



The Clean House and Other Plays

Sarah Ruhl

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This volume is the first publication of Sarah Ruhl, “a playwright with a unique comic voice, perspective, and sense of theater” (*Variety*), who is fast leaving her mark on the American stage. In the award-winning *Clean House*—a play of uncommon romance and uncommon comedy—a maid who hates cleaning dreams about creating the perfect joke, while a doctor who treats cancer leaves his heart inside one of his patients. This volume also includes *Eurydice*, Ruhl’s reinvention of the tragic Greek tale of love and loss, together with a third play still to be named.

Sarah Ruhl received the prestigious Susan Smith Blackburn Prize in 2004 for her play *The Clean House*, which has been produced at Yale Repertory Theatre in New Haven, Wilma Theatre in Philadelphia, South Coast Repertory Theatre in Costa Mesa, and Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company in Washington, DC. Her play *Eurydice* has been produced at Madison Repertory Theatre and Berkeley Repertory Theatre.

The Clean House and Other Plays Details

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From Reader Review *The Clean House and Other Plays* for online ebook

Adrian Collins says

Rather than being hit or miss for me, I generally have mixed emotions when reading any Sarah Ruhl play. She uses absurdism in a poetic way, which is hard to wrap my head around. My favorite play from this collection is *Eurydice*, which has a beautiful focus on language and relationships. Too often I find Sarah Ruhl's plays to be sort of unreachable. Her characters are difficult to relate to, as most of their actions seem irrational or out of the blue. I'd like to see these plays performed to get a better sense of how to take them in. I can never truly make my mind up about Sarah Ruhl, though.

Johnny says

This is a collection of four Sarah Ruhl plays: *The Clean House*, *Late: A Cowboy Song*, *Melancholy Play*, and *Eurydice*. A playwrighting teacher suggested I read some of her work because he saw some elements of what she tries to do in my own writing, specifically the way she employs elements of the absurd and surreal as though there were perfectly commonplace.

This is definitely difficult work to *read*; I'm sure it's quite a different experience sitting in the audience *watching* these plays. Ruhl writes in a lyrical prose. She literally uses enjambment in the dialogue of her plays, and I'm sure actors and directors have a lot of fun interpreting how this should play out on stage. Each play also comes with minimal stage directions, often characterized more as suggestions for production more than anything else, and the whispers of traditional set design is clearly a motif she plays with in each piece, asking potential producers to take care with minimalism and abstraction in creating the visual elements of the playing areas.

The Clean House is by far the prolific play, as measured by its intricate structure and carefully designed character interplay. Short-listed for the Pulitzer Prize, it delves into life, death, love and divorce, and it makes us question the role humor plays in each. Still, I felt as if I was enjoying the play because it was strange in some esoteric kind of way, a feeling that was compounded for me with each subsequent play in this collection.

I don't think I could ever tackle one of these plays for performance, at least not any time soon, but I reserve the right to make final judgment on any of them until I see someone else's interpretation played out on stage.

Chuck O'Connor says

Sarah Ruhl is beloved by many of my theater artist friends and one can't deny her decorated credentials (e.g. Genius Grant, multiple Pulitzer Finalist, most produced playwright in America 2012) but, this collection infuriated me. I found every play to be "twee". The Urban Dictionary defines "Twee" as, "The opposite of simple, authentic and true: desperately exquisite, contrived to the point of ridiculousness, trying to so hard to be ornately exceptional that you (inadvertently) end up looking like a clown." I don't understand how she is considered an exceptional writer based on this work. It is rife with cardboard characterizations that operate as

bloodless puppets twitching to Ruhl's idiosyncrisies. That these fantasies are elliptical collections of ad hoc oddities, which seem to delight in their internal discontinuities while also failing to convey understandable analogy, is infuriating. She fails to communicate anything other than her fragile sense of self and because of that I don't see the imagery she weaves as more than an eccentric solipsistic exercise. Very disappointing.

Clansmitty says

It's interesting, creative, and well-written. A bit too edgy for my taste.

Ian Johnson says

I was recommended this collection by a playwriting teacher. It is beautiful. I am honored to have been able to read it. Ruhl deals with love, life, and death in ways no other writer can. Her use of absurdism and detailed characterization marry in a way to make the reader/audience find the strange parts of themselves that tick deep within. Thank you to Sarah Ruhl, Eurydice and Red for inspiring me to write, read and be my true self.

Below is a review of each play included in the collection...

