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# Order and Mess in Sarah Ruhl's the Clean House

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**Abstract:** Bereavement is a universal and recurrent issue, as everyone will lose someone differently. In general, modern society has relegated the dismal subject to the private domain and perimeter. Americans had much to mourn in the aftermath of some traumas such as 11 September, the Gulf War, Hurricane Katrina and etc…, mourning and grieving have been closely followed. As a consequence, bereavement has become a public issue. Since bereavement is an individual and collective response that varies depending on emotions and conditions, it could also be characterized as the period following a tremendous loss. Hence, the bereaved people are affected psychologically and socially, and experience periodic sadness and questioning through their grieving process. The issues of bereavement, loss, and death have been considered as important topics of theoretical interest due to the perspectives and issues presented by Sigmund Freud, John Bowlby, and Elizabeth Kubler-Ross during the 20th century. They categorized the process of grief and mourning that individuals go through based on stages and foundations that help in comprehending the situations people go through during their grief journey, trying to adapt to a massive loss. The present study is based on Elizabeth Kubler-Ross' Stages of Grief theory (1969) in analyzing The Clean House play of the American playwright Sarah Ruhl. This research is divided into six sections. The first section is an overview of the theme, bereavement. While section two presents the philosophy of Sigmund Freud and John Bowlby as pioneers of grief and bereavement theories. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross' model of grief is discussed in section three. Section four presents Sarah Ruhl's life and works. And section five discusses the play The Clean House (2004), presenting the order and mess in the characters' process of grief, and the emotional conflict due to their bereavement. Section six presents the conclusion.

**Key words:** Bereavement, Grief, loss, Order, Mess, Sarah Ruhl, The Clean House.

## Introduction

Bereavement crises are typically accompanied by the experience of losing someone dear due to death, the end of a relationship, or fatal disease. The nature and extent of a person's bereavement process are influenced by the loss of a close one. Since bereavement is a process and the range of emotions that people feel as they gradually adjust to the loss, bereavement hits people individually, and everyone can experience a broad range of emotions. There is no appropriate or incorrect way to feel. Changes in circumstances after the loss could also have an impact on the grieving process or feelings. From Sigmund Freud and John Bowlby to Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, theorists have been

concerned with bereavement and grief and how to cope with them. Grief, according to Sigmund Freud, is a natural condition that all human beings go through in response to a great loss. John Bowlby's Attachment theory was expanded to cover the attachment systems used by teenagers as well as the attachment systems used in adult romantic relationships. The Swiss-American psychiatrist Elizabeth Kubler-Ross in her five stages of grief models claims that there is no grieving formula, only general categories through which people pass when they are grieving. The current study considers mainly Elisabeth Kubler-Ross' stages of grief theory in analyzing Sarah Ruhl's *The Clean House* (2004).

**Bereavement**

In the early twentieth century, grieving became recognized as a psychological topic worth investigating (Granek, 2010, p.49). Since Sigmund Schlomo Freud proposed the concept of "grief work," professional psychologists have empirically tested his theory and concluded that grief is a pathology that should be classified as such (1917). It is critical in any research study to clearly explain even the most basic concepts relevant to the study. While lay people may define grief and mourning similarly, scholars have distinguished between grief, loss, mourning, and bereavement in literature.

When discussing someone's death, the words "grief," "loss," and "bereavement" are frequently used. Even in the field of psychotherapy, these words are repeatedly used interchangeably, but their meanings differ slightly (Butler, 2012, p.309). Grief is a natural reaction to the loss of someone important in one's life, and it lasts until the person finds new meaning and routine in their life without the other (Ramsay, 1977, p.49). Loss occurs when something important to the person ceases to exist, such as a divorce, job loss, or illness, and is not always caused by another person. Bereavement is the expression of grief caused by the death of a loved one (Butler, 2012, p. 313).

Many variables influence how the bereaved person grieves, including his or her personality and coping style, life experience, faith, and the magnitude of the loss. Grief is a process that takes time to complete. Healing takes time; it cannot be rushed or coerced, and there is no such thing as a "normal" grieving schedule. After a few weeks or months, some people begin to feel better. For others, the grieving period lasts years (Kubler-Ross, 1997, p.25).

There is no right or wrong way to grieve; it is a highly personal process, but it has been observed to progress through several stages (Bowlby, 1979). Although contemporary perspectives agree on the stages of mourning, there are differing perspectives on the goal of grieving. Accordingly, Robert A Neimeyer assumes that no scientific evidence has been found to support the idea of a "clear finish line" as a way to recover from grief (2000, p.541).Whilst William J Worden argues that adaptation rather than recovery occurs (2009). Whereas Dennis Klass et al. believe that the bond that existed between the deceased and the survivors will never be broken. The concept of "letting go" or breaking the bond with the departed can be a result of a society and culture that encourages individualism and separation (Butler 2012, p.315). Although the majority of people can cope with a life changing event such as death, research has shown that 10-15% of people are unable to cope and require the assistance of a care provider (Mauritz and van Meijel, 2009, p. 200).

**Sigmund Freud and John Bowlby**

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), the father of grieving theory and psychoanalysis. Freud's own experiences with bereavement have been widely examined as a creative impetus for his writing. Also his experiences with death demonstrate the utility of a social developmental model of mourning combined with relational psychoanalytic ideas that see grief resolution as the rebuilding of a new, enduring relational link (Shapiro, 1996).

Attachment Theory, developed by John Bowlby (1961), built on Freud's idea of grief and attachment, but Bowlby focused on external relationships, primarily those between infants and parents. Neither Freud nor Bowlby questioned the importance of detachment in the grieving process. However, some theorists argue that when we lose loved ones, we do not detach from them; rather,

we simply perceive them differently. For example, even if their child died a decade ago, a parent may retain some attachment to them (Phillipe, 2017).

**Elizabeth Kubler-Ross' Models of Bereavement**

Another important thinker and pioneer of grief research, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross (1926-2004), a Swiss-American psychiatrist and leading figure in near-death studies, is the originator of *On Death and Dying* (2014), a globally acclaimed book in which she first debated her theory of the five stages of grief, also identified as the "Kubler-Ross model" as an outline of adjustment. Moreover, she says that there is no grieving formula but simply general categories through which people travel when they are grieving. Kubler-Ross divides grief into five phases: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Gross, 2018). Based on Bowlby's (1961) theory that there are common features to grieving and Freud's (1917) theory that grief involves work, Kubler-Ross' basic principles for bereavement are flexible, allowing for the distinctiveness of the grieving process. Not all grievers move through these categories in the same order, and they can move forward or backward from category to category at any moment (1997, p.33). Even Sigmund Freud observed that bereaved people are always grieving, albeit at varying levels of severity (1953).

