

THE CLEAN HOUSE

Sarah Ruhl

Concept by: Marcus Chapman

Brief Concept Summary

Sticking with the script, this production will take place in an absurdist Connecticut. This environment is not limited by time or distance, and the production will make good use of the audience's suspension of disbelief as time moves forward and flashes back with no break or indication.

The World of the Play

Elements: **Captions, Language, Dancing, and Separation of Worlds.**

Captions: This production, like the script suggests will utilize captions/subtitles to help guide the audience through the show. However, several of them may be changed from the original, particularly ones like "They Fall in Love"/ "They Fall in Love Some More" / "They Fall in Love Completely" - this will be shown through physicality and not written out for the audience.

Language: Obviously, this refers to the speaking of both Portuguese and Argentinian Spanish. This will need to be studied and properly researched with the help of a native speaker. But also in the delivery of all lines. This particular breed of comedy, this dry deadpan comedy, has a recognizable cadence - think early SNL. Every actor will need to be able to master their character's take on this cadence and where they fit in within the joke.

Dancing: This will not only be incorporated into the parts that the script indicates, but also in the flawless transitions and every time Matilde's parents are on stage they are dancing - at least her mother. Matilde will try to mimic her mother at one point but will lack her spirit, her energy.

Separation of Worlds: Through the set design and stage dressing it is important that Lane's worlds (the living room) and Ana's world (the balcony) be very distinct from each other. Lane's living room should be plain, orderly, but abundant. While Ana's world is bright, happy, even though it's small.

Themes

The primary themes that this production will emphasize are **marriage vs. love** and **belonging**. Naturally, these two go hand-in-hand.

Examples of marriage vs. love:

The first one is the most obvious, which is what Charles and Lane have versus what Charles has with Ana. Charles and Ana call each other “bashert” or “soul mates.” Whereas, when Charles speaks to the audience, he refers to his relationship with Lane as “justice.” Meaning the world made them both so good, that it was right for them to be together, but not written in the stars.

Another example is actually within Virginia’s head. She says she couldn’t be with someone who made her laugh or was too handsome. She sees marriage as a way of life, something that she was meant to do and she did. Just another one of her projects, on the same level as folding the laundry or vacuuming the house.

Examples of belonging:

The character that struggles the most with belonging is definitely Virginia. She struggles with interaction and finds herself cleaning her sister’s home after she cleans her own because she always needs a project. This is her way of trying to find somewhere that she belongs. She doesn’t succeed.

Another is Lane. Despite her being surrounded by her own world, the world she imagined for herself, she doesn’t feel at home in her own house. She certainly doesn’t feel like she belongs in her own relationship. Even in the end, when Matilde kills off Ana with the funniest joke, Lane gets her husband back, gets her maid back, is on assumably good terms with her sister, we never learn if she ever truly turns out happy where she is.

The final example, that is both literal and metaphorical, is Matilde. She finds herself in a different country, doing a job that she doesn’t even enjoy. Of course she lacks a sense of belonging. However, the metaphorical sense is my favorite, I would argue that Matilde does find a sense of belonging in this

play, when she feels as close to her parents as she can, telling the world's funniest joke.

Mood

The mood of this play is **absurdly funny**. I want the audience to laugh and enjoy the dark and odd humor that this play offers and then walk away going, "why was that so serious and yet so funny?" They should laugh the entire time, and never quite know why.

Scene Design Concept

As I mentioned earlier, the set design is the best way we can convey the separation of Lane's and Ana's worlds to the audience. The primary location of this play, the entirely white living room, is Lane's world. It should reflect her personality. The secondary location is the balcony, Ana's world. Similarly, it needs to be a physical projection of Ana's mind.

Lane's World - The Living Room.

White Everything. White couch. White side tables. White Chair. White lamp that projects white light. The audience should see it and think "God I hope no one drinks red wine in that room." There could be accents of silver on some of the furnishings, but nothing flashy. Everything is plain.

She is a doctor and married to a surgeon, they have money, so the quality of their home should reflect this, but it looks unlived in. Lane is uncomfortable at first when she hires Matilde, because she is not used to someone living in her home. It should be arranged in a way that screams "I'm only here for show."

Inspirational Images:



Ana's World - The Balcony.

This doesn't come on until Act Two. She is the complete opposite of Lane. She is Argentinian, she embraces her culture while also being very proud of being in America. She is light. Bubbly. It is important that even though the balcony is small in size it has a large presence. There should be colors, there may even be strips of fabric hanging from the balcony dressing it with even more color than necessary. Plants and flowers, maybe the beams are painted. A stark contrast to the scene down below. Again, this play exists outside of our reality, it doesn't need to make sense and the colors can be abrupt, but should complement each other some way or how.

Inspirational Images:



Other settings -

Blank stage. This is for when characters have those narrative monologues where they speak directly to the audience.

Hospital Bed. This will be a table rolled out from the wings. Needs to be sturdy enough to carry both Ana and hold Charles weight. There will be a cushion held down by stapled sheets on it to give it that round bed-like look, with light blue or light pink pillows and blankets. The colors should be very gentle, but not white. It is important that we isolate white for Lane's world. Ana is even gonna take off his lab coat when they're kissing - symbolizing taking the "white" out of his life.

Costume Design Concept

We will be sticking with Ruhl's original descriptions for each character, with light alterations.

Lane - will always be seen in white. I think it would be great to see her in a white pant suit, when she is not seen in her white lab coat.



Matilde - Black. Simple black clothes that may be offset by a bracelet but only a small pop or two of color.

Virginia - She mentions several times about women cleaning and has traditional tendencies. I'm thinking of a casual summer dress that is not very revealing. Comfortable but traditionally respectable. Color should be gentle and warm.



Woman/Ana - Plays woman and Matilde's mother in the first act and then Ana in the second. Matilde's mother is definitely going to be in some casual Brazilian dress. While Ana starts off in a hospital gown and probably reverts to jeans and a sweater. Comfortable and screams "I'm cool and casual."

Man/Charles - Plays Matilde's father in the first act and Charles in the second. Matilde's father should probably be in a semi-casual suit jacket and khakis. Charles should be wearing khakis, a button up, a tie, and a white lab coat. Then later a thick parka and the whole Alaskan-hiking get up.

