The Tragic Ecstasy of Girlhood
By Kira Rockwell | Directed by Leila Ghaemi
A BU New Play Initiative production, produced by Boston Playwrights’ Theatre and the Boston University College of Fine Arts School of Theatre.
Tickets: (866) 811-4111 or BostonPlaywrights.org      October 11-21
A WELCOME FROM OUR ARTISTIC DIRECTORS

Dear Friends:

Welcome to the first-ever rendition of The Tragic Ecstasy of Girlhood by Kira Rockwell and directed by Leila Ghaemi. Most certainly this will not be the last time you hear of this work. In fact, there is a Los Angeles production planned for next month! Kira has been studying and honing her craft for two years in our playwriting workshops, and this play is the culmination of her work with us. But we playwrights cannot learn enough about our work until we see our plays up and running in front of an audience, and that’s where you come in. Kira plans to learn a lot about the play with your help, so thank you for joining us in this first incarnation. We want to send our writers into the professional world of the theatre with as much technical and emotional ammunition as possible, and we couldn’t do this without you!

Kira hails from the heart of Texas, and while in our MFA program, she enjoyed a world premiere of her play Nomad Americana with Fresh Ink Theatre and an award-winning production of With My Eyes Shut at the Hollywood Fringe Festival. She has also been working with her gifted director Leila Ghaemi for the past nine months during which the two of them have been exploring the text not only in our classes, but in outside readings and workshops with actors from the College of Fine Arts School of Theatre (“SOT”). A collaboration with the talented artists from the College of Fine Arts SOT, the New Play Initiative, is a perfect fit for our MFA playwrights who come from all over the nation and who bring a wide range of experience to their concentrated studies.

This is an amazing year for us with four new plays! We’ll take you from Kira’s Texas residence hall to a beach on Long Island (Winter People), to a Miami art gallery (Wynwood), and finally to a small town in Pennsylvania (Dead House). You will see the wonderful work these writers have accomplished—all products of the successful collaboration between our two colleges. Playwriting is not an ivory tower endeavor—it’s a messy, challenging, rewarding tightrope walk including the writer, director, designers, and technicians. We can’t wait for your feedback!

Once again, thank you, and welcome to our world!

Jim Petosa, Director
School of Theatre
College of Fine Arts

Kate Snodgrass, Director
MFA in Playwriting/English Department
Graduate School of Arts & Sciences
The Tragic Ecstasy of Girlhood
By Kira Rockwell
Directed by Leila Ghaemi

A BU New Play Initiative production, produced by Boston Playwrights’ Theatre and the Boston University College of Fine Arts School of Theatre.

Scenic Design: Michelle Sparks
Lighting Design: Kat C. Zhou
Sound Design: Lee Schuna
Costume Design: AJ Jones
Assistant Costume Design: Emily Keebler
Fight Choreographer: Jessica Scout Malone
Dramaturg: Eliana Pipes
Stage Manager: Katherine Humbert*
Assistant Stage Manager: Grace Hill
Production Manager: Jeffrey Petersen
Master Electrician: Austin Boyle
Electricians: Carmen Catherine Alfaro, Victor Gutierrez, Jonas Hayes, Connor O’Brien
Production Assistants: Jacob DeSousa, Linda Seminario
Run Crew: Schuyler Pallo-Ross
Costume Master: Cayenne Douglass
Properties Master: Daniel Blanda
House Managers: Anna Oehlberg, Linda Seminario

CAST

Charlie: Tatiana Chavez
Amber: Sarah Hirsch
Audi: Stephanie Castillo
Izzy: Amanda Figueroa
Mercy: Danielle Palmer

The Tragic Ecstasy of Girlhood runs 80 minutes with no intermission.

*Member, Actors’ Equity Association

The video and/or audio recording of this performance by any means whatsoever is strictly prohibited.
AN INTERVIEW WITH THE PLAYWRIGHT

Dramaturg Eliana Pipes talked with *The Tragic Ecstasy of Girlhood* playwright Kira Rockwell about her play, writing, process, and what’s next.