**Sarah Ruhl: Life and Works**

Sarah Ruhl is an American playwright, author, essayist, poet, and professor in dramatic training who has received numerous awards. Ruhl was born on January 24, 1974, in Wilmette, Illinois, and was raised there, a wealthy Chicago suburb on the North Shore. She was a gifted writer from an early age. When she was in third grade, she got a "poison-pen letter" from a classmate, she "corrected the punctuation and sent it back," (Middeke et al, 2013, p.261). Ruhl was a storyteller before she became a writer narrating stories to her mother as a child. Ruhl was later taken to play rehearsals by her mother, where she took notes while watching the world of theater unfold before her eyes accompanied by her only sister Kate, who is a psychiatrist now (AlShamma, 2010, p.11).

Ruhl deals with existential concerns in her plays; her stoic comic posture is a way of destroying gravity, of removing the weight of her words so that she suggest away to cope with difficulty of life. She explained, "Lightness isn't foolishness…It's essentially a philosophical and aesthetic standpoint, extremely serious and wise stepping back to be able to laugh at dreadful things while experiencing them," (Stamberg, 2005). In *Melancholy Play*, a farce about misery released in 2002, Ruhl emphasized the point (Lahr, 2008, p.40).

***The Clean House:* Order and Mess**

The analysis of The Clean House is depending on Elizabeth Kubler Ross' Stage Theory, according to the theory the bereaved person does not have to pass through all the five stages of grief which are; Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance. In addition, not all the stages are experienced by all the bereaved persons regularly.

Lane, the protagonist, is a brilliant doctor. Her interactions with the other characters are important to the play. She is in her fifties. She is clothed entirely in white. Her living room, where the events take place, is furnished with white furnishings, as though she is constantly sterilized both inside and outside her home. White color stands for Lane's organized life, furthermore, it comes to tell that how Lane's mind is clean from mess and disorder before her loss and depression. Ruhl's set gives a view of the contradictory, multilayered significance of the words in the title. The play is set in Lane's white living room, and Ruhl uses the word "white" four more times to describe objects to be included in the set design: "white couch, white vase, white lamp, white rug" (Ruhl, 2006, p.26). The repetition creates an incantatory, almost poetic effect. According to HarperCollins Dictionary, the idea of purity is conveyed by the color white. The scene also refers to a "white room," which is a term for a very hygienic location. White might signify sterility, an artificial pallor, or even cowardice, even though a spotless home may seem like an ideal to embrace (2019).

Matilde, the Brazilian housekeeper that Lane employs, walks in. By dressing Matilde in full black "I wear black because I am in mourning" Matilde says (Ruhl, 2006, p.34). Ruhl distinguishes her from the tidy set and what it stands for. When she speaks, it emphasizes this division even more. The

ideals that the play investigates and eventually rejects are introduced with the title The Clean House. "Clean" most frequently refers to being free of dirt or having moral purity, according to HarperCollins. The phrase "clean!" can also be understood as an imperative when spoken (2019), and both Lane and Virginia are motivated by this order. The titular "house" is not a residence but rather a location that needs to be sanitized, organized, and cleansed. The title implies that cleanliness is associated with femininity because cleaning is typically a woman's duty as an inherited belief. As the play begins, Lane and Virginia both value the idea of a tidy home as a societal ideal, but from different perspectives.

When Lane tries to separate herself from the domestic world, she avoids the figure of the housewife as inferior to her. Almost disdainfully reassigning housework to Matilde. Nevertheless, Matilde is not motivated to keep the house tidy. Her genuine love is humor, yet she is depressed since she mourns her parents. As Lane explains to the audience: "My cleaning lady—from Brazil—decided that she was depressed one day and stopped cleaning my house" (Ruhl, 2006, p.30).

Lane rejects cleaning her house herself. Meanwhile, having no power to make Matilde tidy her house frustrates her. Lane's job as a doctor requires her to make life-or-death choices while maintaining a professional manner and displaying just enough emotion to be compassionate. Lane need for control and her wish to avert death and change are the core causes of her annoyance. The hospital is a spotless, sterilized setting, with the invisible hands of orderlies and nurses removing the deceased from its rooms. Lane has control over the environment in the hospital and, as she shows Matilde:

> MATILDE: Do you tell the nurses at the hospital what to do?
>
> LANE: Yes.
>
> MATILDE: Then pretend I am your nurse.
>
> LANE: Nurse—polish the silver!
>
> MATILDE: Yes, Doctor. (Ruhl, 2006, pp.37-38)

Lane has the authority to give commands to a subordinate if they start acting inappropriately. There is no room for error since, at a hospital, a misplaced grain of dirt could turn lethal. There, cleaning staves off death and deterioration. However, Lane's home life is more difficult to manage without a group of skilled nurses. Lane makes no room for blunders, spills, or messes in her spotless, all-white home, with her all-white outfit, and her perfectly white underpants.

As a white collar doctors couple, Lane and Charles, her husband, adore each other; he says, "I've been faithful to my wife. We met when we were twenty-two years old and fell in love. We had plans" (Ruhl, 2006, p.94). The couple does not have any children. Charles is a dashing professional surgeon in his fifties. A doctor of surgery with a specialization. Virginia, Lane's sister says of him: "When he and Lane first met, I thought to myself, Lane has the best of everything. He has a magnetic personality" (Ruhl, 2006, p.58). As a result, the couple is a successful and happy white-collar doctor couple. However, they are too busy to meet at home. Lane tells Virginia, when she inquires about him, "We hardly see each other" (Ruhl, 2006, p.64). Suddenly, the events reach a climax. Lane is shocked to learn that Charles has feelings for one of his patients, Ana, who is a poor widow from Argentina. Ana is suffering from breast cancer. She is 67 years old. Nonetheless, she is charming and attractive. In the play, Ana is a flat character as her personality does not change as the events unfold. She has the potential to be "anyone's soul mate." Besides, she is "a woman with compassion" (Ruhl, 2006, p.140). Lane is devastated as a result. She admits her complete denial of the matter, saying: "I've never been jealous, I've never been suspicious. I've never thought any other woman was my equal" (Ruhl, 2006, p.76). Lane's shock represents a turning point in both her fortune and her marital life. On the other hand, she refuses to accept her loss. Lane denies that Charles could have feelings for another woman. It is incredible for her and unable to identify the causes. She lists her excellent qualities, claiming that she could never be jealous of another woman or believe that any woman is equal to her. Perhaps her extreme pride exemplifies her "hubris" and provides an explanation for Charles' attraction to another inferior woman. However, Lane may express these words out of heartbreak and sadness.

