

The New England Theatre Geek

It Was the 90s: “Lorena: A Tabloid Epic”

Posted on [October 23, 2021](#) by [Kitty Drexel](#)

Presented by [Boston Playwrights' Theatre](#)

By Eliana Pipes

Directed by Erica Terpening-Romeo

The digital [program](#)

[Boston Playwrights' Theatre](#)

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Content advisory: Because it follows Lorena Bobbitt’s case, this play contains descriptions (not depictions) of sexual assault and domestic violence. A strobe light is also used in the performance.

Review by Kitty Drexel

BOSTON — *Lorena: A Tabloid Epic* by Eliana Pipes re-examines the public spectacle that was the 1993 Bobbitt trial. Lorena (Bobbitt) Gallo’s voice wasn’t heard then. It takes center stage now.

The 90s were a mess. One of the biggest messes was the Bobbitt trial. Lorena Bobbitt was a young Ecuadorian immigrant woman living in Virginia who survived [years of abuse](#) from her husband. One night, after she was raped again, Bobbitt cut off her husband’s penis with a kitchen knife while he slept upstairs. The tabloids (talk shows, trashy magazines, new media, and other outlets) could only focus on what she did to John, not on her story.

“This play is not about trauma,” we’re told. “It is not about the spectacle of suffering.” It is about the spectacle of the media’s frenzy. The news was starving for more Bobbitt jokes; ratings blew up. America couldn’t get enough. Bobbitt’s husband became a minor celebrity. He was [allowed to abuse](#) other women. Over 25 years later, Lorena uses her voice to speak up about the [dangers of domestic violence](#).

NCADV – [The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#)
Massachusetts [Domestic Violence Programs for Survivors](#)

National Domestic Violence Hotline – 24/7 Crisis Hotline: (800) 799-7233
National Sexual Assault Hotline – 24/7 Crisis Hotline: (800) 656-4673



Photo by Stratton McCrady; Sydney Meyer, Erin Davis, Abbey Scobee, McKayla Witt, Ivan C. Walks, Fady Demian, Julien Tornelli, Emma Mineo

The ensemble work by the cast with the leads is impressive for a student production or otherwise. This cast refers back to its members as a matter of course. They have a smooth back and forth that keeps the energy up during blackout transitions and meta-moments in which the fourth wall crashes down around them.

On a sunflower yellow stage with a black background segmented by white lines, the chorus of Erin Davis, Fady Demian, Sydney Meyer, Emma Mineo, Abbey Scobee, Julien Tornelli, Ivan C. Walks, and McKayla Wit scuttle onto the stage in coordinating yellow outfits to play out the events of the Bobbitt trial. At all times, they remind us of our own culpability when human pain is consumed for entertainment value. They are our embodied monkey mind: asking the wrong questions, reacting without social grace, confusing the practice of theatre with their stream of consciousness existence.

They hold the line and the production keeps moving. They do it so well that director Erica Terpening-Romeo could have done away with bringing the lights down at all... But then we wouldn't see the cast scurry back and forth across the stage as if they were afraid to be seen changing costumes or moving the Japanese screen-like floating wings.

We're given lots of facetime and pleasant answers from Lorena (Gabriela Medina-Toledo). The Playwright (a poised Valyn Lyric Turner) interviews and explains her process to Lorena. Lorena is generous with her patience. Medina-Toledo plays Lorena with sunshine-bright positivity. She has every reason not to trust the process. It was the process that acquitted her ex-husband of all charges after all.

Lorena: A Tabloid Epic usurps narrative form with a Brecht meets Churchill meets Beckett style. It forces us to relive the clusterfuck of manipulation and machination of the Bobbit trial's tabloid dopamine chase, and it treats the media hellstorm nightmare-scape that was 1993 with the proper severity it deserves: none.

The show does treat Lorena Bobbitt the person with due respect. *Lorena* grants the woman the trust and civility she never received during the trial.



Photo by Stratton McCrady; Valyn Lyric Turner, Gabriela Medina-Toledo

What I appreciate most about *Lorena: A Tabloid Epic* is its ability to transcend beyond the lie that an audience has to live a character's pain in order to understand it. *Lorena* is subversive. We understand the narrative without living every excruciating detail of Lorena's trauma. We empathize with Lorena because she needs us to, because we're human. Instead, we're given humorous devices as reminders: a run around the set to the [Benny Hill theme](#) or a play-with-in-a-play soap opera. Pipes distracts us until she has our complete attention for her big truth reveal. A reveal I won't spoil.

I was twelve when the Bobbitt trial made headlines. I remember thinking three things: John Bobbitt sounded mean; it wasn't fair that women should be responsible for the emotions and behaviors of men; another person's pain shouldn't be funny. Adults told me I was oversimplifying. I don't think I was.

The UN says that [Domestic violence](#) is a pattern of behavior in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner. Abuse is physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person.

Buying the wrong onions is a mistake. Accidentally driving down the wrong street is a mistake. Abuse isn't a mistake. Abuse is on purpose. Abusers will abuse again.

It is possible to believe a victim and to have compassion for an abuser. Sometimes, the most compassionate thing a community can do is send an abuser to prison for the rest of their life. *Lorena: A Tabloid Epic* gives us facts about the Bobbitt trial while unraveling a more universal narrative about women's experiences. It is up to us to change the narrative for other generations.

"Lorena"

A poem by [Lucille Clifton](#)

it lay in my palm soft and trembled
as a new bird and i thought about
authority and how it always insisted
on itself, how it was master
of the man, how it measured him, never
was ignored or denied, and how it promised
there would be sweetness if it was obeyed
just like the saints do, like the angels
and i opened the window and held out my
uncupped hand; i swear to god
i thought it could fly

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