What is the genesis of *The Tragic Ecstasy of Girlhood*?
Before moving to Boston to pursue my MFA in playwriting, I was working in the recreation department at a youth residential care facility back in Texas. The play is very much a work of fiction, but the subject matter is inspired by those three years. The play’s inception was actually an accident or rather a rebellion. I was supposed to be working on an entirely different play, one about a church and a sinkhole, and while I was stuck I started to hear dialogue between three teenage girls. . .forty pages later I thought, “This is going to be my next play.” Recently, teenage girls have been getting a huge spotlight in American Theatre, Barron’s *Dance Nation* and DeLappe’s *The Wolves*, and I believe if those stories about girlhood are going to be seen, then these teenage girls deserve to be represented in the conversation.

How did you become a playwright?
In short, Katori Hall’s *The Mountaintop*. Longer version: I’ve always been a writer and then, in eighth grade I became an actor. But it wasn’t until undergrad while pursuing my BFA in theatre performance at Baylor University that I dared to combine my two artistic identities. It was there that I took my first playwriting course and, as cheesy as it sounds, found my identity in the theatre community. In retrospect, I think I’ve always been a playwright at heart and I feel so thankful for my formative acting years that have since laid the foundation for my current writing endeavors.

How has the process shaped this play—both from writing it as an MFA student to being in the room with actors?
This past summer was a major rewrite season. My mentor Kate Snodgrass has continually pushed me to dig deeper, to peel back the layers, and to “get in the swamp.” But, all that work aside, I do believe that a play can only come to life when it is in the hands of actors. I feel so fortunate to be working with these young women. They have been so vulnerable and smart this entire process.

Is there anything about the process that has surprised you?
I am delightfully surprised by how much I adore working with our director Leila Ghaemi. My whole life teachers and mentors have encouraged me to “find your people” and I am so grateful to have found a people in Leila. I hope to work with her again and again and again.
What drew you to the title *The Tragic Ecstasy of Girlhood*?
Can I just say I hate picking titles?! I do. For each of my plays I keep a note in my phone with potential titles that I toss around until one lands. For me the title encapsulates all of the feelings of being a teenage girl. Things are either utter bliss or they are devastatingly heartbreaking.

What other projects do you have coming up?
In December, *Girlhood* will have a West Coast Premiere with Third Culture Theatre! Also, I’m currently working on a few new plays. One explores purity culture and the other is the sinkhole church play I mentioned earlier.

What’s something you wish you could see more of in the theater?
I want to see plays that diversify the Southern narrative, i.e. plays by female playwrights, playwrights of color, playwrights who don’t identify with the middle class and the classes above. Also, I want to see more blended family units portrayed on stage and neurodiversity, specifically I want to see neurodiverse characters and actors in plays not about neurodiversity. Also, I want to see more theatre in the theater. Too many times of late I’ve walked out of the theater thinking, “Did I just sit through a live taping of a TV show?”

On the cover page, you call *The Tragic Ecstasy of Girlhood* a poetic drama; how do you see the role of poetry in this piece?
I am really inspired by the works of Naomi Wallace, who writes these gritty dramas about the working class and she always finds a way to bring out the poetry in their circumstances. In *Girlhood*, there’s poetry to be heard in the way the girls think, feel, and speak. The play deals with heightened emotions and aims to break through any defense mechanism to get below the surface.

Even though we never see them directly on stage, church and therapy are major and mandatory parts of these girls’ lives. How do you think those institutions affect the play?
At the age most the girls in *Girlhood* find themselves, you’re still trying to figure out how your body works, and where you fit into the world, but then you have these adults, mostly with good intentions, who try to spoon-feed you the answers to life that will fix all of your problems. They say things like, “If I had known this at your age, things would have been very different for me.” I think both church and therapy are very personal journeys, but when you’re a teenager, you aren’t really allowed to make decisions for yourself on that scale, and sometimes those things become more harmful than helpful.

