

At the center of *Smile Orange*, Trevor Rhone's story about the goings-on in a third-rate Jamaican tourist hotel, is a vicious cycle of exploitation. That Rhone's script is about 20 years old is irrelevant to its main point--that the rape of the Jamaican economy affects more than just property values--because that point is still valid. But unfortunately the script's age may be a factor in its willingness to embrace a bundle of anachronistic prejudices. Even if only for a political purpose, a more contemporary script would have given the kind of blatant bigotry here a deeper, more conscious theatrical exploration.

The jokes at other people's expense in *Smile Orange* are not benign, even if they are benignly presented. Rhone's flippancy about sexism, homophobia, and prejudice against the disabled might be considered, after more than 20 years of women's liberation, post-Stonewall activism, and soul-searching about human relations, at the very least insensitive. But the fact that director Jaye Stewart didn't address the hatred in the script is more than unfortunate; it robs *Smile Orange* of any righteousness it might have had.

There are no real heroes in Rhone's story. Everyone here has a dark side and a weakness. Everyone here feeds off everyone else: Jamaica's white minority exploits the black majority, giving them menial jobs at the bottom of the tourist barrel; the black gentry plays along; the black workers (not at all romanticized here) exploit the tourists; and the tourists, of course, exploit them right back. The poverty in Rhone's script is, to borrow from Dan Quayle, a poverty of ethics. Everybody's a hustler. Everybody's got a game to play.

The biggest player of all is Ringo (Victor Cole), a charming lout who works in the dining room as a waiter. Married with children, he is nonetheless a Romeo when it comes to tourist women, particularly white women. "If it weren't for the children, I'd be through with her," he says of his wife as he and his coworker Joe (Reginald Metcalf)

revel in memories of Ringo's conquests during the previous tourist season. Ringo's irresistible, according to these tales, and his wife is a jerk for assuming she should have a slice of his pie. To protect Ringo from her, Joe tells the new assistant manager, O'Keefe (Stewart himself), that she's a madwoman. This is supposed to be hilarious.

The other women in Smile Orange don't fare much better. Though we never see Ringo's conquests, they're portrayed as inherently gullible, even stupid. The one flesh-and-blood female in the play--the switchboard operator, Ms. Brandon (Debi Stewart)--is opportunistic and crass.

Ms. Brandon's situation provides the excuse for a good number of cracks about the disabled. Determined to grab an American husband in order to get permanent-resident status in the United States, Ms. Brandon busily works on a disabled guy during his vacation. "A one-foot man better than no man," she tells her girlfriends on the phone. Then she says that, well, yes, if she absolutely has to have sex with him, she'll close her eyes and bear it. There's more--about the guy not being able to dance, about her stroking his wooden leg.

The homophobia's of the same variety. Teaching the new busboy, Cyril (Leon "Trey" Wilson), about waiting tables, Ringo has to first make sure the boy's not too funny. The test of Cyril's masculinity allows Ringo to express both relief and male solidarity. Later, when Joe gets a letter and \$10 from a male tourist he helped with some car trouble, Ringo gives him a hard time about receiving attentions from a "faggot."

Certainly all these prejudices are prevalent in society, both here and in Jamaica. And as such they're as much grist for the mill as anything else about the human condition. In this particular script, with its dark take on what happens to the soul under the burden of constant oppression, these examples of inhumanity might have served to emphasize the message. Hatred, undoubtedly, breeds more hatred. But

that's not how Rhone, or director Stewart, plays it. These prejudices are not criticized or commented on. In fact, in the coddling of Ringo as a lovable scoundrel, they're not recognized at all for what they really are. And that gives Smile Orange a horrible kind of tunnel vision.

Robbed of moral ground, there's not much to the play or this production other than a few moments of light comedy. Cole, Metcalf, and Wilson in particular have a wonderful presence and rapport. But unfortunately their charisma isn't enough to redeem Smile Orange.