Staging Disability in John Belluso's *The Rules of Charity* (2007)

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Abstract:

Since the 1990s, disability studies have received increasing attention. These studies denote the various ways people understand, explain, and respond to disability. Several theories or models have emerged over time, each with different assumptions about what disability is and how society should deal with it. This research aims to analyze John Belluso's *The Rules of Charity* (2007) from a socio-psychological perspective. Rooted in the literary disability theory, the paper incorporates elements of both the psychoanalytical and the family systems theories. It investigates the effects of disability on family relationships and dynamics as well as the societal challenges faced by disabled individuals. The paper also highlights the significant psychological consequences of disability on parent-child interactions in Belluso's play. Key sources of conflict in the relationship between adult children and their disabled parents stem from long-term interdependence and caregiving responsibilities. Caring for a disabled parent carries substantial emotional, physical, and often financial burdens, impacting on the caregiver's wellbeing and interpersonal relationships.

Keywords: Disability - John Belluso -*The Rules of Charity* - psychological consequences - family dynamics.

تجسيد الاعاقة فى مسرحية "*قواعد الاحسان*" لجون بيلوزو (2007)

المستخلص:

منذ تسعينيات القرن الماضي، حظيت دراسات الإعاقة باهتمام متزايد, وتشير هذه الدراسات إلى الطرق المختلفة التي يفهم بها الناس الإعاقة ويشرحونها ويتعاملون معها. وقد ظهرت على مر الزمن عدة نظريات أو نماذج، لكل منها افتراضات مختلفة حول ماهية الإعاقة وكيف يجب على المجتمع التعامل معها. يهدف هذا البحث إلى تحليل مسرحية "*قواعد الإحسان*" (2007) لجون بيلوزو من منظور اجتماعي-نفسي. وانطلاقًا من نظرية الإعاقة الأدبية، يدمج هذا البحث عناصر من كل من النظرية التحليلية النفسية ونظرية النظم الأسرية. ويتناول البحث تأثير الإعاقة على العلاقات الأسرية والديناميكيات العائلية، بالإضافة إلى التحديات الاجتماعية التي يواجهها الأفراد ذوو الإعاقة. كما يُبرز البحث العواقب النفسية الكبيرة للإعاقة على تفاعلات الوالدين مع أبنائهم في مسرحية بيلوزو. وتتمثل أبرز مصادر الصراع في العلاقة بين الأبناء البالغين وآبائهم من ذوي الإعاقة في الاعتماد المتبادل طويل الأمد ومسؤوليات الرعاية. إذ إن رعاية أحد الوالدين من ذوي الإعاقة تنطوي على أعباء عاطفية وجسدية، وغالبًا مالية أيضًا، مما يؤثر على صحة مقدم الرعاية وعلاقاته الاجتماعية .

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإعاقة - جون بيلوزو - *قواعد الإحسان* - العواقب النفسية - الديناميكيات العائلية

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Introduction:

Disability is described by the World Health Organization (WHO) as "an integrative concept that represents the negative interaction between an individual's health conditions and personal and environmental contextual factors" (O'Young,et.al.,2019,p.697). Physical, intellectual, mental, sensory, or any other limitation that negatively affects one's ability to participate in activities might be considered a disability. Disability can also be acquired or congenital, apparent or invisible, temporary or permanent. People with disabilities have been ignored, ostracized, stigmatized, and oppressed in societies despite their enormous numbers. Their access to housing, work, education, healthcare, and transportation is restricted. People with disabilities are therefore unable to fully participate in society due to disability barriers.

Since the 1990s, disability studies have received increasing attention. These studies delve deep into the various ways people understand, explain, and respond to disability. Several theories or models have emerged over time, each with different assumptions about what disability is and how society should deal with it. Here are the main ones: The Medical Model of Disability views disability as a defect or deficiency within the individual. It is largely grounded in biomedical science, where disability is seen as a result of a physical, mental, or sensory impairment that needs to be treated or cured. The Social Model of Disability developed in the 1970s and 1980s by disabled activists who argue that disability is not caused by impairment, but by society's failure to accommodate difference. The focus is on barriers in the environment—physical, institutional, and attitudinal. The Biopsychosocial Model blends biological, psychological, and social factors to offer a more holistic understanding of disability. It acknowledges the medical reality of impairments but stresses that context and environment shape the disability experience. Last but not least, the cultural model explores how disability is constructed and represented in language, media, art, and literature. It focuses on narratives and symbols that shape public attitudes.

