



Blue/Orange

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In a London psychiatric hospital, an enigmatic patient claims to be the son of an African dictator - a story that becomes unnervingly plausible. An incendiary tale of race, madness and a Darwinian power struggle at the heart of a dying National Health Service, Blue/Orange premiered at London's Cottesloe Theatre in April 2000 and transferred to the West End in 2001.

Blue/Orange Details

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From Reader Review Blue/Orange for online ebook

Adrian says

I felt like I should have been all over this, with themes of mental illness, ethnicity and politics, but didn't quite ring true for me somewhere - maybe it would be different in performance. Would love to have seen the original cast of Ejiofor/Lincoln/Nighy.

Alyce Hunt says

We read the beginning of this play as an unseen text at the start of our English literature module. It's been playing on my mind since, so when I spotted it in the library yesterday I couldn't resist giving it a full read. This is a no holds barred exploration of the system in place in mental health establishments. Bruce believes that his patient, Christopher, is schizophrenic, and they need to keep him in for longer. Robert, his superior, undermines him: they can't keep Christopher in, because they have a shortage of beds. It wouldn't be following procedure.

The angel and the devil psychiatrists contrasting with the rapidly unraveling Christopher makes the tension unbearable. I'd love to see this performed. It's powerful on the page, but would be even more so up on stage.

Jill says

Written as a screenplay. Office politics, racism, and a doctor's self-importance get in the way of an accurate diagnosis for a black schizophrenic.

Bruce Costella says

Found this on a recommended reading list for drama on the /lit/ wiki page and boy howdy am I glad I gave it a go. A budding psychiatric doctor determines at the end of a court mandated twenty-eight days that his patient is clearly schizophrenic and requires further evaluation. Claiming to be the illegitimate son of a Nigerian dictator, the patient's only goal is to return home. However it is opinion of the doctor's more seasoned supervisor that the patient is mentally fit and can return home without impunity. What follows is an examination of mental illness, the healthcare industry and race in contemporary England.

Penhall is a masterclass in dialogue, his characters are at once funny and poignant. When characters interact their words carry a sparring quality and it is a joy to follow the verbal ripostes, parries and jabs as they each vie for what they want. The plot develops organically and deceptively, coming to a mostly satisfying conclusion. I appreciate that the story boils down to an interpersonal conflict that is open to as much or as little nuance as the reader wants to take away from it. Highly suggested.

Pauline Butcher Bird says

This very clever and enthralling play gets top marks for holding my attention through every word spoken.

Christopher, a black patient in his 20s is diagnosed with borderline personality disorder and has been detained for 28 days under Section 2 of the Mental Health Act. He describes an orange as blue in colour and states his father is Idi Amin. It is the day of Christopher's release but Bruce, a junior doctor thinks Christopher is really schizophrenic and should be detained longer. Robert, his senior, disagrees because they need the bed. Their disagreement and interviews with Christopher is the play. My quibble is that I don't believe doctors speak to each other or to their patients with such contempt. 8/10
Freak Out! My Life with Frank Zappa

Robert Morrow says

I saw the West End production with Bill Nighy as the consultant and it was fabulous. Later I saw a rather poor rendition of the same play at the Intiman Theatre in Seattle. This tells me that much of the power of the book is in the subtext. The fundamental insecurity of the three main characters is not so much in the words as in the group dynamics; all of them have vulnerabilities. Sometimes funny, sometimes frightening, this remains one of my favorite late 20th Century Plays.

Fia Eamónn Wáhlín says

A great Play that I would love to see live, important issue with many different views.

Bobby Sullivan says

I couldn't help comparing this play to *The Shrike*, another award-winning drama set in a mental hospital. The dialogue in *The Shrike* was more real and believable.

Marybeth says

Joe Penhall, an English writer, is known for his three-character full length plays, and this is the best of the several I read. It's about a young African man who has been institutionalized for thirty days of observation because of mental illness and the two doctors that treat him (and don't agree on a course of action). Complicating matters further is the patient's insistence that he's the son of Idi Amin. The dialogue is intense and fast-paced, and the patient sometimes gets lost in the power struggle between the two doctors. It deals head on with race and the politics of medicine and treating the mentally ill.

Michael Reffold says

Thought-provoking and realistic - I imagine it would be even more powerful when seen on stage.

Ben says

Saw the Young Vic production, the kind of play that fizzles with ideas bringing in concepts of linguistics, mental health, race and typical office politics. Frequently hilarious, sometimes shocking - the tone shifts beautifully throughout. Also, David Haig is a national treasure.

Mahdi Lotfabadi says

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Adam says

A play about the struggle of power, race and use of language in an NHS hospital. The language and plot developments are clever, slowly weaving the characters and their words together it also harks back to the PC brigade of what you can and call people and what is procedure and what is right and if being PC is right. It is also a bit Pinteresque as the action all takes place in one room over the course of a day. Worth a read for anyone interested in contemporary theatre or race in theatre.

Debra says

The inmates are running the asylum

Jacqueline says

The world is blue as an orange

No error the words do not lie
They no longer allow you to sing
In the tower of kisses agreement
The madness the love
She her mouth of alliance
All the secrets all the smiles
Or what dress of indulgence
To believe in quite naked.
The wasps flourish greenly
Dawn goes by round her neck
A necklace of windows
You are all the solar joys
All the sun of this earth
On the roads of your beauty.

(Paul Eluard)

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