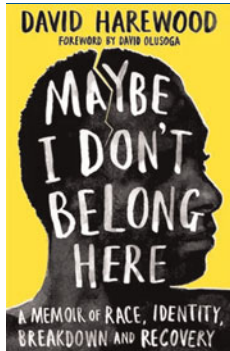


Book reviews

Edited by Allan Beveridge and Femi Oyeboade

Femi Oyeboade , Department of Psychiatry, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK. Email: femi_oyeboade@msn.com

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Maybe I Don't Belong Here: A Memoir of Race, Identity, Breakdown and Recovery

By David Harewood. Bluebird. 2022.
£9.99 (pb). 256 pp.
ISBN 9781529064179

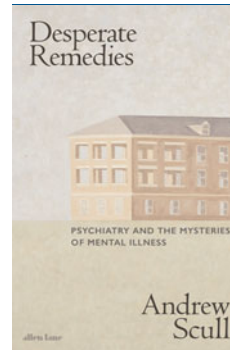
David Harewood's book is revelatory. It deals with aspects of brutal and inexplicable racism that is rarely discussed but that is devastating in its consequences. It is explicit and direct in its descriptions of severe mental illness, the influence on behaviour, thinking and the experience of reality. Then it proceeds to draw a link between racism and mental illness, highlighting the way alienation and disrupted identity contribute at least to the content of psychosis, if not to the actual causation.

He writes, 'When I was seven years old, matters became irrevocably clear. It was an incident I'll never forget for it created a rupture that lasts until this very day. Playing alone outside my house one day, I noticed an older, white gentleman walking towards me from across the road. He wasn't charging at me so I didn't feel danger, but I could tell it was a purposeful walk. I stopped what I was doing and watched as he got closer. When he was finally within arm's length, his face a picture of hatred and anger, he leaned in towards me and said: "Get the fuck out of my country, you little Black bastard!"'. If there is anyone still out there who disbelieves the reality of brazen and malevolent racism, David Harewood's experience should put an end to that.

Harewood had just completed his drama training at RADA and was embarking on his career as an actor when he had his episode of psychosis. It occurred in the context of the use of cannabis and alcohol. He developed grandiose beliefs, believing that he could do anything and that he was a genius with supernatural powers. He believed that he was disappearing and invisible. And he experienced visual and command hallucinations. He concludes, 'Psychosis left me a shell, unable to comprehend the world around me, with no ability to focus or remember anything'. The current tendency to see all mental illness as mere distress does a great disservice to the profoundly disturbing and potentially fatal consequences of Harewood's experiences.

Encounters with psychiatrists were less than ideal. The first clinical interview ended with the psychiatrist saying 'He just thinks he's Lenny Henry'. These encounters compared poorly with the kindness of absolute strangers. He did not receive any diagnosis or explanation about what was happening to him. It was only during the making of the documentary *David Harewood: Psychosis and Me* that Erin Turner and Rowena Jones, both psychiatrists, gave information and explanations.

Harewood's book ought to be widely read, particularly by psychiatrists who want to know how the social and cultural conditions in Britain contribute to the adverse milieu that is itself both the setting for psychosis as well as a probable cause.



Desperate Remedies: Psychiatry and the Mysteries of Mental Illness

By Andrew Scull
Allen Lane. 2022. £25 (hb). 512 pp.
ISBN: 9780241509241

The history of psychiatry is frankly embarrassing, but do we need yet another critical account? Well, Scull is one of the best commentators and the counsel of the years has brought him to acknowledge that 'some progress' has been made. Refreshingly, he has no time for social labelling theory and avows the very real misery of much mental illness. He is also as critical of psychoanalysis and the current vogue of cognitive-behavioural therapy for everything as he is of drug treatments. Further, Scull is wise enough to briefly acknowledge that much of medicine has an ignoble past and that modern practice is often palliative rather than curative.

The early chapters of this generally impressive tome re-tread some old ground, but Scull writes very well, with an eye for telling details. He revisits Henry Cotton's ridiculously overzealous application of Billroth's surgical bacteriology to patients, as he covered before in horrifying detail in *Madhouse: A Tragic Tale of Megalomania and Modern Medicine* (2005). Psychiatry has arguably been particularly prey to an all too recurrent theme of desperate novel treatments oversold and adverse effects ignored, before being dropped when something new comes along. Scull may well be right that asylum doctors could get away with even more than those running physical hospitals because of the stigmatisation of people with mental illness – even if many denizens were quite wealthy. He clearly identifies the periodic oscillations between an overreliance on biomedical treatments for people who are severely ill and psychosocial approaches for the less unwell. Scull is also rightly scathing, in a chapter updating his radical account of *Decarceration* (1977), about how we have moved from 'confinement and cruelty in jails' to 'total institutions akin to prison and concentration camps' and more recently to 'an alternative version of malign neglect' in the community. He asserts more than demonstrates that this was a political initiative to save money rather than (as psychiatrists tend to believe) a direct result of drug discoveries. Perhaps all citizens of democracies share some responsibility for allowing the 'neoliberal dismantling of the welfare state' and doctors particularly so. Scull cannot, however, resist the occasional ill-aimed swipe at psychiatry, stating baldly that we were particularly slow to adopt randomised controlled trials – whereas Archie Cochrane, for example, writing in *Effectiveness and Efficiency* (1972) was more critical of other specialties.

It is almost 300 pages before we get to the contemporary practice of psychiatry and these last few chapters feel a bit rushed, particularly in comparison with the rest of the book. Scull seems conflicted about whether the drugs we use have 'miraculous' and 'dramatic benefits' (like lithium) or merely afford 'at best, some ...