Lane goes through denial as the first stage of grief which functions as a protective mechanism since the griever's mind is unable to handle the emotions all at once (Kubler-Ross and Kessler, 2005, p.19). However, she quickly progresses to the second stage, which is anger when the griever has eventually admitted the reality of the loss and, helpless, turns to unprovoked angry outbursts because it provides the much-desired sense of control (Kubler- Ross and Kessler, 2005, p.31). Lane explodes in anger when she returns home. "I'm going in the other room to shoot myself," she says to her sister, Virginia, and Matilde, her Brazilian maid (Ruhl, 2006, p.72). Then she injures her left hand by using a can opener. She pulls her hand away from Charles when he wants to "examine the bandage on" her wrist (Ruhl, 2006, p.103). In a sharp tone, she utters short, impressive angry sentences: "We've all met. You can leave now, Charles" (Ruhl, 2006, p.103).

Lane's anger is directed both towards herself and at others around her. For instance she fires Matilde after learning that she and Virginia have agreed that the latter will clean Lane's house instead of Matilde every day. Virginia, a flat character with a simple personality, embodies the stereotype of the housewife and enjoys cleaning because it gives her the sense that she has accomplished something worthwhile. She is Lane's polar opposite. She also enjoys cooking and doing housework. She is younger than Lane. Lane directed her rage at Virginia and Matilde:

> LANE: I asked Matilde. Has Virginia been cleaning the house?
>
> MATILDE: Yes.
>
> LANE: For how long?
>
> MATILDE: Two weeks.
>
> LANE: You're fired. You're both fired. (Ruhl, 2006, p.78)

When Virginia sees Lane in this condition, she warns her, "You're not capable of making a rational decision, your husband left you today" (Ruhl, 2006, p.80). Lane responds angrily and arrogantly, "I'm aware of that. I'm always capable of making a rational decision!" (Ruhl, 2006, p.80). Virginia is well aware of her sister's suffering and inner struggle because of her loss, thus she wants to aid and support her sister, but Lane replies with a high tone directed her anger at her sister:

> LANE: Virginia. I'm all grown-up.
>
> I DO NOT WANT TO BETAKEN CARE OF.
>
> VIRGINIA: WHY NOT? (Ruhl, 2006, p.84)

Lane's bereavement progresses from the second stage of her grief immediately to the fourth stage which is depression. Since, the grievers can travel back and forth between the five stages of grieve at any time since they are fluid, allowing for individualization of the grieving process, not all grievers go through these stages in the same order (Kubler-Ross, 1997, p.33). According to Kubler Ross and Kessler the griever in the fourth stage has abandoned all attempts to change the loss, through anger or bargaining. All energy and will to fight are rapidly replaced by feeling of emptiness, sadness, and loneliness (2005, p.27). Since Lane is a woman in her fifties who is "menopausal", she is easily depressed (Ruhl, 2006, p.61). "Depression" is one of the menopause-related psychological symptoms (Ludden and Michael, 2017, p.112). As a result, her depression is deepened by this cause.

In light of her depression, Lane imagines Charles and his beloved kissing each other in a magical realistic scene. The scene is meant to be in Lane's head, but Matilde and the audience see it, in the meanwhile, Lane reveals her soliloquy to the audience: "This is how I imagine my ex-husband and his new wife. My husband undoes her gown. He is very gentle. He kisses the scar, the one he made. He kisses her forehead" (Ruhl, 2006, p.85). Even Matilde enters the stage of theater while they are still standing and starts asking, "Who are they?" Lane responds, "My husband and the woman he loves. Don't worry. It's only my imagination". "They look happy," Matilde says (Ruhl, 2006, p.86). Lane weeps, then laughs, and continues to cry and laugh for some time. Despite the fact that she appears to be in hysteria, the audience can sympathize with her because this scene expresses her deep, painful suffering and inner psychological mess.

Several occasions, laughter is followed by tears. Lane expresses hesitation about how to respond to a joke made in Portuguese shortly after learning of her husband's infidelity and then fluctuates between laughing and weeping. Lane's face alternates between the traditional masks of comedy and tragedy in a typically theatrical moment as it is shown in this scene:

> *Matilde tells a joke in Portuguese.*
>
> MATILDE: You're crying.
>
> LANE: No, I'm not.
>
> MATILDE: I think that you're crying.
>
> LANE: Well—yes. I think I am. (Ruhl, 2006, pp.87-88)

Ruhl describes Lane's situation through the stage direction as, *"Lane tries to laugh. She cries. She laughs. She cries. She laughs. And this goes on for some time"* (Ruhl, 2006, p.88). Ruhl thus establishes a connection between laughter and tears, which will reappear in Matilde's final monologue, in which she describes laughing and then crying at her own birth. The laughter associated with Ana and Matilde's mothers' deaths is tinged with sadness. Crying follows laughter as Matilde enters the world. Ruhl uniquely blends pathos and humor.

Lane's sadness deepened when Charles and Ana arrive at Lane's house to introduce Ana to her (Ruhl, 2006, pp.103-107). Charles informs her that their marriage has been ended because he has found his "soul mate," or "bashert," as defined by Jewish law. "In Jewish law, you are legally obligated to break off relations with your wife or husband if you find what is called your bashert," he says to Lane (Ruhl, 2006, p.106). It is no surprise that Ana is Jewish. For Ana's sake, Charles now believes in Jewish ideas. As a natural consequence, they do not feel "guilty," and Lane should receive it as he sees fit. They make the decision to share a house.

In view of her helplessness, Lane agrees to let Matilde work as a part-time maid for Ana's house cleaning. Ana has captured not just Lane's husband but also her maid, as well as her sister's admiration and pity. Lane weighs in on the situation, adding, "My God! You can't just walk into my home and take everything away from me" (Ruhl, 2006, p.113). Lane uses the word "home" rather than "house" as she has previously done in order to allude to the word's emotional overtones rather than the "house" as a structure.