Disability studies explore disability within medical, social, cultural, political, and ethical frameworks. According to Katsarova (2021), in recent decades, disability policies have increasingly emphasized the social model of disability and the concept of independent living. These frameworks have significantly influenced political discourse on disability at both national and international levels. Nonetheless, the notion of 'care' remains influential, particularly in everyday practices and approaches informed by the ethics of care (p.31). Berger (2013) emphasizes the need to view disability as a social issue, stating that disability studies look for revealing the ideology of ableism, to dismantle it, and to expose it for everyone to recognize (p.15). Consequently, disability studies confront the ideas of ableism and normalcy that limit the experiences of individuals with disabilities.

Psychosocial disabilities refer to a variety of cerebral health conditions that significantly influence an individual's capacity to function in everyday life and participate fully in society. Across Europe, individuals with these disorders face systemic difficulties, including inadequate support services, stigma, and limited healthcare access (Martinelli, 2025). Sang, K.et al. (2021) believe that the persistent underrepresentation of disabled individuals in employment, particularly within academia and the arts, underscores systemic societal disparities. Despite their advocacy and resilience, these individuals often face barriers that hinder their full participation and recognition in their respective fields. Such challenges not only limit opportunities for talented scholars and artists but also reflect broader issues of inequality and exclusion (p.15). For example, according to the UK government's Family Resources Survey, external, 22% of the population has a disability. In addition, the Creative Diversity Network, external, an association that aims at escalating diversity and inclusion across the UK broadcasting industry circulated a report at 2022 that proposes that it will take until 2041 for people with disability to be appropriately represented in television, both on and off screen, if matters continue at the current rate of progress (Ryan, 2023).

The cultural disability studies have led to the development of literary disability theory, which critically examines how disability is depicted in literature. Numerous critics have observed that disabled characters are often presented as stereotypes, metaphors, or symbols. Hall (2016) points out that "disability perspectives can transform understandings of structure, genre and narrative form. These perspectives can destabilize established theoretical paradigms in literary criticism and provide a fresh, often provocative approach to analyzing literary texts" (p.1).

Approaching literature through the lens of disability theory enhances our critical understanding of how disabled figures are represented. According to Davis (1999), the evolution of literary disability studies occurs in three key phases. The first phase analyzes texts to highlight negative portrayals of disabled characters. The second phase seeks out positive representations. The current phase focuses on the very nature of representation itself (p.249). Thus, literature has the potential to change negative portrayals of disabled individuals across various genres. Thus, literary disability theory investigates these harmful and misleading representations while also challenging narrative conventions that limit the lived experiences of disabled people.

Many playwrights aim to create a new form of theatre focused on individuals with disabilities, often referred to as Disability Theatre. This type of theatre seeks to change how dramatists represent disability on stage, moving away from traditional metaphorical interpretations. Johnston (2016) describes disability theatre as “one branch of a wider international disability arts and culture movement which seeks to address and redress the very idea of disability in the modern arts and, by extension, society” (*Disability theatre,*p.15). One key goal of disability theatre is to provide an authentic portrayal of the lived experiences of disabled individuals. Additionally, Johnston (2012) highlights theatre as an effective platform for artists with disabilities to confront social norms, spark critical discussions, and reimagine what theatre and performance can be (*Stage turns*,p.14).

In their book, *Bodies in commotion: Disability and performance*, Sandhal and Auslander (2005) note that “disabled performers and theatre artists have rejected (traditional) scripts and created works based on their own experiences, challenging both tired narrative conventions and aesthetic practices” (p.4). Traditional representations of disabled individuals in theater often fail to reflect their genuine experiences. In response, the disability theatre serves as a platform for resistance and redefinition. As Fox and Lipkin (2002) assert, it “asks the viewer not just to trouble gender or ability, but the entire matrix of identities constructing – and constricting – our understanding of the normate” (p.7). Through this approach, disability playwrights utilize theater as a political tool to confront and dismantle narratives that position disability as abnormal or a deviation from the norm.

While critics of disability theatre recognize the metaphorical use of disability in many plays, they do not dismiss it entirely. They believe that playwrights can create new metaphors that resonate more closely with the lived experiences of disabled individuals. Additionally, Lewis (2006) identifies two primary focuses within disability theatre: one that highlights disability as a social construct, and another that "celebrates the difference of the disability experience, what is called "disability culture" or "disability cool" in the disability community" (p.102). In this way, disability theatre promotes disability rights, challenges dramatic stereotypes, questions notions of normalcy and ableism, and authentically represents the lived experiences of disabled people.

