

heart of our overloaded perceptions, the fragmentation of hope, and the ultimate acceptance of the scars. Because there is always the salve of a new future.

Superficially, all Cora, Anna, and Denise have in common is that they once, as very young women, shared a flat in Dublin's trendy Ranelagh. All three are older and (maybe) wiser when, by accident, Cora and Anna meet and reminisce over a coffee, the chat inconsequential, superficial.

But suddenly, there's more to it all. Anna explodes into a rage at the mention of a former boyfriend. He's dead, but that's not the problem. She lost him to the third of the trio, her sister Denise, and the two haven't met or spoken since. So we commence "La Ronde" as the three women's lives play out over the next couple of years, punctuated by occasional meetings: always only two, though.

O'Rowe's dialogue is immaculate, authentic and as revealing in what is not said as in its staccato confidences. A pregnancy that never becomes a child; a lover who initially seems to heal the wounds of an earlier bad experience only to be revealed as physically violent; a husband who leaves, but is a constant reminder because the woman he left for is a neighbour, even though he has now left her as well.

Through it all, as the confidences spill out, the terror of self-revelation kicks in, and there are inventions, protective layers of pretty lies to help the heads to be held high.

And under all the tribulations runs the tragedy that ultimately puts the troubles of the living in perspective: the shadow of a death that for all three women marked the end of innocence.

O'Rowe directs the play himself (superbly) for Landmark, playing at Project in Dublin, and his layered script is handled with infinite tenderness by three of our most accomplished actors: Derbhle Crotty, Cathy Belton and Aisling O'Sullivan.

Below, Aisling O'Sullivan, Cathy Belton and Derbhle Crotty in *The Approach at the Project and Everyman, Cork*



Take three women in tune with life, but not with each other, and cocoon them in what is obviously the clatter of a crowded coffee shop that is the essence of urban life in 2018.

And in that uneasily constricted space we see the splinters of their lives flying to embed themselves in some kind of surface that will offer stability.

That's the premise of *The Approach*, Mark O'Rowe's quite simply stunning new play. It cuts to the