

The Memory of Water
By Shelagh Stephenson

Reviewer – Michael Gray

“I wish you'd stop remembering things that didn't actually happen ...”

Shelagh Stephenson's poignant comedy touches on Alzheimer's and identity, the family and its failings, and of course the unreliability of our childhood reminiscences.

In Nick Caton's assured production, the dead mother returns as an elegant wraith, nicely suggested by Shirley Piggott. The “three pelican children” had all turned out very differently, far removed from the good Catholic daughters who shared the odd girls' night in with their mother and Nat King Cole.

I struggled to believe in Sharon Goodwin's Mary – a successful and ambitious medic, specializing, ironically, in post-traumatic amnesia. Hazel Reilly was a very watchable nervous mess as the youngest, still a truculent teenager at 33, with a chip on her shoulder and a high metabolism. Jean Speller was reliably amusing as the health food entrepreneur reciting recipes as an aid to sleep, and sending her husband [Boot Banes, looking as if he'd much rather be running a pub outside Ripon] off to far-flung trade fairs. Neil Smith completed the cast as Mary's lover.

There was lots of smoking, not always tobacco, many telling moments as the three sisters fail to bond over the bin bags, and plenty of laughs from the non-sequiturs of the script: allotments, Shreddies, esperanto, Toffees from Torquay.

The design – subsidence crack, cardboard coffin – and the lighting were excellent, and the company pulled off the near-impossible challenge of convincing us that this was a snowy winter's evening by the Yorkshire coast.

Producer for Writtle Cards was Laura Bennett.