In addition, Charles informs Lane that they will be picking apples after they leave her. Picking apples is symbolic in that it reminds the audience of "Adam and Eve's sin." Charles and Ana "have sinned," so they are going apple picking (Ruhl, 2006, p.118). Lane is taken aback by what she hears. She rushes in a rage again, the matter that back her to the second stage of her grief which is anger. How can Charles go to pick apples? She thinks to herself as she yells: "You must be insane! Apple picking! My god! I'M SORRY! But—apple picking? This is not a foreign film! You don't even like foreign films! Maybe you'll pretend to like foreign films, for Ana," (Ruhl, 2006, p.118). Charles is unconcerned. He leaves with Ana and Matilde. Lane returns to her depression once more again, it is obvious when she tells Virginia: "I want to be alone," (Ruhl, 2006, p.120). Loneliness and depression "often co-occur," and they are "linked" (Weeks and Michela, 1980, p.121).

Lane's depression is depicted in a magical realistic scene (as a stage of her grief). Her living room has been transformed into the sea, which Ana's balcony is presumed to view. Ana, Matilde, and Charles, surrounded by apples, pose on Ana's balcony. They eat apples on the balcony and toss the flawed ones or the cores of the perfect ones into Lane's living room, where Lane stands defenseless, as it illustrated in the stage direction:

> *They start taking bites of each apple and if they don't think it's a perfect apple they throw it into the sea. The sea is also Lane's living room. Lane sees the apples fall into her living room. She looks at them.* (Ruhl, 2006, p.123)

This act of throwing has become symbolic as well. It symbolizes their interference in her life. Furthermore, chewing and throwing the rotten apples or the cores of the nice ones implies that they have violated her married life and her home, as well as stripped her to the core.

Ruhl also concretizes the abstract through her use of setting space. Through overlapping locations, she theatrically metaphorizes space. The playwright allows the messiness of the affair to overflow into Lane's neatly ordered world by placing Ana's balcony over Lane's living room. Since Ruhl describes the setting of the play as: *"The space should transform and surprise. The balcony should feel high but also intimate—a close-up shot"* (Ruhl, 2006, p.26). That implies, however, that the chaos and order shown in the individual's psych undergoes depression, the fourth stage as an advanced stage in their grief process. Presentational and representational elements coexist, and the "metaphysical Connecticut" becomes metaphorical as well. Lane's internal state of chaos and disorder, imposed by the disintegration of her marriage, manifests externally through this ingenious use of space. The pain and depression she feels when she imagines Charles and Ana together near the close of the first act is heightened by their physical proximity (Al-Shamma, 2014, p.54).

Out of the situation, Lane is bargain with Charles and Ana in a magical realistic scene. When Matilde arrives at Lane's house, Charles and Ana are dancing in the background (Ruhl, 2006, p.128). Lane strives to learn as much as she can about Charles and Ana's life. She constantly enquiring about them with Matilde:

> LANE: What's her house like?
>
> MATILDE: It's little. She has a balcony that overlooks the sea.
>
> LANE: What does she cook?
>
> MATILDE: I'm not a spy!
>
> LANE: I'm sorry. (Ruhl, 2006, p.128)

During bargaining the third stage of grief, the griever tries to come up with a scenario in which the object of the loss can be recovered (Kubler-Ross and Kessler, 2005, p.24). With the development of events, there is a shift in the magical realistic style between Ana's balcony and Lane's living room. Charles and Ana frequently appear on the balcony, which serves as the backdrop for Lane's living area. On the stage, two different locations are juxtaposed at the same moment. Therefore, Lane's heart breaks as she watches them together: "Do they seem to be very much in love?" she asks sadly. "Yes," Matilde says (Ruhl, 2006, p.129).

Lane erupts in anger once more as Virginia and Matilde express sympathy for Charles and Ana, yelling: "Poor Charles! Poor Ana. Poor me! Poor sounds funny if you say it lots of times in a row: poor, poor, poor, poor, poor, poor, poor. Doesn't it sound funny?" (Ruhl, 2006, p.131). Lane has further outbursts of anger (Ruhl, 2006, p.137). And loses her "cool" (Ruhl, 2006, p.38). Respectively, Lane is swinging back and forth between being angry and being depressed as a natural respond for her grieve. After her recent tantrum of anger, Lane is in a deep depression again. A magical realistic situation was complemented by this outburst. While Charles and Ana go swimming in the mentioned sea in front of Ana's flat, which is Lane's living room at the same time, Lane stood watching them sadly and helplessly (Ruhl, 2006, p.135). Ruhl presents the situation in the stage direction as following: *"Ana and Charles on the balcony. Ana is dressed in a bathrobe. ", "Charles looks out over the balcony, watching Ana run out to the water. He throws his clothes off the balcony. They land in Lane's living room.* " In light of her loss and loneliness, Lane powerlessly *"comes across Charles' sweater, she breathes it in,"* and *"Lane sits with Charles's sweater in her hands" (*Ruhl, 2006, pp.132-137) Ruhl possesses magical realist techniques to heighten the sense of whimsy, and the drama ends in hopeful mirth rather than devastating silence (Al-Shamma, 2014, p.38).

Ruhl, portrays Lane's tremendous pain and loss in a moving way through these incredibly sensitive and affective non-verbal communication movements. Lane's audience feels pity for her and sympathizes with her. Then she erupts in a rage when she sees her sister vacuuming her living room. She yells in a loud, high-pitched tone, saying: "I DON'T WANT ANYTHING IN MY HOUSE TO BE CLEAN EVER AGAIN!" (Ruhl, 2006, p.38). Cleaning Lane's house becomes a metaphor for expressing her inner thoughts. Dealing with her inner condition is far more essential to her than dealing with the mess in her house. Cleaning her house has lost its significance. Her mind is a complex mix of confusion and devastation. She is enraged, perplexed, upset, and dejected. Her tone

of voice and body language express her anguish and pain. Observing the characters' speeches in the play in various situations and emotions reveals that Ruhl masters the use of voice and vocal techniques.

Consequently, Lane has finally reached the fifth and final stage of her grief, "acceptance" before the play ends. She accepts the fact that she has suffered a setback. She realizes she will never see her husband again. She also admits that Ana has a zeal for life and personality traits that she lacks and that Charles adores Ana in a way that he never adores her. She cries saying to Ana: "Okay! I hate you! You – glow – with some kind of – thing – I can't acquire that – this thing – sort of – glows off you" (Ruhl, 2006, p.151)

Lane has gone through a period of emotional development. Her conversation conveys her defeat and acceptance of her husband's loss. She sees Ana as superior to her as a female since she possesses attributes that Lane lacks. She is captivating and bright. She is a perfect match for everyone and can be their "soul mate." Lane believes Charles looked at her "with admiration" when they first met. When he saw Ana, though, he looked at her "with affection" (Ruhl, 2006, p.155). And there is a big distinction between these two looks. Lane, undergoes the five stages of grief as a reaction to this heartbreaking loss. The technique of magical realism accompanies every stage of her grief representing and symbolizing her psychological state and her sad feelings.

