cultural life in general, to the "transitional area" of experience which mediates or transcends such binary oppositions, polarities or dichotomies as reality and fantasy, the objective and the subjective. Such phenomena originate, according to Winnicott, in the child's use of its first "not-me" possession, its special bit of blanket, teddy bear or other "transitional object" which, paradoxically, is at one and the same time both a "me" and a "not-me" possession, both self and other, inner and outer, created and discovered, invented and found.

Unfortunately, however, Winnicott called the transitional object the first "not-me" possession when his own argument is that it is both a "me" and a "not-me" possession. He further muddied the intellectual waters by referring to the transitional realm as an "area of illusion" rather than as an "area of faith" (Eigen, 1981). Just as we have come to

recognize the "field of dreams" (1989) as one comprised of wisdom as well as wish-fulfilment, so the transitional area transcends the merely illusory. For me, at least, despite attempts to redefine its common sense, the term "illusion" necessarily devalues this field and reflects the bias of the one-sidedly objective stance which Winnicott himself sought to surpass. It obscures the very truth he wished to emphasize: namely, that such uses of the imagination frequently lead human beings to a heightened, rather than a diminished sense of reality, promote biological and psychological survival and lead, at least in the case of creative genius, to the significant transformation of what passes for consensual reality itself.

## IX

But not all children and adults are equally able to employ transitional phenomena, just as they vary in their capacity for what Erikson (1950) called "basic trust," a phenomenon clearly related to what theologians refer to as "faith." The absence of a transitional object in a child's early experience or its inability to engage in imaginative play are significant indicators of pathology. It seems that a capacity for imaginative play is both a sign of healthy development and a protection against pathology. The ability to utilize images of supportive significant others and to have confidence in their love and concern ("Jesus loves me, this I know . . .") would appear to depend upon at least a minimal experience of positive response from actual as opposed to transitional caretakers. However, this is not to deny that particularly gifted children are sometimes able to extract or create at least some of the support they need even in very unfavourable circumstances.

To return to the characters in the film: both Harold and Philip, having received some degree of care, are able to use the transitional phenomena of their cultural milieu to sustain themselves. Treat's experience may either have been more impoverished and traumatic, or he may have lacked sufficient innate creative capacity to make use of transitional phenomena to ease his pain to the point at which it could be borne rather than having to be denied. Unlike Treat, Harold and Philip are not forced to split off their childhood experience. Hence, it remains available to them as the basis for empathic identification and compassion, as in Harold's Christ-like devotion to his "dead end kids":

HAROLD: You're not a Dead End Kid, are you?

TREAT: A Dead End Kid?

HAROLD: 'Cause if you were a Dead End Kid I'd give you everything I had . . . I swear to God . . . I'd give you the very shirt off my back.

TREAT: You don't have to go that far.

HAROLD: There are no limits as far as the Dead End Kids and me are concerned.

TREAT: No kidding.

HAROLD: I love those fucking Dead End Kids! (p.19).

Healthy parents who, having in childhood received love from their caretakers, wish in turn to pass this gift on to their own offspring, thus making "reparation" (Klein, 1986) for destructive wishes and acts toward both preceding and succeeding generations. In the same way, Harold desires to give to the orphans as he had been given to. In the words of the No. 59 Chorale of Bach's (1734-35) Christmas Oratorio:

Ich steh an deiner Krippen hier,  
O Jesulein, mein Leben;  
Ich komme, bring und schenke dir,  
Was du mir hast gegeben.

I stand here beside Thy manger,  
O babe Jesu, my life;  
I come, bring and give to Thee  
That which Thou hast given me.

It would be incorrect to call Harold's empathic identification with the orphans a projective identification. For although he sees his orphan self in them, this self is not split-off or repressed. Rather, it is an integrated aspect of his overall personality, an integration made possible by the care he, like Philip, received. Not having been split off, Harold's child self is available to him as a conscious resource for empathic identification rather than for denial, projection and control. Hence, through empathic rather than projective identification, Harold can vicariously receive what he seeks to give to the deprived boys. And he seeks to give them everything he has.

HAROLD: This is a real tragic situation I've wandered into, one boy's a delinquent . . . the other boy's shoulders are just dying for a gentle encouraging squeeze.

PHILIP: They are?

HAROLD: Anybody ever give your shoulders an encouraging squeeze?

PHILIP: I don't think so.

HAROLD: That's a tragedy. Every young man's shoulders need an encouraging squeeze now and then.

PHILIP: Treat never did that.

HAROLD: I imagine not. What about your father?

PHILIP: I don't know. He ran away from home when I was small.

HAROLD: He deserted the family?  
 PHILIP: Yes.  
 HAROLD: Well, I know shoulders, Philip. If I know anything, I know about shoulders.  
 . . . You want me to give them a squeeze, try it out, see how it feels?  
 PHILIP: (hesitantly) I don't know.  
 HAROLD: You don't have to touch me. I'll touch you . . .

