

MOLLY BLOOM is a delicious, saucy, sexy, funny and, at times, poignant three-dimensional portrait of a woman. A woman carved so magnificently that she represents many parts of all women.

She lies in her bed, in the middle of the night, with her husband, rolled up, head to toe, next to her “like a mummy.” He has been out on the town and her stream of consciousness muses his whereabouts. What the hell has he been up to? Oh, she knows that he has been to a funeral but she knows also that funerals lead to drink and drink leads to other adventures, which husbands like to describe as male bonding, perfectly innocent!

Our saucy heroine has not been quite “innocent” herself, however. This very afternoon she has been frolicking with her lover, who has visited, to rehearse a song which Molly will sing when they go to Belfast in a week or two. Molly is an amateur singer who rather fancies herself as a diva. If it weren't for politics, which she detests, she would sing more often, instead of being ousted by Irish lasses born and bred in Ireland. Molly's father, you see, was in the British army in Gibraltar. Not a plus in Ireland in 1904.

And so, the landscape of this 'stream of consciousness' monologue rattles along between the present, in Dublin and Molly's childhood in Gibraltar. In Gibraltar, Molly of sixteen or so is full of youthful beauty and confidence. Her sexuality is fiery, a little randy tart, some might say, a little hussy, a whore! Others might say she's just a young woman with a healthy, growing sexuality. Molly is not sure how she feels about all that early stuff herself. Sound familiar?

And now she's having an affair, which has certainly been provoked, not by her own waywardness but by her husband's fantasies of being cuckolded. “Who's in your mind now, who ...” he says, while fucking her, “The German Emperor?” “Yes,” she retorts with irritation.

Molly has a daughter, Milly, whose plump little bosoms and laziness drive Molly into a fury. Her daughter's youth and beauty irk Molly in that splendidly irrational fashion that sets many a household on fire today. Faced with such freshness, Molly feels old and worn, fat and feeble. Molly has her period, Molly farts ... all hysterically penned by a genius. She is rebellious and self-effacing. She challenges the hypocrisies of politics and the expectations of women. She is wise and quite stupid all at once.

Molly Bloom, however, is not a one-dimensional bawdy rollercoaster. James Joyce delicately reflects on the futility of war, as Molly grieves the loss of a lover and the senselessness of all that slaughter. Joyce also roots Molly's humour in the pain of having lost a child. But, above all, at the end of it all, Molly is not anti her husband or men or anything in totality. She also celebrates her marriage of sixteen years, with her tenderness so sweet that the listener cannot but understand that this is a real marriage, a marriage like most marriages that have stood some test of time.

And this is just a part reflection of a 100-minute monologue, brilliantly edited by my husband, painstakingly learnt by myself, over two months – and performed with much joy and celebration of one of the greatest writers of the 20th century.

Jennifer Steyn.