

Good Golly Miss Molly Bloom

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Molly Bloom: Excerpted from *Ulysses*. By James Joyce, Smock Alley Studio, Temple Bar, Dublin, June 16

Molly Bloom was more modern than her time: a spitting, sweating, flesh and blood woman; unafraid to give in to her sexual urges; unafraid to wield her sexual power over men.

If the entire weighty volume of *Ulysses* remains largely inaccessible, Molly's earthy monologue, coming at the end, with its last words closing the book, serves as a welcome physical guide for readers, with its finely-drawn map of the female body.

In staging the stream-of-consciousness soliloquy, director Liam Carney taps into the natural expressiveness of the speaking voice, and performer Eilín O' Dea brilliantly captures the nuances of Molly's rambling mind as she rakes over one sleepless night in Dublin, in 1904.

Being mediated through the spoken voice, the movement of time sharpens into focus as the physical urges of Molly's womanly desires are satisfied in front of our eyes.

The sexual frankness is almost shocking, especially considering the early 20th-century origins of the book. Masturbation, adultery, lesbian fantasy . . . it's like *Sex and the Edwardian City* starring the voracious Molly.

In its physical preoccupations - menstruation, childbirth, the sensation of sexual activity, the aesthetic inadequacies of genitalia - it predates that other feminist sensation, *The Vagina Monologues*, although its physical discoveries are evoked in less contrived terms. Eilín O' Dea is thoroughly engaging and word perfect as the half-dressed heroine, single-handedly sustaining the energy in the dingy Smock Alley venue for the 90 minutes of the performance. Draped across the bed, squatting on top of the chamber pot, or standing by her looking glass, her physical and emotional versatility carry the show.

However, that such a quintessentially Dublin text should be vocalised through a distinct - even over-emphasised - Irish west-coast accent seems a strange and jarring directorial decision, though one that makes a certain sense considering the entirely American demographic of the audience for the Bloomsday show.

Or, perhaps, it was suggested by the Galway origins of Joyce's life partner and muse, Nora Barnacle.

The audience for Molly Bloom will surely remain a niche one - mostly American tourists and scholars - but anyone looking for a way into Joyce's famously indigestible novel could do worse than begin here.