There follows a moving scene that, for me at least, calls to mind the central image on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in which Michelangelo depicts God reaching out to bring Adam to life through His touch.

PHILIP: Well, maybe that would be all right.  
 HAROLD: That would be fine. Come on over here. Come on. . . . How's that feel?  
 PHILIP: (lets out a deep breath) Feels okay.  
 HAROLD: Feels good?  
 PHILIP: Yes.  
 HAROLD: Feels real good?  
 PHILIP: Yes, feels real good.  
 HAROLD: Feels encouraging, huh?  
 PHILIP: Uh huh.  
 HAROLD: Makes you feel there's hope.  
 PHILIP: Yes.  
 HAROLD: (squeezing shoulder) This is what you missed.  
 PHILIP: Yes.  
 HAROLD: That feeling.  
 PHILIP: I missed that.  
 HAROLD: You got it now.  
 PHILIP: I do?  
 HAROLD: Forever and ever, Philip. I would never leave you (pp.37-8).

### X

In the light of this allusion to Christ's promise that "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20), it becomes evident that, in addition to its various psychoanalytic meanings, Kessler's play may at the same time be viewed as an allegory of the arrival of the Guest who heals and redeems and who, although betrayed and crucified, nevertheless triumphs over death by living on in the hearts of those who believe in Him. The allegorical betrayal is fulfilled when Harold is delivered over to "the mob" (whose "securities" he has stolen) by a combination of circumstances arising from Treat's initial attempts to obtain a "ransom" and later by his envy of Harold's power and his inability to master his aggression.

Having performed his miracles (the Houdini escape, the transformation of the house, the provision of food, clothing, money and a map), communicated most of his teaching, and even administered a baptism (in the scene in which he exposes Philip to the rain), Harold had nearly completed his ministry. But not quite since, as he himself says, "We're talking about life and death, Treat, mortality! The human condition!" (p.45) and, hence, his final lesson must take the form of an encounter with death itself. Whereas the film leaves us wondering why Harold apparently chooses to leave the boys, in the play the events leading up to the final scene are more satisfactorily explained. Harold takes Philip for a walk in the course of which he is spotted by his enemies. Telling Philip to keep on walking, Harold heads off in a different direction drawing his enemies after him (in this way "sacrificing" himself). Later he returns to the house with a wound in his side to die on the sofa in a cruciform position. But only after having provided Philip with his map and having told him, "Don't worry . . . I'll always be with you . . . Forever and ever. You can count on me" (p.96).

This Redeemer's healing mission seems really to have been fulfilled. Philip and Treat are like the orphans who once enjoyed a brief escape from the orphanage. Although beaten on their return, they had nevertheless seen what they had to see (p.96). So Philip and Treat had encountered what they needed to encounter in Harold. Philip's healing was well advanced by the time of Harold's death. Treat, on the other hand, had consistently resisted his saviour. He even caused Harold momentarily to despair and to echo Christ's words in the Garden of Gethsemane. Harold muttered to himself: "I wish to god I could get out of this lousy business. I wish to god I could go back to Chicago" (p.62). Prior to Harold's death, Treat had consistently rejected his many offers of an encouraging hug. Now, finally, he reaches out to touch him. This contact has a devastating effect in breaking down his final defences against the pain of his early losses. As in the case of a previous doubting Thomas (John 20: 27-29), it leads to the collapse of all resistance and to a final confession of faith.

Philip had previously accepted with gratitude Harold's location of him in time and space: "We're tucked away safe and sound at the very edge of the Milky Way which is swimming in the great ocean of space . . . circling the sun . . . in the Western Hemisphere, North American Continent, State of Pennsylvania, City of Philadelphia . . . the sixty-fourth block . . ." (pp.71-2). Now, at last, with this touch, Treat too can accept the identity Harold had freely offered him from the beginning. "Harold! Harold!," he cries. "I am a Dead End Kid, Harold! I am a fucking Dead End

Kid!" (p.98). Aren't we all?

#### Summary

After many years of repression of religiousness by psychoanalysts and of psychoanalysis by the religious (Kung, 1990), the dialogue between psychoanalysis and theology has been resurrected and is enjoying new life. Since *Orphans* lends itself to both modalities of interpretation, a double analysis illustrates their occasional complementarity. The concept of projective identification illuminates the scapegoating process in which the self visits its own split-off emotional pain upon another, crucifying the other rather than acknowledging its own brokenness. An alternative to the sacrifice of the other is the creative self-sacrifice entailed in the working-through of childhood suffering. Such integration makes possible the empathic (as opposed to projective) identification of the self that is sacrificed with the self that is saved, thus transcending masochism in that the sacrifice of the self is at the same time an affirmation of its core values and ideals.

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