

**Loneliness in Sarah Ruhl's *The Clean House***

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## Abstract

Sarah Ruhl (1974) is one of the remarkable American female playwrights whose main literary concern revolves around the perpetual feeling of loneliness and the exploration of various ways of how the characters attempt to escape it. Ruhl features *The Clean House* with a configurative framework that provides metaphysical places with special connection to reality. The play is distinguishably poetical, genuinely personal and extremely conceptual. The study concentrates on how loneliness pervades the lives of her characters and shaping their actions, highlighting their inner struggles and the strategies they employ in order to cope with loneliness and loss as well as finding meaning, connection, and interaction in life.

Keywords: Cleaning, Humor, Relationships, self-discovery, compassion.

## الخلاصة

سارة روول (1974) هي واحدة من أهم كاتبات المسرحية الامريكيات التي كان اهتمامها الادبي الرئيسي يتركز على الشعور الدائم للوحدة و محاولة الشخصيات اكتشاف وسائل متعددة للهروب من هذا الشعور. تميزت مسرحية روول **البيت النظيف** بأطار تكويني يمثل افكار و مفاهيم تجريدية مع وجود صلة مميزة مع الواقع. فهي شعرية بصورة مميزة, شخصية بصدق و ادراكية بنفس الوقت. تبين هذه الدراسة كيف أن الشعور بالوحدة يحتل و يتغلغل في حياة الشخصيات و يؤثر أفعالهم, مبينا صراعاتهم الداخلية و الطرق التي يستخدموها لكي يتمكنوا من مواجهة الشعور بالوحدة و الضياع و كذلك ايجاد المعنى و التواصل و التفاعل في حياتهم. الكلمات المفتاحية: التنظيف , الهزل , العلاقات , ايجاد الذات, العطف.

## Introduction

Loneliness is the unpleasant feeling of deprivation, the feeling of being apart from others, the lack of specific types of human communication, or as a continuous and vague need for other individuals (Weiss, 1975, 65).

There are two distinct types of loneliness, the emotional and the social loneliness (Mijuskovic, 2012, 35). The first type is produced because of the individual's feelings of distress accompanied by a state of dissatisfaction to an inherent set of social needs: such as the absence of a spouse or a lover. It is presented by a feeling of emptiness and restlessness where individuals seek to establish with others who, despite having social relationships with them, the individual lacks satisfaction of his emotional

needs. This type of loneliness is described, as personal in a sense it is the product of the individual's own perceptions, values, self-standards, and characteristics. Whereas, social loneliness is foster an overlap of emotions; of nothingness, aimlessness tension and boredom. It seems almost clear; and yet it is essential to notice best whence the urge for a sense of a community, and how social contact, under what circumstances, the symptoms must be allayed. Individuals experiencing this type of loneliness are apt to encounter utter loneliness. They may see their inner world as desolate or empty of others.

However, there are different types of individuals within those two types of loneliness. According to Weiss, the American author and clinical expert, the first group is of the hopeless lonely who feel dissatisfied with their relationships and tend to have only a few non-intimate interactions with others (Weiss, 67). They lack close contact with their partners, empty and abandoned. Sometimes they blame others for their situations. The second group is of individuals who are temporarily and periodically lonely. They are the most social of the lonely groups, as they tend to have social contacts at work, organizations, or at different foundations. They have strong faith that their loneliness is not permanent state and have less feelings of being abandoned. Their loneliness disappears when they do interesting activities. The third type is the resigned lonely individuals who surrender to their unavoidable social condition, as if they are willing to die. The majority of people of this type are over 55 years old, mostly widowed individuals, unemployed or disabled.

Sarah Ruhl portrays loneliness in *The Clean House* as an emotional and personal reflection of the complex nature of human connections. Loneliness has both positive and negative sides, and Ruhl presents them through her characters. The positive side of loneliness motivates her emotionally detached characters as they try their best to confront and escape their feelings of loneliness with different methods. The negative side allows them to carry a social stigma (Yolton, 2000, 77). They become embarrassed to admit to being lonely, creating barriers even within family dynamics, most importantly affecting their decision –making that leads to a further emotional loneliness.