John Belluso (1969–2006) is an American playwright whose works primarily focused on disability. He lived with Camurati-Engelmann disease, a non-fatal bone disorder that affects muscle strength, and had been in a wheelchair since he was 13. Belluso's experiences as a disabled individual significantly influenced both his daily life and his writing. He viewed his disability as a source of power and potential, seeing it as an integral part of his identity.

As part of a new generation of disabled playwrights, Belluso established the Project of Other Voices in 1981, a professional lab for theatre artists with disabilities. The project aimed to achieve two main goals: to provide training and employment opportunities for disabled individuals in theatre, and to transform the representation of disabled characters on stage. It works to replace stereotypical portrayals of impairment, isolation, and loss with narratives of shared history, identity, and community. Additionally, it highlights the social construction of disability identity and actively challenges prejudice and discrimination against people with disabilities.

Family systems theory, developed by Murray Bowen, is a foundational concept in family therapy. Bowen (2004) views the family as a living, open system where members both influence and are influenced by one another. He believes that families are complex, dynamic, and emotional units with distinct patterns of communication, interaction, independence, connection, and adaptation to stress (*Family therapy*,p.154-155).

Bowen (1966) outlines eight interconnected concepts that shape family functioning: differentiation of self, triangles, emotional cutoff, nuclear family emotional system, sibling position, multigenerational transmission process, family projection process, and the emotional process in society (The use of family theory,p.350-368). By understanding these concepts, individuals can identify patterns in their development and relationships, helping them to function as mature and psychologically healthy people with lower levels of anxiety.

Family systems theory and family dynamics are closely linked, as both focus on interactions among family members. Danielsbacka (2016) defines family dynamics as “the interaction between family members as well as varying relationships within a family,” encompassing both positive and negative emotions and interactions, such as support and conflict (p.12). Thus, family dynamics describe the roles, responsibilities, and development of family members, with each family having its own unique set of dynamics that can be either positive or negative, constructive or harmful.

Changes in any family member's abilities, such as chronic illness or disability, significantly impact the entire family and its dynamics. The presence of a disabled member can disrupt normal family interactions. Acceptance and understanding of the needs and challenges faced by the disabled individual can influence family dynamics positively. Families that share a mutual understanding and positive perspectives on disability tend to exhibit greater resilience and better adjustment. Recognizing the demands placed on families by disabled members can lead to positive changes in family dynamics and the implementation of effective coping strategies for caregiving and daily responsibilities.

Caregiving itself is marked by a range of positive and negative emotions toward a family member with a physical disability. Caring for a disabled parent carries substantial implications for interpersonal relationships and the psychological and physical well-being of the caregiver, who often faces emotional, physical, and financial stresses. This situation can result in conflicting feelings, including love, anger, sympathy, and hostility toward the disabled parent.

Belluso’s play *The Rules of charity* (2007) focuses on Monty, who has cerebral palsy. This condition is primarily caused by brain damage that occurs before birth or from a lack of oxygen during delivery. It is an ailment mainly due to brain damage occurring before birth, or due to deficiency of oxygen during birth, associated with reduced coordination of muscular activities, impaired speech, hearing and sight, and sometimes mental impairment. Cerebral palsy often comes with additional challenges related to perception, sensation, cognition, and communication, making it a chronic condition that significantly affects those who have it. Additionally, individuals with cerebral palsy may experience issues such as epilepsy, muscle weakness, stiffness, slowness, tremors, balance difficulties, and sleeping anxiety (Rethlefsen, et al.,2010,p.458-461).

Disability carries significant psychological implications that can be explored through Psychoanalysis theory, which was established by Sigmund Freud in the late 19th century. Freud emphasizes the role of ambivalence in the development of this theory. In his work *Totem and* *taboo* (2004), he defines ambivalence as "the simultaneous existence of love and hate toward the same object" (p.82). He argues that all close relationships are marked by this sense of ambivalence, where feelings of love and passion can coexist with underlying negative emotions. He also views this blend of love and hate as inherent to human nature. In his article "Instincts and their vicissitudes" (1915), Freud notes that hate predates love, emerging from self-preservative instincts. Hate initially reflects the ego's response to unwelcome external stimuli, allowing the sexual and ego instincts to develop an opposition similar to that of love and hate (p.1038).