In acceptance, the griever eventually comes to accept the loss and learns to live with it after experiencing depression and mourning. The griever will never be completely satisfied with the loss, no matter how happy they are. Rather, the acceptance stage is devoid of emotions. It is a peaceful stage. The griever can finally rest after the exhausting struggle of the first four stages (Kubler Ross and Kessler, 2005, p.43). Thus, Lane is now aware of her husband's affection for Ana and his preference for her. Out of Lane's acceptance of the loss and her self-adaptation, she was stripped of her feelings of jealousy in response to the feelings of humanity towards Ana when she found her suffering alone. Lane affected by the development of Ana's illness, seeing her as a human in need, not as her husband's beloved. Then, Lane elevated to the highest level of acceptance of what fate sent her. Consequently, Lane decides to take Ana to live with her in her house as Ana is in a critical case of her disease, providing her psychological and medical support. Lane has requested Virginia and Matilde to care for Ana while she is at work, and they have agreed to do so. As a result, Lane not only accepts Ana's presence in her marital life, but she also agrees to be accountable for her. Lane has triumphed over her crisis.

Subsequently, Ana's entire possessions are relocated into Lane's living room, indicating Lane's complete acceptance of Ana and her entire possessions. Ana owns only a few pieces of furniture and a bowl with an old fish in it. She also has a bag of clothes and a bag of apples (alluding to the symbolic importance of apples as previously described). Lane's living room contains all of these things. As if Ruhl, is implying through such a highly sensitive scene that people's crisis and bereavement experiences may free their hearts from evil feelings, making them feel for those who are grieving or in pain, regardless of who they are. Ruhl's ability to weave together the jagged edges of conflicting lives, finding common ground between rivals for the same man or simply people with discordant attitudes toward life, makes Ruhl's play as rewarding humanistically as it is theatrically. What makes the play so fulfilling is that, beyond the oddities, subtle intellect, and smart aphorisms, there is a deep feeling for women's camaraderie, practicality, and emotional resilience.

In view of Lane's acceptance, when Virginia makes ice cream, Lane shares the ice cream with Ana (after a brief hesitation), and then both of them eat from the same container as do Virginia and Matilde, that is described in the stage direction: *"Matilde and Virginia come back with spoons and ice cream. After a moment of hesitation, Lane takes a spoon from Virginia. They all eat ice cream out of the same container*" (Ruhl, 2006, pp.162-163). When Ana grows feverish, Lane gets a blanket and sits alone "guarding" her while she sleeps. Ruhl characterizes this as: *"Lane sits on the floor and watches Ana sleep. She guards her the way a dog would guard a rival dog, if her rival were sick*" (Ruhl, 2006, p.168). Lane's posture on the floor and the analogy of this deep stage direction reveal her suspense, professional conscience, and acceptance of her loss. She has adapted and abandoned her resistance.

In the case of Charles, he is described as *"a sympathetic surgeon under his white coat, he is childlike."* He is also *"in his fifties.*" (Ruhl, 2006, p.24). All of these characteristics assist the audience as well as the readers in understanding his nature and his behaver. Charles' unexpected attraction to Ana can be explained in part by his "midlife crisis" or "andropause" (Wilbur, 2012, p. 11). Lane has observed an odd change in Charles' demeanor as he goes apple picking with Ana. Act II begins with a realistic scene in the same living room of Lane and Charles' house from act I. This room has been transformed into an operating room in a hospital where Charles performs surgery on Ana. While the two performers playing the characters of Charles and Ana sing a medieval love ballad about being medically cured by love. As a result, two distinct locations (the living room and the operating room) are juxtaposed at the same time. Instead of the characters' minds, past memories are reacted on stage.

As a consequence, a surgical operation scene is transformed into a love tango scene of singing and dancing. Ana hints that she feels as if Charles has left "his soul" inside her (Ruhl, 2006, p.97). They re-act their first meeting. Charles falls in love with Ana unexpectedly, quickly, and deeply. Her love rapidly alters his life and personality. Charles confesses through a soliloquy, "When I met Ana, I knew: I loved her to the point of invention," (Ruhl, 2006, p.95). He keeps saying Ana's name over and over when he meets her in the hospital: "Ana, Ana, Ana, Ana…your name goes backwards and forwards…I love you…" (Ruhl, 2006, p.99). He says to Lane, Virginia, and Matilde, "Ana has been in my genetic code," (Ruhl, 2006, p.108).

This love between Charles and Ana, stand as a magical gate for Ana to start a new life after being sick for a long time and as being also old woman. Therefore, this love adds a lot to her and comes as a mean to accept the idea of going on in life, as she says in her soliloquy: "with Charles, it was like— BLAM! My mind was going," (Ruhl, 2006, p.96).

Currents of desire turn directions in *The Clean House* as a man leaves his wife for a mistress, whose serious condition he must then confront. Matilde informs Lane that: "Charles doesn't go to work. He cancels half his patients. He wants to spend all his time with Ana" (Ruhl, 2006, p.131). It turns into a convoluted love story. Dr. Charles, with all his virtues, is in love with an elderly Argentinean Jewish widow. His demeanor is completely different. Lane is taken aback by what she hears while Matilde describing the reaction of Charles when Ana refuses to go to hospital: "Charles yells and throws things at the wall" (Ruhl, 2006, p.130). Charles even modifies his religious views for Ana, disregards his work, and shows little concern for his patients! As a result, the shock of Ana's approaching death or loss will be devastating. Nonetheless, Ruhl handles death in *The Clean House* with an elegance touch than in her other grief works (Al-Shamma, 2014, p.38).

Therefore, Charles denies totally the perception that Ana is dying. He denies this idea, saying: "No. You're not going to die. I won't let you die" (Ruhl, 2006, p.98). He is astounded to learn that her disease is potentially lethal and that her situation is critical. Charles undergoes denial as the first stage of his mourning. However, he quickly moves to the second stage. He exploded in outbursts of anger, when Ana refuses to "take any medicine" or return to the hospital, he "yells and throws things at the wall" (Ruhl, 2006, p.130). When Lane hears this from Matilde, she wonders and objects, saying, "Charles never yells" (Ruhl, 2006, p.130). But nonetheless, Matilde ensures that he has done "Oh, he yells. They broke all the condiments and spices yesterday. There was this one yellow spice— it got in their hair and on their faces until they were all yellow" (Ruhl, 2006, p.130). Charles' anger is aimed at inanimate objects. When Matilde tells Lane this, a magical realistic scene appears to accompany Charles' rage. *"A spice jar goes flying from the balcony. A cloud of yellow spice lands in Lane's living room"* (Ruhl, 2006, p.130).