What cultural or regional norms informed the play?
I’ve lived in the South for most of my life, 24 years, and it’s only been in the last two years of living in Boston that I’ve truly come to know the cultural and
regional norms that raised me. Growing up I was taught three things: serve 
God, love your mama, and don’t question authority. Let’s just say, I’ve got at 
least one of those down.

**What is the biggest thing that people think they know about the world of this 
play, that isn’t so?**
I think a huge misconception about youth that live in institutions like the one in 
the world of this play is that they are bad kids.

**What is the most important thing that people don’t know about the world of 
this play, that they need to know?**
These children are a part of our future. Their message is urgent and it needs to 
be taken seriously. They can’t be written off or ignored. We need to take care 
of them. We need to have better systems in place to properly care for them, for 
their caretakers, and for their families.

**What do you think most characterizes your writing?**
I like to joke that my plays are like a bowl of mashed potatoes—hearty, 
universal, and warm. So I would say tone is a big factor in my work. Also, I am 
very character driven. I let them lead me and the story. My characters are often 
complex, enigmatic, and don’t always make good choices, but they are human, 
relatable, and so freaking endearing. I’m not interested in writing about villains 
or heroes; I write about people for people just like you.
CAST & CREW

DANIEL BLANDA (Properties Master) is a first-year Playwriting MFA student at Boston University. He has spent the last four years living in New York City working as a playwright, actor, and director. Since its publication in 2016, his play Shoulda Coulda Woulda has received multiple productions including the Actors Studio at Pace University in Spring 2018. He has participated in a number of film festival projects across the Northeast including a directing credit for Grey Area, which debuted at the Hip Hop Film Festival in 2017. He is very excited to join the team and begin his journey at Boston Playwrights’ Theatre.

STEPHANIE CASTILLO (Audi) is a junior at Boston University pursuing her degree in Theatre Arts. She is ecstatic to have been a part of the incredible process leading up to this performance of The Tragic Ecstasy of Girlhood at BPT. Her previous credits include the ensemble of Black Snow, and Dorothy in the SOT’s production of Particularly in the Heartlands. Thank you to my parents for their endless love and generosity, and thank you, Steven and Matt, for your constant support and guidance.

TATIANA CHAVEZ (Charlie) is a D.C. native and a third-year student pursuing her BFA in Acting at BU’s SOT. This is her first production at BPT. She is very excited to work with her peers Kira Rockwell and Leila Ghaemi on The Tragic Ecstasy of Girlhood.

CAYENNE DOUGLASS (Costume Master) is a first-year MFA playwright at BU. Her plays have been produced at New Perspectives Theatre Company, Dixon Place, MIFT, Big Apple Theatre Festival, ESPA Primary Stages Detention series, Manhattan Repertory Theatre, The Players Theatre, FEAST: A Performance Series, CalArts New Works Festival, Edmonds Driftwood Players in Seattle and Ain’t I a Woman in Louisville. In 2018, Cayenne participated in the First Stage Residency through The Drama League and was awarded the Barn Arts Residency in Bass Harbor, ME, and the Emerging Artists Residency at Tofte Lake Center in Ely, MN. In December, she will be published by Smith and Kraus in two monologue anthologies.

AMANDA FIGUEROA (Izzy) is a senior Acting major at BU’s SOT, in her first BPT production, and she could not be more thrilled. Recent productions include Our Town, The Life and Death of King John, and Yo Soy Lola, a yearly showcase of Latinx artists who speak on their experiences while raising money for scholarships for Latinx youth. Amanda started dancing at the age of three and has had a passion for the arts ever since. Last spring, she had the opportunity to study abroad in Madrid, Spain and living with a host family. As a Latina artist, she is very proud to be a part of The Tragic Ecstasy of Girlhood with this spectacular cast and crew.