According to Bozhenko (2011), Freud suggests that both love and hate coexist in personal relationships and highlights ambivalence as a crucial factor in adult-parent dynamics. Intergenerational relationships can reflect these ambivalent feelings. Some studies report positive sentiments in adult child-parent relationships, while others focus on their ambivalent aspects (p.1626). Parents and children may navigate their mix of negative and positive emotions by recalling their fundamental love for one another. However, these conflicting feelings are retained in their memories, resulting in a persistent blend of emotions and behaviors.

Analysis:

Belluso's *The Rules of charity* explores the complex and ambivalent relationship between a disabled father and his daughter, highlighting their struggles with feelings of anger, hatred, and resentment. The narrative illustrates scenarios where disabled parents rely on their adult children for care and support, leading to significant contradictions in their relationships. The primary source of tension between adult children and their disabled parents stems from their long-term interdependence and the responsibilities of caregiving.

The play begins with a jarring and unsettling moment where Loretta slaps her father. This dramatic opening establishes the complex, contradictory love-hate dynamic between Monty and Loretta. Loretta tells her father, "(C)ruelty is a form of goodness…And I've decided that from this day forward I will use only cruelty in all my dealings with you" (*The Rules of charity*,2007,p.2). The central theme of the play revolves around the duality of love and hate directed toward the same person.

In his paper *"Female sexuality*" (1931), Freud argues that a girl's primary love object is her father, stating that by the end of her development, the father becomes the new love-object (p.228). Loretta makes efforts to care for her father by bathing him, giving him his medication, and handling all the household tasks. She even refuses to place him in a nursing home, describing it as a terrible and repulsive place. She tells Horace, “The state-run, Medicaid nursing homes; they’re horrible. Horrible places. Disgusting. I couldn’t do that to him. And I promised my mother, that I would take care of him” (*Rules*,2007,p.22). However, Loretta acknowledges that she is not like her mother: “I’m nothing like her” (*Rules*,2007,p.30).

Loretta’s care and love for her father are complicated by anger and violence. She struggles to identify with her mother, leading her to feel that she is unable to meet her parents’ expectations. She also believes she disappoints her father, which causes her to think that he hates her: “I think he hates me” (*Rules*,2007,p.22). In reality, Loretta projects her own feelings of hatred onto her father, convinced that he despises her. This suggests that Loretta may be experiencing self-hatred, feeling she is not the ideal daughter that both her family and society expect. She cannot understand the reasons behind her father’s supposed hatred, and her angry attitude toward him reveals her difficulty in fulfilling her duties as a daughter. As a result, Loretta struggles with low self-esteem, feeling inadequate in her role as both a caregiver and a daughter.

Monty also grapples with ambivalent feelings toward Loretta. Traditionally, a father is seen as the provider and protector of the family, offering love and support. However, his disability complicates this role. Monty resents being a burden, and his sense of helplessness clashes with the typical image of a father. Despite this, it is evident that he loves his daughter and recognizes her mixed emotions. At the end of the play, he requests that Loretta read a passage from his journal:

> LORETTA (reading).I had a wife who I did love. I have a daughter who I love so very deeply. And they have shown me that Love’s Power, the Power that Love holds over us, it is the Power, of Contradiction. But I believe that the Contradiction of Love and Hate and Cruelty and Goodness can be resolved. These contradictions can be resolved with a Swallow in the soul. (*Rules*,2007,p.84)

Negative emotions, such as hate and violence, toward individuals with physical disabilities often coexist with positive feelings like love and kindness. Monty realizes that love can be intertwined with hatred and cruelty. The resentment and pain he feels are rooted in his disability. As a father, he knows that Loretta grapples with these conflicting emotions. Consequently, he explains to her that love inherently contains contradictions, suggesting that negative feelings are always part of love.

The relationship between Loretta and Monty is characterized by Loretta as a caregiver to her disabled father, highlighting their love-hate ambivalence. Loretta bears a significant burden, as she has no siblings and has lost her mother. Both she and her father are unemployed, which exacerbates her stress and struggles, manifesting in her interactions with him. This strain is evident in Loretta's feelings of hatred and her violent behavior toward Monty.

