

methuen | drama



*blue*MURDER

*a play or two*

Peter Nichols

B L O O M S B U R Y

# Blue Murder

'*Blue Murder* is funny, sharp and playful. It's so disruptive it threatens at any time to implode.' *Independent on Sunday*.

Subtitled a play or two, *Blue Murder* opens with *Foreign Bodies*, where Swinging London meets bourgeois Shrewsbury and the drinks are laced with cyanide. As the son of the household struggles to write his first play, a murder story is offered to him on a plate. The second half, *A Game of Soldiers*, is a Whitehall farce taking place in St James's Palace. The same dramatist has brought his complete play to be censored but the Lord Chamberlain's Men have a few shameful secrets of their own to hide, including a priapic guardsman.

Peter Nichols was born in Bristol in 1927 and educated there at the Grammar School and Old Vic Theatre School. After National Service in India, Malaya and Hong Kong, he was an actor in repertory and television for five years, then a teacher in London schools. He has written some twenty original plays and adaptations for television, six feature films and the following stage plays: *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg*, *The National Health*, *Forget-Me-Not Lane*, *The Freeway*, *Chez Nous*, *Privates on Parade*, *Born in the Gardens*, *Passion Play*, *Poppy* and *A Piece of My Mind*. These have won four *Evening Standard* Awards, a Society of West End Theatres Award for Best Comedy and two Best Musical Awards. He was resident playwright at the Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis, where he co-directed *The National Health*. He has also directed revivals of *Joe Egg* and *Forget-Me-Not Lane* at Greenwich and the first production of *Born in the Gardens* at Bristol. The 1985 Broadway revival of *Joe Egg* won two Tonys. *Feeling You're Behind*, a book of memoirs, came out in 1984.

*By the same author*

*Plays*

A Day in the Death of Joe Egg

The National Health (or Nurse Norton's Affair)

Forget-Me-Not Lane

Chez Nous

The Freeway

Privates on Parade

Born in the Gardens

Passion Play

Poppy

A Piece of My Mind

Plays: One (A Day in the Death of Joe Egg, The National Health,  
Forget-Me-Not Lane, Hearts and Flowers,  
The Freeway)

Plays: Two (Chez Nous, Privates on Parade, Born in the Gardens,  
Passion Play, Poppy)

*Autobiography*

Feeling You're Behind

PETER NICHOLS

# **Blue Murder**

**a play or two**

B L O O M S B U R Y

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# **Blue Murder**

*Blue Murder* was first presented at Quakers Friars, Bristol, by Show of Strength on 1 November 1995. The cast was as follows:

<b>Hester/Daphne</b>	Pat Rossiter
<b>Edwin/Trimmer</b>	Alan Moore
<b>Colin/Nick</b>	Sam Bond
<b>Isabel/Prue</b>	Claudia McNulty
<b>Lionel/Parrott</b>	Andrew Hilton
<b>Bernie/Randy</b>	Meredith Davies
<b>Rex/Denis/Jack</b>	Kevin Kibbey

It was restaged for a national tour by the Touring Partnership in September 1996. The cast was as follows:

<b>Hester/Daphne</b>	Nichola McAuliffe
<b>Edwin/Trimmer</b>	Barry Foster
<b>Colin/Nick</b>	Matthew Lloyd Davies
<b>Isabel/Prue</b>	Ysobel Gonzalez
<b>Lionel/Parrott</b>	Anton Rodgers
<b>Bernie/Randy</b>	Ian Reddington
<b>Rex/Denis/Jack</b>	Andrew Harrison

For both productions:

*Director* Peter Nichols

*Associate Director* Alan Coveney

*Designer* Andrea Montag

An oblique sign / indicates that this is where the next speech should start, interrupting the first.