However, Charles must choose between defying and defeating Ana's disease and striking a bargain. In a situational irony, or a gap between what is expected and what is delivered, Charles travels to Alaska "to chop down a yew tree for Ana," believing he can "invent a new medicine" for her (Ruhl, 2006, p.144). He wants to grow it in her backyard so she can smell it. How can a highly qualified surgeon like him think that way, even if he is motivated by love, feelings of helplessness, and a desire to bargain. Charles appears in the background of the stage, looking for the tree in a freezing wind, whereas Matilde narrates to Virginia and Lane in the latter's living room. The playwright

combines real-world settings such as Lane's living room and Ana's balcony with magically realistic scenes such as Charles' search for and chopping of the yew tree in Alaska. He emerges wearing " a heavy parka" and carrying " a pick axe" as he walks through the snow in search of a yew tree (Ruhl, 2006, pp.144-148).

After cutting down the yew tree, Charles believes he has fulfilled his goal, or "his bargain," and he sends Ana a telegram. He tells her cheerfully that he has cut down the tree but that he would like to learn how to fly a plane because he cannot get on a plane with the tree. He would like her to wait for him saying, "Dear Ana. Stop. Have cut down tree. Stop. Cannot get on plane with tree. Stop. Must learn to fly plane. Stop. Wait for me. Stop. Your beloved, Charles" (Ruhl, 2006, p.160). He reappears in the background of Lane's living room in a magical realistic scene, even though he is supposed to be in Alaska. As in Alaska, it snows inside the room. He leaves as soon as Ana reads the telegram. Ruhl depicts Charles' bargaining stage with some touching magical realistic scenes. Thus, the audience sympathizes with the helpless, sad Charles. Despite this, all of his bargaining trials failed.

Ana's condition deteriorates sadly. She is unable to bear the pain. She begs Matilde to kill her with a joke. Matilde always tells her jokes in Portuguese as the work is a trilingual play (English, Portuguese, and Spanish). Matilde does not interpret them. Although Matilde's joking in the play is intended to provide comic relief, it is now used as a killing weapon. Matilde's mother and Ana both die laughing as a result of a joke. Although the comic relief in the play is not related to light-hearted scenes that lessen the tension of the action all the time but is also tied to sad ones that increase the grief of the characters. Matilde's parents were the funniest couple in Brazil. However, her mother died laughing as a result of her father's joke; then, unable to live without her, he shot himself. Despite her depression and mourning, Matilde searches for the perfect deadly joke, which signifies bereavement and succession. Matilde possesses and puts to proper use the power that her father possessed but was unable to control. The perfect joke thus acts as an incantation might in a shamanic ritual, as a means of gathering and focusing otherworldly power. The magical realist style of the play provides a shamanistic interpretation of Matilde's joke as a shamanic gateway linking ordinary life and a magical realm of spirits in an afterlife.

Despite this, Matilde reluctantly agrees to Ana's request to perform euthanasia on her. Ana stands up because she chooses to die standing. "Everyone's always dying lying down. I want to die standing up," Says Ana (Ruhl, 2006, p.170). She is paying attention to Matilde's joke. No one in the audience can hear the joke, as if Ruhl only wanted them to understand its effect. Ana collapses and dies from laughing. This scene may contain an autobiographical hint. The playwright shows that the "battle of her father with cancer" and his death, as she was twenty, was the most powerful experience of her life. They were "extremely close." Ruhl adds, "He died like a prince." "I don't know if that was educational, but it was influential—in the moral and spiritual sense," (Dias and Prithi, 2010, p. 5). However, "he made jokes up until the last minute" the matter that would be effective in creating a distance from suffering (Renner, 2007, p.6). As shown in the play, jokes are associated with grief and loss in Ruhl's mind.

In addition, Lane and Virginia make their way into the living room. Lane examines Ana and diagnoses her death as the playwright describes: *"Lane and Virginia rush in. Lane checks Ana's pulse. The women look at one another"* (Ruhl, 2006, p. 172). With Virginia's assistance, Lane washes Ana's dead body. This demonstrates Lane's humanity and tolerance. It also implies that she has fully recovered from her grief. She did not only look after Ana when she was sick, but she also washed her body when she died.

Finally, Charles appears, carrying the yew tree, "sweating and breathing heavily" after "carrying his tree great distances." However, it is too late; Ana has passed away. "He collapses over her body," (Ruhl, 2006, p.173-175). As a fourth stage of his grief, he experiences complete depression and mental breakdown.

Cengage Learning Gale shows that Ruhl's *The Clean House* demonstrates that it is "a ritual for grief and loss that allows the audience to participate, but within Ruhl's characteristic mood of lightness

and humor that leads to acceptance" (2018, p. 4). Both of the play's protagonists mourn and endure the loss of loved ones; "so it's true, all is said and done, grief is the price we pay for love" (Bucchianeri, 2018, p. 1). Ruhl cleverly depicts their grief with magical realistic scenes.

Moreover, a desire rises up again out of reconciliation between Charles and Lane. The desire in Sarah Ruhl's plays is not a "wanting" but a heightened quasi theological state of longing that is attuning oneself to the other, allowing the other to be him or herself (Muse,2018,p.97). When Charles came back from Alaska, Lane welcomed him. *"Lane kisses Charles on the forehead*," (Ruhl, 2006, p.174). Then he collapses between her arms and asks her to hold the tree. *"Lane nods. Lane holds the tree. "* (Ruhl, 2006, p.174) they gazed into each other's eyes, and their eyes filled with desire.

The final stage of both Lane and Charles grief is acceptance. They are coping with their losses, though Lane has cured and coped with his loss faster than Charles. It is clear that she is psychologically stronger than him and has a more stable demeanor. Although the play contains some grief, the overall effect is one of lightness and release. Ruhl, as a playwright, has progressed from the fourth to the fifth stage of bereavement, from despair to adjustment and even acceptance. (Al-Shamma, 2014, p.38).