LEILA GHAEMI (Director) has served as a theatre maker in Montreal, New York, San Francisco, and the Greater Boston area. She received her BFA in Theatre
Arts from BU where she is now pursuing her MFA in Theatre Education. She has had the great pleasure of working at various theater companies including the Stratford Festival, American Conservatory Theater, New Repertory Theatre, BPT, and BU’s New Play Initiative—all of which developed her passion for new play development. Recent new play development credits include *The History of Sexuality* by Dane Stewart (consultant), *Birds* by Rebecca Gibian (consultant), *Daddy Issues* by Tom L. Wark (director), *Walking While Black* by Kemiyondo Coutinho (actor), *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Ursula Rani Sarma (actor), script-reading for ACT’s Artistic Development department, and teaching devised theatre at Boston University Summer Theatre Institute.

**GRACE HILL (Assistant Stage Manager)** is excited to be working on her first production with BPT. After returning from a spring semester in Madrid, Grace spent her summer working in New York City as an assistant stage manager for New York Classical Theatre. Currently in her final year of the SOT’s BFA Stage Management program, she has worked on numerous productions through the Boston University SOT and School of Music’s Opera Institute.

**SARAH HIRSCH (Amber)** is so excited to return to BPT! She was last seen here in *Every Piece of Me*. She is a senior Theatre Arts major at BU concentrating in acting and playwriting. Previous credits at BU include Sally Bowles in *Cabaret* and Little Stone in *Eurydice*. Sarah is grateful and proud to have worked with such an incredible team of artists these past few weeks! Thank you, BPT, for producing this project!

**KATHERINE HUMBERT* (Stage Manager)** is delighted to be working on another production with BPT where she has stage managed *Brawler, Elemeno Pea, Every Piece of Me, The Atheist*, and *Memorial*. She has spent several years with Central Square Theater where she has assistant stage managed The Nora Theatre Company’s *Operation Epsilon* and *Arcadia*, and Underground Railway Theater’s productions of *SILA, A Disappearing Number*, and *Mr. g*. She has also had the pleasure of working on The Nora/URT’s *The Other Place* and *Arabian Nights*. A graduate of Carnegie Mellon University, she returned to the Boston area several years ago to explore the theatre scene and has been enjoying every moment. Most recently, Katherine assistant stage managed SpeakEasy Stage Company’s production of *Allegiance* and *Men on Boats*. Other recent stage management credits include: *Matchless* and *The Happy Prince* (URT), *Into the Woods* (Weston Drama Workshop), and *Translations* (Bad Habit Productions).

**AJ JONES (Costume Design)** is a third-year costume design graduate student at BU. He is originally from Indiana where he attended the University of Southern Indiana. He is excited to be a part of this great production at BPT. He has designed and worked on numerous shows at BU and the BU Opera Institute including *Antigone* (designer), *Labyrinth of Desire* (designer), *Emmeline* (asst. designer), and *The Cradle Will Rock* (asst. designer). He is currently working on his thesis project and hopes to move to New York after graduation. To see some of his work, visit [ajjonescostumes.wix.com/theatre](http://ajjonescostumes.wix.com/theatre).
JEssica scout malone (Fight Choreographer) is a Boston-based theatre artist, director, and fight choreographer. With more than 17 years of movement training spanning a variety of disciplines, Jessica is passionate about finding new stories to tell and new ways to tell stories. She is a graduate of BU’s SOT and an SAFD-certified Actor Combatant, and firmly believes that more women should play with swords. She is, above all, thrilled to be back in the room with some of the most kind-hearted, exploratory, and joyful artists she knows. Kira and Leila, here’s to many more Next Times. For more information, please visit jessicascoutmalone.com.

Danielle Palmer (Mercy) was last seen in the SOT’s production of Antigone as Chorus/Messenger/Page in the Booth Theatre. Danielle was also seen as Esther in Lynn Nottage’s Intimate Apparel. She is thrilled to be a part of this production of The Tragic Ecstasy of Girlhood and to start her relationship with BPT. A junior at BU, Danielle is looking forward to studying abroad next semester to continue her studies as a BFA Acting major.