## Sarah Ruhl: The Woman playwright

Sarah Ruhl dominated the American stage with her dramas that were among the top ten most-produced plays between 2003 and 2013. (Muse, 2018, 19). She started her theatrical life from an early age as she began her classes at the Piven Theatre workshop in the fourth grade. As a child, she thought she would be a teacher and a short story writer, instead of being a playwright. Actually, her literary talent started at the wake of her poetic strength since she wrote poetry before she wrote plays, publishing a collection of poems, entitled 'Death of another Country' when she was only eleven.

Ruhl had a great experience at the Piven Theatre workshop whose founder Joyce Piven identified certain source materials as stories, fairytales, literary tales where the focus was on language, transformation, and playfulness rather than scenery: the theatre he founded was without props and sets as well as ignoring the fourth wall (Durham, 2013, 56). Ruhl points out that this focus helped shape her aesthetic, as she tried and succeeded at writing a play that demonstrates both her fondness of language and whimsical sense. Besides, the workshop was also involved in the process of developing Ruhl's skills in writing *The Clean House* where they staged its first sit-down readings. It also commissioned and staged a number of Ruhl's plays such as *Orlando*, in which she adapted from Virginia Woolf's novel.

It is important to mention that the theatre of the 1990s was known of its strict prohibition of women's playwriting as they were not allowed to use certain theatrical devices or produce plays that ignite critical themes (Ibid). It was dominated by new plays by male playwrights and there were rarely any débuts by female playwrights. Therefore, in the 1990s there was a strong cry for a change to the unfair working troubles faced by many contemporary female playwrights who worked hard and in return passive critical attention was paid to their plays such as Caryl Churchill, Elaine May and Nancy Hasty. However, the feminist creative playwrights organized special meetings to discuss crucial matters and issues. The result was a powerful response to an urgent intellectual need as there is no answer to real woman's questions except for the woman herself. It was at this chaotic time Ruhl's beam started to shine as she stood still to face the continued tension beneath the endless critical discourse.

Situating Ruhl within current trends of women playwriting is very important, although the entitlement to gender is not seen as the most significant element in forming her perspective. Elaine Aston summarizes in her preface to the new edition of Professor Sue Ellen Case's pioneer work *Feminism and Theatre* (2008), Aston writes an introduction of the Feminist theatre and the feminist theatrical theory since 1980s (Al-Shamma, 2014, 26). She believes that the younger generations are hesitant to completely relate themselves as feminists for several reasons. She thinks that these include an anxiety and fear of being recognized with the bra-burning women's libbers of the 1970s who called for freedom with a symbolic liberation of everything that oppressed women, and the new stylistic appeal of non-politicized woman power feminism of the 1990s. Female playwrights are less apt to be recognized themselves as such due to the fear of being marginalized in terms of production. Instead of focusing mainly on women's or feminist issues, Aston highlights that women playwrights today address complex matters involving nation, class, race, gender, and Ruhl is no exception (Ibid). Aston alludes to a feminist influences, to the achievements of the second wave feminism, which are now often neglected or not fully appreciated and these influences or elements are evident in Ruhl's repeated depiction of female protagonists and her frequent employment of female agency. In addition to that he structure of her plays tends to be character based; or in relations to Chekhov, as Ruhl confessed that she has professed a tremendous admiration and adapted several of his pieces. She has also remarked that she likes a theatre of incremental alteration versus one that builds to an Aristotelian climax and her plays supports this claim. Some feminists' theatre critics believe that the single Aristotelian climax is associated with masculinity and masculine power; Ruhl's dramaturgy may be deemed feminist in the sense that it challenges this model. Thus, she corresponds to current tendencies in woman playwriting while staying nonconformist. Aston's list of concerns regarding woman playwrights is extensive and it is also relevant to male playwrights and audience members of either gender. Conforming to current trends entails being willing to encounter a wide range of complicated and interconnected global concerns. Ruhl examines a subset of themes within this broad subject, but with her own distinctive voice.



She is mostly concerned with loneliness and how to escape it while the characters process different stages of grief and sadness. This is apparent when she bore the heavy burden of her father's death while writing her *Eurydice* (2003). The play tells a sad story of two lonely lovers separated by death encompassing the Greek mythical end of Eurydice and Orpheus. In *Melancholy Play* (2002) where her characters look for partnership and try to escape loneliness and the mundanity of adult life raising attention towards the excitement of childish fancy. Although her theatre is not a place of depression and pain, she manages to tackle the seriousness of her themes with surreal attitude. Concerning this she uses unusual 'estrangement technique strategy' evocative of the Brechtian theatre that permits the audience to acknowledge the rational thought and social action rather than emotional involvement. (Khun. T et al, 2004, p.327). This technique is employed by blending elements of humor and magical realism that reveals her poetic sensibility and intellectuality which she consistently welds to the action of her dramas.