> HORACE. May be you hate him?
> LORETTA. What?
> Horace. May be your father doesn't hate you, but may be you hate him? Is that true?
> Beat, she does not answer. (*Rules*,2007,p.48)

Loretta is hesitant to acknowledge her feelings of hatred and anger. It's challenging for her to express anger toward her father, someone she feels she should empathize with. Such feelings of resentment are not typically accepted outside the family and are often viewed as selfishness. This internal conflict between anger and care leads to guilt, which Loretta tries to suppress. These repressed emotions can contribute to depression and other issues, as she reveals to Horace: "I have trouble sleeping, too" (*Rules*,2007,p.21).

Freud suggests that the inability to love, which can lead to hatred, is a key characteristic of melancholia. He describes it as involving "a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, [and] inhibition of all activity" ("Mourning and melancholia",1917,p.243). Loretta's struggle with the capacity to love is evident when she admits to Horace that she harbors a "cold hatred" toward her father.

> LORETTA. … I do hate him. Cold hate. I hate having to take care of him. And it's a cruel thought. But what can I do to stop it? Cold hate, is what I feel. And the strange thing is; I love him, too. How can both of those things exist, together, wrapped up tight like a knot, inside my heart? (*Rules*,2007,p.48-9)

Loretta's father's disability forces her into a parental role for which she is unprepared. This responsibility complicates her ability to make independent life choices, as she must always take her father's needs into account. Daatland and Herlofson (2001) note that "in many instances, the social integration of older individuals comes at the cost of female caregivers, who become socially isolated while performing their caregiving tasks full-time at home" (p.49). This imposed parental role on adult children often leads to feelings of resentment and anger that coexist with their love and care for their parents. Loretta struggles to navigate this internal conflict while also wanting to pursue her own dreams of motherhood. Her inability to achieve this leads her to fake a pregnancy; she stuffs a balloon under her shirt and pretends to be expecting**:**

> HORACE. Why would you do something like this?
> She does not answer.
> HORACE. You don't go out of the house like that do you?
> Beat.
> LORETTA. No. It's a game I play once in a while. It makes me feel like I have, like a feeling of Goodness, growing inside of me. And we can't afford to have a real baby right now. It's just a game I play. Everyone has little games they play. (*Rules*,2007,p.53)

Loretta's dream of becoming a mother is undermined by her challenging circumstances and her role as a caregiver. Nonetheless, she believes that the idea of having a baby provides her life with meaning and a sense of goodness. She attempts to offset her cruelty toward her father by envisioning her motherhood, thinking that being pregnant makes her "glow with goodness" (*Rules*,2007,p.52). This perceived goodness serves as a counterbalance to her violence against Monty.

Monty's disability also significantly affects his relationship with Loretta. He experiences deep frustration in his attempts to assert his independence. In one scene, he resists Loretta's care by throwing himself off the bed**:**

> His face grows dark. He throws himself from the bed and crashes onto the floor. Loretta reenters. She pauses, stares at him on the floor. Fury in her eyes, she SLAPS him across the face.
> LORETTA. I told you to stop throwing yourself onto the floor, stop doing that! Why do you do this? You're driving me crazy!
> She pulls the blanket off the bed, tosses it on him.
> LORETTA. You can sleep on the floor tonight.
> She leaves him there and exits back into the bedroom. (*Rules*,2007,p.30)

Monty objects to the way his daughter treats him. Disabled fathers often face emotions like sadness, shame, anger, or depression due to the loss of independence and the physical reliance on their children. This can lead to shifts in their personality, which may further alter their behavior, creating tension and negativity in their relationships with their adult children.

Monty integrates his impairment into his identity, despite being fully conscious of his status as a disabled person. "[He] transfers into the wheelchair" (*Rules*,2007,p.32) when Paz urges Monty to act out his infirmity so that she can portray it as his only reality in her movie. She wants him to be placed in the wheelchair, which is a stereotypical portrayal of people with physical disabilities that all non-disabled people observe. Thus, by drawing attention to the artifice of disability embodiment in Paz's film, Belluso's play " pushed the disabled body outside of its normal confines by calling attention to the artifice of disability embodiment in Paz's film" (Maclean,2014,p.57).

Furthermore, Paz believes that Monty's infirmity makes his existence terrible. In fact, she limits the experience of handicap to heroic or tragic models. Although the other characters view Monty as one of the two clichés, Belluso's portrayal of him is strong because he avoids letting Monty's disability become an all-encompassing characteristic that only depicts him as either heroic or resentful. As he works to recover his individuality, Monty actually defies these conventional norms.