## ACT ONE

### FOREIGN BODIES

#### Scene One

*Two rooms of a substantial, light and pleasant house in the suburbs of Shrewsbury in Shropshire. The time is spring, 1963 but the style is the 1950s.*

*A small study on audience left, lit from a window on the left which has views of a garden; a door in the upstage wall; wainscoting; a large desk with a telephone in front of the window; a case of cups and trophies; stereo extension speakers against an imaginary wall which would, if it existed, divide the two rooms from each other. A fragment of the missing wall and several other features indicate the limit of each room – carpets, placed furniture, perhaps even a raised level for the study.*

*The main area's the living-room, also with a door in its upper wall from the passage or hall; in the right wall, which is at an angle, French windows on to the rear garden, of which some should be seen: a paved terrace, trees and flowers in a bed. A baby grand piano, its keyboard hidden; chintz sofas and armchairs; carpets with parquet surrounds; a stereo unit against the imaginary wall beside a chair; large flower arrangements in vases.*

*The song 'Nice People' is heard before the lights (or tabs) go up. EDWIN's in the study. He lights a cigar and polishes a trophy, starts to mix drinks for HESTER and himself. HESTER comes in through the French windows wearing a broad-brimmed straw hat, carrying a trug with fresh-cut flowers and removing gardening gloves. She frowns at the music and calls:*

HESTER. Edwin!

*He can't hear, so she turns down the volume on the radiogram. In the study he looks at the speakers, puts the trophy back on*

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*its shelf. She shrugs and smiles, removes hat, takes a glass vase that's half full of water and begins arranging her blooms.*

EDWIN leaves the study and reappears in the living-room, leaving the study door open to the passage, bringing the drinks.

EDWIN. Sorry. Was it too loud?

HESTER. Well, we're not deaf. But we shall be if you play your new whatever-it-is at that volume.

EDWIN. Stereo. Hi-fi. I thought you liked that song.

'Nice People with Nice Manners  
But got no money at all.'

*They dance, singing along with the record.*

EDWIN and HESTER. 'We've got such nice habits, we keep rabbits  
But got no money at all ...'

HESTER. It is nice, yes. Funny too. People pretending to be what they're not.

EDWIN. Missing the news.

*He stops the record and tunes the radio, catching snatches of speech and music, including an early Beatles.*

HESTER. This is Gracious Living.

EDWIN. It is indeed, my dear, thanks to you.

HESTER. Thank you kindly, sir, said she. But I meant these Tall Bearded Irises. It's their name: Gracious Living. And the delphiniums Hilda Lucas are a lovely show this year too.

RADIO NEWSREADER. ... only a matter of time before Southern Rhodesia also gains its independence. Solicitors acting for Mr John Profumo, Secretary of State for War, have today begun an action for damages against the Italian and French newspapers *Il Tempo* and *Paris-Match* which have thrown doubt on the minister's statement to the House in which he denied impropriety with Miss Christine Keeler.

EDWIN. Good for him!

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE 3

RADIO. Mr MacMillan the Prime Minister has repeated that his faith in Mr Profumo remains unshaken and regards the matter as closed. This afternoon Mr and Mrs Profumo went to the races with the Queen Mother.

HESTER. Oh, that's nice.

EDWIN (*turning it down*). You see, the mistake the French and Italians make is judging our ministers by their own. This island hasn't been invaded for a thousand years. Time in which to breed a very different sort of animal.

HESTER. Isn't that how long it takes to grow a nice lawn?

*With a gay laugh, ISABEL and COLIN come from the garden, dressed for tennis and carrying rackets.*

COLIN. I'm afraid she's far too good for me.

*EDWIN holds up a warning hand and turns up the volume.*

RADIO. Mr Harold Wilson, new leader of the Labour Party after the unexpected and mysterious death of Mr Hugh Gaitskell, pledged today to lead the party to victory in the next election.

EDWIN. I don't think.

RADIO. Next month he goes to America for meetings with President Kennedy –

EDWIN (*turning off*). And a fat lot of good that will do. Not even Prime Minister and hardly likely to be.

COLIN. More gems from the *Daily Telegraph*.

*Makes a wary, sophisticated gesture at ISABEL behind EDWIN's back.*

HESTER. So, Isabel, did you give my son a good thrashing?

ISABEL. Sorry?

EDWIN. Did you thrash him? Trounce him?

ISABEL. Ah. Hardly. Only took the final set 8–6 after going to seven deuces.

COLIN. So what's the latest on Profumo?

EDWIN. The PM says it's all my-eye-and-Betty-Martin and I'd