### **Loneliness in *The Clean House***

The idea of the play came to Ruhl when she was at a tea party where all the invitees were doctors. She overheard a doctor talking about her Brazilian maid who wouldn't clean her house all day passionately and wished to have fair wages. She gossiped about how she had her maid hospitalized and medicated so that she could fulfill her role as a servant properly. In fact, this feeling of superiority over the weak always provokes Ruhl as she comments, "Does medical school supersede our gender? As women are we supposed to clean after other people?" (Muse, 2018,59). She thinks that cleaning one's house is one of the basic things to ensure a profitable and healthy environment, and that cleaning can reduce stress and anxiety, creating a sense of order and perfection. However many women face great challenge when it comes to the cleanliness of their homes. This can actually reflect deeper problems related to their lack of awareness and loneliness. She is surprised that some women rejected cleaning either because of their high education or rich status, having maids to clean their own dirt as well as disrespecting them. She fights for what she believes through her play and thinks that all domestic workers should have clear terms of employment, fair wages, reasonable working hours, and safe

working conditions, ensuring these basic rights can help elevate their status and reduce instances of disrespect.

Ruhl criticizes double-faced realities where the things appear on the surface but are entirely different underneath. So she ironically chose *The Clean House* as the best title to her play to highlight the tension between the appearance of having a clean harmonious life inside the house and the reality of the under covered relational and emotional loneliness of its residents. Erving Goffman comments that when a character plays a part or says something he implicitly wants his listeners to take seriously the impression and thoughts that is fostered before them. They are required to believe the person they see and hear the attributes he seems to possess. Goffman continues that the individual presents his act and start on his show for the benefit of others. The result is that the individual becomes fully taken by his own show; he can truly believe that what he stages to others is the exact reality he lives. However it is typical of others to believe the act the individual is presenting, only few will have doubts about the truth that lies beneath the surface (Goffman, 1956.20). Moreover, Goffman links the individual's life and interactions to a theatrical performance and individuals to actors on stage. According to him, every individual has a front region and back region behavior. The front region is the societal appearance, where the person is in the presence of others and actively engaged in interaction. The back region is where the individual can reveal his true self by dropping the social mask and free from the scrutiny of others. The access to this region is controlled in order to keep outsiders from realizing the flaws in the performance presented. Ruhl's characters try to maintain an elegant and positive version of themselves in front of others to enhance their social standing.

*The Clean House* was first premiered at the Yale Repertory Theatre in September 2004. It garnered a critical and widespread attention for its exquisite themes and characterization.

The play begins with the arrival of Matilde a woman in her late twenties to the United States. She left Brazil after the sudden death of her parents. Matilde is alone and penniless, therefore, she starts to work as a housekeeper at Lane's house. Though Lane, a physician in her early fifties hires Matilde to clean her house. The latter rejects cleaning because she thinks it requires a lot of physical effort and consumes the time she can use

to write ‘jokes’ that is what she is truly passionate about. She explains to the audience that when she was a child she thought: ‘if the floor is dirty, look at the ceiling’ (Ruhl, 2006, 30). So cleaning is not what she wants to do, instead she desires to be a famous comedian, but she needs money and this is the only job she could find. Matilde’s approach to escape loneliness is through humor as she wishes to be connected to her cultural roots as well as to her deceased parents who were also comedians.

Lane’s house is unique with its white furniture objects ‘white living room, couch, vase, rug, and lamp’ that must be cleaned continuously. She becomes frustrated and decides to take Matilde to the hospital to check her mental status. Lane protests, “I’m sorry, but I didn’t go to medical school to clean my own house” (5). The playwright investigates through Lane’s statement not just her ideas concerning cleaning but also the relationship of the boss and the laborer. To Lane, the very act of cleaning is a female gendered system. She defines herself as a prosperous doctor who takes care of the sick and considers this as inconvenient to being a housewife. Her caring is merely devoted to her profession and social status. Leslie Durham argues that Lane’s feminine perception is complex because she thinks that allowing a woman whose not equal to her class to do the housework will clearly not threaten the new gendered design she has built. Lane’s preference of a ‘stranger’ to clean her house suggests the importance of her self-image and perhaps a form of bragging. As a successful doctor, she might wish to keep an image of being above certain tasks, and focus solely on her prestigious career.