Eliana pipes (Dramaturg) is a playwright, filmmaker, and actor. Recent playwriting works include Stand and Wait (Gaffney National Playwriting Prize Winner, O’Neill Theater Conference Semifinalist); Stiletto Envy (Samuel French Off-Off Broadway Festival, The Fire this Time Festival); Isadora del Sol (KCACTF John Cauble Award for Outstanding Short Play); A Brief History of the United States (Kennedy Center Millennium Stage). Her work has been developed with The 24 Hour Plays Nationals, and Checkmark Theatre Company. She received a BA in English from Columbia University and is currently a first-year in BU’s MFA Playwriting program. More at www.elianapipes.com.

Kira rockwell (Playwright) is a Boston-based writer who was born and bred in the heart of Texas. Her character driven plays aim to foster empathy, cultivate hope, and challenge complacency. Her plays Nomad Americana, With My Eyes Shut, and The Tragic Ecstasy of Girlhood have been developed with Fresh Ink Theatre, Theatre@First, Goat Song Theatre Collective, Nouveau 47 Theater, Southwestern College, and Baylor University, as well as with BPT. Her work has been featured across the nation at the Hollywood Fringe Festival (2018), Last Frontier Theatre Conference (2016), Fresh Ink Theatre’s Mad Dash (2018, 2017), One-Minute Play Festival Boston (2017), Little Black Dress Ink’s Onstage Fest (2017, 2016, 2015), and WaterTower Theatre’s Detour: A Festival of New Work (formerly known as Out of the Loop Fringe Festival—2015, 2016). After having its workshop premiere with BPT, The Tragic Ecstasy of Girlhood will have a Los Angeles premiere. Kira is a proud member of The Dramatists Guild. She holds a BFA in Theatre Performance from Baylor University and is currently earning her MFA in Playwriting from BU. Kira is wife to Mark Rockwell, owner of Lonesome Hero Design Studio. They are parents to the sweetest, fastest, lab/pit rescue named Koda. Find out more: www.kirarockwell.com

Lee Schuna (Sound Design) is a transmasculine freelance sound designer, composer, music producer, and graduate of the Music Industry program at
Northeastern University. Credits include *Hype Man*, *Peerless*, *Really*, *The T Party* (Company One); *Every Brilliant Thing*, *Grand Concourse*, *Significant Other* (SpeakEasy Stage Company); *Straight White Men*, *Two Jews Walk Into a War*, *Lonely Planet*, *Statements After an Arrest*, *Fiddler on the Roof* (New Rep); *Fires in the Mirror*, *The King Stag* (Tufts University); and *The Women Who Mapped The Stars* (The Nora Theatre Company). He is currently working on experimental electronic music to be released on his pet record label, Human Nature Records, as well as collaborating with queer artists Anjimile & Sir Babygirl. [humannaturerecords.com](http://humannaturerecords.com)

MICHELLE SPARKS (Scenic Design) is a BFA Scene Design candidate at BU and works as both a scenic designer and scenic artist. Previous design credits include Boston University’s *Particularly in the Heartland*, *Richard III*, *The War Reporter* (Opera Institute), and *Punk Rock*.

KAT C. ZHOU (Lighting Design) is a Boston-based lighting designer and MFA candidate at BU. She has previously designed at Harvard College and The Underlings Theatre Company. Formerly, she served as president of the Harvard-Radcliffe Gilbert & Sullivan Players. This is her BPT debut. More info on her work can be found at [katzhoudesign.com](http://katzhoudesign.com).

SPECIAL THANKS

Mark Stanley

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Founded in 1839, Boston University is an internationally recognized institution of higher education and research. With more than 33,000 students, it is the fourth largest independent university in the United States. BU consists of 16 schools and colleges, along with a number of multi-disciplinary centers and institutes integral to the University’s research and teaching mission. In 2012, BU joined the Association of American Universities (AAU), a consortium of 62 leading research universities in the United States and Canada. Established in 1954, Boston University College of Fine Arts (CFA) is a top-tier fine arts institution. Comprised of the School of Music, School of Theatre, and School of Visual Arts, CFA offers professional training in the arts in conservatory-style environments for undergraduate and graduate students, complemented by a liberal arts curriculum for undergraduate students.

