



[Kicking against the Pricks](#)

**Three short plays by Sam Orton and Hilly Barber
at Studio Salford, The Kings Arms, Salford
Reviewed by [John Waterhouse](#) January 2018**

Kicking against the Pricks is in fact three short plays of equal length, loosely connected by the common theme of some of the struggles faced by the less advantaged in modern life. The overall result is a surprisingly varied cocktail of comedy and drama with some insightful observations of situations, which most of pray we never find ourselves in but are sadly not uncommon.

You put it out there, the first play, one of two offerings by Sam Orton, involves almost the whole ensemble in a fast-moving look at how disorientated groups of young people affect those around them, offering different viewpoints as to whether they are a nuisance or victims. Whilst being well-acted with excellent characterisations, this was for me by far the weakest of the three works. With so many impassioned soap-box soliloquies by the six cast members, interspersed with snappy drama, it was difficult to keep track of the central thread. It did seem a bit of a mish

mash but the best bits of this piece could be taken out and re-worked into a potentially very cogent piece of theatre, with perhaps more 'show' than 'tell'. Credit must also be given to

Sokaribo Dokubo Jr

. who appeared only in this work but clearly has a lot of acting talent.

Macaroni, also by Sam Orton is a level-paced two-hander, which works very well, pitting humanity against a machine. **Mary Geraldine Hooton** well portrayed the frustrated isolation of a character bound in a wheelchair with only a speaking computer for company, whilst **Mary Leighton Murray** maintained the clinical detachment of a machine incapable of empathy. The situation steadily developed without ever descending into melodrama, maintaining interest from start to finish. A well-crafted take on how far AI might come to take hold of our lives.

Dawn and Dave by Hilly Barber was for me the stand-out piece, starting off with the introduction of a loopy, messy and essentially outrageous young couple played with great energy and feeling by **Ewan Orton** and **Abigail Ramsdale**. You would not want this pair living next door to you and even less want to have to deal with them.

Sylvia Arnold

was excellent as the housing officer who had drawn the short straw. Without giving away a spoiler, it can be said the role-reversal which develops is reminiscent of a Tom Stoppard play with the overall effect being comparable to a Harold Pinter one, except that with this play you understand what's happening and what the issues are.

Hilly Barber's

intervention as 'the mum' gave this short work the rounded edge of a longer piece and the play is genuinely funny whilst at times quite disturbing.

Perhaps of the three pieces presented, *Dawn and Dave* raised the most difficult of questions; how should society deal with the seemingly unemployable who refuse to take responsibility for

their own lives. There is also the side issue of just how far should parents go to protect their 'adult' off-spring? A very interesting and amusing little play which has something important to say.

Overall an enjoyable evening of three essentially very different but loosely connected plays where the pace never falters.

***Kicking against the Pricks* is on at the Kings Arms until Saturday 13th January.**