Virginia, Lane’s older sister, is a woman in her late fifties. She informs the audience in her monologue that she is frustrated that Lane refuses to clean as she believes that cleaning is a sacred and personal work a woman must do at home. She loves dust and connects the individual’s ability to make progress in life with his ability to remove dust. She always waits for dust to accumulate under the bed so that she can clean happily. Virginia represents an image of classical and social notion of woman’s primal instinct of devotion with the caring of the family and home. She is lonely and seeks companionship; her children have grown up and left home. Her loneliness can trigger what Cynthia Macgregor describes it as ‘the empty nest syndrome’ which is the feeling of void and loneliness that parents might experience as they start to lose their identity as a parent that



is closely tied to the role of a caregiver, protector, and breadwinner. (Macgregor, 2017, 49). The loneliness felt in Virginia's situation is largely due to a sudden lack of purpose or direction. As she was heavily involved in her children's lives and now feels unneeded. Therefore, she decides to escape her loneliness by planning to take over the cleaning responsibilities at Lane's house and helping Matilde to get more time at writing jokes. Unlike Matilde, Virginia finds solace and value in cleanliness and order, she tells Matilde that, 'cleaning my house- makes me feel clean,' but the latter stresses a huge difference in their situations, 'But you don't have to clean other's people's houses for money'(22). Thus, Virginia arranges a secretive contract where she can clean Lane's house instead of Matilde. This partnership not only alleviates Virginia's loneliness but also gives her a renewed sense of self-worth. Moreover it works perfectly for all the characters involved. Lane is thrilled that her house is clean; Matilde has the time and energy to focus on her comic writing and Virginia is completely satisfied.

The turn of events happens when Lane discovers that her husband, Charles, is having an affair with a cancer patient. She runs back home in tears to find out that her sister is cleaning instead of Matilde. The growing hollow of loneliness becomes noticeable by Lane as she is disappointed at what Virginia has done and has to deal with the aftermath of her failing marriage, realizing that she couldn't fulfill her position as a wife. Charles, on the other hand is Lane's husband, a bright doctor who feels lonely, neglected and emotionally disconnected in his marriage. Yet, they had built a harmony based on their intellectual mentality and friendship. Charles madly falls in love with his Argentinean patient, Ana in order to escape his loneliness. His escape comes through the deep emotional connection he fulfills with Ana, which transcends the physical aspect of their relationship. Charles sees Ana as his soul mate a symbol of affinity and spiritual bond. To the extent, he brings Ana home and asks Lane to be her friend. This request is in fact complicated and an emotionally charged moment in the play. It can be interpreted in several ways, depending on how James Al-Shamma views Charles' understanding of his relationship with both Lane and Ana. He believes that Charles seeks reconciliation by introducing Ana to Lane. He might desire that Lane can see the love he has towards Ana, thereby finding some peace or closure (Al-Shamma, 2014, 13). James Al-Shamma continues that this request could also be interpreted as insensitive,

as he fails to acknowledge the agony and betrayed she feels, disregarding the emotional impact of his naïve actions. His request may also stem from a desire for harmony among the people he cares about. It could mirror his inner struggle and a wish to merge these important parts of his life into a cohesive whole, where love and understanding prevail over pain and resentment.

Lane's decision to permit Ana to enter her house, despite knowing she is the woman her husband is cheating with is a significant moment in the play. She is now trying to confront the reality of the infidelity she faced, as well as striving for an understanding of the situation or looking to retain some control over how things unfold by keeping her friends and the situation close. Her journey towards escaping loneliness begins when she opens up to the imperfections in her life and accepting that not everything in her house needs to be clinically clean. However, the audience cannot be sure whether she is really telling the truth when she acts completely fine or she is only boasting herself of having strength to confront her loneliness. This uncertainty comes to surface when Lane and Virginia become hesitant to let Matilde work for Ana whom she meets and admires greatly.

