



Book of Ego by Irene Loy: Drama Therapy and the Excavation of Self

Description

Restaged at Alliance Theater after its acclaimed July 2025 Great Salt Lake Fringe premiere, Irene Loy's *Book of Ego: A Sacred Parody* is a startlingly rigorous example of embodied autobiography. Rooted in her practice-based doctoral research, the piece merges clowning, autoethnography, trauma performance, and ritual practice into a single, emotionally saturated event. Loy constructs a theatrical landscape where the body becomes archive, the clown becomes critic, and the stage becomes a site of communal witnessing. From its opening gesture to the final scene, the performance asks what stories we carry, what stories we suppress, and what it might take to finally set them down.

There are solo shows, and then there are excavations—performances that feel less like theatre and more like the actor willingly walking us through the burning corridors of her own memory. *Book of Ego* is the latter: a raw, deeply vulnerable, and often darkly humorous self-revelatory performance that blends clown, autobiography, trauma narrative, and sacred ritual into a single trembling offering. Originally developed through improvisation and premiered earlier this year, under the direction of Jack Cobabe, Loy's piece returns in an expanded, slightly expanded form at the Alliance Theater. Cobabe's direction provides an unobtrusive but essential scaffolding—shaping transitions, honoring silence, and giving Loy the structural space her vulnerability requires. According to the program, the work emerges from her practice-based PhD research at the Transart Institute and Liverpool John Moores University—and it shows. The piece bears the fingerprints of physical theatre, trauma studies, autoethnography, and ritual performance.

A performer in a white outfit holds two blue foam blocks while standing in front of a ladder on stage, *Book of Ego: A Sacred Parody*, written and performed by Irene Loy, directed by Jack Cobabe, Great Salt Lake Fringe Festival 2025. Photo Credit: The Utah Review.

A trigger warning in the program signals the emotional terrain ahead—love, loss, mental illness, suicide. In the single page program, Loy dedicates the performance —for Granny,— next to a small butterfly illustration, a quiet invocation that becomes the emotional key signature of the work. The show opens in silence. Loy enters as a clown—red nose, breathy nonverbal sounds, exaggerated gestures—and awkwardly drags a ladder across the stage. The comedy is intentional, but so is its fragility. Her clown persona confronts balance, effort, futility, and hope in the same breath.

From a bottomless Mary-Poppins-like bag, she spills out objects that will become the architecture of the play: angel wings, a tinsel-lined halo, a cloak, a mask, a wooden lazy susan, and a mound of blue foam blocks. These objects accumulate like memories—innocent at first, then increasingly weighted. At one moment, she scatters dozens of foam blocks across the floor, literally constructing the terrain of her interior life. What begins in humor gradually shades into unease. Her body becomes an archive, stumbling and straining beneath the weight of selfhood.

Midway through the show, Loy dons a mask and cloak and transforms into the Clown Cleric—half preacher, half trickster, half self-help guru. Opening the titular Book of Ego, she begins reading: “Awkward with objects. I am useful only if I am helpful. If I make a mistake, then I certainly don’t want to make the same one twice!” The humor softens the blow but doesn’t dull its sting. The clown persona externalizes internal judgment, revealing the scripts Loy inherited, internalized, or weaponized against herself. When the Clown Cleric discovers a missing section—one Loy literally hid in her own pocket—the moment lands with ritualistic force. Shame and repression emerge as physical acts; the return of the missing page becomes the return of truth.

A theater stage setup featuring a projector screen displaying 'Carry Only What is Yours,' a ladder, and Book of Ego: A Sacred Parody, written and performed by Irene Loy, directed by Jack Cobabe, Great Salt Lake Fringe Festival 2025. Photo credit: Jack Cobabe

From here, Loy inhabits a constellation of selves: Sparkle Angel, age five, atop a ladder at a Christmas pageant, overwhelmed by the sadness she senses from the audience. Good Girl, age fifteen, yearning to write and perform but convinced artistic ambition is impractical. Karli, the banished avatar of rage and rebellion. Cue Taker, age twenty and then thirty-six, building her life on two husbands and watching both structures collapse. Lazy Susan, endlessly spinning, rehashing, reviewing, unable to let go.irate Irene, confronting death, generational pain, and the weight of always being “the one who helps.” Each persona is distinct but interwoven, chapters from the same embodied autobiography.

What Loy accomplishes extends beyond solo performance—it enters the terrain of trauma-informed performance studies, where embodiment, memory, and community converge. The emotional intensity of Loy’s performance resonates deeply with research on arts-based trauma healing. Scholar Sara E. Goessling argues that trauma is not only psychological but profoundly embodied—that the body carries memory and pain in ways talk alone cannot reach. In her work with youth, Goessling shows how creative performance becomes a “relational encounter,” a site where individuals re-story their lives and reclaim agency. Loy extends that lineage: each gesture, each shift in persona, each foam block she piles onto her back becomes a relational offering. The stage becomes a site of restoration and self-witnessing, enacting Goessling’s findings that trauma healing is not merely cognitive but embodied, communal, and collaborative. What emerges across these characters is not simply memoir, but a rigorously structured excavation of identity, the kind that invites theoretical framing.