Ana shows total surrender and acceptance of her destiny when her health deteriorates. As Ana realizes she is dying, she rejects treatment in a hospital choosing instead to accept the inevitability of death because, as she says: "I don't want a relationship with a disease. I want to have a relationship with death" (Ruhl, 2006, p.159). The matter that pushes Charles to distraction. He heads off to Alaska in despair, hoping to retrieve a yew tree whose smell, he believes, could potentially heal Ana. Once preserved from abstraction, such an experience is tinged with mortality. When Ana says she wants to have "a relationship with death," she gets a love relationship that is aware of her and each of the characters' mortality. A flaw in "love" is revealed here: it cannot accept death. When Ana's condition deteriorates, Charles flees. "I want him to be a nurse, and he wants to be an explorer," she laments (Ruhl, 2006, p.161).

Matilde and Virginia undergo the fourth stage of their grief, which is depression, thereby setting in experience a series of events that gradually support them in elevating their emotions to accept their loss and cope with their grief. Concerning Matilde, in her second monologue, she tells the audience that she is in mourning for her parents: "I wear black because I am in mourning. My mother died last year," (Ruhl, 2006, p.34).

A perfect joke, which her father spent a year making up, was the murder weapon. Matilde's mother does not die the way we might traditionally understand death. As she laughs, she undergoes one of Ruhl's signature transformations, metaphorically dissolving (as in the phrase "to dissolve into laughter"), and thus shamanically moving from the living world to the world of spirits.

Moreover, Matilde's crisis makes her locked up in her loss and grief over her parents. Since she sees her parents in magical realistic scenes every once in a while on stage, through such scenes Ruhl embodies Matilde's deep feelings of sadness and loss, as well as transfer to the audience the realistic depth of those feelings. As it is shown when Matilde tries to reflect her emotions to the audience as she recalls her parents during cleaning: "Matilde *stops cleaning.* This is how I imagine my parents.They are dancing. *Matilde longs for the.* " (Ruhl, 2006, p.39).

Matilde still grieves for her parents. She is lost, flitting between the real and imagined, tracing her parents in the hope of seeing or hearing them. Matilde's parents are poised between reality and imagination, for they can see Matilde and the audience can see them as Matilde watches them and, as the stage direction indicates, *"They blow kisses to Matilde. Matilde waves back"* (Ruhl, 2006, p.39). The scene implies that the bond between parents and children endures after death.

When Charles and Ana first appear, the audience immediately notices that their roles as Matilde's parents have been double-cast. Ruhl writes in her introductory remarks: "It is important that Ana and Charles play Matilde's mother and father," (Ruhl, 2006, p.27). Charles and Ana's love is reminiscent of Matilde's parents' love. For Matilde, their relationship is defined by her parents' love and death;

Charles and Ana are like a palimpsest through which her parents can appear, and thus Matilde stands as a circle from the dead to the living and back again.

Matilde's father feels guilty as a symptoms of denial, the first stage of grief, as he was the reason behind his wife's death when tells her a joke so this lead him to depression, the fourth stage, instantaneously. Out of his shock and depression, he committed a suicide.

On the other hand, Matilde believes in the idea that a joke has the ability to spiritually cleanse the soul and mind of all impurities that weigh on it. As she tells Virginia, "A good joke cleans your insides out. If I don't laugh for a week, I feel dirty. I feel dirty now, like my insides are rotting" (Ruhl, 2006, p. 56).

Then eventually, with the help of Virginia and Ana, Matilde is able to get over her grief when she agrees to Virginia's deal to clean Lane's house instead of Matilde, freeing Matilde to think of witty jokes. Matilde's acceptance stage is developed and ingrained when she moves to Ana's house, becoming more adjusted to her loss while enjoying spiritual peace. The fruit obtains an increased layer of meaning in the next scene, as Ana and Matilde sit on the balcony surrounded by apples so plentiful that they will never be able to eat them all. The apples now embody more than a bucolic afternoon, for they have become tangible props that evoke sensual pleasure, plenty, and satisfaction. Rashly, Matilde tends to suggest, "We could take one bite of each, and if it's not a really, really good apple, we can throw it into the sea" (Ruhl, 2006, p.123). Their interaction with the apples indicates that they act out of impulse and desire, finding plenitude and joy in life. Since the characters bite into the apples, the audience's senses are involved, and they enjoy sharing in the sensory-driven contentment of the balcony. The fateful experiences and circumstances that people go through in their lives make them search for the pleasure that is responsible for determining their destiny under the conviction of not adhering to the laws of the material and physical world, looking only for what makes them adapt to coexist with this world.

In view of her content and stability, Matilde admitted, "I made up eighty-four new jokes since I started working for you. I only made up one at the other house. It was a good one though. Sometimes you have to suffer for the really good ones" (Ruhl, 2006, p.123). Matilde nevertheless remains; dressed in black mourning garb throughout the play, Matilde constantly readies herself for the perfect joke, the core of her true pursuit and passion, which she ultimately discovers and tells to kill Ana in an act of mercy: "ANA: I would like you to kill me with a joke," (Ruhl, 2006, p. 166). The scene implies that Matilde concedes that in order to experience true love, people must recognize that all close relationships demand acknowledgment of death or, more broadly, separation. However, it is precisely and paradoxically the characters' acceptance of these barriers to fullness that enables them to love completely.

Acceptance in grief does not imply abandonment or defeatism in this context, but rather care and wisdom. Matilde uses "weird" methods to keep her parents' deaths in perspective and maintain emotional distance from them. For instance, she attempts to visualize her parents' joyful moments and make up new jokes, recalling her late mother's advice: "in order to tell a good joke, you have to believe that your problems are very small and that the world is very big," (Ruhl, 2006, p.55). She does not merely accept her loss. She disrupts her own sadness with estrangement strategies such as humor. Thus, she does not only represent a distinctive attitude of acceptance for herself but also provides a suitable reference point for the peculiar bereavement rehearsal that Ruhl produces for the audience.

Turning to Virginia, Lane's sister she reflects the isolation and loneliness of modern existence. Her life is aimless without a job or a community. She suffers from low self-confidence and depression due to her husband's neglect. So, she compares her husband to a piece of furniture. Thus, the play focuses on the complicated intimacies between women. Looking back on her marriage, Virginia admits, with just a little disappointment, "My husband is like a well-placed couch. He takes up the right amount of space" (Ruhl, 2006, p.55).Virginia's husband is thoroughly effective as the resident sofa. Therefore, she sees the quintessence of life in dust, as she says, "If it were not for dust, I think I would die" (Ruhl, 2006, p.31).Virginia finds her consolation in cleaning and order. She defends

cleaning in her soliloquy to the audience saying: "People who give up the privilege of cleaning their own houses—they're mad. How do you know if you've made any progress in life if you don't clean?" (Ruhl, 2006, p.31). She enters the standoff as a privilege and a practice that gives her life direction and meaning.

