How the Other Half Loves

by Alan Ayckbourn at Lowry, Salford

Reviewed by John Waterhouse September 2017

How the other half loves is one of the best known and most performed of the 70 plus (and counting!) plays written by Alan Ayckbourn, and as with so many of his works, it uses the device of interrelating three couples in broadly middle-class surroundings. Having opened in the West End in 1970, this play is not so much dated as a time capsule both of early 70's life and attitudes, as well the kind of issues upon which comedy was typically then based.

Ayckbourn is well known for giving set builders headaches - think of the self-collapsing chest of drawers in ***Bedroom Farce*** or parts of three rooms on different levels in ***The things we do for***

love . With this play, two houses have to merge into each and the set at the Lowry carried this through quite magnificently, with all-round stage sections alternating from the early 70's tack in a small semi to impressive mock-regency, even carried through with the overhead lighting and furniture, so that Bob Phillip's modest dwelling contrasts sharply with his boss Frank Foster's prestige home.

The social divide, of course mirrored through the characters, is brought to a head through their respective ideas of what constitutes a dinner party and it is this divide which adds emphasis to the driving premise of the story - a secret affair between Bob and his boss's wife Fiona, not quite the posh lady going for 'a bit of rough' but almost. Class was more of an issue fifty years ago and whilst hardly a social commentary, this play does provide many interesting insights into divisions across the income spectrums, evidenced by Fiona and Teresa's dress sense (elegant Fiona would never be seen in white boots and a short skirt!) and even their shopping lists; essentially a contrast between Avocado and Baked Beans.

How the Other Half Loves **is on at the Lowry until Saturday 16th September.**