Loy’s work also echoes Della Pollock’s theories of performative writing—autobiography rendered through breath, timing, and physicality rather than detached narration. Pollock positions performance as worldmaking, where vulnerability is method and the body becomes a site of truth. Loy’s piece exemplifies this: she does not retell her past; she inhabits it, allowing the audience to feel the tremor between who she was, who she is, and who she is becoming.

A group of five individuals poses together, smiling, while holding blue geometric objects and a bouquet

Book of Ego: A Sacred Parody, written and performed by Irene Loy, directed by Jack Cobabe, Great Salt Lake Fringe Festival 2025. Photo provided by the playwright.

Together, these frameworks illuminate what Loy achieves: she performs autobiography as worldmaking (Pollock), metabolizes trauma through embodied relationality (Goessling), and transforms storytelling into communal emotional labor and story. The result is not simply a performance about healing, but a performance that enacts the conditions under which healing becomes possible.

In the final movement, Loy stands before the mound of foam blocks—her failures, marriages, losses, inherited beliefs—and piles them onto her back. The weight grows heavy, almost unbearable. Then a song begins, and she shakes the blocks free, dancing with a joyful abandon bordering on the sacred. She invites the audience to dance—and they dance with her. In this moment, autobiography dissolves into communal ritual, a release. The Clown Cleric returns for a final scene: “Carry only what is yours.” Loy gathers a poem, a pen, and her glasses. She leaves the Book of Ego behind.

I would tell you where to turn to, but you’ve got your own.
I’m not asking,
I’m telling you.
You’ve got your own.
And it’s your favorite book.
Do you know how I know?
Because you read it, every day, all day, to yourself.
To other people, too, of course, but mostly, to yourself.
You’ve read it so much, you have parts of it memorized.
-Irene Loy

Book of Ego: A Sacred Parody is not merely a performance—it is an act of courage, a map of survival, and a fierce reclamation of self through embodied truth. Loy invites audiences not to observe from afar, but to feel implicated in the fragile, transformative work of living. It is rare to see a piece that balances humor, pain, ritual, theory, and autobiography with such precision and heart. This is theatre as excavation. Theatre as healing. Theatre as a reminder that we can carry our histories—but only some of them belong to us. Loy reminds us that the Book of Ego is never truly finished; it is rewritten through courage, community, and the willingness to look at ourselves without turning away.

SEE THE SHOW

When: Saturday, November 15th, 2025

Tickets: \$16 (+fee)

[Tickets](#)

Venue: Alliance Theater 602 E 500 S
Suite E 101 (Main Stage)
Salt Lake City, UT 84102

United States

Content Note: The performance includes themes of childhood trauma, love and loss, grief, depression, and suicide.

Poster for 'Book of Ego: A Sacred Parody' featuring layered blue geometric shapes on a soft white background. Book of Ego: A Sacred Parody, written and performed by Irene Loy, directed by Jack Cobabe, Great Salt Lake Fringe Festival 2025. Photo provided by the playwright.

About the Playwright: Irene Loy

Irene Loy is a nonprofit professional, writer, improviser, and interdisciplinary theatre artist based in Salt Lake City. Her work spans dramatic writing, applied improvisation, and embodied research, with a focus on the intersections of humor, vulnerability, and feminist performance.

Loy holds an MFA in Dramatic Writing from the University of New Mexico and an MA in Speech and Hearing Sciences from Indiana University in Bloomington. She is currently completing a low-residency PhD in Creative Research with Transart Institute and Liverpool John Moores University, where her doctoral work develops a feminist theory of humor grounded in embodied practice and the radical art of taking ourselves less seriously.

A Midwesterner by origin, Loy has lived abroad in Canberra, Australia, and Vienna, Austria, and spent more than a decade in New Mexico before making her home in the Intermountain West. As a playwright, she has written more than a dozen plays along with numerous poems and essays, finding her strongest voice in the feeling space of metaphor where dream logic, embodied intuition, and emotional truth take precedence over the mundane.

Since 2016, Loy has practiced improvisation and applied improv both onstage and in everyday life, shaping her approach to performance as a site of relationality, risk, and revelation. Her first poetry chapbook, *I HAVE NAMED THE GODDAMNED RAVENS*, was published by Common Meter Press in July 2023.

Book of Ego: A Sacred Parody continues her commitment to blending humor, autobiography, and embodied storytelling, creating work that is as intellectually rigorous as it is emotionally resonant.

For more information about Irene Loy and her work, visit ireneloy.com.

Sources

Goessling, K. P. (2020). Youth participatory action research, trauma, and the arts: Designing youthspaces for equity and healing. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 33(1), 12–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2019.1678783>

Pollock, D. (1998). Performative writing. In P. Phelan & J. Lane (Eds.), *The ends of performance* (pp. 73–103). New York University Press.

*Special thanks to Irene Loy for accommodating my schedule and inviting me to come see a special pre-performance this week.

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