In Act Two, Loretta tries to convince Monty to sell his journal:

> LORETTA. Yes you will. We need their money.
>
> MONTY. My story, my words – I will never give them to Paz. And I will Never give them to LH. (*Rules*,2007,p.63)

In addition to being a part of his identity, Monty views his memoir as a means of protesting against prejudice. He uses it to establish his own voice and become well-known. As a result, he vehemently opposes offering it to Paz and LH in return for cash. However, because of their dire circumstances, Loretta begs LH for money:

> LORETTA, LH. All we are asking for is a little money; Charity.
>
> MR.MILLICENTE (picking up his fork from the table, staring at Monty as he speaks). Yes, but for Charity to exist, there must always be a Giver and a Receiver; and the rule of Charity is, it is the Giver who decides whether the Receiver is worthy or not. And you poor, stupid, filthy sinners are simply not worthy.
>
> Your story is worthless. It has no value.(*Rules*,2007,p.80)

LH's perspective on Monty's impairment is representative of the majority of non-disabled persons. LH believes that disabled people's lives are not important enough to be represented. He also wants to destroy Monty's memoir since he knows how important it is. The memoir serves as a potent storytelling tool for Monty's story. The memoir represents powerful medium to narrate Monty's story. Kerley (2014) notes that “the creation of disability memoirs…can help counter the negative discourses, challenge language practices, and promote the disability identity” (p.14). Monty is able to feel un-marginalized and un-objectified thanks to the memoir. He develops his own viewpoint, which empowers him and allows him to manage his own image.

It should be mentioned that Loretta and Monty's love-hate relationship leads them to look for love outside of their family. The dynamics between Monty and his daughter, as well as between Monty and his partner LH, reflect a powerful critique of altruism in the context of disability. These relationships expose the often-complicated emotional and moral expectations placed on disabled individuals, particularly within familial and intimate settings. Rather than presenting charity as a purely benevolent or idealistic act, the narrative challenges this notion by revealing its limitations, tensions, and potential for exploitation. Through this lens, the play confronts the audience with a more realistic and unflinching depiction of how disability is navigated in personal relationships—emphasizing that care and love are frequently entangled with obligation, discomfort, and power dynamics. Loretta encounters Horace, a stranger, and becomes attached to him. She only desires kindness and love. She asks Horace:

LORETTA. Just be a darling. To me. Okay?
HORACE. A darling?
LORETTA. Yes. That's what I want. (*Rules*,2007,p.25)

Loretta's desire for love and affection leads her to search for someone who can take the place of her father. However, her conflicted feelings drive her to seek out a partner who closely resembles him.

It's evident that Horace is struggling with numerous issues—he fails job interviews, battles alcoholism, and faces difficulties with sleeping, comprehension, and reading. One could argue that he suffers from an invisible disability, in contrast to Monty's more visible one. Loretta not only becomes emotionally attached to a man who mirrors her father, but she also redirects her unresolved anger toward Horace. As Jain (2015) suggests, "the insecurely attached daughter tends to carry the negative influence of her relationship with her father into the relationship with their romantic partner" (p.80). Loretta continues to push Horace away with relentless criticism:

LORETTA. Go brush your teeth.
He suddenly grabs her face, violently.
HORACE. Don't tell me what to do. Okay? (*Rules*,2007,p.68)

Additionally, the strain of caregiving further complicates Loretta's relationship with Horace, who has now become a part of the family and attempts to take on the responsibility of caring for Monty. However, Horace proves to be ill-suited for this role, and as a result, he reacts with violence. The tension between Loretta and Horace, fueled by anger and resentment, escalates to its peak by the end of the play. In a final act of frustration, Loretta demands that he leave and never return:

LORETTA. Because I hate you. You have made my life even worse than it already was. You fucking cripple.

> HORACE. Oh. This cripple, could kill you, if he wanted to. This cripple, could do such a thing.
>
> LORETTA (stares at him blankly, emotionless). Go to sleep now. (*Rules*,2007,p.67)

Loretta draws a comparison between Horace and her father, which places her in a state of emotional ambivalence. These conflicting emotions significantly impact her relationship with her partner. The responsibility of caregiving, shared by both individuals, exacerbates the strain on their already struggling relationship, ultimately contributing to its dysfunction. As Tough (2017) notes, "The potential imbalance of give and take within caregiving relations may lead to a change in dyad dynamics, distress for both partners, and poorer relationship satisfaction and quality" (p.2043).