The Clean House

The Clean House offers a layered, thought provoking answer to the question of what it means to live a "clean" life. Through the play, a bond between four unlikely women is formed and within each of their characterizations Ruhl further complicates the theme of cleanliness. The play deals with love, marriage, humor, language, religion and death all through asking the reader/viewer the question of "what happens when you muddy someone's perfect, tidy life?"

Late: a cowboy song

I hadn't heard much of this play prior to purchasing this collection, however after reading it I am very intrigued by the mechanisms that operate within it to create a fully realized theatrical universe. The play takes place in Pittsburgh, where a woman, Mary, and her live-in lover, Crick, struggle with love and the passing of time. Mary ultimately has a run-in with a lady cowboy from her past, Red, which turns her concepts of love and time on their head. I would say the crowning achievement of this play is the way Ruhl presents the concept of gender through Mary's lens on romance, as well as motherhood. For this reason it is a must read.

Melancholy Play

Like Late: a cowboy song I had not been exposed to this play prior to reading it. Though I would say it is my least favorite in the collection, it is definitely worth a read, and plays with elements that Ruhl doesn't delve into as much in her other plays. I would say that this play is the most absurd in the collection, as I really needed to glue myself to the lyrical movement of the text to understand all that was being said. In this text, Ruhl examines the feeling of melancholy and the effects it has on a group of people. Through this Ruhl takes the cliché themes surrounding love, and satirizes them in a way that allows the reader to look at them through the activation of a farcical, melodramatic universe.

Eurydice

I am a sucker for mythology so I was quite looking forward to this one. My expectations were met. Eurydice

is one of the most beautiful and delicate pieces of text I've had the privilege of reading. The five stars are for Eurydice, though the other plays are mostly worthy as well. This play does so much well, starting with the relationship between a daughter and her father. Ruhl writes of love often, however the love in this play is stronger than that of any other; it is the roots of a full grown oak tree. In addition to the relationship the style in which the play is written is lyrical, delicate and makes the reader feel as though they are swimming. The use of letter writing is particularly strong, making the final scene a satisfying end to a beautiful journey. The use of the chorus (of stones) is engaging, vibrant, and gives life and characterization to the underworld. I would recommend this play to anyone because the characters, structure and inspiration behind it are filled with so much heart you can't help but tear up by the time it's over.

Mrsculpepper says

well i only actually read the 1st 2 plays. and i enjoyed them.

Dylan Zucati says

Why has it taken me so long to read such a beautiful collection of plays? I've loved Sarah Ruhl's writing from the moment I first heard someone do a Eurydice monologue for an acting workshop. She wrote in her book of essays that she's a poet who retired into playwriting and I think that's a perfect way to describe it. I hope to see one of these plays visualized soon, the unworldly nature of her stage directions makes for an impressive production in my head. If you like magical realism and lower case queer plays about upper case Queer characters, give this collection a read, I promise it will be worth it.

Shannon says

I picked this up from the library to read Eurydice and loved it so much I read the rest. I would LOVE to see Eurydice and Clean House performed.

Diego L. Pedroza says

3.5

Tracey says

I enjoy Sarah Ruhl's lightness, contemplation and whimsy. Melancholy Play was one of the first scripts I ever interacted with years ago, and it was delightful to revisit it now, along with 3 others by Ruhl.

Ann says

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Jilly Hanson says

Melancholy Play and Eurydice are definitely the two plays that I liked best. Eurydice is like, the saddest thing ever and I want to do it so bad. Ugh. So heartbreaking.

Holly says

This book is gorgeous. I have only seen one of the plays (which was incredibly well done) and would like to see the rest, but it's just as good of an experience to read all of the plays side by side. Ruhl's whimsical tone and repeated themes of the cyclical nature of families and the innocence and purity of love make for a somehow simultaneously draining and uplifting reading experience.

The Melancholy Play seemed a little bit out of place in this collection. I still really enjoyed it, but thought that it might have been more effective either on its own or maybe with other plays Ruhl wrote?

Regardless, I cannot get enough of her.

Shayla says

I'm not going to give this book any stars because I actually just read The Clean House and saw Eurydice. The other two plays, Late, a cowboy song and Melancholy Play, I did not read. Goodreads needs to start including single volume plays on here.

Anyway, I thought The Clean House was ok. I always have to get accustomed to the "magic" in her plays. What seems semi-normal or realistic, usually won't be by the end of the play, and I just have to remember that. I think I would be annoyed that I couldn't hear the jokes in English, not to mention, Matilde doesn't seem funny AT ALL. Of course much depends on the actress, and her notes say all the actors must be able to tell a good joke, but I don't even think Ruhl has written much for the actress to work with.

Amene says

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