Despite the imperfect understanding between the Argentinean Ana and the Brazilian Matilde, they swiftly create a bond that goes beyond the language barrier. Ana's distinct reaction towards Matilde is made clear when she mispronounce her name. In fact, Ruhl comments that 'Matilde' is called by the American characters in the play as 'Matilda'. But Ana is the first character who recognizes Matilde's Brazilian origin and tries to correct the pronunciation of the name. Ana's attention is a sign of respect and acknowledgement of Matilde's identity. It shows how she values her not just as a person but also as a person with her own recognition. The intimacy and care Ana shows, adds a change to Matilde situation after Lane's decision to fire her. However, the playwright adds that "Ma-chil-gee" is the correct Brazilian pronunciation and the characters who say Matilde's name properly are most likely to understand her comic jokes, in which Ruhl adds a relief from her continuous loneliness. Lane and Virginia are accustomed to mispronounce the name, while Ana tries to say it correctly and learn its meaning. She admires her name which is a symbol of a woman with great power at battles.

Ana decides to hire Matilde as a joke teller because she loves hearing her jokes. Now, both Lane and Virginia become reluctant to let Matilde go work for Ana for different reasons. Virginia emotionally tries to convince her to stay. She protests, ‘we clean together, we talk, and fold laundry as women used to do...Now we are alone.... It is terrible’ (15). Lane on the other hand claims her sisterly affection for Matilde and promises to pronounce her name correctly, but then she offers her a raise. Lane’s annoyance and hesitance in this situation in fact stem from her personal conflicts and tensions involving Ana; the woman who took her husband first and now tries to take the housekeeper. By retaining Matilde, she thinks she might be recognizing the value Matilde adds to her life, not just in terms of cleaning but also by bringing a new perspective of joy, such as her quest for the perfect joke. It can also be seen as her way to combat her loneliness and the emotional turmoil due to her husband’s affair. The result of these manipulative attitudes ends with: Matilde’s winning both sides as she decides to split her time, half with Lane and Ana, and the other half with Ana and Charles.

Matilde tells Ana some jokes and despite the latter’s desire to laugh loudly, she warns Matilde that the joke might kill her as her mother before died laughing because of her father’s joke. Now that Matilde’s main caring function has been transformed. This duality puts her in a menacing situation as she recognizes how humor and tragedy are closely linked and wonders if laughter can actually cause death. Ruhl uses the idea of death by laughter, by which she resembles what Maggie Hennefold explores in her book, “*Death by laughter: Female Hysteria and early Cinema*”. Both of them delve into the role of laughter in the lives of lonely women, portraying laughter as a force capable of inducing joy and tragicomic outcomes, as explained in this scene. Hennefold explains that death from laughter is one of the most uncommon causes of death usually resulting Asphyxia which means the loss of consciousness due to the reduction of oxygen and, often too much carbon dioxide in the blood (Hennefold, 2024, 45) . Or from sudden cardiac arrest which happens when the heart stops beating because blood cannot do its normal flow to the brain and around the body.

Matilde is not literally required to clean anymore, but instead she tries to associate her jokes to cleaning. This is an acute observation of different

types of care as the jokes she tells invariably touch on the topic of cleaning for the sake of Lane and Virginia. Ruhl starts contrasting the two ideas in the middle of the first act. She views cleanliness and laughter as competing powers that keep spirituality alive. Virginia's manner towards laughing is different from Matilde'. Virginia, who finds companionship and peace when cleaning, thinks simply, 'I don't like to laugh out loud' (20). At this point, it becomes obvious that Ruhl's characters who love cleaning hate laughing, and those who like laughing hate cleaning. This love-hate forces of cleaning and laughing lead to physical and biological changes as the increase in blood pressure and heart rate when laughing, which are the same changes that occur in the moments fear and anxiety. Laughter and cleaning ignite positive emotion through which each character seeks acceptance and elimination from loneliness. The playwright weaves both ideas with the employment of the 'dirty joke'. Matilde notes, "A good joke cleans your inside out. If I don't laugh.. I feel dirty.. like my insides are rotting"(93). In fact, jokers with their humor may not clean houses, but clearly clean people's minds, thus cleaning and cleansing are known as different powers. Ruhl illustrates the finest jokes are those that are the most cleansing, are the dirty ones.

The scene shifts to show Ana, Charles and Matilde sitting up on Lane's balcony. They start picking and biting apples, and if it's not the perfect apple they throw it underneath the balcony which is Lane's white living room. The fall of the moldy apples represents Charles choice of starting a new life away from loneliness he felt with Lane. Besides, it physically manifests Lane's weakness to end her marriage. When Charles' sweater gradually drifts down from the balcony and falls in front of Lane. She picks it up to smell it muttering, 'we were anatomy partners. We fell in love over a dead body' (104), and then remembering how he looks at Ana with love and admiration, 'I didn't know his face was capable of doing that'.