It is noted that Monty, feeling overwhelmed by a world that marginalizes him for both his disability and his sexuality, turns to journaling as a form of escape. In contrast to this isolation, Monty also seeks connection through his relationship with LH. Although there are moments of hope, LH ultimately represents the unattainable love Monty yearns for, particularly in relation to his fractured bond with Loretta. However, it becomes evident that LH's intentions are not rooted in genuine affection; rather, he appears more focused on currying favor with his boss by connecting Monty with Paz for a documentary project.

Monty believes that LH harbors deep, passionate feelings for him, but it becomes evident that LH gives little regard to Monty's emotions. LH flatters Monty and deceives him into thinking he is loved, all in service of his own agenda—specifically, convincing Monty to meet Paz. Their relationship reaches a breaking point when Monty proposes they leave and start a new life together. LH's response reveals his true feelings: "I don't want to be a faggot. I don't want to take care of a cripple. I don't want to be a cripple" (*Rules*,2007,p.43).

LH assumes that living with Monty will somehow make him a cripple. Mogendorff (2011) observes that "Impaired bodies tend to be feared as they are associated with loss and suffering: loss of health, prospects, beauty, employment and income. Disability is also associated with vulnerability: people are seen as wounded or damaged and at risk for further impairment or misfortune" (p.16). LH views disability as something akin to a contagious disease, fearing it will somehow infect him. He believes that Monty, as a disabled person, is undeserving of charity or love. This attitude culminates in a violent act at the end of the play, when LH flips Monty's wheelchair, causing him to fall and ultimately leading to his death. This brutal violence reflects the real-world hatred and aversion that people with disabilities often face.

The Rules of charity (2007) illustrates parental grappling with contradictory emotions toward their caregiving children. Disability disrupts the traditional image of the father, creating tensions that undermine the ability to perform parental roles effectively. Fathers with physical impairments often face financial strain and limited resources, which further strain their relationships with adult children. These challenges can lead to stress, repressed anger, and complex emotional dynamics, where fatherly love mixes with feelings of frustration and resentment. In the play, the disabled father Monty experiences ambivalence toward his daughter Loretta, as he feels the weight of being the provider and protector of the family—a role that his disability has now made impossible. Monty despises being a burden and feels that his helplessness contradicts the conventional image of fatherhood. Despite this, he loves his daughter and is aware of her conflicting emotions toward him. He understands that love is often intertwined with hatred and cruelty, and that disability can generate these ambivalent feelings. In this context, negative emotions—such as hate and violence—toward people with physical disabilities are frequently coupled with expressions of sympathy, such as love and kindness.

The ambivalence in the relationship between parents and children intensifies when one of the parents has a disability or a chronic illness. Loretta carries an immense burden, as she has no siblings, her mother is deceased, and both she and her father are unemployed. These combined pressures heighten her stress and emotional turmoil, which are reflected in her strained relationship with Monty. The tension is clear in Loretta's feelings of hatred and her acts of violence toward him. She struggles to admit the depth of her anger, as it feels wrong to direct such emotions toward a father she is expected to empathize with. Anger and resentment are difficult to express, especially when they are not understood or accepted outside the family, where they may be perceived as selfish or inappropriate. The complex mix of anger and care is often followed by guilt, which Loretta suppresses. This internal conflict can lead to further emotional distress, potentially contributing to depression and other mental health issues.

It can be argued that Loretta's hatred and anger toward her father stem from a deep sense of abandonment caused by his disability. Daughters resort to their fathers seeking love, support, and validation, but Monty's disability challenges Loretta's image of the ideal, strong, and loving father. He no longer fits the traditional role of the provider and protector, leaving Loretta to confront a reality where she must assume the parental role. This shift forces Loretta into a position for which she is unprepared, and the pressure of caregiving makes it increasingly difficult for her to make independent life choices. She is constantly tied to the needs of her disabled father, which inhibits her ability to pursue her own desires and goals.

The role of caregiver often generates additional resentment and anger, emotions that are complicated by the love and care Loretta still feels for Monty. This internal conflict is difficult for her to resolve. At the same time, Loretta harbors dreams of becoming a mother, but her circumstances and her responsibilities toward her father prevent her from realizing this aspiration. Her frustration and unfulfilled desire manifest in a fake pregnancy, symbolizing her attempt to escape her reality and fulfill a dream that seems impossible in her current life. Ultimately, Loretta's wish to become a mother is shattered by her poor circumstances and her overwhelming role as a caregiver to Monty.

