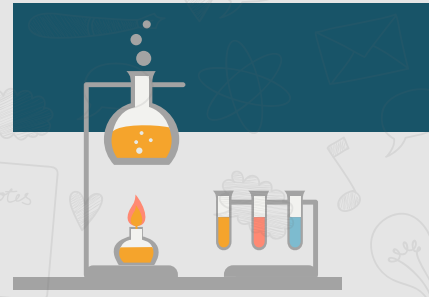


Evaluative Essay: Violet



My friend was right. He had warned me to go early if I wanted to get a seat at a vantage point. I didn't believe him so I took my sweet time. By the time I finally arrived at the theater where "The Violet" was showing, there were only a few more seats left. "What was the purpose for my ticket?" I wondered almost aloud. "Wasn't it supposed to secure me a seat at the place of my choice?" But I knew the answer to my own question so I didn't even pursue the thought further. I managed to locate a seat just next to the middle aisle. Perfect! That would enable me to catch all the sideshows of "the violet" as well. The curtain raising comedian was just finishing and there was a thunderous laughter. I joined in although I hadn't caught the joke. Then the lights went off and the play began.

The settings and the story line of "The Violet" left good memories that might be cherished for a long time by those present. Seating in the theater beholding the scene made me feel like I was in another world. The stage had been impressively done. Different props had been setup to provide locales that were used as the nightclub, the hotel room as well as the bus. The backdrop of the stage was a beautiful painting of a sky that was dotted with clouds perhaps to show that there was some hope for the woman that was in dire need of a miracle.

The scene was reminiscent of what I had seen in plays that captured ancient cities of the 1960s. The year 1960 is actually the year that Crawley Brian (who is the play write) elected to stage his play in. The protagonist in "The Violet" is a woman who is moving in search for a miracle. The play begins with a musical that is playing softly in the background as the lady boards a bus en route to Oklahoma where she hopes to get a miracle of healing from a famous evangelist.

Sarah Johnson, who was taking the role of Violet and Maggie Joyner who was taking the role of young Violet had a striking resemblance, a fact that made the piece look even more original, the story so believable and the message so powerful. The resemblance of the two made it seem like they were actually not acting but just living their day to day lives. Johnson made a voluminous contribution in the development of the plot especially through her beautiful singing. What she didn't do very well however is to bring out the real complexities that encapsulate her character. The audience was supposed to feel sorry for her but that did not happen as they were not properly convinced that the character was undergoing some level of emotional pain. I think she concentrated a lot on her singing and forgot her facial expressions.

One of the questions that kept ringing in mind is just how they would manage to showcase the scar of the woman to the entire crowd since the scar was the most important part of the play. I was pleasantly surprised by the creativity employed. Since it would not be possible for the entire audience to see a scar on the woman's face, the director elected to use a projection. The image of the scar was projected and was made to slide ahead as Violet looks at her face. The audience has the opportunity to see the scar that is disturbing the woman to the extent of making her go to look for help. The director must have done this intentionally to provoke empathy from the audience. And if that was his goal, then he realized it as people gasped and held their breath all around me at the sight of the disturbing scar.

The choice of the back ground music that is used in the play also went a long way in capturing the desperation that the woman has. Tracks with sad and slow themes were used. I could almost sense a sad emotion sweep across the hall as every person became engrossed in the film. One of the tracks used is one based on the song "the ugliest pilgrim" perhaps to illustrate how the woman was also on a pilgrimage of sort. And in deed, she was on pilgrimage. The play went through the different stages of her journey from the time she boarded the bus to the meetings and the time she makes some new friends including some two

soldiers.

The castes were naturals with their jokes and that is possibly what made the theater roar in laughter in between the scenes or in between the sentences. But again, the people did not laugh for too long. Not because the joke was not funny enough but because nobody wanted to miss the next line. Am not sure whether the people wanted to concentrate more because they found the play captivating or the many flashbacks that the play presented. These flashbacks are very important in the providing of some background information but the flashbacks can easily result in mix ups. For instance, I was lost in the flashback when the play returned to the present and I almost lost the flow of the play in the process.

The costumes would have been perfect if some of them had not been excessively revealing. The play was supposed to capture the society of the 1960s which was not as liberal as the present day society especially as regards to clothing. Apart from this slight flaw, the entire play was a good performance. The fluidity of the play is what impressed me. The director did a commendable job in the stage transitions as one scene led to the other scene so seamlessly that the audience was not left with an idle moment of wondering what was going on. While flashbacks and daydreams were both used in the play, it was relatively easy to tell when it was a flashback or when it was day dream.

Watching “The Violet” made me realize just how difficult a musical it was to stage. The caste however did a splendid job as they juggle their vocal abilities with their witty acting and often humorous acting. There was however too much haste in the switching of songs. In a musical, the song is supposed to be seen in the actions of the caste something that was not done very well by the producer of “the violet”. The selection of the caste was very well done though and this went a long way in making the story an authentic one.

It would be a shame if the play had been so well written and acted but there was no use of proper lighting but luckily, the lighting design was one of the most

impressive parts of the play. The lights were especially useful in highlighting the backdrop and they were used well to try to reflect the various themes of the play. During a cheerful moment, the lights would shine brightly and warmly on the backdrop while the somber moments were reflected by the dark colors. This went along way in helping the audience knows what mood was being depicted in a certain scene and it was almost infectious.

In conclusion, the violet play is a complex play as there are so many things that are happening within it which makes it a not so easy play on stage. This notwithstanding, the staging of the play was done well and the meaning of the play came out strongly and this must be the reason why they scooped May awards in 2006 (Drama Desk Awards). It was however evident that some actors and actresses could do better than they did. For instance, Violet should have shown as much emotion on her face as she did through her singing. The settings were very tight to the schedules that if they were altered in the smallest ways, then the play could have lost its focus. The underdeveloped day dreams and flashbacks in the play were also a little bit confusing to the audience but by and large, the caste did their best to tell the story of violet.

One of the most commendable things about the play is that it does a good job of portraying an understanding of relationships something that is not easily seen in many plays. The play even uses music to further send the message home and that I would say puts the violet on a very high pedestal. The play has a very strong storyline since it reveals the journey that most people especially the young adults go through in the process of life. One easily identifies with the characters of the play especially the woman who is in pursuit of a miracle. I remember relating with the woman as I sat thinking just how I could put effort in pursuing a given goal. I would have easily forgotten the presence of any other person in the theatre as I got engrossed in the captivating play had it not been for the comical effect that has been used well in the play.