After that Matilde gossips to Lane about what happens between Ana and Charles. She describes their arguments and conflicts over medicine like a 'soap opera'. Then she tells her a joke but Lane never laughs, instead she sheds tears. Lane is experiencing an intense reaction as she purges herself completely when her cries turn into laughter. Through Ruhl's use of the cleansing force, she allows Lane to outburst admitting that she doesn't want her house to be clean and welcomes dirt in her house. Virginia reacts

by leaving a plate on the ground and spilling dirt, all over the white floor. The stains gives her fabulous feeling as if the chaos is more palliative and soothing than the fake obsessive attitude towards cleanliness that appeared at the beginning of the play. This change in Lane's character proves how she is incapable of winning what she has already lost, so she escapes her loneliness through the abandonment of being clinically clinging on cleaning and control.

Ana's cancer becomes worse as she refuses to receive medical treatment. Charles recalls a sympathetic love story of an American surgeon who had adored his wife. He created rubber gloves to help heal her chapped hands. Charles is afraid to be alone again so he gallantly yet fool heartedly travels to Alaska to harvest an anti-cancer compounds extracted from the yew tree to slow the growth of Ana's cancer. He also desires to plant the yew tree in Ana's garden so that she can smell the tree from the balcony. Charles adores Ana to the point of invention as he experiments new cures on his epic quest. She won't go to the hospital so he said 'he would bring the hospital to her' (111). For many centuries the yew tree as Penny Billington explains has been referred to as magical because it symbolizes both life and death. Its roots offer cure while its leaves are poisonous. Moreover, it is a known custom that yew branches are prepared and carried at funerals ( Billington,2015,79).

Despite Virginia's accusation that her sister lacks compassion, Lane finally demonstrates it. She moves the sick Ana into her house to take care of her while Charles is away. She switches the caring space and her position therein. Rather than operating Ana inside the walls of the hospital that has been given the privilege in today's culture, Lane has decided to do so at home. As she does so, she withdraws from her job as a doctor; her care is neither socially or financially acceptable, but it somehow beneficial. In fact due to this restaging and recasting of her care and role as a doctor, Lane accepts the fact that she need Virginia's compassionate assistance. As a result, she is granted a valuable chance to redefine their sisterly relation.

At the end of the play, the four women sit together to enjoy a handmade chocolate ice cream. The stage directions indicate that no one cleans up the mess and Ana dies after hearing Matilde's joke. Ana dies at Lane's messy and dirty house instead of the hospital where everything is



clean. They start to pray and wash Ana's dead body while Lane carrying the yew tree branches that Charles brought. Her death is depicted as peaceful and calm. As a matter of fact, the death scene carries two contradictory facets of meaning. The first is a sense of intimacy that refers to spiritual warmth and acceptance of fate. The second; is the prevailing loneliness the characters feel especially Charles who collapses over Ana's dead body.

## Conclusion

The paper reflects several results concerning loneliness in Sarah Ruhl's *The Clean House*. It shows how she masterfully explores through her richly drawn characters as they experienced loneliness differently, reflecting their unique desires, hidden struggles, and the strategies they used in order to find connection and escape loneliness.

Lane's strategy to escape loneliness is by immersing herself in her work as a doctor. She prioritizes her career at the hospital over her marriage and keeps a professional demeanor to avoid facing her loneliness. However, the study shows how Lane's interactions with Virginia, Matilde, and Ana, forced her to confront her own vulnerability and seek connection, thereby addressing her loneliness more directly and that professional success cannot compensate for emotional loneliness. Virginia's way to escape loneliness involves cleaning, as well as developing a bond with her sister and Matilde. Charles, on the other hand tries to escape loneliness through his desperate longing for love and living his life to the fullest so he hopefully attempts to save Ana from her fatal condition. Ana's sickness brings her a special kind of loneliness, tempered by her love with Charles. Her search for humor and jokes proves her resilience in the face of isolation. Those strategies highlight the pervasive feeling of loneliness that defines their lives. Even Matilde, the comedian who loves humor and laughter, carries her own burdens of loneliness and unfulfilled dreams. Therefore the play is considered as a call to accept imperfections and loneliness in life and relationships.

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