Belluso skillfully portrays the challenges faced by physically disabled parents, highlighting their deep frustration as they struggle to maintain independence. Disabled fathers often experience emotions such as sadness, shame, anger, or depression due to their loss of self-control and the physical dependence on their children. These feelings can lead to changes in personality, increasing the likelihood of difficult behavior. While Monty feels fatherly affection toward Loretta, he is acutely aware of his status as a disabled father and incorporates his disability into his sense of identity. What stands out in Belluso's portrayal of Monty is that he refuses to allow disability to define him entirely or reduce him to a mere stereotype of bitterness or heroism, even though others around him often see him through one of these lenses. Disability is not presented as just a debilitating condition, but as an integral part of Monty's life and story.

Monty's queer identity is integral to his character, not merely an aspect of his disability. His dynamic relationship with Horace—a sighted individual who objectifies disability—reveals how attraction can be influenced by power disparities and voyeuristic tendencies. Belluso confronts this directly, using it to delve into the cultural tendencies to both desexualize and fetishize disabled bodies. Thus, the play highlights the challenges disabled individuals face in expressing their desires and identities within a society that frequently undermines their sexual autonomy.

Belluso reframes disability not as a personal misfortune but as a focal point of political discourse. Monty's experiences—marked by poverty, reliance on his daughter Loretta, and interactions with social services—highlight the systemic neglect and dehumanization faced by disabled individuals. The very act of staging the play necessitates a reevaluation of theatrical norms, including mobility, accessibility, and visual communication, thereby transforming the production process into a political statement. Belluso's play underscores that disability is not an isolated condition but a complex social experience influenced by economic status, gender, sexuality, and power dynamics, compelling audiences to confront and engage with these realities.

In *The Rules of charity*, John Belluso presents Monty as a sharp and confrontational character, challenging the common stereotype of disabled individuals as passive or pitiable. Monty's complex traits—manipulation, resentment, and contradictions—serve to defy the simplistic roles often assigned to disabled characters in literature and theatre. The intricate relationship between Monty and his daughter Loretta delves into the emotional complexities of caregiving and dependence, highlighting societal expectations surrounding familial care, autonomy, and the underlying power dynamics inherent in acts of assistance. Through moments of both tenderness and cruelty between the two characters, Belluso emphasizes that disability is deeply intertwined with aspects of family, economics, and sexuality, rather than existing in isolation.

By resisting binary stereotypes and oversimplified metaphors, Belluso offers a nuanced portrayal of the physically disabled character, encouraging awareness among non-disabled audiences about the psychological impact of disability. He demonstrates that even extraordinary bodies live ordinary lives, facing struggles, desires, and problems that are not so different from those of non-disabled people. Belluso also illustrates how disability can evoke ambivalent emotions, particularly within the context of family relationships and caregiving. The tension between love and hate in these relationships reflects the complexity of the adult-child dynamic when one parent is disabled. This ambivalence—where both affection and resentment coexist—becomes a crucial element in understanding the emotional landscape of adult-parent relationships.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, John Belluso’s play The *Rules of charity* (2007) effectively addresses the representation of disability in drama, avoiding stereotypes, metaphors, or symbols. Belluso strives to present the lived experience of disabled individuals, highlighting the challenges they face and exploring the psychological implications of disability and caregiving. The play rejects the medical and tragic models of disability, instead emphasizing the need to view disability as a social construct. Through his portrayal of a disabled character, Belluso calls for greater understanding, integration, and inclusion of disabled people. His work exposes the ideologies of ableism and normalcy, aiming to challenge and eradicate the objectification, dehumanization, and marginalization of disabled individuals. As a result, Belluso's play, like others, resists traditional, metaphorical representations of disability in society and culture. It is hoped that this study will contribute to raising awareness about the importance of eliminating discriminatory practices—such as marginalization, exclusion, and oppression—that disabled people face.

Furthermore, *The Rules of charity* (2007) offers a powerful portrayal of disability and its impact on families, providing a deep insight into their lived experience. Belluso depicts the unique dynamics within families living with disability, illustrating the challenges they encounter. The play sheds light on the profound effect disability has on family functioning, revealing how it influences every aspect of family life. Monty's disability dramatically reshapes his family dynamics, with his daughter Loretta abandoning her own life and career to become his primary caregiver. Belluso's play, curiously, captures the daily financial, social, and emotional stressors faced by families with a disabled member, highlighting the profound impact these challenges have on their overall well-being and daily existence.

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