As much as Matilde dislikes cleaning, Virginia loves it. She enjoys cleaning her own house even though, she assumes, it both clears her head and makes her feel clean, "cleaning my house— makes me feel clean. It clears my head" (Ruhl, 2006, p.44). She proposes a deal to clean her sister's house instead of Matilde because it would fulfill her primary goal. Virginia emerges with immense delight and a feeling of accomplishment from cleaning, exulting in the contentment of converting a toilet from a dirty to a clean state, "Let's start in the bathroom. I love cleaning the toilet. It's so dirty, and then it's so clean!" (Ruhl, 2006, p.51).Virginia's addiction to cleanliness originated from an impulse to impose order on the world. The play contains many humorous lines due to Virginia's concern with cleanliness, but there are also deeper thematic undercurrents that link fear of losing control with cleaning and cleanliness.

Virginia's bond with Lane, her sister, is unable to meet her social needs. Only with Matilde, Virginia is able to establish any kind of deep connection. Together they pass the time as Virginia cleans. Virginia instantly divulges personal information about her life since she is desperate to chat with someone. Furthermore, Virginia's self-perception is rapidly shifting. In an honest moment, she confesses to Matilde: "Since I was twenty-two, my life has gone downhill, and not only have I not done what I wanted to do," (Ruhl, 2006, p.50).

Additionally, Virginia's justification for not wanting children masks a deep dread of losing control. She imagines beautiful children growing up in an ugly world, a matter that creates a deep and huge fear inside her. As she explains to Matilde: "I never thought that the world was quite good enough for children anyway," (Ruhl, 2006, p.49). Virginia's home possessions serve as a substitute for children, ones that are secure in their places as she tucks in the silverware. Virginia says to Matilde:

I have my house cleaned by approximately 3:12 every afternoon. The silverware is gently sleeping in its box. I tuck in the forks, the spoons, the knives. I do not have children. (Ruhl, 2006, p. 48)

Virginia finishes cleaning her own house by mid-afternoon, and this routine gives meaning to her life. She half-jokingly claims that cleaning has saved her from contemplating suicide, which she might do if her days were free. Even her self-confidence is almost fragile or may be virtually non-existent to the point where she cannot enjoy her life. She cannot even laugh at a joke. As is evident in this scene:

> MATILDE: You want to hear a joke?
>
> VIRGINIA: Not really.
>
> VIRGINIA: I don't like my laugh. It's like a wheeze. Someone once told me that. Who was it —my husband? Do you have a husband?
>
> (Ruhl, 2006, p.55)

After Lane vehemently prohibits Virginia from cleaning anymore, Virginia opens herself up to disorder. She contributes to the mess in her sister's living room, creating a gigantic mess. Since it is declared in the stage directions, "Virginia dumps a plant on the ground and the dirt spills onto the floor. She realizes with some surprise that she enjoys this. Virginia makes a giant operatic mess in the living room" (Ruhl, 2006, p.141). Then Virginia, with a sense of fabulous, shouted, "I'M MAKING A MESS!" (Ruhl, 2006, p.142). Making a mess releases pent-up emotions and frees Virginia from her cleaning obsession. Virginia experiences a purging episode of her own that enables her to accept the random, chaotic aspects of life, random trauma, and the way the world works. The material messes that clutter the stage imply that the characters are grappling with deep philosophical issues and questions. As Professor Durham writes, "the externalized mess is more palliative than the false, obsessive cleanliness that existed early in the play" (2013, p.59).

Eventually, the acceptance of chaos and disorder drives Virginia to the acceptance of Ana's death. Virginia assists with washing Ana's body and saying a prayer as her body finally rests in Lane's living room (Ruhl, 2006, p.173). "Virginia weeps" at Ana's farewell (Ruhl, 2006, p.170). Her acceptance of her own lack of control has facilitated an immense attitudinal shift. The characters gather around Ana's body as a community, whilst in the first act, Ruhl establishes the isolation of each of the characters. Death, love, mourning, and humor coexist at the play's final stage with an optimistically and richly blended suggestiveness.

Thus, not all the characters in *The Clean House* experience all of Kubler- Ross' five stages of grief. Lane and Charles go through all five stages, while Matilde and Virginia undergo just two stages, which are; depression and acceptance. For Ana, she passes through only one stage of grief, which is acceptance. In the case of Matilde's father, he goes through denial accompanied by guilt and shock as its main symptoms and depression then committed suicide at once. Most of the characters do not go through these stages in order, as they could swing between them back and forth.

Accordingly, *The Clean House* enacts the changing of characters' emotions as they learn to accept that the world is random and chaotic down to the level of its atoms. Only then can they transform, accepting that the world's impermanence is cause to embrace the magic of every day, even in the face of loss or death. Lane, Charles, Ana, Matilde, and Virginia's personalities shift through the charm of the material stage, enticing audience members and inviting them to share in this joyful transformation. *The Clean House* does not carry a universal sense, and the audience will not all perceive it in the same way, but in particular situations that shape each viewer's experiences and interpretations. However, the audiences as well as the readers of the play are compelled to notice a significant transformation, which implies that nothing, even the soul, is eternal or sublimely reliable. However, once audience or readers acknowledge this reality, they will be liberated from their dread of dying and taught to appreciate every day's joy. *The Clean House* challenges psychological realism through the metamorphosis of the staged world. The characters must undergo a philosophical swerve, learning to accept the chance clashes of life, the pull of desire, and the inevitability of death. The play enables the audience to feel these changes by connecting them to stage elements that are both mundane and loaded with shifting significance, and to experience the freedom from anxiety that comes with accepting the swerves of life and accepting the dissolution of death. The play contained lightness and romance, which made the characters and the audience accept life changes in a more realistic way.

## Conclusion

The study finds in a reflection of real life's complicated emotions and situations as Ruhl blends the distinction between tragedy and comedy. The audience would laugh at something that other members were crying about, and the cast could never anticipate when there might be laughter. While grieving is required to overcome a severe loss, life must continue. The characters of The Clean House have gone through all or some of Kubler Ross' five stages of grief as a result of their unawareness of the chaos of the world, as they do not understand the idea that the world is not governed by a system but rather a world full of coincidences and surprising turns, which made each character faces symptoms of complicated grief after the sudden loss of a close loved one. As result, Lane and Charles experience all five stages during their grieving process. Virginia and Matilde go through two stages of depression and acceptance. Matilde's father passes through two stages denial and depression. While Ana experiences only one stage of grief, which is acceptance.

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