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The School of Theatre has a long tradition of embracing the value of the professional theatre’s participation in the education of our students. We have now arrived at a landmark number of professional theatre ventures that embrace, in a special way, the possibilities of building strong bridges between the study and practice of the theatre arts.

Boston University’s Professional Theatre Initiative provides opportunities for stimulating, creative interactions between participating theatres and our students. In many instances, we have created models for producing relationships that deepen the educational experience, providing a special path for professional experimentation, and creating new possibilities for the creation of new plays for the theatre.

We are pleased to celebrate our professional partners in this endeavor. In this region, New Repertory Theatre and Boston Playwrights’ Theatre are the most recent cornerstones of the initiative. Reaching outward, relationships with Actors’ Shakespeare Project in Boston, Arena Stage in Washington, D.C., along with Williamstown Theatre Festival and Glimmerglass further enhance the possibilities of this initiative.

As part of our Professional Theatre Initiative, the New Play Initiative provides playwrights and directors with a variety of developmental options to support the creation of new work for the theatre. The semi-annual season of fully produced new plays written by our MFA Playwriting students, and directed by their MFA Directing colleagues, is a highlight of this endeavor.
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Dianne Walters
Sandra Weintraub
Founded in 1981 at Boston University by Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott, Boston Playwrights’ Theatre is an award-winning professional theatre dedicated to new works. At the core of our programs is the Playwriting MFA offered in the celebrated English Department in the College of Arts & Sciences and in collaboration with the award-winning School of Theatre in the College of Fine Arts. Alumni of our program have been produced in regional and New York houses as well as in London’s West End; our own productions of alumni work have garnered regional and Boston awards, including numerous Best New Script Awards from the Elliot Norton committee and the Independent Reviewers of New England.

From class workshops to our Season of New Plays, BPT employs the best of New England’s professional actors, directors, and designers to bring each playwright’s vision to its first audiences.

Each spring we produce New Noises: Massachusetts Young Playwrights’ Project. Area high schools work with professional playwrights, directors, and actors to see student works on stage for the first time.

Fifty local theatre companies join us annually for the Boston Theater Marathon, a showcase of new ten-minute plays by New England playwrights chosen each year from hundreds of entrants. Each play is produced by a different New England theatre company in a single ten-hour event with all proceeds going to charity.

When we are not producing plays, we continue our mission to support new works by renting theatre space to other New England theatre companies at below-market rates. Our Black Box Rentals provide support for the development and production of new plays.

Derek Walcott, Founder
Kate Snodgrass, Artistic Director
Jacob Strautmann, Managing Director
Jeffrey Petersen, Technical Director and Production Manager
K. Alexa Mavromatis, Marketing Coordinator

Melinda Lopez, Adjunct Assistant Professor
Ronan Noone, Adjunct Assistant Professor

We are proud of our mission.
To get involved, visit BostonPlaywrights.org.

With your support, we support new plays!
The Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival, part of the Rubenstein Arts Access Program, is generously funded by David M. Rubenstein.

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Kennedy Center education and related artistic programming is made possible through the generosity of the National Committee for the Performing Arts.

This production is entered in the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival (KCACTF). The aims of this national theater education program are to identify and promote quality in college-level theater production. To this end, each production entered is eligible for a response by a regional KCACTF representative, and selected students and faculty are invited to participate in KCACTF programs involving scholarships, internships, grants and awards for actors, directors, dramaturgs, playwrights, designers, stage managers and critics at both the regional and national levels.

Productions entered on the Participating level are eligible for invitation to the KCACTF regional festival and may also be considered for national awards recognizing outstanding achievement in production, design, direction and performance.

Last year more than 1,500 productions were entered in the KCACTF involving more than 200,000 students nationwide. By entering this production, our theater department is sharing in the KCACTF goals to recognize, reward, and celebrate the exemplary work produced in college and university theaters across the nation.